

TOMAR HOPEFUL OF
TALKS WITH FARMERS

P5



OLI FORMS NEW
GENERAL CONVENTION
COMMITTEE

P9



VACCINE EFFECTIVE
AGAINST NEW UK
MUTATION

WHY SMITH IS WARY
OF ASHWIN
AFTER ADELAIDE

P10

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WEATHER

Mainly clear sky. Moderate to dense fog in the morning. Cold wave conditions at isolated pockets. The maximum and minimum temperatures would be around 24 and 04 degrees Celsius respectively.

RAINFALL: Nil

RELATIVE HUMIDITY

Max: 100% Min: 39%

TEMPERATURE

Max: 23.9°C (+3) Min: 5.3°C (-3)
SUN RISES 07:11 hrs SUN SETS 17:30 hrs
MOON RISES 13:16 hrs MOON SETS 01:51 hrs

THUMBNAILS



A vendor selling caps for upcoming Christmas day celebration, in the Capital on Tuesday. DEEPAK

Pak issues visas to Indian pilgrims: Amid the ongoing tensions between India and Pakistan, Islamabad issued visas to two groups of Indian Hindu pilgrims this month to visit their revered sites in Pakistan, the Pakistan High Commission in New Delhi said today. The group would visit Shree Katas Raj Temples, also known as Qila Katas or complex of Katas Temples in Chakwal district of Punjab, Pakistan from 23-29 December. The Katas Raj Temples surround a sacred pond to Hindu devotees.

No board exams till Feb: Union Minister of Education Ramesh Pokhrayal 'Nishank' on Tuesday ruled out conducting board examinations for classes 10 and 12 till February next year in view of the COVID-19 situation. Usually, the practical exams are conducted in January and theory exams begin every year in February and conclude in March. The minister said decision about when the exams will be conducted will be taken later after assessment of the situation and consultation with stakeholders.

DDC polls: Gupkar alliance leads in Kashmir Valley

JAMMU, 22 DECEMBER

The Farooq Abdullah led Peoples' Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD) maintained a massive lead over the BJP in the Kashmir Valley during Tuesday's counting of votes for the first-ever District Development Council (DDC) elections in Jammu and Kashmir. However, the BJP led in the Jammu division where the PAGD has also bagged a good number of seats in certain pockets.

This was the first election in Jammu and Kashmir since it lost its special status following abrogation of Article 370 and downgrading into a Union Territory (UT) last year. The 8-phased election began on 28 November and ended on 19 December.

The results declared so far, in 275 out of the 280 seats, PAGD was leading on 118 seats, BJP 72, Congress 22 and others 52. The J&K Apni Party, which is considered friendly towards BJP, had so far won 7 seats. Congress initially was a constituent of the PAGD but later pulled out. The party may continue to support the alliance.

The PAGD was leading in south Kashmir where the BJP had initially won 2 seats. The north and central Kashmir have given mixed results among the National Conference (NC), PDP, JKAP and independents. The CPI(M) has so far bagged 5 seats in south Kashmir. However, the JKAP's performance has been insignificant as compared to the patronage of the centre it enjoys.

The NC managed to win one seat in the Samba district of Jammu where it was a clean sweep by the BJP. The Kashmir-centric parties have managed to win seats in the Reasi, Ramgarh, Kishtwar, Rajouri and Poonch districts of Jammu.

SEE P 5

The Statesman

PEOPLE'S PARLIAMENT, ALWAYS IN SESSION

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Centre's SOPs for UK flyers

Passengers to declare travel history, quarantine if found Covid positive, states the SOP

SNS & PTI

NEW DELHI, 22 DECEMBER

Passengers coming from the UK should undergo RT-PCR test and be isolated in a separate unit of an institutional facility if found positive, stated the health ministry's standard operating procedure issued on Tuesday in view of the new Covid strain detected there.

India has suspended all passenger flights connecting the UK from Wednesday till 31 December in the wake of the emergence of a mutated strain of the virus there, joining several other countries that have imposed a similar flight ban.

The SOP by the health ministry for epidemiological surveillance describes the activities to be undertaken at the point of entry and in the community for all flyers who have travelled from or transited through the UK from 25 November to 23 December.

It stated that all travellers from the UK will be required to declare, according to existing procedure, their travel history of past 14 days and fill up the self-declaration form to be screened for Covid-19.

All passengers coming from the UK from December 21 to 23 would be subjected to the RT-PCR test on arrival and this has to be ensured by respective state governments, the SOP stated.

Those found negative in RT-PCR test at the airport would be advised quarantine at home and followed up.

The passengers who are found positive shall be isolated in an institutional isolation facility in



Crowding at Delhi Airport due to rigorous tests on Tuesdays.

a separate unit coordinated by the respective state health authorities. They would earmark specific facilities for such isolation and treatment, it said.

A spike gene-based RT-PCR test should also be performed by an appropriate laboratory in case of a positive sample, the health ministry recommended.

Also, contacts of such travellers who were found COVID-19 positive at airport testing would be subjected to institutional quarantine and tested according to ICMR guidelines.

"In case the sample is found positive on the 14th day, further sample may be taken until his two consecutive samples taken 24 hours apart are tested negative," the guidelines stated.

It stated that state-wise passenger manifest of the flights from the UK landing at various airports in India for the past four weeks from November 25 to December 23 shall be conveyed by the Bureau of Immigration to the state government and Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP) so that the data would be provided to the surveillance teams.

The list of passengers travelling between December 21 and 23, who are found RT-PCR negative at airport testing, shall be shared with the states by the Central unit of IDSP.

"If the genomic sequencing indicates the presence of a new variant of SARS-CoV-2, then the patient will continue to remain in a separate isolation unit. While necessary treatment as per the existing protocol will be given, the patient shall be tested on 14th day, after having tested positive in the initial test."

In case the report of the sequencing is consistent with the current SARS-CoV-2 virus genome circulating in the country, the ongoing treatment protocol including home isolation and treatment at facility level as per case severity may be followed, the SOP stated.

The special leave petition has been filed after a delay of 462 days. This is one more case which we have categorized as a certificate cases' filed before this court to complete a mere formality and save the skin of officers who have been throughout negligent in defending a litigation! the apex court said.

The top court, while referring to a judgement passed by the apex court in October this year, said it had defined certificate cases the objective

of which is only to put a quietus to the issue by recording that nothing could be done because the highest court had dismissed the appeal.

We have repeatedly deplored such practice and process, it said.

When the counsel appearing for the petitioner contended that a valuable land is involved in the matter, the bench said, In our view, if it was so, then the officers responsible for the manner in defending this petition must be made to pay for it.

We are thus constrained to dismiss the petition as barred by time and impose cost of Rs 15,000 on the petitioner for wastage of judicial time. We put it to the counsel that the cost would have been much greater but for the fact that a young counsel is appearing before us and we have given considerable concession in the costs on that factor alone, the bench said.

It directed that cost be recovered from the officers responsible for delay in filing of plea in the apex court.

The irony is that despite observations, no action was ever taken against officers who sit on the file and do nothing, a bench headed by Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul said.

The matter is further aggravated in the present case and even the present petition is

20 passengers arriving from UK test positive

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, 22 DECEMBER

All were direct Air India flights from London.

"Five passengers were found Covid-positive at the Delhi airport. One passenger who took a connecting flight to Chennai was tested there and found positive," an official in Delhi said. A second flight from London landed in Delhi at 6 am on Tuesday and two more were scheduled for the night. All the passengers were being tested, said Dr Gauri Agarwal, founder of the Genestrings Diagnostic Center handling testing at Delhi airport. In Kolkata, state Health and Family Welfare Department officials said those sitting near two passengers found positive will be told to be in home isolation.

be ensured by the state governments and IDSP.

Those travellers from the UK who arrived in India from November 25 to December 8 will be contacted by district surveillance officers advising them to self-monitor their health and in case of development of symptoms would undergo RT-PCR test.

The list of travellers who arrived in India between 9 and 23 December will be shared with respective states and district surveillance officers for daily follow-up till 14 days after their arrival in India.

"The district surveillance officer has to ensure daily follow-up of passengers under observation for 28 days starting from date of arrival," the SOP stated.

He also stated the mutated Covid-19 in the UK has increased transmissibility. However, this mutation is not affecting the severity of the disease. Case fatality is not affected by this mutation, he said.

India's active cases dip below 3 lakh

SNS & PTI

NEW DELHI, 22 DECEMBER

India's Covid-19 active case-load has fallen below 3 lakh, the lowest in 163 days and comprises just 2.90 per cent of the total infections, the Union Health Ministry said.

The total active cases stand at 2,92,518. On July 12, the active cases had last settled below three lakh at 2,92,258.

Less than 20,000 daily new cases (19,556) were added to the national tally in a day after 173 days.

The share of active case-load in the total cases has further shrunk below 3 per cent to 2.90 per cent, the ministry highlighted.

"India has achieved a new low in daily cases. Less than 20,000 daily new cases (19,556) were added to the national tally in a day after 173 days. The new added cases were 19,148 on 2 July," the ministry said.

The total recoveries have surged to 96,36,487.

The gap between recovered cases and active cases continues to grow and presently stands at 93,43,969, the ministry said.

A total of 30,376 cases have recovered in a span of 24 hours. New recoveries have been exceeding the new cases continuously since the last 25 days.

Of the new recovered cases, 75.31 per cent are observed to be concentrated in 10 states and UTs.

Maharashtra has reported the maximum number of single day recoveries with 6,053 recoveries. Kerala follows with 4,494 new recoveries. The ministry said that 75.69 per cent of the new cases are concentrated in 10 states and UTs. Kerala reported the maximum daily new cases numbering 3,423 in the last 24 hours. Maharashtra recorded 834 new cases while West Bengal reported 1,515 new cases yesterday.

Ten states and UTs account for 76.74 per cent of the 301 case fatalities reported in a span of 24 hours. Of the new fatalities, 18.27 per cent came from Maharashtra which reported 55 deaths. West Bengal and Kerala follow with 41 and 27 new deaths, respectively.

Delhi's positivity rate plunges to 1.14 pc: Delhi on Tuesday identified 939 fresh coronavirus (Covid-19) cases detected out of 82,386 tests, according to the Delhi government's latest health bulletin.

The city's Covid positivity rate came down further to 1.14 per cent - lower than yesterday's 1.29 per cent, when the positive cases reported were 803. The national capital's Covid caseload thus climbed to 6,18,747. (SEE P 2)

Irony that no action ever taken against officers who sit on file: SC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, 22 DECEMBER

The Supreme Court has said it is an irony that despite its repeated observations deprecating the practice of government authorities filing appeals before it belatedly to complete a mere formality, no action has ever been taken against officers who sit on file and file nothing, a bench headed by Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul said.

The apex court, which dismissed the plea filed by Deputy Conservator of Forests against the Bombay High Court's February last year order on a cost of Rs 15,000 on the petitioner for wastage of judicial time, observed that it has repeatedly deprecated such a practice.

The top court noted in its order that it has dealt with the issue of government authorities approaching courts belatedly as if the statute of limitation does not exist for them.

The special leave petition has been filed after a delay of 462 days. This is one more case which we have categorized as a certificate cases' filed before this court to complete a mere formality and save the skin of officers who have been throughout negligent in defending a litigation! the apex court said.

The matter is further aggravated in the present case and even the present petition is

of which is only to put a quietus to the issue by recording that nothing could be done because the highest court had dismissed the appeal.

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We are thus constrained to dismiss the petition as barred by time and impose cost of Rs 15,000 on the petitioner for wastage of judicial time. We put it to the counsel that the cost would have been much greater but for the fact that a young counsel is appearing before us and we have given considerable concession in the costs on that factor alone, the bench said.

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Development can't wait: PM at AMU centenary

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

ALIGARH (UP), 22 DECEMBER

It is natural to have differences in society, he said. But when the issue is securing national goals, these differences should be set aside.

He listed economic development, education, standard of living and nationalism (rastravaad) among the common goals. These are some of the issues on which we cannot differ in the name of our political or ideological (vaicharak) compulsions.

This was the first time in over five decades that a prime minister participated in an AMU event, after Lal Bahadur Shastri attended one in 1964.

The PM's address also comes against the backdrop of sporadic protest by AMU students in past months over issues like the new CAA, and the targeting of the campus by some BJP leaders.

Politics can wait, society can wait. But the country's development cannot wait, he said. Modi said the poor, the deprived and the youth do not want to wait any longer.

We should not waste time in *mathbed* (differences) and move forward on a common ground to build a new India,

He said there is space beyond *siyaset* (politics) and *satta* (power), which should be explored by campuses like AMU.

Politics can wait, society can wait. But the country's development cannot wait, he said. Modi said the poor, the deprived and the youth do not want to wait any longer.



We have to be extra cautious. Whoever comes from outside will be checked at the airports itself. With a new strain of coronavirus detected in Chennai, the Karnataka government mandated 14-day quarantine for travellers arriving in the state from the UK, Denmark and the Netherlands.

B S YEDYURAPPA

KARNATAKA CHIEF MINISTER

UP's anti-conversion law cannot be sustained, contains many defects, says ex-SC judge Lokur

NEW DELHI, 22 DECEMBER

Former Supreme Court Judge Justice Madan B Lokur on Tuesday criticised the Uttar Pradesh's anti-conversion law, saying it cannot be sustained as it contained many defects from legal and Constitutional point of view. He said there was no immediacy that called for passing the law—Prohibition of Unlawful Con-

version of Religion Ordinance when the state assembly was not in session. If one looks at the ordinance from a purely legal and Constitutional point of view, there are so many defects in it. The judge doesn't have to get into politics. Just have to look at the Constitution and see if it is valid or not.

The Constitution says Ordinance can be passed if there is a need for immediate action. What

is the need for immediate action to pass it when the Vidhan Sabha is not in session? Absolutely nothing... There is no way that this Ordinance can be sustained, said Justice (Retd) Lokur.

He was speaking at the launch of the book launch In Pursuit of Justice—An Autobiography, on former Chief Justice of the Delhi High Court late Justice Rajinder Sachar.

PTI

Classified

LEGAL NOTICES

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING ATTENDANCE OF DEFENDANT (Order 5, Rule 20 of the Code of Civil Procedure)

In the Court of Mr. Neelam Singh Additional Judge-02 South East District, Room No. 615 Saket Court, New Delhi CS - 838/2019 NOTICE

Benu Garg Versus Subeg Singh Aneja

To, Mr. Subeg Singh Aneja, s/o Gurba Singh, p/o 886/6, Ward 6, Flat No. C-2, Mehrauli, Delhi. Also at: D-105, Ground Floor, Lajpat Nagar-I, New Delhi, 110024.

The Defendant above-named.

Whereas you are intentionally evading service of summons, it is hereby notified that if you shall not defend the case on the 15th day of February, 2021, the day fixed for the final disposal, it will be heard and determined ex parte.

Given under my hand and the Seal of the Court on this 1st day of December, 2020.

Addl. District Judge-02 South-East District Saket Court, New Delhi Seal of the Court

COURT NOTICE CIVIL JUDGE REWARD IN THE COURT OF SH. JITENDRA SINGH Additional Civil Judge (Senior Division), Rewari

CNR No. HRRE02-001458-2020

Peshi : 09-03-2021

Publication Notice Under Order 5 Rule 20 CPC Anita

General Public.

Suit for Declaration

Notice to:

General Public.

In the above titled case, the defendant could not be served. It is ordered that the defendant should appear in person or through counsel on 09-03-2021 at 10:00 a.m.

For details logon to https://highcourthd.gov.in/?rs=district_notice&district=reward and check with above CNR No.

You can also check the status at www.ecourts.gov.in/verif/history

Additional Civil Judge (Senior Division); Rewari

Seal of the Court

IN THE COURT OF DELHI AT NEW DELHI (Extra Ordinary Original Civil Writ Jurisdiction) CP APPL. 7102/2020

Writ Petition (C) No. 8028/2006

M/s. Prem Nath Motors Pvt. Ltd.

— Petitioner

Versus Radha Sood & Sons.

— Respondents

Notice to :

Respondent No. 5 : Harish Chander, c/o All India Engineering General Mazdoor Union, E-27, Karan Pura, Noida-201301

Whereas the abovementioned petitioner has presented abovementioned application in the above Writ Petition which was listed before the Court on 24-02-2020 and on other subsequent dates and the Court ordered issuance of notice of the application to you.

And whereas it has been proved to the satisfaction of the Court that you can be served in an ordinary manner. Notice is hereby issued that, if you wish to defend the abovementioned application, you may cause an appear-

ance to be entered on your behalf either in person or through an Advocate duly appointed by you for the purpose before the Court of the Registrar on 15th January, 2021 at 10-30 a.m.

If no appearance is made on your behalf, by yourself, your pluck or someone by law authorized by you before the said application on the aforementioned date, no further notice of the subsequent date of hearing of the said application will be given and the same will be heard and determined ex parte in your absence.

Given under my hand and the Seal of the High Court of Delhi, this 27th day of November, 2020.

Deputy Registrar (Writs) For Registrar General Seal of the Court

IN THE COURT OF SH. AASHISH GUPTA ACJ/CC/ARC (South East) Saket Courts, New Delhi SS-89/2020

In the matter of:

Smt. Neelam Kapur, w/o Late Shri Suraj Prakash Kapur, r/o F-51, Ground Floor, Kalkaji, New Delhi-110019.

— Petitioner

Versus

The State (Govt. of NCT of Delhi) Through S.D.M. (Kalkaji) at Plot No. 37, Institutional Area, Tuglakabad, Near Batra Hospital, New Delhi.

Email: m.s.29956500@nic.in Contact : 011-29956500

— Respondents

Whereas, an application U/s 377 of the Code of Succession Act, 1925 has been made by Neelam Kapur, successor of Late Sh. Suraj Prakash Kapur for grant of Succession Certificate in respect of debts/securities of deceased.

And whereas the said applicant shall come for hearing on 02-02-2021 at 10:00 a.m.

Therefore, the public at large is hereby given notice if any person has objection to the grant of Succession Certificate, favourably to said applicant, he may appear and file objections in writing in person or through duly appointed pleader, on the said date and time.

Given under my hand and the Seal on 21-12-2020.

ACJ/CC/ARC (South East) Saket Courts, New Delhi Seal of the Court

COURT NOTICE (U/s 5 Rule 20 CPC) IN THE COURT OF SH. ANTERPERT SINGH Civil Judge (Junior Division), Gurugram

Capt. Davindra Singh Yadav Versus

General Public.

CNR No. HRGRO2-000240-2020

Next Date: 13-01-2021

Publication Notice issued to:

General Public.

In above titled case, the defendant(s)/respondent(s) could not be served. It is ordered that defendant(s)/respondent(s) should appear in person or through counsel on 13-01-2021 at 10:00 a.m.

For details logon to https://highcourtgd.gov.in/?rs=district_notice&district=gurugram.

Dated, this day of 21-12-

Civil Judge (Junior Division), Gurugram Seal of the Court

SUMMONS FOR SETTLEMENT OF ISSUES (O 5 R 1, 5) IN THE COURT OF Sh. Nitish Kumar Sharma, Civil Judge (West), Room No. 118, Tis Hazari Courts, Delhi. CS SC/941/2019

SHYAM INDUS POWER SOLUTION Pvt. Ltd. ... (Plaintiff)

Versus

A-ONE ELECTRICALS

To, M/s A-ONE ELECTRICALS, Through its Proprietor/ Authorized Signatory, Sh. Japendra Kumar Singh, E-174, Second Floor, Sushant Lok, II, Sector-56, Gurugram-122002, Haryana.

Also at, F-169, Sushant Lok, Phase-II, Sector-56, Gurugram-122002, Haryana. Contact No.9871511440, 999995525.

Whereas SHYAM INDUS POWER SOLUTION Pvt. Ltd. has instituted a suit against you for you are hereby summoned to appear in this Court in person, or by a pleader duly instructed, and able to answer all material questions, relating to the suit, or who shall be accompanied by your advocate or pleader to answer all such questions, on the 18th day of January, 2021 at 10 O'clock in the forenoon, to answer the claim; and further you are hereby directed to file on that day a written statement of your defence and to produce on the said day all documents in your possession or power upon which you base your defence or claim for set-off, or counter-claim, and that you rely on any other document whether in your possession or power or not, as evidence in support of your defence or claim for set-off or counter-claim, you shall enter such documents in a list to be annexed to the written statement.

Take notice that in default of your appearance on that day before mentioned, the suit will be decided as determined by your absence.

Given under my hand and seal of the Court, this 19th day of October, 2020.

Civil Judge-01, (West), Delhi.

SEAL FMG

PUBLIC NOTIFICATIONS

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice is hereby given that the Share Certificate Folio No 0091975 for 150 Ordinary Share Certificate of Jyoti Laboratories Pvt. Ltd, standing in the name of Shri Rudrak Singh have been reported lost/stolen. An application thereof has been made for the issue of duplicate shares to the Company registered at Ujala House, Ram Krishna Mandir Road, Kondhwa, Off Andheri Kurla Road, Andheri East, Mumbai-400 059 to whom objections if any, are to be made against the issuance of duplicate shares within 15 days from the date of this notice. If no claims/objections are received during this period the company shall be free to issue duplicate share certificates.

—GENERAL Body meeting of Janta Adarsh Sansthan is scheduled to be held on 10-01-2021 at 11 a.m. at Shastri Sadan, Sector-III, R. K. Puram, New Delhi.

Agenda : Confirmation of minutes of GBM 03-2019, discussions about final accounts 31-03-2020 & any other matter with permission of chair.

All members are requested to attend.

Indu Shekhar General Secretary

SALE BY AUCTION

E-AUCTION, E waste, on 30-12-2020, at 2:30 Inspection 28 & 29-12-2020 from 11:00 to 4:00 P.M. Deendayal Antyodaya Bhawan, CGO Complex, Udyog Bhawan, Delhi-110001. Rs. 30,000/- Accurate

Sd/- EO, Basirhat - I PS

TENDER NOTICE

e-tenders are invited vide N.I.E.T. No.: BDO / KCKI / NIET-01(e) of 2020-21, Dated: 22.12.2020 & E.O / K-I PS / NIET-01(e) of 2020-2021, Dated: 22.12.2020 by the B.D.O. / E.O. Kallachak-I Block, Malda, on behalf of Governor of West Bengal. Interested bidders are requested to visit the website: www.wbtender.gov.in for details. Last date of tender submission: 08.01.2021 up to 18.00 hours (Phone No.: 03512-244258); Selim Habib Sardar, B.D.O./E.O. Kallachak-I Dev. Block, Malda

NOTICE

Applications are invited from eligible bonafide agencies vide NIT No.

87/BASIRHAT-IPS/2021, dt 22.12.2020 of EO,

Basirhat - I PS for construction of different works under Basirhat - I PS. For details visit Office notice Board & www.wbtender.gov.in

Sd/- EO, Basirhat - I PS

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Sd/- EO, Basirhat - I PS



The MCDs have denied sharing any information, which means they are trying to hide something. They must be transparent with regard to public money

SATYENDRA JAIN

DELHI URBAN DEVELOPMENT MINISTER

Kejriwal supporting farmers' stir for political gains: Capt

Amid their continuing war of words, Punjab CM again alleges that his Delhi counterpart has backed farmers' stir against the Centre's agri laws to draw political mileage in Punjab ahead of Assembly polls

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
CHANDIGARH/NEW DELHI,
22 DECEMBER

Punjab chief minister Captain Amarinder Singh today alleged that the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader and his Delhi counterpart Arvind Kejriwal has joined the farmers' agitation against the Centre's controversial new agriculture laws to draw political mileage from the stir ahead of the 2022 Punjab Assembly polls.

"You (Kejriwal) just joined agitating farmers cursorily to score brownie points while you and your party is remotely concerned about their woes. Had you a bit of concern for the beleaguered farmers, your party should have held demonstrations against the Central government especially in Delhi itself," Capt Amarinder said.

Asking the Delhi CM "not to change colours like a chameleon", the Punjab CM said the people of Punjab have been "with farmers from



the core of their heart" and have "wisely visualised the devious game of Kejriwal who is out to draw political mileage from the farmers' stir".

"Just wait and watch, it is a writing on the wall, you and your party (bunch of sycophants) would be decimated from the political scene of Punjab, probably the process has already been set in," Capt Amarinder claimed.

He dared Kejriwal to come clean on his "dubious stand"

on the "draconian farm laws, which were earlier notified by his government earlier and now he is shedding crocodile tears over this sensitive issue by showing fake sympathy with the farmers, which is nothing but sheer theatrics on Kejriwal's part".

Ridiculing the allegations leveled by the AAP leader as "absolutely baseless, politically motivated and erroneous" that he had recently met Union home minister Amit Shah with regard to the

The Punjab CM charged that only a "political novice and no do-gooder" like Kejriwal could jump to such conclusions whereas the real picture was "starkly different" from what was being painted by his Delhi counterpart who, he added, should not cross the limits of decency.

Capt Amarinder and Kejriwal have been locked in a war of words for the past several weeks, with each of them questioning the other's support and solidarity for the protesting farmers camping at Delhi borders for nearly four weeks now as part of their stir against the Narendra Modi-led BJP government's contentious farm laws.

On his part, Kejriwal has rejected Capt Amarinder's allegations against him while launching a counter-attack on the latter for having allegedly "struck a deal with the Centre" after "coming under pressure" from a central agency like the ED, which seemed to have turned the heat on his family again.

Mercury dips across north India, cold wave conditions likely in Delhi over next 4 days

PTI
NEW DELHI, 22 DECEMBER

Icy winds swept north India on Tuesday while cold wave conditions are predicted in parts of Delhi over the next four days as the minimum temperature is expected to drop to three to four degrees Celsius.

A blanket of dense fog enveloped isolated places in Uttar Pradesh where a 75-year-old woman died allegedly due to the cold even as chilly weather conditions severely hit normal life in interior Odisha.

In the national capital, moderate to dense fog is expected over the next four days, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said.

The Safdarjung Observatory, which provides representative data for the city, recorded a minimum of 5.3 degrees Celsius and a maximum of 23.9 degrees Celsius on Tuesday, the IMD said.

The observatory had recorded a minimum of 3.4 degrees Celsius on Sunday, the lowest this season so far.

The minimum temperature had increased slightly to 5.5 degrees Celsius on Monday under the influence of a fresh Western Disturbance affecting the upper reaches of the Himalayas.

The maximum temperature settled at 23.5 degrees Cel-

sus, two notches more than normal.

After the WD withdraws on Tuesday, the temperatures are expected to drop again. Mahesh Palawat, an expert at Skymet Weather, a private forecasting agency, said.

Dense fog and severe cold conditions prevailed at isolated places of Uttar Pradesh with Churk in Sonbhadra district being the coldest place in the state recording a low of 3.2 degrees Celsius. Rukmini, a resident of Uttar Pradesh's Banda district, died on Monday due to the extreme cold, her family members claimed.

The meteorological department has forecast cold conditions at isolated parts of Uttar Pradesh over the next few days.

Cold conditions prevailed in Kashmir too as the minimum temperature remained below the freezing point across the valley, even as the Met office said the weather is likely to remain dry and cold till the weekend when a spell of light to moderate snowfall is possible at widespread places.

The weather remained dry across Kashmir on the second day of 'Chillai-Kalan' -- the 40-day harshest winter period when the chances of snowfall are most frequent and maximum, officials said.

They said while the valley continued to reel under sub-

zero night temperature, there was slight improvement in the mercury at a few places.

Srinagar -- the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir recorded a low of minus 5.2 degrees Celsius down from the previous night's minus 4 degrees Celsius, they said. The mercury in Pahalgam tourist resort in south Kashmir also went down from the previous night's low of minus 4.6 degrees Celsius to settle at a low of minus 5.8 degrees Celsius, the officials said.

'Chillai-Kalan' is considered the harshest winter period in Kashmir as a cold wave grips the region and the temperature drops considerably leading to the freezing of water bodies including the famous Dal Lake here as well as the water supply lines in several parts of the valley. The chances of snowfall are most frequent and maximum during this period and most areas, especially in the higher reaches, receive heavy snowfall, the officials said.

Normal life in interior Odisha was severely hit as the mercury plummeted to 4 degrees Celsius at Phulbani in Kandhamal district making it the coldest place in the state.

The weather office has warned continuation of the cold wave to severe cold wave in five districts during the next 24 hours.

Haryana schools to remain shut for students of I-VIII classes

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
CHANDIGARH, 22 DECEMBER

In view of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Haryana government on Tuesday decided to keep schools closed for Class I to Class VIII students, who will continue to get online classes.

This apart, the state government has also decided to change the school timings of students studying in Class IX to XII from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Sharing more information, a government spokesman said that classes from IX to XII have already started but schools will remain closed for the classes from I to VIII.

Students of these classes



(Class I to Class VIII) in government schools will be taught through EDUSAT and for this, the school education department has developed an app named AVSAR. Monthly Assessment Tests will be started from the first week of January through this mobile app.

Teachers have been directed to register every student on the AVSAR app and ensure that students are using this

app regularly. All the teachers have been directed to attend the school every day to update the skill passbook and also update the details about continuous comprehensive assessment work, informed the spokesman.

He said concerned class in-charge teacher/subject teacher and the head of the school will be held responsible if any negligence is found in the implementation of usage of AVSAR app.

Teachers have also been directed to ensure that all students participate in the exam through the AVSAR app. The presence of all staff working in government schools has been made mandatory from 9:45 am to 1:30 pm.

HP vets rue lack of facilities to implement govt schemes



REPRESENTATIONAL IMAGE

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
SHIMLA, 22 DECEMBER

The veterinary doctors in Himachal Pradesh have urged the state government to provide them basic facilities to extend the benefits of government schemes to livestock owners in the state.

The Himachal Pradesh Veterinary Officers Association has taken up the issue with the Additional Chief Secretary, Animal Husbandry through a memorandum, requesting to call a meeting of office bearers to discuss the demands, said General Secretary of the Association, Dr Madhur Gupta.

The Association has pointed out that the Veterinary doctors are not only using their personal mobiles and internet to implement the government schemes to benefit the livestock owners, but are also being made to do online data entry, which is not their work.

"The government schemes for livestock owners are no doubt very good. But the Veterinary officers are facing difficulties in the implementation of these schemes for lack of basic facilities. The government must provide computers and internet and improve other facilities at the veterinary hospitals at sub division level for better functioning on the whole," said Dr Madhur Gupta.

The Association office bearers said the government must work out a solution to these problems to facilitate Veterinary doctors in the field at the earliest, as they are resentful of the indifference towards them.

operators at the veterinary hospitals at sub division level to make it easier for the Veterinary doctors to focus on their primary job.

The Association has also called for computer training of the Veterinary pharmacists for smooth functioning, holding that the issue was taken up with the Director, Animal Husbandry earlier also, but nothing happened.

"More so, the Veterinary doctors have been giving duties in the field without any safety equipment in Covid.

The department must provide them safety equipment to ensure that they are not at risk in performing their duties at the doorstep of the livestock owners," said Dr Gupta. He said while the government offices are closed due to five-day week in Covid now, the veterinary hospitals are open even on Saturdays and the Veterinary doctors and the para staff are giving regular services.

The Association has urged the government to fill up 100 vacancies of the Veterinary Officers in the state at the earliest so that the department is able to reach out to the livestock owners effectively with all the welfare schemes.

The Association office bearers said the government must work out a solution to these problems to facilitate Veterinary doctors in the field at the earliest, as they are resentful of the indifference towards them.

1.9L Haryana health care workers to get Covid vaccine in first phase

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
CHANDIGARH, 22 DECEMBER

More than 1.9 lakh health care workers (HCWs) from both private and government sectors in Haryana will be vaccinated in the first phase of Covid-19 vaccine rollout in the state.

Sharing details of the preparedness of Covid-19 vaccine rollout, additional chief secretary, health, Rajeev Arora said the state health department has completed the groundwork and is all set to introduce Covid-19 vaccine soon in a phased manner starting from HCWs.

For this, the data of more than 1.9 lakh Health Care Workers (HCWs) from both private and government sectors have been uploaded on CoWIN portal, he said.

Arora said that the Department has already identified 1,800 vaccination session sites and more than 5,000 vaccinators have been mapped for the process of administering the vaccine.

The COVID-19 vaccine introduction will span over a



Moreover, to ensure the vaccine reaches every district the health department has 22 Vaccine Vans (insulated) for transporting vaccine across the state.

He said the Haryana government has prepared the vaccine rollout plan and is all set to introduce it. He said that the Department is preparing for introduction of Covid-19 vaccine and will expeditiously roll it out when available.

Arora said that the Department has already identified 1,800 vaccination session sites and more than 5,000 vaccinators have been mapped for the process of administering the vaccine.

He stated the platform of the existing universal immunisation program of state with enhanced capacity is being used for Covid-19 vaccine.

Besides this, all districts have been instructed to create additional dry space for storing logistics and the majority of districts have already created extra space for the same, he added.

DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL-I, DELHI

4TH FLOOR, JEEVAN TARA BUILDING, PARLIAMENT STREET, NEW DELHI-110001

OA No. 846/2018

State Bank of India

---- Applicant

Shri Naveen Kumar

VERSUS

---- Defendant

To,

1. Shri Naveen Kumar
S/o. Late Shri Munshi Kumar
R/o. House No. B-40, 3rd Floor,
Hari Nagar Ashram, Near Gurudwara,
New Delhi-110014.

Also at:

Shri Naveen Kumar Assistant Manager M/s. Canoro Resources Limited
O/o. 5-6, Nilgiri Towers, Kaushambi, Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh-201010.

Whereas the above named applicant has instituted a case for recovery of Rs. 10,87,702.65/- (Rupees Ten Lacs Eighty Seven Thousand Seven Hundred & Two and Paisa Sixty Five Only) against you and whereas it has been shown to the satisfaction of the Tribunal that it is not possible to serve you in ordinary way. Therefore, this notice is given by advertisement directing you to make appearance before Lt. Registrar on 08.02.2021 at 10.30 A.M. (for further details kindly visit DRT website www.tribunal.gov.in. Phone Number: 011-23748473).

Take notice that in case of your failure to appear on the above mentioned day before this Tribunal, the case will be heard and decided in your absence.

Due to ongoing Pandemic Situation, all the matters will be taken up through Video Conferencing and for that purpose:-

(i) All the Advocates/Litigants shall download the "Cisco Web application/Software" (ii) "Meeting ID" and "Password" for the next date of hearing quacases to be taken by "Registrar/Recovery Officer-I" and Recovery Officer-II shall be, available one day prior to the next date at DRT Official Portal i.e. "drt.gov.in" under the Public Notice Head.

(iii) In any exigency qua that, the Advocates/Litigants can contact the concerned official at Ph. No. 011-23748473.

Given under my hand and seal of the Tribunal on this 15th September of 2020 By order of this Tribunal

By order of this Tribunal
For Registrar

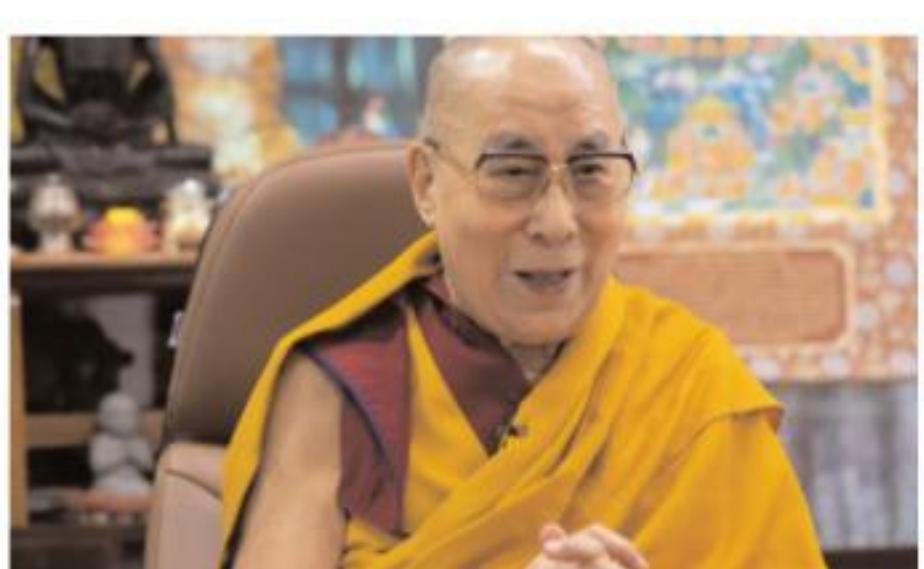
Dalai Lama to discuss climate change with Thunberg, scientists on 10 Jan

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
SHIMLA, 22 DECEMBER

The Tibetan spiritual leader and Nobel laureate, Dalai Lama will discuss 'The Crisis of Climate Feedback Loops' with climate change activist Greta Thunberg and leading scientists on 10 January 2021.

A Central Tibetan Administration (based in Dharamshala in Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh) official said the special free live-stream event was being organized by the Mind and Life Institute on the issue of climate change.

"From the destruction of permafrost to the thawing of permafrost, the effects of human-



'Dalai Lama was one of the earliest advocates for environmental protection and sustainability and in recognition of his contribution, he was awarded the United Nation Earth Prize in 1991'

was one of the earliest advocates for environmental protection and sustainability and in recognition of his contribution, he was awarded the United Nation Earth Prize in 1991.

Dalai Lama is one of the

first Nobel Laureate to be recognized, among others, for their environmental conservation effort. In his new book, 'Our Only Home: A Climate Appeal to the World', he has called for attention on the urgent need for climate action and praises Greta Thunberg and other young climate activists for their determination to bring about positive change," he said.

He added those interested may watch the live webcast in Tibetan, English, Chinese and other languages on the official websites and Facebook pages of the Office of Dalai Lama which begin from 9 am IST on 10 January.



'No public interest in disclosing details of donors of pol parties'

NEW DELHI, 22 DECEMBER

There is no public interest in disclosing details of the donors of political parties, the Central Information Commission (CIC) has held, rejecting a plea formulating the details public. The Commission upheld the arguments of the State Bank of India that

the information sought by Pune-based RTI activist Vihari Durve was personal in nature held by it in fiduciary capacity.

Durve had sought details of donor and donee of electoral bonds from the books of accounts of State Bank of India branches designated to sell these bonds.

TENDER

INDIAN RAILWAYS

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA (Bharat Sarkar)
MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (Rail Mantralaya)
(RAILWAY BOARD)

E-TENDER NO. 2020S202 FOR PROCUREMENT OF 79,761 MT MILD/ CORTEX STEEL SHEETS/ PLATES/ COILS THROUGH e-R METHOD

1. On behalf of the President of India, the Executive Director, Railway Stores (S), Railway Board, New Delhi invites e-tender for procurement of 79,761 MT (approx.) of Mild, Corten Steel Sheets, Plates and Coils on Running Contract basis.

2. The interested tenderers are advised to visit the website <http://ireps.gov.in> for details of the tender and submission of their e-bids.

3. Normal manual offers will be accepted against e-tender.

4. Tender will be closed at 15:00 hours on 01.02.2021.

No. RS(S)2020747/3 Dated: 22.12.2020

(Amita Bhalla)
Dy. Director, Railway Stores (S)-I
Railway Board.

2649/20
For and on behalf of the President of India
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

PSPCL PUNJAB STATE POWER CORPORATION LIMITED
(Regd. Office: PSEB Head Office, The Mall, Patiala-147001)
Corporate Identity Number: U410PB2010SGC33813
Website: www.pspcl.in

Notice Inviting Tender

Tender Enquiry No. 537/GHTP/EMC/GMMC-102 Dated: 18-12-2020

Short Description: Award of running contract for rewinding of stator / rotor of 220V DC motors (up to 8.5kW rating); three phase, 415V AC squirrel cage motors (up to 75kW rating) / slip ring induction motors (below 55kW rating) and three phase, 415V AC submersible pump motors / special motors of assorted ratings installed at GHTP, Lehra Mohabat. Date & time for request for registration of contractors / firms with GHTP shall be received 15-01-2021 up to 17-00 hrs. Date & time for receipt of request for issue of tender documents shall be received 21-01-2021 up to 17-00 hrs. Date & time up to which tender shall be received: 25-01-2021 at 11-30 a.m. Date & time of opening of tender: 25-01-2021 at 12-00 p.m.

Tender specification can only be downloaded from PSPCL website: <https://pspcl.in> and hard copy of the same will be issued by the office.

Note: It is informed that in case tender process is not completed due to any reason no corrigendum will be published in newspapers. Details regarding corrigendum may be seen on PSPCL official website i.e. <https://pspcl.in>

Dy. Chief Engineer
Elect. Mtc. Circle, O&M
GHTP PSPCL, Lehra Mohabat

GHTP-61/2020

EAST DELHI MUNICIPAL CORPORATION

Office of the Executive Engineer (CS)
Block-B2, Near 212 Bus Stand, Nand Nagri, Delhi-110093
Email ID: eccentralstore35@gmail.com

CORRIGENDUM

With respect to NIT No. EE(Central Store)/TC /2020-21/19 dated 25.11.2020, due on 08.01.2021 for the work of "Selection of Consultant To Work As "PROJECT CONSULTANT" Under The Scope Of Consultancy And MONITORING OF PPP PROJECT FOR DOOR-TO-DOOR COLLECTION & TRANSPORTATION OF MSW IN EAST DELHI MUNICIPAL CORPORATION AREA", the date of opening of technical bid has been extended to 15.02.2021. Details can be seen on <http://mcdefenders.com>, <https://mcdefenders.com>.

Executive Engineer
Central Store EDMC
EDMC'S CITIZENS HELPLINE NO. 155303

NORTHERN RAILWAY

E-TENDER NOTICE

Sr. DEE-TRS-GZB acting for and on behalf of President of India invites E-Tender against Tender No. 230-TRS-GZB-2020-21-03. The details are as under:

1. Name of the work	Complete body cleaning & cyclonic filters cleaning in 3240 Nos. 3-phase locomotives at ELS/GZB for 36 Months.
2. Approx. Cost of work	Rs. 44,60,986.22/-
3. Earnest Money to be deposited	Rs. 89,200/-
4. Cost of tender document	Rs. 3,540/-
5. Last Date & Time of submission of tender bid of tender	13.01.2021 (11.00 Hrs.)
6. Date & Time of opening of tender document	13.01.2021 (11.30 Hrs.)
7. Website particulars where complete details of tender documents can be seen	www.ireps.gov.in

(i) The tenderer's must be registered on the Indian Railway E-Procurement system (IREPS) site i.e. [www.ireps.gov.in](http://ireps.gov.in) for participating in the e-tender system.

(ii) For all terms and conditions please refer tender document.

(iii) No manual offers are acceptable.

(iv) Cost of tender document and Earnest money will be acceptable through net banking or payment gateway only.

No: 230-TRS-GZB-2020-21-03 Dated: 21.12.2020

Serving Customers with a Smile

NORTH DELHI MUNICIPAL CORPORATION

OFFICE OF THE EX. ENGINEER (ELECT)-I
UNDER GROUND CAR PARKING ASAFA ALI ROAD
NIT No.27/MWEEE-I/2020-21/TC Date: 22.12.2020

DUAL BID TENDER NOTICE

Issue of Tender documents From : 22.12.2020 . 17.00 PM

Issue of Tender document To : 12.01.2021 . 10.00 AM

Pre-Bid Meeting (At office of CE(Elect),

10th Floor, Civic Centre, Delhi) : 30.12.2020 . 03.00 PM

Tender Closing Date and Time : 12.01.2021 . 10.00 AM

Technical Opening Date and Time : 14.01.2021 . 11.00 AM

Opening of Financial Bid (Tentative) : 18.01.2021 . 10.00 AM.

For ONLINE TENDERING TIME TABLE PLEASE REFER www.tenderwizard.com/NORTHDMCETENDER.

The Executive Engineer, Elect. Division-CSPZ, Under Ground Car Parking, Asfa Ali Road, New Delhi-110020 on behalf of Commissioner, North Delhi Municipal Corporation invites online item rate tenders in dual bid for following work:-

S.No.: 1. Name of Work: Providing GSM sim based mobile services for North Delhi Municipal Corporation, Head of A/c: XL-VII-Edu, Estimate Cost Amt.: Rs. 78,31,296. Tender Amount: Rs. 76,03,200, Earnest Money: Rs. 1,52,100, Tender Cost: Rs. 1500, Time of Comp.: 2 years, Rates hold good for: 4 M.

The TENDER document can only be downloaded online from www.tenderwizard.com/NORTHDMCETENDER and not available manually. The interested agencies/firms which are not registered in online tendering with NDNC shall have to register itself first and then only they can participate in the bids. The procedure for registration can be seen at website www.tenderwizard.com/NORTHDMCETENDER or www.mcdefenders.com and may be contacted to AO(IT), 24th floor, SP M Civic Centre, Delhi-2, All amendments, if any shall only be uploaded online and no press publicity shall be done.

Sd/-

Executive Engineer
(Elect/CSPZ/ North DMC

R.O. No.47/DPI/North/2020-21

...those who practice politics of hatred face defeat in front of the truth



SAMAJWADI PARTY SUPREMO AKHILESH YADAV

AFTER THE BAIL OF RAMPUR MP AZAM KHAN'S WIFE TAZEEN FATIMA

i
ndia

BJP poised to gain a RS seat from Gujarat

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

AHMEDABAD, 22 DECEMBER

Ahmed Patel died on 25 November while BJP's newly elected Rajya Sabha member Abhay Bhardwaj passed away a week later. If the elections for the two vacant seats are held together, the BJP and Congress could bag one seat each with their respective strengths (111 and 65) in the state Assembly.

conduct the by-elections separately. Since Congress leader Ahmed Patel was re-elected to the Upper House in August 2017, the tenure of the person elected to the vacancy would expire in August 2023. BJP's Abhay Bhardwaj was elected to the Rajya Sabha for the first time in June this year but he succumbed to Covid-19 even before attending the Upper House for a single day. The person elected to this vacancy would retire from Rajya Sabha in June 2026.

'Aaya Ram Gaya Ram' culture takes centrestage in Bengal ahead of polls

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

KOLKATA, 22 DECEMBER

also switched allegiance and vowed to back the TMC in the forthcoming elections.

A senior TMC leader, on condition of anonymity, said the party should not have pursued the "immoral" "Aaya Ram Gaya Ram" culture, coined after Haryana legislator Gaya Lal who changed his party thrice within a fortnight in 1967.

"It was wrong on our party to induct so many lawmakers from the Congress and the Left. It was immoral politics on our part and we should have refrained from doing it."

"Sometimes, to increase your support base, you have to take decisions which might affect you in the long run," he said. Political desertions were rare in West Bengal, where ideological convictions identify politicians.

The first instance of defection can be traced back to 1952 when four Forward Bloc MLAs joined the Congress after the first West Bengal assembly elections. They resigned from their posts, leading to by-elections.

However, the first major defection took place 15 years later in 1967 when Congress leader and former chief minister Prafulla Chandra Ghosh walked out of the Bangla Congress and CPI (M)-led United Front government with all the stakeholders while keeping intrinsic values of the river island intact.

Sonowal on Monday graced a surrender ceremony in the city where 64 militants belonging to four banned armed outfits laid down their arms and joined the mainstream. He asked all the surrendered militants to work for promoting brotherhood and friendship in the society and contribute to the process of nation building.

Drishti Rajkhowa, the self-styled deputy commander-in-chief with 17 other United Liberation Front of Assam (Independent) rebels, Ong Terton, the self-styled C-in-C of People's Democratic Council of Karbi Longri (PDCK), 32 members of United People's Revolutionary Front and 13 cadres of Dimasa National Liberation Army surrendered their weapons.

"Progress can never be made without peace. Nobody can live peacefully with a heart full of hatred," he said.

Bimal Gurung's Gorkha Janmukti Morcha, the BJP's ally in Darjeeling hills for over a decade,

times and agriculture and allied services 6.1 times. Further, Miss Banerjee refuted Shah's comments on health and education sectors and said that Covid management has been done very well following which the patient discharge rate stands at 95 per cent.

On the occasion, Miss Banerjee announced that Rs 10,000 each would be given to 9.5 lakh class XII students in place of tabs as the government was unable to procure so many products. "We can't buy Chinese products as the Centre has imposed restrictions. So we are giving the money so that students can either buy tabs or smartphones. The money would be transferred directly to the bank account of students within three weeks," she said.

Miss Banerjee said 50,000 police personnel had applied for transfer to home districts of which 35,000 have already been transferred. The recruitment notice for appointment of 16,500 primary teachers would be issued tomorrow and the interview process would be held from 10 to 17 January.

The state Cabinet today approved recruitment of 10,370 personnel under West Bengal Police including 9282 constables and 1088 sub-inspectors. Along with this, approval was given for creating three new police circles (at Patharkrama, Namkhana and Sagar) and new police sub-divisions (at Dalkhola, Itahar, Habra, Deganga, Bagda, Farakka, Baduria, Hasnabad, Gopiballavpur and Belpahari).

Rajib, 3 other ministers skip Cabinet meet

KOLKATA, 22 DECEMBER

Four senior ministers—Rajib Banerjee, Chandranath Sinha, Goutam Deb and Rabindranath Ghosh—skipped the state Cabinet meeting today raising speculation in the political circle.

Sources said that Sinha could not attend the meeting as he is busy with the preparations for upcoming Miss Banerjee's Bolpur rally.

State parliamentary affairs minister Partha Chatterjee said that ministers must have informed the chief ministers about their absence.



Shah on growth: Mamata in point-by-point rebuttal

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, 22 DECEMBER

Continuing her attack against BJP and Union home minister Amit Shah, chief minister Mamata Banerjee today gave a detailed sector-wise data on the state's progress across all sectors including law and order situation and questioned as to whether the figures issued by the government of India were to be believed or the Union minister's claims.

Miss Banerjee had told yesterday that she would give a detailed response to all the claims that were made by Mr Shah during his two-day trip to the state. Following which, Miss Banerjee today countered all the claims in a step-wise manner.

Quoting GOI data released on 31 October and published in RBI report on 13 October, Miss Banerjee said industry sector holds the fourth position in India though Shah said that industrial production is in the 20th position.

"GOI has ranked West Bengal in second position in terms of growth of State GDP while Mr Shah had placed the state on the 16th position. Debt as a percentage of GSDP in 2010-11 was 40.65 per cent which was brought down to 33.30 per cent in 2019-20 while for Mr Shah any child born today will have an interest of Rs 50,000 on their head as the amount of loans. Shah had said that foreign direct investment (FDI) was 1 per cent in 2011.

Referring to the National Crime Record Bureau data, Miss Banerjee said crimes have decreased during her tenure and Kolkata has been twice declared as the safest city for women.

Giving an account of her government's achievements over the past decade, she said that 383 ex-Maoists have surrendered, 370 KLO activists have been rehabilitated, and hills and Junglmalah have become peaceful. She said that the state celebrated festivals peacefully.

Deliberating on the state's sector-wise progress since her government came to power, she said that since 2011, GSDP has increased 2.7 times, tax revenue 2.9 times, capital expenditure 7.2 times, plan expenditure 5.9 times, social sector 5.6 times, physical infrastructure 3.9

times and agriculture and allied services 6.1 times. Further, Miss Banerjee refuted Shah's comments on health and education sectors and said that Covid management has been done very well following which the patient discharge rate stands at 95 per cent.



The results of DDC polls should act as an eye-opener for the BJP and its proxy political party

NATIONAL CONFERENCE VICE PRESIDENT OMAR ABDULLAH
AFTER GETTING A MASSIVE LEAD OVER BJP IN DDC POLLS

The Statesman

05

NEW DELHI, WEDNESDAY 23 DECEMBER 2020

THUMBNAILS



Delhi office bearers along with all councillors stages satyagraha to demand the due fund of corporations at Rouse Avenue, Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, ITO, in the Capital on Tuesday.

DEEPAK

No permission for special Assembly session: Kerala governor Arif Mohammad Khan on Tuesday turned down the request of the Left Democratic Front (LDF) government to convene a special session of the Assembly to pass a resolution against the new farm laws enacted by the Centre.

PTI

Life term for Covid vaccine adulteration: Citing intelligence inputs from the Interpol and the World Health Organisation (WHO) that there is possibility of adulteration of the expected Covid-19 vaccine, the BJP government in Madhya Pradesh today decided to increase the penalty on adulteration from three years imprisonment to life imprisonment.

SNS

3,000 volunteers for Phase III trials: Bharat Biotech on Tuesday announced recruitment of 13,000 volunteers and continued progress towards achieving the goal of 26,000 participants for the Phase III clinical trials of its Covid-19 vaccine 'Covaxin' across multiple sites in India.

PTI

Fighting cerebral palsy, 21-year-old cracks JEE

KOTA, 22 DECEMBER

Paralysed below the neck, 21-year-old Tuhin Dey writes exams holding a pen in his mouth and operates his mobile phone and computer the same way. This has not stopped him from getting admission to a prestigious engineering institute.

Tuhin, who suffers from cerebral palsy, secured Rank 438 in the JEE (Mains) this year and got admission in information technology at the Indian Institute of Engineering Science and Technology in West Bengal's Shibpur. Tuhin has so far undergone 20 surgeries and several plates have been inserted into his body to keep his bones straight.

A resident of Midnapore in West Bengal, Tuhin prepared for the exam at a coaching institute in Rajasthan's Kota. He had cracked the JEE (Advanced) last year but failed to score required marks in Class 12. "Everybody in the institute is delighted that such a candidate has taken admission. I am very glad that he has received so many awards and he will definitely be a good student for us, a senior official at the Indian Institute of Engineering Science and Technology said. The official said it is for the first time that a student with 90 per cent disability will be studying at the institute. The institute is in process of providing his family a lodging facility.

PTI

Farmers' stir: Tomar hopeful of talks

Agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar meets two more peasants' bodies from Delhi and UP that extended support to the legislations

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 22 DECEMBER

As farmers' agitation against three farm laws entered its 27th day, agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar said on Tuesday he is hopeful that protesting unions would soon complete their internal discussions and resume talks with the government to resolve the crisis.

He met two more peasants' bodies from Delhi and Uttar Pradesh that extended support to the legislations.

Representatives of different farmers' bodies had come to tell that the laws are good and are in the interest of farmers. They had come to urge the government not make any amendments to the laws," Tomar said after meeting the two groups.

"I am hopeful they (protesting farmers' unions) will soon complete their internal dis-

cussions and come forward for talks. We will be able to find a solution successfully," the minister said.

Agriculture Ministry had written to the protesting groups on Sunday, urging them to specify their concerns on the government's proposal and finalise a date for the next round of talks to end the protests. At least five rounds of formal talks have failed to break the deadlock as the agitating unions have not agreed to anything less than repeal of the laws.

UP-based Kisan Sangarsh Samithi (KSS) and Delhi-based Indian Kisan Union (IKU) are among those farmer groups that have extended support to the laws in the last three weeks. The previous groups were from Haryana, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh.

However, nearly 40 groups are agitating against the laws on various Delhi borders.

The protesting groups have



Farmers protest against the new farm laws at Ghazipur border, in the Capital on Tuesday. SNS

maintained that the new laws will eliminate the safety net of the minimum support price (MSP), do away with the mandi (wholesale market) system and leave them at the mercy of big corporates. The government has been saying that

these apprehensions are misplaced.

Rajya Sabha MP Surendra Singh Nagar as well as former Uttarakhand Minister and IKU National President Ramkumar Walia were also present after the meeting.

While supporting the laws, KSS also urged the minister to

ensure that procurement at minimum support price (MSP) continues.

Pradhan claimed that thousands of farmers who have come in tractors in support of the laws have been stopped at the border and therefore a select group has come for the meeting.

In its representation made to Tomar, KSS also requested the Centre to implement the 2011-12 agreement signed between farmers of Gautam Buddha Nagar with Noida, Greater Noida and Yamuna Development Authorities.

"Even after the High Court order, the development authorities are not implementing the agreement under which the UP government had decided to give 10 per cent of the developed land to farmers whose land was acquired for the development and housing project," Pradhan said.

KSS further demanded that the government should not

only that much land which is required for the development. In the Secunderabad industrial area, industries have developed 45 per cent of the land acquired and the rest is not used yet.

"The land was acquired in 1972, but only on paper, the industries are made functional. No infrastructure has been developed. There is no proper road and water facility. Villagers are finding it difficult," Secunderabad Block Pramukh Pushpendra Bhati said.

KSS also demanded steps towards modernisation of mandis, use of mandi tax for development of mandis, a scheme to reduce tubewell charges and farm loan at a lesser interest rate, among others.

"We have read the farm laws in detail and are in favour of farmers. We urge farmers not to get misled on this issue," Walia said.

Two flyers from UK test Covid positive at Kolkata airport

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
KOLKATA, 22 DECEMBER

Two passengers from the UK were found positive for COVID-19 after they arrived at the airport here, health department officials said on Tuesday.

A flight carrying 222 passengers from the UK arrived at Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International (NSCB) airport on Sunday night, they said. "Twenty-five passengers did not have COVID reports with them. So they were taken to a nearby quarantine centre, and their coronavirus tests were conducted. Two of them tested positive," a West Bengal Health and Family Welfare Department official said.

According to COVID-19 protocols, all international travellers coming to India will have to remain in isolation for seven days.

With help of the airline concerned and the Airports Authority of India, the health department is contacting those who were sitting near the two persons in the flight and requesting them to go for home isolation for two weeks, the official said.



Those who have tested negative for COVID-19 on arrival at the airport are being requested to report to the state health department immediately if they develop any symptom of the infection

tested negative for COVID-19 on arrival at the airport are being requested to report to the state health department immediately if they develop any symptom of the infection," the official said.

Civil Aviation Ministry said on Monday that all passenger flights connecting to the UK will remain suspended from Wednesday till December 31 in the wake of the emergence of a mutated variant of coronavirus there.

Moreover, travellers com-

ing from the UK through flights till Tuesday midnight would be tested for COVID-19 on arrival at airports "as a measure of abundant precaution," it added.

Asked about the new variant of the virus, the state health department official said, "We only know that the new COVID-19 strain is more contagious. We need details of clinical tests of those infected by this variant to talk on it."

LITTLE JOYS



Under privileged children enjoying before Christmas at Maidan in Kolkata on Tuesday. SNS

Guj govt issues advisory on mucormycosis infection

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
AHMEDABAD, 22 DECEMBER

The Gujarat health department has issued an advisory to doctors and health officials after some Covid-19 patients were recently found infected with mucormycosis,

it is a serious but rare fungal infection and has an overall mortality rate of 50 per

cent".

As per the advisory issued on Monday, mucormycosis infects people with weak immune system and having other existing illnesses.

It most commonly affects the sinuses or lungs after inhaling fungal spores from the air, or the skin after the fungus enters through a cut, burn or other type of skin

injury. "However, it can occur in any part of the body," said the advisory. It said though the overall mortality rate is around 50 per cent, early identification and treatment can lead to better outcome.

The department made it clear that mucormycosis "cannot spread between people or between people and animals".

DDC: Farooq-led Gupkar Alliance gets massive lead over BJP

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
JAMMU, 22 DECEMBER

The Farooq Abdullah led Peoples' Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD) maintained a massive lead over the BJP in the Kashmir Valley during Tuesday's counting of votes for the first-ever District Development Council (DDC) elections in Jammu and Kashmir.

However, the BJP led in the Jammu division where the PAGD has also bagged a good number of seats in certain pockets.

This was the first election in Jammu and Kashmir since it lost its special status following abrogation of Article 370 and downgrading into a Union Territory (UT) last year. The 8-phased election began on 28 November and ended on 19 December.

Of the 275 out of the 280 results declared so far, the PAGD was leading on 118 seats, BJP 72, Congress 22 and others 52. The J&K Apni Party, which is considered

friendly towards BJP, had so far won 7 seats. The Congress was in the initial stages as a constituent of the PAGD but later pulled out but the party might continue to support the Alliance.

The PAGD was leading in south Kashmir where the BJP had initially won two seats. The north and central Kashmir have given mixed results among the National Conference (NC), PDP, JKAP and independents. The CPI(M) has so far bagged 5 seats in south Kashmir. However, the JKAP's performance has been insignificant as compared to the patronage of the centre it enjoys.

The NC managed to win one seat in the Samba district of Jammu where it was a clean sweep by the BJP.

The Kashmir-centric parties have managed to win its leaders were not allowed to campaign for its candidates but on the other hand the BJP ministers flew in to extensively campaign for their candidates across J&K.

Voting underway for Arunachal panchayat

TANAGAR, 22 DECEMBER

Polling for panchayat and two urban local bodies in Arunachal Pradesh is underway on Tuesday with election officials and voters adhering to Covid-19 protocols.

Voting began at 7 a.m. but the turnout was moderate in early hours as chilly weather conditions kept most people indoors. State Election Commission (SEC) deputy secretary Habung Lampang said.

A total of 4,89,423 voters are eligible to exercise their franchise at 1,472 polling stations to elect members for 141 Zilla Parishad seats and 1,702 gram panchayat segments and 23 councilors for two urban local bodies - Itanagar Municipal Corporation and Pasighat Municipal Council. EVMs are being used for polls for the two civic bodies and ballot papers for panchayats.

Will BJP leaders quit if they don't get 200 seats in Bengal, asks Kishor

SNS & PTI
NEW DELHI, 22 DECEMBER

A day after claiming that the BJP will struggle to cross double digits in the West Bengal assembly polls, election strategist Prashant Kishor on Tuesday challenged its leaders to say on record that they will quit their positions if the party failed to get 200 seats.

"BJP will struggle to cross double digits and will get less than 100 seats in West Bengal. Will quit my work if they do," Kishor told, reiterating his assessment.

He also clarified that if the saffron party does any better than what he has predicted, he would quit his work.

On Monday, he tweeted that the BJP would struggle to cross double digits in West Bengal, setting off a war of words with BJP leaders on the

microblogging website. His remarks came after senior BJP leader and Union Minister Shah's visit to West Bengal during which political heavyweight Suvendu Adhikari, nine MLAs and a TMC MP joined the saffron party.

Shah, considered the architect of the BJP's resurgence in West Bengal, had asserted that his party will win over 200 seats in the upcoming polls.

BJP national general secretary Kailash Vijayvargiya, the party's pointsman in the state, took a swipe at Kishor, saying the country will end up losing a poll strategist after the West Bengal elections.

"Given the ongoing BJP tsunami in Bengal, once the new government is formed, the country will have to lose an election strategist," Vijayvargiya quipped in Hindi on Twitter.

UK virus strain: Returnee's sample to go to NIV for analysis

CHENNAI, 22 DECEMBER

A passenger who arrived here from London via Delhi has tested positive for coronavirus and genomes from his sample would be analysed to see if it matched with the new strain of the pathogen detected in the United Kingdom, a senior official said here on Tuesday.

The passenger, who tested positive has been admitted to the state-run King's Institute of Preventive Medicine and Research here, Health Secretary J Radhakrishnan said.

His sample would be sent for genomic analysis to National Institute of Virology, Pune for confirmation, he told reporters. "It has to be seen if it matches with that of the strain seen in the UK." Over 1,000 passengers who arrived from the UK in the past about 10 days were being monitored for symptoms.

All international passengers, on arrival, were being tested for coronavirus and they have been advised home or institutional quarantine for 14 days as per guidelines, he said.

SEARCH FOR MISSING



General Public is hereby informed that a lady named Laxmi Verma W/o Sh. Jitender Verma, R/o F-599, Dakshin Puri, New Delhi has been missing since 14.07.2020. In this regard a DD No. 66A dated 15.07.2020 has been registered at PS Saket, New Delhi.

The description of missing lady is as under:

Name : Laxmi Verma, Husband's Name : Sh. Jitender Verma, Age: 33 years, Height : 5'5", Face : Round, Complexion : Fair, Built: Normal, Wearing: Blue & pink Kurta, Blue Leggi and Cream Colour Sandal in feet. If anyone having any clue/information, kindly inform the undersigned at following phone numbers.

SHO
P.S., SAKET,
New Delhi
Ph. : 011-29561300, 29562300
DP/137/SD/2020

Trump confers Legion of Merit to Modi

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
WASHINGTON, 22 DECEMBER

President Donald Trump has conferred the Legion of Merit, one of the highest military honours of the US, on Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his leadership in elevating bilateral strategic partnership and accelerating emergence of India as a global power.

India's ambassador to the US, Tarunji Singh Sandhu, accepted the award on behalf of the prime minister from the US National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien at the White House on Monday.



President Trump "presented the Legion of Merit to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his leadership in elevating the US-India strategic partnership," O'Brien said in a tweet. Modi was presented with the highest degree Chief Commander of the Legion of Merit which is given only to the Heads of State or Government.

VBU centenary: Modi address on 24 Dec

Ocean's 23

Just how much contemporary geopolitics is in flux can be gauged from the fact that the entry of France ~ premised on its sovereignty over Réunion Island in the western India Ocean and backed strongly by India ~ as a full member of the little-heard and even less talked about Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) last week has sent a frisson of excitement among the strategic affairs community. The development is perhaps an accurate reflection of the mini-frenzy among nation-states and associations thereof to align and re-align themselves into groupings based on geographical, ideological or economic synergies across the globe as they constantly seek ways to enhance diplomatic leverage, economic interests and national security. In case of the IORA, France's elevation from dialogue partner to full member comes after years of strenuous lobbying and New Delhi is thought to have played an important role in getting its strategic partner on board, helping with Iran dropping its objections, while Paris worked on providing reassurances to Teheran on its support for resurrecting the nuclear deal which was derailed after President Donald Trump pulled the USA out of it but President-elect Joe Biden has shown an interest in salvaging. Ensuring China, also a dialogue partner, does not muscle its way in as a full member is a common strategic aim for both India and France going forward given the IORA's 23 members comprise a rather disparate bunch ~ Australia, Bangladesh, Comoros Islands, India, Indonesia, Iran, Kenya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritius, Mozambique, Oman, Seychelles, Singapore, Somalia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Thailand, UAE, Yemen, and now France.

The IORA's dialogue partners include China, Egypt, Germany, Italy, Japan, South Korea, Turkey, UK and USA and the tussle within the grouping now that France is in, is to keep Russia and Saudi Arabia, which are very keen to come on board as dialogue partners, out of this association of Indian Ocean periphery countries. The IORA charter, worded suitably vaguely to allow its members a lot of leeway in interpretation, is clear on one point - decisions are taken by consensus so an objection from even one country stalls the process. Membership is open to "sovereign states of the Indian Ocean Rim willing to subscribe to the principles and objectives of the Charter". What shape these could potentially take and the leverage a cohesive grouping can provide for its members' strategic interests is being keenly analysed including in South Block. As it is, India may find itself in pole position to influence the shape of things to come if its application to become vice-chair of IORA from 2023 to 2025, which indicates it would be the IORA chair from 2025-27, is successful. India's has held the IORA chair once before from 2011 to 2013 but this time New Delhi seems to want to make it count.

Pen-and-paper

A n initiative to benefit students has eventually been announced at the end of a virtually wasted year. The pen-and-paper format will be sustained in the ICSE and ISC exams. Towards that end, there will be two months of the conventional on-campus classes before the formal exams next year. The chief executive and secretary of the council, Mr Gerry Arathoon, has acknowledged that online exams will not be practical in view of the problem of connectivity and availability of computers for a fairly large section of students. Two months of rigorous classroom interaction will, therefore, have to be conducted in schools before the board exams. The objective, announced rather belatedly, is to ensure, that students do attend school for practical classes, to complete the projects, for revision, and for clearing doubts. This is remarkably rational and the chief regret must be that it has been unveiled rather late in the day, barely a few months before the two public exams. The council chief has conveyed the message to the 1500-odd principals online, and it is fervently to be hoped that the traditional format will be revived without much ado on the part of the teachers, the taught and also, of course, the guardians. The importance of sending children to school prior to the board exams will have to be underlined. Yet above all, the schools will have to be suitably sanitised so that the children are safe. Indeed, the safety of students must be of overriding importance before they write their papers. The board exams are unlikely in February/March as the schools are yet to reopen. Students have attended online classes, but there is little doubt that they need to attend class for the wrap-up teaching lessons, practicals and eleventh-hour revision. The schools have been closed since the last week of March this year and many institutions have been conducting online classes. But for practical classes, online experiments cannot serve the purpose; it is essential for students to do the laboratory work themselves.

The format proposed for ICSE and ISC schools can well be followed for Madhyamik and Higher Secondary institutions. But there are red herrings across the trail. Not all students have laptops and many are using smartphones, also an expensive proposition. The grim reality must be that many students are not in a position to clear the fees, and the backlog must be considerable. The pretty obvious query must be: Can they buy a laptop? There are parents who have suffered a salary cut as well, not to forget those who have lost their source of livelihood. It is, therefore, a complex problem with profound societal, economic and academic implications. For West Bengal, where Assembly elections are scheduled in April/May, it is imperative for the Election Commission to announce the dates so that the ICSE/ISC council can finalise the attendance schedule.

Boon or Bane?

At the moment, people with no knowledge of farming are making the most noise; the Government should disregard the advice of such busybodies and use its own good sense. Not for nothing did US President Dwight D Eisenhower say: 'You know, farming looks mighty easy when your plough is a pencil, and you're a thousand miles from the corn field'



The war of words between proponents and opponents of farm laws has totally obfuscated the real issues involved. Rhetoric has replaced informed debate, with the Government side declaring the Farming Acts as the ultimate beneficial legislation, and the protesting farmers demanding the immediate repeal of the said Acts.

The farming laws have much to commend them, a point that the Government is assiduously making in a well-designed publicity blitz, yet there is also a significant downside to them, as pointed out in these columns in Farmers and Farming (30 June), Agricultural Revolution (15 September) and Climate and Agriculture (28 October). Significantly, even prior to the passing of the laws, the Farming Ordinances, which were the precursors of the Acts, were opposed tooth and nail by farmers. On the other hand, the laws have been acclaimed by trade bodies, indicating clearly who would benefit from the new laws.

At a time when the Coronavirus pandemic rages unchecked, and Chinese troops are massed at our borders, the immediate priority for all concerned should be to seek an end to the farmers' protests, which are affecting the daily life of ordinary citizens adversely and which also pose a threat to the life and health of the protesters. In a PIL by some public-spirited citizens for clearing the roads around Delhi, the Supreme Court sensibly observed that the Government should end the impasse by meaningful discussions with farmers, after putting the new Acts on hold.

Yet, no side is in a mood to relent. Prime Minister Modi's personal popularity has ensured that till now there has been little opposition to the Government's actions, even to those that affected the general public negatively, like demonetisation and GST. Protestors against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) were generally those opposed to right-wing ideology, so it was easy for the Government to discredit the CAA protesters by labelling the CAA protesters as anti-nationals and Pakistanis. Later on, many prominent CAA protesters came to be arraigned in the Delhi riot cases.

Right-wing social media supporters have branded the

protesting farmers as middlemen masquerading as farmers, accompanied by a small number of farmers misled by opposition parties. The protestors have even been called Pakistani and Chinese agents. Even Central ministers have supported such calumny. Suffice it to say that such vituperative rants enrage the farmers and makes the resolution of the conflict difficult.

The farmers' protests have put the Government in a quandary, because farmers and soldiers are iconic figures in India; agriculture being the main occupation of Indians since pre-historic times. The country also owes a debt of gratitude to farmers, who, after the Green Revolution, have made the country self-sufficient in food, growing enough food grains to feed the ever-growing Indian population and generating a sizeable surplus also. Presently, FCI godowns are overflowing with grains, holding 2.7 times of our annual requirement. This is not a one-off phenomenon; as on 1 April 2020, food grain stocks stood at 73.85 million tonnes which are three-and-a-half times of the reserve requirement of 21.04 million tonnes.

Agriculture is also a remarkably resilient sector; farmers reaped a record harvest during the Coronavirus pandemic. Export of agricultural commodities for the first half of FY 2020-21 increased 43.4 per cent to Rs 53,626.60 crore ~ at the time when overall exports declined by 21 per cent and touched their lowest level in the last ten years.

Thus, the problem before us is not that of increasing agricultural production but that of ensuring a remunerative price for farm produce. The farmers' insistence on MSP being non-negotiable should be viewed in this context. Affluent societies like the US and EU handle the problem of over-production by providing incentives for limiting the production of agricultural commodities. This solution may not be open to us but changing the mix of the crops planted by farmers and better marketing facilities for farm produce would change the face of Indian agriculture. Burgeoning

farm exports suggest the existence of a large export market.

Votaries of the Farm Acts vociferously argue that the Farm Acts would achieve exactly this result but forget to mention that a large amount of spadework would have to be done before farmers can adapt to the changed environment. For example, there are mandis for particular commodities at various places where that particular commodity is freely bought and sold. Before suggesting the planting of a new crop, a stable market for that crop should be developed. Of course, this presupposes that the farmers had been provided with the necessary expertise, along with seeds and the necessary finance for growing the new crop.

As such, farmers planting non-traditional crops have to face the vagaries of the market ~ during the lockdown starred hotels shut down, leading to huge losses for floriculturists and producers

of exotic vegetables. Despite all risks, many hardy farmers in Punjab, UP and Haryana. Thereafter, the Government could share its vision about the farming sector with all stakeholders. Talks should be held with farmers on the ways to achieve this vision, which should be broken down into objectives and sub-objectives.

The dialogue between the Government and farmers should thrash out the nitty-gritty for achieving each small sub-objective. No doubt, such negotiations would require a lot of homework for both parties but true consensus can be achieved only when each side is clear about the points in issue and also about what the other party wants.

At the moment, people with no knowledge of farming are making the most noise; the Government should disregard the advice of such busybodies and use its own good sense. Not for nothing did US President Dwight D Eisenhower say: 'You know, farming looks mighty easy when your plough is a pencil, and you're a thousand miles from the corn field.'

The time has come for the Government to listen to farmers and not to armchair experts.



DEVEN德拉
SAKSEN
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Principal Chief Commissioner
of Income-Tax

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR editor@thestatesman.com

Toughest electoral battle ahead

SIR, It is now vividly clear that the upcoming Assembly election in West Bengal in early 2021 will be one of the toughest ones in the history of independent India. A series of murders and clashes have already happened in recent weeks. With the ruling party at the Centre, the BJP determined to displace the party in power in the State, the AITMC, which is equally determined to regain power, governments are also being drawn into partisan conduct.

Limited to west and north India in its early stages of growth, the BJP has been active in the east now to reinforce its dominance since 2014. Having won Assam in 2016 and gaining a foothold in several north-eastern states, the party has set its eyes on Bengal. It is pouring resources and deploying experienced personnel. The party's impressive performance in the neighbouring state of Bihar recently has added further colour to the

BJP's eastern game plan. The AITMC that replaced the Left Front which had been in power for 34 years until 2011 is staring at a crisis now. The Left has joined the Congress in the margins, and it will be a contest between the aggressive Hindutva agenda of the BJP and the inconsistency of the AITMC. The police have been ineffective against violent activists of the ruling party.

The recent mob attack on the convoy of BJP national president marked a low in the law and order situation. The battle between

AITMC and the BJP should not become a tussle between the Centre and State. The role of the Election Commission will also be under lens in the coming days once it announces the schedule for the election. Governments and constitutional entities must stay above the politics, regardless of the high stakes parties might be playing for.

Yours, etc., Sanjay Chopra,
Mohali, 21 December.

MGR's LEGACY

SIR, With reference to your report, 'MGR legacy most wanted in TN

now' (18 December), despite over three decades having passed since MGR died, his legacy still has great relevance in the political realm of Tamil Nadu.

MGR was a cultural and political icon among the rural Tamil still want that a politician should be like him, one who will champion the cause of the poor.

MGR still lives in the minds of the people, replaying his clean, politically-charged characters and those countless songs that revolutionised the thinking of the marginalised. What stage plays

A MEMBER OF THE **ANN**
ASIAN VOICES

Only one-third of Indonesians wanting to get vaccine

An online survey carried out by Indonesia's health ministry has found that only one-third of Indonesians wanting to get Covid-19 shots are willing to pay for a vaccine. The survey was carried out alongside the Indonesian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ITAGI) with support from UNICEF and the World Health Organisation from September 19 to 30. More than 115,000 respondents in 508 of all 514 cities and regencies across the country's 34 provinces were questioned.

The report found that 65 per cent of respondents were willing to receive a Covid-19 vaccine if it is available for public use, while nearly eight per cent said they would reject it. The remaining 27 per cent of respondents said they were still hesitant - which the report described as a group that was "critical for a successful vaccination programme".

However, among those who wished to be vaccinated, only 35 per cent were willing to pay for it. Approximately 38 per cent were unwilling to pay, and the remaining 27 per cent were undecided. Respondents' willingness to pay for the inoculation varied between 32 and 41 per cent in provinces of Java.

The survey also found that people in Papua, Kalimantan, Maluku and the Lesser Sunda Islands ~ like Bali, Lombok and Flores ~ generally showed a higher willingness to pay, and those in provinces of Sulawesi and Sumatra were least willing to pay. Overall, the lowest level of willingness

The Jakarta Post

to pay was reported by day labourers, drivers and domestic helpers at 12 per cent, although 60 per cent of them would like to get vaccinated. More than 31 per cent of those willing to accept the vaccines and pay for them said they would only pay up to 50,000 rupiah (\$3.54), while 28 per cent would pay up to 100,000 rupiah and about four per cent would fork out more than 500,000 rupiah.

This trend reflected a connection between affordability and the socio-economic status of the respondents, the report said. Most of those still undecided about paying for a vaccine said they would not pay more than 50,000 rupiah. Most of those still undecided about paying for a vaccine said they would not pay more than 50,000 rupiah. Health minister Terawan Agus Putranto has said that the government only plans to cover the cost of inoculation for 32 million of the 107 million people targeted to receive Covid-19 vaccines by 2022, which has sparked criticism and calls for wider coverage of free vaccines. Terawan said the vaccination programme would target 67 per cent of 167 million people aged between 18 and 56 years, as recommended by the ITAGI.

The remaining 75 million people would have to pay for their vaccines at private hospitals and clinics. Experts have expressed concern that such a private scheme may stall Indonesia's efforts to reach the desired coverage necessary to achieve herd immunity, especially in a country that has seen its people avoiding vaccination for other diseases for various reasons, including religious concerns.

PERSONAL

TWO PERSONS need two highly qualified gentlemen as friends, not below 75. Contact: 8583929857/9836543221.

DIGITALLY DOES IT

SIR, The Government of India is strongly pushing for making the country completely digital. The Union Government has already made the Aadhaar Card and PAN Card available to people in digital medium and has also linked them. There should then be no problem in making the voter ID card available digitally to the people of the country.

The problem in the current process is that it takes a lot of time to prepare the vote's card and reach it to the voter.

The Election Commission should take effective measures for its resolution and reform.

Yours, etc., Chandan Kumar Nath, Guwahati, 21 December.

achieved for the Communists in Kerala during the 1940s and 50s, movie dialogues and songs did for MGR to help him become a legend, and one of the strong political faces of Dravidian politics.

Ironically, though both Rajinikanth and Kamal Haasan are firm in their approach towards creating and establishing an entirely different political culture in Tamil Nadu, sans Dravidian politics, they still stake claim to the legacy of MGR.

Yours, etc., Ranganathan Sivakumar, Chennai, 21 December.



AITMC and the BJP should not become a tussle between the Centre and State. The role of the Election Commission will also be under lens in the coming days once it announces the schedule for the election. Governments and constitutional entities must stay above the politics, regardless of the high stakes parties might be playing for.

Yours, etc., Sanjay Chopra,
Mohali, 21 December.

MGR's LEGACY

SIR, With reference to your report, 'MGR legacy most wanted in TN



The world is on the threshold of a new era of cooperation in which individuals, business and nations more readily join forces

N CHANDRASEKARAN
CHAIRMAN, TATA SONS

THUMBNAILS

Export curbs removed: The government on Tuesday removed export curbs on medical goggles and gloves, which were in demand due to the Covid-19 pandemic, to boost outbound shipments of these products. The export restrictions were imposed on account of the spread of Covid-19. "The export policy of medical goggles and Nitrile/NBR gloves is amended from restricted to free category making all types of medical goggles and Nitrile/NBR gloves freely exportable," the Directorate General of Foreign Trade said. PTI

Reliance Capital: Reliance Capital Ltd, part of the debt-ridden Anil Ambani-promoted Reliance Group, has received 10 more bids, including from SBI Life, for its subsidiaries, sources said. Earlier this month, the committee of debenture holders had extended the last date for submission of expression of interest to 17 December 2020. PTI

IIF appeal: The Institute of Indian Foundrymen (IIF), an apex industry body which represents foundry industry in India, appealed to the government for temporary suspension of export of iron ore and reduction of the import duty on pig iron, metal scraps till the prices of other steel products stabilise to previous six months level. The industry is facing several challenges such as non availability of skilled manpower; inverted MSME payments, security deposit and export promotion, according to a Press release statement. SNS

Samsung AirDresser: South Korean tech giant Samsung on Tuesday introduced its advanced smart clothing care solution "AirDresser" in India for Rs 1.10 lakh. This latest innovation from Samsung uses powerful air and steam to remove dust, pollutants and germs, according to a release. SNS

ICICI Bank ups focus on serving MNCs

Lender is looking at services beyond credit needs of such overseas corporates

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI, 22 DECEMBER

With the increase in foreign direct investment into the country, ICICI Bank today said it is upping its focus on serving the multinational companies (MNCs).

The second largest private sector lender is looking at services beyond credit needs of such overseas corporates with an eye on the fee income possibilities, its executive director Vishakha Mulye told reporters.

It already serves about 1,500 MNCs out of an overall market of up to 5,000 companies, she said.

Mulye said factors like aversion to China, favourable demographics and an improvement in the overall ease of doing business are leading many companies to look at investing in India, leading to an increase in foreign direct investment (FDI).

FDI flows were at \$30 billion in the first half of the year despite the pandemic, as against the \$43 billion last year,

DEDICATED OFFERING



► ICICI Bank, which has been witnessing a robust growth in its MNCs business, on Tuesday announced a dedicated offering for the segment to further accelerate on the segment.

► The "Infinite India" service is an online platform aimed at foreign companies looking to set up shop in

she said.

The bank, which has been witnessing a robust growth in its MNCs business, today announced a dedicated offering for the segment to further accelerate on the segment, Mulye said.

The "Infinite India" service is an online platform aimed at foreign companies looking to set up shop in India and offers services like facilitating incorporation and corporate filings.

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► Factors like aversion to China, favourable demographics and an improvement in the overall ease of doing business are leading many companies to look at investing in India, leading to an increase in foreign direct investment (FDI).

incorporation and corporate filings, Mulye said, stating that operating in India is complex for an overseas company.

The bank will also get access to the dealer and vendor ecosystem of the company through such a relationship, she said, stressing that it is not credit needs alone which it is targeting to serve.

She said this also blends

well with its overall strategy of sticking to the India-centric business from abroad.

When asked about the recent changes on the current account front and how it will affect such an initiative, Mulye said it will not impact because the credit needs of such new to India MNCs are very limited as they are sufficiently capitalised.

The bank has devoted a dedicated team of professionals, which includes both shifting in-house resources and also hiring new employees with established relationships to help in the MNCs vertical, she said.

Extending services like acting as an authorised dealer for both inward and outward remittances, payments and collections services can also help it garner fees, she said.

The bank was the first to launch offshore non-deliverable forwards contracts on the rupee after the Reserve Bank allowed the IFSC units to dabble in it, Mulye said, adding that it commands an over 30 per cent share of the market at present.

Over 120 FDI proposals from China since Apr

NEW DELHI, 22 DECEMBER

The government has received over 120 foreign direct investment (FDI) proposals worth about Rs 12,000 crore from China since April, when it was made mandatory for a company from countries sharing land border with India to invest in any sector only after getting government approval, sources said. As per that decision, FDI proposals from China need government approval for investments in India in any sector.

An inter-ministerial committee has been formed by the government to scrutinise these proposals, they said, adding most of the investments are for brownfield projects (means in existing Indian companies).

In April this year, the department for promotion of industry and internal trade (DPIIT) came out with a press note stating that a company or an individual from a country that shares land border with India can invest in any sector here only after getting government approval.

The decision was taken to curb opportunistic takeovers or acquisitions of domestic firms due to the current Covid-19 pandemic. PTI

Centre plans to set up development finance institution: DFS secy

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 22 DECEMBER

The government plans to set up a development finance institution (DFI) in the next three to four months with a view to mobilise Rs 111 lakh crore required for funding of the ambitious national infrastructure pipeline, according to financial services secretary Debasish Panda.

"We need a development financial institution as infra financing needs patient capital, and banks are currently not suited for lending for long-term projects which do not generate any cash for years," he said.

Ever deepening the bond market with regard to infrastructure financing is a matter which is receiving attention of the government and there is a need to do something more in order to have a robust bond market for infrastructure financing, he said.

"To provide funding to enhance credit rating of projects, a DFI is needed, and we are actively working on it, and soon such an institution will be in place. We are in the

process of finalising details such as shareholding of the government and whether such a body will be formed through a statute.

"The DFI will be a catalyst, and would fund projects where others are not willing to enter because of the risks involved," he said.

Further, Panda said the work is in progress and the DFI should become a reality soon, may be by the end of the current financial year or early next year.

In her last Budget speech, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman had proposed to set up DFIs for promoting infrastructure funding. About 7,000 projects have been identified under the National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP) with projected investment of a whopping Rs 111 lakh crore during 2020-25.

NIP, a first-of-its-kind initiative to provide world-class infrastructure across the country and improve the quality of life for all citizens, will be crucial for attaining the target of becoming a \$5-trillion economy by financial year 2025.

Industry bodies for holding back new wage definition

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 22 DECEMBER

would result in major cut in take-home salaries and also put additional burden on employers. The new definition of wages is part of the Code on Wages, 2019 passed by Parliament last year. The rules to enforce the law was also firmed up last year.

Now, its implementation is planned from 1 April 2021 along with other three codes on industrial relations, social security and occupational health safety & working conditions.

The new definition provides that the allowance of an employee cannot be more than 50 per cent of the total salary. This would increase the social security deductions like provident fund.

Presently, the employer and employee contribute 12 per cent each towards the social security schemes run

by the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation.

At present, a large number of employers split salaries into numerous allowances to reduce the social security contributions. This helps employees as well as employers. The workers' take-home pay increases while the employers reduce provident fund contribution liability.

Restricting allowance to 50 per cent of the total pay would also increase employers' payout on gratuity payments to those employees who work for more than five years in a firm. The gratuity is also worked out as proportion of the average pay.

The source said that the industry bodies agree that this would enhance the social security benefits for workers but are not ready for it due to economic slowdown.

Parliamentary panel suggests franchise protection Act for auto dealers: Fada

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI, 22 DECEMBER

The Federation of Automobile Dealers Associations, which represents around 15,000 auto dealers across the country, in September advocated for the enactment of such a law in the country, after American cult bike manufacturer Harley Davidson announced its exit from India.

It said that a "fair competition franchise Act" will not only be a win-win for both the auto original equipment manufacturers and dealers, but will also be beneficial to customers in the long run, it said.

First introduced by the United States in the 1980s, many developed countries such as Mexico, Brazil, Russia, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Japan, Italy and Sweden have such rules in place to protect the franchisees, it said.

In its report submitted to Rajya Sabha chairman Venka-



"I am grateful to the standing committee and specially the chairman, K Keshava Rao, for strongly recommending the franchise protection Act for auto dealers," said Fada president Vinkesh Gulati.

He added that the absence of such a law leads to a tussle in managing dealership operations in various ways, short-term agreements and non-existence of a clearly defined exit policy.

There are various examples where auto manufacturers suddenly announced their exit from India, leaving auto dealers high and dry with their investments going down the drain, he said.

Currently, almost all auto dealerships are privately owned proprietorship or family-owned businesses, he added.

Google invests in two startups

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 22 DECEMBER

While Google did not disclose details of its latest investments, separate announcements by investee companies stated that Google has participated in Glance's \$145 million (about Rs 1,071.5 crore) and VerSe Innovation's \$100 million (about Rs 739 crore) funding rounds.

Technology in the country.

In the same month, Reliance Industries had announced that Google will pick up 7.7 per cent stake in Jio Platforms for Rs 33,737 crore.

"We are also eager to support the wider ecosystem in India, particularly local startups ~ Glance InMobi and VerSe Innovation ~ to enable them to further scale the availability of relevant and engaging content in different formats across various Indian languages.

"These investments underline our strong belief in part-

nering deeply with India's innovative startups, and our commitment to working towards the shared goal of building a truly inclusive digital economy that will benefit everyone," Sengupta said.

Glance, a part of SoftBank-backed InMobi Group, has closed a \$145 million investment round from Google and existing investor, Mithril Capital.

VerSe Innovation ~ which runs Dailyhunt and short video app Josh ~ has completed an over \$100 million (about Rs 739 crore) funding round from AlphaWave, Google and Microsoft, and the funding values the company at over \$1 billion.

Sengupta said over the last few years, improved connectivity and more affordable data have paved the way for India's startup ecosystem to scale and solve for the needs of the country's growing number of internet users.

18.1 m to be employed by direct selling industry by 2025

NEW DELHI, 22 DECEMBER

Direct selling sector is poised to employ more than 18 million by 2025 and as per industry estimates, the Direct Selling industry in India, which currently ranks No. 15, globally, is expected to grow at a Compounded Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of about 4.8 percent to reach Rs 15,930 crore by 2021.

This proves that the Direct Selling Industry is flourishing and illustrates its potential with the continued rate of growth ~ increasing at an impressive rate of 12.1 percent Y-o-Y. Another interesting trend that is noticeable is that the sector has been instrumental in employment generation for nearly 122 million Indians who lost their jobs this due to the pandemic. Gautam Bali, Managing Director, Vestige Marketing Pvt Ltd., said, "Direct Selling is one of the fastest-growing sectors in India today. Despite these challenging times, the sector has witnessed spectacular growth in the last three quarters."

LANS

Wipro inks \$ 700-million IT deal with Metro AG

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, 22 DECEMBER

Wipro today said it has signed a \$700-million digital and IT partnership deal with Metro AG that will see over 1,300 staff of the German wholesaler move to the Indian IT major.

"The estimated deal value for the duration of the first five years is approximately \$700 million. With the intention to extend up to four additional years, it can be a potential spend of up to \$1 billion," Wipro said in a statement. As a part of this transaction, Wipro will take over the IT units of Metro AG ~ Metro-NOM GMBH in Germany and Metro Systems Romania S.R.L., it added.

"Through this partnership, more than 1,300 employees across Germany, Romania and India will transfer to Wipro, providing them with

new opportunities to advance their careers, access innovation, work with leading digital technologies and adopt new ways of working that enable agility, speed and scale in engineering," it said.

Wipro said it will deliver a complete technology, engineering and solutions transformation programme for Metro as the latter positions itself as a wholesale 360-degree provider in the hotel, restaurant and catering food industry. "Wipro's transformation programme will encompass cloud, data centre services, workplace and network services, along with application development and operations to provide an integrated, flexible and robust digital infrastructure to help drive Metro's transformation agenda," the statement said.

Omega Seiki Mobility to invest ₹200 cr

NEW DELHI, 22 DECEMBER

Omega Seiki Mobility Pvt. Ltd., part of the Anglian Omega Group, plans to open a new state-of-the-art manufacturing unit in Karnataka. The company will invest Rs 200 crore by 2021. In order to combat Covid-19 and provide its vaccines easy access to people at large, the company is coming up with a cold storage in Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh to assist Covid-19 vaccines (in collaboration with Trans ACNR for reefer trucks) deliveries in small towns.

Omega Seiki Mobility chairman Uday Narang said, "We have multiple manufacturing sites in Delhi, NCR and we also plan to have around 200 dealerships across the country by the end of next year." "Besides these expansion plans, Pan India we are reaching out to e-commerce companies for fleet tie-ups," informed Narang while speaking with mediapersons on Tuesday.

The company also unveiled smart electric commercial and passenger vehicles for the B2B and B2C market segments in November last month. The new range of the electric vehicle includes three products: Sun Ri (three-wheeler cargo), Ride (E-rickshaw), and Stream (passenger auto-rickshaw) having smart mobility features.

The company has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) for joint development on refrigerated containerised electric vehicles with lithium-ion batteries. At the start of the collaboration, both parties have identified the following projects to work on jointly such as, "design, develop and make a prototype sample for refrigerated unit and insulated box for electric-three wheeler Rage+".

Sensex regains 46K level on positive cues

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

MUMBAI, 22 DECEMBER

HCL Tech was the top gainer among the Sensex companies, rallying 5.09 per cent, followed by Tech Mahindra, Infosys, PowerGrid, Sun Pharma, Nestle India and L&T.

Only five index constituents finished in the red ~ Kotak Bank, Bajaj Finance, HDFC, RIL and IndusInd Bank, which slipped up to 0.94 per cent.

European markets witnessed a sharp recovery after German pharmaceutical company BioNTech said it was confident that its coronavirus vaccine would work against the new UK variant.

The variant, detected mainly in London and the southeast of England in recent weeks, has sparked concern worldwide because of signs that it may spread more easily.

EMPHATIC COMEBACK

► After gyrating 968 points in a volatile session, the 30-share BSE Sensex ended 452.73 points or 0.99 per cent higher at 46,006.69 points.

► On similar lines, the broader NSE Nifty climbed 137.90 points or 1.03 per cent to 13,466.30 points.

Send Republicans back to the Senate to protect all that America stands for



PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP'S DAUGHTER IVANKA TRUMP
ADDRESSING VOTERS IN GEORGIA

The Statesman
NEW DELHI, WEDNESDAY 23 DECEMBER 2020

09

Israel on cusp of fourth national elections in two years

JERUSALEM, 22 DECEMBER

Israel appeared headed to its fourth election in two years on Tuesday after a last-ditch effort to keep the government afloat and push off the automatic dissolution of parliament failed.

Negotiations meant to bring about a budget compromise between the government's two main parties broke down early Tuesday and in a late-night Knesset session, members of the Likud and Blue and White parties voted against a proposal to postpone Tuesday's budget deadline for another two weeks. The measure failed by 49 votes to 47.

If the government does not pass a budget by midnight Tuesday, Israeli law stipulates that the Knesset dissolve and triggers snap elections in 90 days. Most avenues to evade that deadline have been closed off. Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud and defense minister Benny Gantz's Blue and White party have been at loggerheads over the national budget issue since May. Netanyahu and Gantz had proposed pushing off Tuesday's deadline by two more weeks in an effort to reach a compromise on the 2020 budget. AP

Scientists: UK strain unlikely to affect efficacy of Covid vaccines

More than 40 countries, have banned travel to and from the UK, several scientists said it was necessary

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 22 DECEMBER

The faster spreading coronavirus strain first detected in the UK is unlikely to make vaccines less effective as of now but the preventives may need to be appropriately altered if more mutations occur over time, say scientists.

More than 40 countries, including India, have banned travel to and from the UK, a move several scientists said was necessary in view of the rapid spread of the new viral strain, EDC said in a statement.

Preliminary modelling results communicated by the UK on December 19 suggest that the variant is significantly more transmissible than previously circulating variants, with an estimated increase in reproductive number (R) by 0.4 or greater with an estimated increased transmissibility of up to 70 per cent, EDC said in a statement.

According to Jeremy Farrar, director of the London-based research charity Wellcome Trust UK, there is no indication at the moment that the new strain would evade treatments and vaccines.

However, the mutation is a reminder of the power of the virus to adapt, and that cannot be ruled out in the future. Acting urgently to reduce transmission is critical, Farrar said in a statement.

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) announced on

Sunday that the rapid increase of a SARS-CoV-2 variant with multiple spike protein mutations have been observed in the UK.

More than 40 countries, including India, have banned travel to and from the UK, a move several scientists said was necessary in view of the rapid spread of the new viral strain, EDC said in a statement.

R number denotes the expected cases directly generated by one case in a population while transmissibility is the ability of a virus to be passed on from one person to another.

The ECDC, however, said there is no indication of increased infection severity observed related to the variant. The assessment is challenged by the fact that the majority of cases were reported in people under 60 years who are less likely to develop severe symptoms, it said.

The new strain of the virus is known to have 13 mutations



People walk past posters of suggestions for Covid-19 prevention in New York, the United States on Tuesday. IANS

in the spike protein of which the N501Y mutation is responsible for it spreading 70 per cent faster than earlier versions of the virus, said Deepak Sehgal, professor and head of department of Life Sciences, Shiv Nadar University.

N501Y is the mutation. The 501st position in the spike protein's amino acid chain has altered from asparagine, denoted by the letter N, to tyrosine, represented by the letter Y, therefore N501Y, scientists explained.

Spike protein is a crown protein on the virus which comes in contact with human cells to enter and infect. Sehgal noted that the new

variant has mutations to the spike protein that the three leading vaccines are targeting. The three leading vaccines are Moderna, Pfizer and Oxford-AstraZeneca. However, vaccines produce antibodies against many regions in the spike protein, so it's unlikely that a single change would make the vaccine less effective, Sehgal told.

Over time, as more mutations occur, the vaccine may need to be altered.

This happens with seasonal flu, which mutates every year, and the vaccine is adjusted accordingly, Sehgal explained. The SARS-CoV-2 virus, however, doesn't mutate

as quickly as the flu virus, he added.

Virologist Upasana Ray agreed with Sehgal, noting that there is not enough evidence to suggest that these mutations may affect the efficacy of current vaccine candidates.

It is important to remember that we don't know whether this variant is a serotype' (variant), Ray, a senior scientist at CSIR-IGIB Kolkata, told.

She explained that it is still unknown if the new strain interacts with the host immune system differently compared to other existing variants.

As such, there is no evidence to date that this variant alters disease severity, either in terms of mortality or the seriousness of the cases of Covid-19 for those infected.

She said the structural proteins of a virus are responsible for the attachment of the virus receptor co-receptor in cells, ultimately leading to the entry of the virus inside the host cells.

Thus changes in the structural protein might influence strength of virus-receptor interactions and thus infectivity, she added.

PM Oli forms new general convention committee

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
KATHMANDU, 22 DECEMBER

The ruling Nepal Communist Party on Tuesday appeared to be headed for a split after the warring factions held separate Central Committee meetings, with Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli announcing a new 1,199-member committee to organise the party's general convention in an effort to strengthen his hold on it.

Oli, who is also one of the two chairmen of the ruling party, announced the new committee during a meeting of the party's Central Committee members close to him at Baluwatar, the PM's official residence, the Kathmandu Post reported.

The members of the newly-formed general convention organising committee took oaths in the presence of the prime minister. The meeting also decided to remove Naryan Kaji Shrestha as the party spokesperson.

Foreign minister Pradeep Gyawali, a Standing Committee member, was appointed as the new spokesperson of the party, said Binod Shrestha, a Central Committee member.

Nepal on Sunday plunged into a political crisis after Oli got the President to dissolve Parliament, a controversial move amidst a prolonged

tussle for power between him and former premier Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda' within the ruling dispensation.

Oli's latest move is aimed at achieving a majority in the Central Committee, My Republica reported. The newly-formed committee adds 556 members to the existing 446-member Central Committee of the ruling party.

Addressing the Central Committee members of his faction, Oli said that it would not make any difference to the party if some leaders quit.

In the meeting, Oli also proposed to hold the party's general convention on November 18-23 in Kathmandu next year. Earlier the party's convention was scheduled from 7 to 12 April, 2021.

Oli's decision to announce the new committee comes at a time when rival factions of the ruling party are preparing to make formal announcements for a party split.

The rival faction led by Prachanda also held a separate central committee meeting in Kathmandu.

Former PMs Madhav Kumar Nepal and Jhalanath Khanal and former agriculture minister Ghanashyam Bhushal were among the senior leaders who attended the Central Committee meeting of Prachanda-led faction.

Kushner joins Israelis on landmark visit to Morocco

ASSOCIATED PRESS
BEN-GURION INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT (ISRAEL), 22 DECEMBER

Senior White House adviser Jared Kushner led a delegation from Israel to Morocco on Tuesday on the first known direct flight since the two countries agreed to establish full diplomatic ties earlier this month as part of a series of US-brokered normalisation accords with Arab countries.

Kushner, President Donald Trump's son-in-law, has overseen the diplomatic push that saw the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco normalize relations with Israel in historic agreements that

also brought them major favors from Washington.

As part of the deal, Morocco, which is home to a small but centuries-old Jewish community and has long welcomed Israeli tourists, secured U.S. recognition of its 1975 annexation of the disputed region of Western Sahara, which is not recognized by the United Nations.

The US decision to recognize Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara has drawn criticism from the UN as well as American allies in Africa and beyond. African observers have said it could destabilize the broader region, already struggling against Islamist

insurgencies and migrant trafficking.

Former US Secretary of State James Baker, who served as UN envoy to the Western Sahara, has called it an astounding retreat from the principles of international law and diplomacy. Israel has traditionally backed the UN position and has not said whether it will join the US in recognizing Moroccan control over the area.

Before Israel's establishment in 1948, Morocco was home to a large Jewish population, many of whose ancestors migrated to North Africa from Spain and Portugal during the Spanish Inquisition. The delegations were expected to restore low-level relations between Israel and Morocco that existed in the 1990s and sign several cooperation agreements, including the establishment of direct flights, said Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman Lior Haiat.

The goal is to move the relationship from a low level to full diplomatic relations," he said. He said there was no firm timeline for this process.

Before Israel's establishment in 1948, Morocco was home to a large Jewish population, many of whose ancestors migrated to North Africa from Spain and Portugal during the Spanish Inquisition.

The delegations were expected to restore low-level relations between Israel and Morocco that existed in the 1990s and sign several cooperation agreements, including the establishment of direct flights, said Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman Lior Haiat.

The real extent of those child deaths. She did it by getting forensic pathologists to put the dead bodies of hundreds of newborn babies, infants, toddlers and teenagers on examination tables to determine exactly how they died.

Child death reviews are common in developed countries but had never been done in South Africa before Mathews' project. As she feared, the findings were grim.

In 2014, she embarked on a research project to uncover

the real extent of those child deaths. She did it by getting forensic pathologists to put the dead bodies of hundreds of newborn babies, infants, toddlers and teenagers on examination tables to determine exactly how they died.

Child death reviews are common in developed countries but had never been done in South Africa before Mathews' project. As she feared, the findings were grim.

Over a year, the patholo-

Russia hits more EU officials with entry bans over Navalny

ASSOCIATED PRESS
MOSCOW, 22 DECEMBER

Moscow is expanding the list of European officials barred from entering Russia in response to the European Union's sanctions over the poisoning of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, Russia's Foreign Ministry announced Tuesday.

The move comes a day after Navalny, a longtime adversary of President Vladimir Putin, released a recording of a phone call he said he made to an alleged state security

operative, who was identified by media as a member of a team that has reportedly trailed the politician for years. In the recording, the man indicated his involvement in covering up the supposed poisoning of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, Russia's Foreign Ministry didn't reveal either the names of the EU officials or the exact number who would be barred from Russia. But it did say that the list includes those who are responsible for promoting anti-Russian sanctions initiatives in the 27-member bloc.

Russia's Foreign Ministry called the EU sanctions a confrontational political decision and announced that it was expanding the list of representatives of EU member states and institutions who will be denied entry to the Russian Federation. The Ministry didn't reveal either the names of the EU officials or the exact number who would be barred from Russia. But it did say that the list includes those who are responsible for promoting anti-Russian sanctions initiatives in the 27-member bloc.

Last month, EU foreign ministers imposed sanctions on six Russian officials and a state research institute over what German authorities said was poisoning in Russia with a nerve agent.

In a statement Tuesday,

around dinner tables and in front of TVs.

Fatal child abuse is where the justice system often fails and cases are falling through the cracks, Mathews said. There was, she says, the case of a 9-month-old child who had seizures after being dropped off at day care. Though rushed to the hospital, the child died.

Doctors found severe head injuries and told the mother to go to the police, but no one followed up.

Chinese military says it 'expelled' US naval ship from South China Sea

BEIJING, 22 DECEMBER

China's military on Tuesday claimed to have "expelled" a US Navy destroyer which sailed through the disputed South China Sea challenging Beijing's claims over the area.

US naval ships regularly sail through the disputed South China Sea (SCS) in a bid to assert freedom of navigation in the region.

China claims almost all of the 1.3 million square mile South China Sea as its sovereign territory. China has been building military bases on artificial islands in the region also claimed by Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam.

China has impeded commercial activity like fishing or mineral exploration by countries like Vietnam and the Philippines.

On Tuesday, the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Southern Theater Command said that the US destroyer USS John McCain "trespassed into waters near China's Nansha Islands (Spratly Islands), without the authorisation of the Chinese government". PTI

LEISURE

10 MINUTE CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1 Broad flat fish (3)
- 3 Vocalise musically (4)
- 5 Go-between (12)
- 8 Very small (4)
- 9 Unsparring (8)
- 12 Required (6)
- 13 Woody grass (6)
- 15 Cross (8)
- 18 Rabbit's tail (4)
- 20 Not attached to anything (12)
- 21 Retained (4)
- 22 Implore (3)
- 23 Yonder (4)
- 24 Impair (7)
- 25 Length (4)
- 27 Short-haired youth (8)
- 28 Effrontery (5)
- 29 Clear (5)
- 30 Bill of fare (4)
- 31 Deficit (8)
- 32 Support (7)
- 33 Concubine (5)
- 34 Location (4)
- 35 Rebuff (4)

DOWN

- 1 Entourage (7)
- 2 Unit of length (4)
- 3 Short-haired youth (8)
- 4 Effrontery (5)
- 5 Clear (5)
- 6 Bill of fare (4)
- 7 Go-between (12)
- 8 Very small (4)
- 9 Unsparring (8)
- 10 Required (6)
- 11 Empathic (8)
- 12 Retained (4)
- 13 Woody grass (6)
- 14 Support (7)
- 15 Cross (8)
- 16 Concubine (5)
- 17 Location (4)
- 18 Rabbit's tail (4)
- 19 Rebuff (4)
- 20 Impair (7)
- 21 Retained (4)
- 22 Implore (3)
- 23 Yonder (4)

SOLUTIONS TO YESTERDAY'S CROSSWORD

CROSS 1. Hoopla, 13 Hoopla, 14 Impair, 15 Pelican, 16 Longface, 17 Lance, 18 Face, 19 Rebuff, 20 Col.

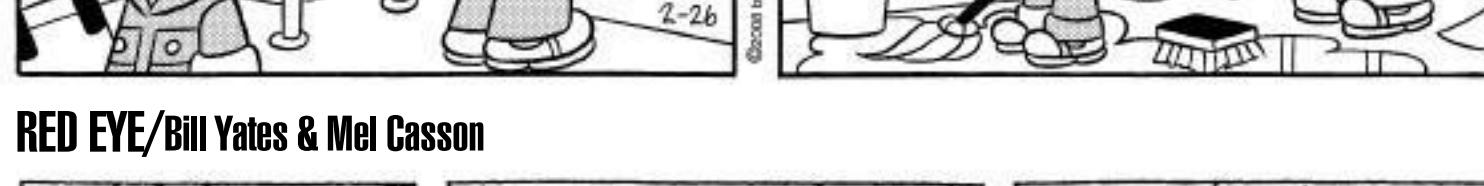
DOWN 1. Entourage, 2. Unit of length, 3. Short-haired youth, 4. Effrontery, 5. Clear, 6. Bill of fare, 7. Go-between, 8. Very small, 9. Unsparring, 10. Required, 11. Empathic, 12. Retained, 13. Woody grass, 14. Support, 15. Cross, 16. Concubine, 17. Location, 18. Rabbit's tail, 19. Rebuff, 20. Impair.

By arrangement with The Independent. Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required

BEETLE BAILEY/Mort Walker



RED EYE/Bill Yates & Mel Casson



DADDY DAZE/John Kovaleski



SO YOU WANT TO PLAY "DANGER HOUSE," WHAT'S THAT?

WE MOVE AROUND THE HOUSE WITHOUT TOUCHING THE FLOOR BECAUSE IT'S VERY DANGEROUS.

WELL, OUR 1970s SHAG CARPET IS PRETTY GROSS.

GERMS AND BACTERIA CAN BE DANGEROUS.

Quicker fix for snakebite



A team of researchers has created a mixture that can be administered orally

S ANANTHANARAYANAN

If the number of persons who succumb to malaria is a cause for worldwide concern, those that succumb to snakebites, which is a fourth of that number, should be of concern too.

Managing snakebite, however, has not received the proportionate attention of the global health community, says a paper in the journal, *Nature Communications*, while proposing an alternate preparation that could be more effective, easier to administer and more readily available. Laura-Oana Albulescu, Chunfang Xie, Stuart Ainsworth, Jaffer Alsolaiss, Edouard Crittenden, Charlotte A Dawson, Rowan Sofley, Keirah E Bartlett, Robert A Harrison, Jeroen Kool and Nicholas R Casewell, from the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam and Centre for Analytical Sciences, Amsterdam describe a combination of just two preparations, which can be orally administered, and is effective against the venom of most of the medically-important vipers of Africa, South Asia and Central America.

In the contest between health workers and the community of snakes, of saving or immobilising victims of snakebite, snakes have the advantage of millions of years of evolution of highly effective venoms, and instruments of delivery. Snakes administer their cocktails of chemically complex venoms through perfectly adapted needle-like fangs, and the venom quickly spreads across the victim's body through the bloodstream. For centuries, humans had no inkling of how the venom acted and the only recourse was tourniquets and amputation.

It was after the late 1800s that scientists observed that it was possible for people to get immunity to snake or insect bites if they trained with low doses of the same poison that they

feared. The notion that the body generates an antidote was followed through and methods were found to culture the antibodies against important venoms by injecting the venoms into the bodies of animals. The process was successful and there are now several farms, or labs, all over the world, that produce doses of antivenin, as the substance is called, against a variety of snakes, spiders, and so on.

As each antivenin is almost solely effective against the venom of a small group of species, the appropriate antivenin needs to be near at hand, to be administered fairly soon and it often needs refrigeration to stay effective. And again, as the antivenin is produced in the body of an animal, there are often reactions when used in humans. Hence, both for administration, by injection, and then to deal with possible reactions, there is a need for trained personnel. These features limit the value of the line of treatment. However, it is almost the only recourse in case of a poisonous snakebite. And antivenin does save thousands of lives each year.

Snake venom is now understood to consist of proteins and enzymes, or substances that promote or retard body processes. Venom has evolved to contain those agents that lead to tissue damage, or that affect the nervous system – leading to paralysis, or that affect the clotting of the blood, either by creating clots or by preventing clotting. Although the discovery of the constituents of the substances the immune system of the animal produces is daunting, we now have the possibility of analysing what snake or other venom consists of and devising synthetic agents to neutralise the active portion of the venom.

One approach, the paper says, has been the use of "small molecule" inhibitors, as an alternative to the products of the immune system. The "small molecule", which is what most of the

drugs that we use consist of, are units that act by attaching to cells or other molecules, to block or facilitate the cell action. While acting in a way not different from the enzymes in snake venoms, the advantage with small molecules is that they can be administered orally, unlike large molecule drugs, which need to be administered intravenously.

The authors of the paper in *Nature Communications* note that the viper family of snakes, which consists of hundreds of varieties, including the rattlesnake, the adders, pit vipers, bush vipers, the Russel's viper, the saw scaled viper, is responsible for the majority of snake poisoning incidents over the Americas, Africa and Asia. While treatment of snakebite needs to take care of several classes of toxins, across species, it is found that there are three specific kinds that account for more than 60 per cent of the toxins found. These three, which are substances that cause the breakdown of proteins, are found to be the main cause of (a) destruction of tissue, (b) decay of cell membrane, with leakage of fluids and (c) breakdown of the clotting mechanism, leading to haemorrhage.

The authors draw attention to a known preparation, *varespladib*, which inhibits the action of enzymes that break up proteins, and was considered for the treatment of a cardiac disease. While this application did not progress, *varespladib* showed promise as antivenin, as it could block the action of a category of components of the venom and another group, which includes the cobra. In addition, the authors say, there were other substances in use to inhibit other groups of enzymes, which also proved effective against venom-induced haemorrhage and tissue death. They also cite a licensed oral medicine, used to treat cases of poisoning by heavy metals (mercury, arsenic), which worked

against the venom of the saw-scaled viper.

The authors hence proposed that a selection of such small molecule specifics could be combined, to act as "broad spectrum" treatment and take care of the venom of several species of snakes. And in this effort, "to rationally select and preclinically validate a therapeutic small molecule mixture capable of neutralising distinct pathogenic toxins found in the venoms of geographically diverse, medically important, hemotoxic (toxic to blood) vipers," the authors say, they have succeeded.

They prepared a mixture of just two small molecule substances. One is *marimastat*, which was tried out for its ability to suppress the action of some enzymes, in the immune system for instance. The other is *varespladib*, which we have spoken of. The paper describes how this combination, administered to experimental mice, a fixed time after controlled doses of different venoms were administered, showed that the combination was successful in overcoming the main viper venoms that are encountered.

About a year ago, a group from the University of California, writing in the journal of the American Chemical Society, described a nanoparticle-based "long molecule", which was easier to handle and had similar "broad spectrum" application. The present, small molecule solution, however, has the great advantage that it can be administered orally, or need not be injected. The concept that has been demonstrated could hence lead to an antivenin dose that a person could carry with her when she ventures into the wild. If she should be bitten, she could just swallow a first-aid dose which would keep her well till she reached medical attention!

The writer can be contacted at response@simplescience.in

—THE INDEPENDENT

PLUS POINTS

Hibernating humans?



Early humans could have hibernated to survive harsh winters like some modern animals do, researchers have suggested.

Scientists came to this conclusion after examining fossilised human remains found in a cave burial chamber known as Sima de los Huesos – or the "Pit of Bones" – at the Atapuerca archaeological site near Burgos in northern Spain. Using microscopes and CT scanning, the academics discovered that the bones, which are roughly 430,000 years old, had lesions and other bone damage like those seen in animals that hibernate. By slowing their metabolism, it is thought that early human species could have slept for months to weather freezing winters, a time when food supplies would have been extremely scarce.

The researchers – Juan-Luis Arsuaga, who heads the Atapuerca Foundation, and Antonis Bartsios, of Democritus University of Thrace in Greece – acknowledge that the "notion that humans can undergo a hypometabolic state analogous to hibernation may sound like science fiction". However, in a paper published in the December issue of the journal *L'Anthropologie*, they point out that "primitive mammals and primates" like bush babies and lorises hibernate, which suggests that "the genetic basis and physiology for such a hypometabolism could be preserved in many mammalian species, including humans".

Speaking to *The Guardian*, Patrick Randolph-Quinney, a forensic anthropologist at Northumbria University, Newcastle, said, "It is a very interesting argument and it will certainly stimulate debate. However, there are other explanations for the variations seen in the bones found in Sima and these must be addressed fully before we can come to any realistic conclusions. That has not been done yet, I believe."

The Sima de los Huesos site has been excavated annually since 1983 and 5,500 human skeletal remains have been unearthed there to date, according to the Atapuerca Foundation website. The bones, which are believed to have been thrown to the bottom of the cave shaft deliberately, have yielded many clues about early human evolution in Europe.

Telescope in China opens



Nestled among the mountains in Southwest China, the world's largest radio telescope signals Beijing's ambitions as a global centre for scientific research.

The Five-hundred-metre Aperture Spherical Telescope (Fast) – the only significant instrument of its kind after the collapse of another telescope in Puerto Rico this month – is about to open its doors for foreign astronomers to use, hoping to attract the world's top scientific talent.

Wang Qiming, chief inspector of Fast's operations and development centre, told AFP during a rare visit by the foreign press last week that he had visited Arecibo in Puerto Rico. "We drew a lot of inspiration from its structure, which we gradually improved to build our telescope." The Chinese installation in Pingtang, Guizhou province, is up to three times more sensitive than the US-owned one, and is surrounded by a five km "radio silence" zone where mobile phones and computers are not allowed. Work on the Fast began in 2011 and it started full operations in January this year, working mainly to capture the radio signals emitted by celestial bodies, in particular pulsars – rapidly rotating dead stars. The 500m giant satellite dish is easily the world's largest – covering the area of 30 football pitches – and cost 1.1 billion yuan to build, as well as displacing thousands of villagers to make room for it.

China has been rapidly boosting its scientific credentials to become less reliant on foreign technology. In the last two decades, it has built the largest high-speed train network in the world, finalised its Beidou geolocation system – a competitor of the American Global Positioning System – and is now in the process of bringing lunar samples back to Earth.

The data being collected by Fast should allow for a better understanding of the origins of the universe – and aid in the search for alien life.

—THE STRAITS TIMES/ANN



MAHARSHI KRISHNA DEB

While pluripotent cells of mammalian embryos (commonly referred to as embryonic stem cells) differentiate to give rise to all the cell types that constitute our body, the discovery of the ability to convert differentiated cells back into their embryonic pluripotent state through the generation of induced pluripotent stem (iPS) cells, by Kazutoshi Takahashi and Shinya Yamanaka in 2006, has brought about a paradigm shift in our understanding of the biological system. Moreover, this discovery allows generation of patient-specific iPS cells (by converting an abnormal cell into an iPS cell) from which normal cells or organs can be created and thus offers the opportunity to implant such patient-specific cells or organs back to the patient and thereby, bypass the disadvantage of rejection owing to compatibility.

However, one of the biggest hurdles to using these revolutionary cells for regenerating any cell type is that the process of cellular reprogramming is highly inefficient. Most studies indicate the role of overlapping

pathways in the induction of tumorigenesis and pluripotency, which has thereby led to the development of a perception that iPS cells may harbour tumorigenic potential. Therefore, although the appeal of application of iPS cells in regenerative medicine is highly revered, such strategies to generate a high number of these iPS cells can offset their therapeutic benefit.

To rip the regenerative advantage that iPS cells can offer, we set out in a quest to identify an oncogene whose inactivation may improve the efficiency of cellular reprogramming. We conducted a loss-of-function screen by deploying an RNA interference approach of silencing gene expression. We targeted 1,000 putative cancer-related genes (genes that are activated upon cancer formation) upon generation of iPS from differentiated cells. This screen identified *Tnfaiap2*, which is a potential oncogene as the road-block in generation of iPS cells. Planarians rely on these pluripotent populations to meet their homeostatic and regenerative demands and thus, as such, their immortality is attributed to the omnipresent existence of those

SLOWING DOWN AGING

New research holds promise that tissues could be maintained and ultimately, regenerated

omnipotent cells.

Phylogenetic analysis indicated that planarians express a *Tnfaiap2* homolog called exoc3. Hence, we decided to check the implication of suppressing the expression of this gene in planarians. Strikingly, although the depletion of exoc3 similarly increased the number of pluripotent cells, these planarians exhibited severe deformations of various tissues and organs owing to impaired differentiation of their pluripotent cells. Together, the data indicated planarian homolog of *Tnfaiap2* is required to maintain tissue homeostatic and regenerative potential in planarians.

To gain mechanistic insight about the role of *Tnfaiap2* in stem cell differentiation, we analysed the protein profile of mammalian pluripotent stem cells devoid of *Tnfaiap2* gene. This analysis revealed *Tnfaiap2* affects lipid metabolism since repression of *Tnfaiap2* resulted in the loss of architectural intermediate filament protein Vimentin (VIM) which is required for the formation of Lipid Droplets (LDs) that are central hubs for lipid metabolism. Besides Vim, we also detected the loss of another factor involved in lipid metabolism, carnitine palmitoyltransferase (CPT1A). CPT1A facilitates transfer of fatty acid from cytoplasm to mitochondria where these fatty acids are subsequently metabolised by undergoing beta-oxidation for production of energy in the form of ATP. Interestingly, lipid profile of both exoc3 and *Tnfaiap2* lacking pluripotent cells of planarians and mammals showed significant deficiency of fatty acids.

To test whether external supply of fatty acid could rescue differentia-

tion defects of planarian and mammalian pluripotent cells depleted of exoc3 and *Tnfaiap2* respectively, we supplemented the cells with fatty acids. Strikingly, this external supply of fatty acids was found to restore differentiation in both and thus led to the revival of organ homeostasis and regeneration.

The outcome of this work would be essential to attenuate aging which is the biggest risk factor for most human diseases like cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes, sarcopenia, rheumatoid arthritis, macular degeneration, cataract, osteoporosis besides several neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and schizophrenia as well as predisposition to various viral diseases like influenza and Covid-19. The risk factors for these diseases increase exponentially with age owing to reduction in the number of functional stem cell pools that leads to deterioration in tissue homeostasis. It would be interesting to identify *Tnfaiap2* to increase the stem cell population in aged cells, while decline of the effect of the drug would allow the stem cells to differentiate for restoration of organ homeostasis to ameliorate hallmarks of aging like tissue atrophy which would result in alleviation of aging-associated diseases. Although aging is inevitable, such therapeutic interventions can offer options to extend one's healthy lifespan.

The work has been published in the journal, *EMBO Reports* on 10 December this year.

The writer is a former researcher of Stanford University and is currently the principal investigator in the laboratory of germline and chromosome biology at Admas University, Kolkata





THE JAFFER CODE

Wasim Jaffer (photo, left) has sent a message to Ajinkya Rahane in Australia, challenging him and his team-mates to decode it. "Dear @ajinkyahane88, here's a (hidden) message for you. Good luck for Boxing Day! People, In, Cricket, Know, Grief, In, Life, Lingers, Aplenty, Never, Dabble, Rise, And, Handcraft, Unique, Legacy," tweeted Jaffer.

For more updates

www.thestatesman.com

THUMBNAILS

Don's cap: An Australian businessman has bought Donald Bradman's first baggy green Test cap for \$450,000 at an auction, the second-highest price paid for a piece of cricket memorabilia. Peter Freedman plans to show Bradman's Test debut cap around Australia.

'Racist' Warne: Shane Warne was accused of racism while commenting on Australia's Test match against India at Adelaide last week. He called Cheteshwar Pujara "Steve," referring to a nickname given to Pujara when the 32-year-old Indian played for Yorkshire.

Saurashtra row: Ex-player Nikhil Rathod has alleged a conflict of interests against the treasurer of the Saurashtra Cricket Association, Shyam Raichura, in an e-mailed complaint. He also alleged the SCA was being run by the sons of its erstwhile officials.

Wrong tune-up: Sri Lanka coach Mickey Arthur has said his team have not entered the Test series against South Africa in an ideal manner after three weeks of Twenty20 cricket in the Lanka Premier League. Sri Lanka will play two Tests in South Africa.

Family first: Pakistan bowling coach Waqar Younis will return home after the first Test against New Zealand – which will be played from 26 December at the Bay Oval in Mount Maunganui – to meet his family, whom he has not met since June, it is reported.

New role: Ex-South African player Jacques Kallis has been appointed batting consultant of England for the forthcoming two-Test tour of Sri Lanka that begins on 14 January. Kallis is third on the list of top run-getters in Tests with 13,289 runs, and also took 292 Test wickets.

Grateful Burns: Australia's Joe Burns, who scored a half-century in the second innings of the first Test again form, thanked coach Justin Langer for the support he had extended. Burns was under fire after failing to score in Sheffield Shield and warm-up matches.

Double strike: Chelsea striker Tammy Abraham scored a late opportunist double to secure a 3-0 home win for Chelsea over West Ham United in the Premier League on Monday after Brazilian defender Thiago Silva had fired them in front with an early header.

Badminton calendar: The Badminton World Federation was on Monday said to have announced the tournament calendar for the first half of 2021, which includes 17 competitions that would serve as qualification tournaments for the Tokyo Olympics.

Dope doubt: Russia's weightlifter and Olympic medalist Tatiana Kashirina has been temporarily suspended for an anti-doping rule violation. Kashirina won silver at the 2012 Olympics and five gold medals at the world championships between 2010 and 2018.

Calcutta Hard Court Tennis Championship: Wild card entrant Akshat Agarwal stunned top seed Arghya Das in the opening round of the Men's Open Singles at the ongoing Calcutta Hard Court Tennis Championship 2020, held at both Clay and Synthetic Courts of the Calcutta Club Ltd.

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Smith hopes to do better against Ashwin on Boxing Day

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

ADELAIDE, 22 DECEMBER



Australia batsman Steve Smith said today he had not played Ravichandran Ashwin (in photo) well in the first Test and was looking forward to countering the India off-spinner in the Boxing Day fixture at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

Ashwin got Smith caught at slip for just one in the first innings with a delivery that did not turn. Smith said it was his mistake against what he thought was decent bowling.

"He (Ashwin) is a good bowler, he has played a lot of

cricket. He is a world-class performer. Unfortunately, he got the better of me the other day. I will hopefully learn something from that and move forward and play him in the next game...I just nicked one that didn't spin. Unfortunately, that happens sometimes and I thought it was pretty well bowled. The two balls prior to that spun a bit and got grip off the wicket. The next one was more of a sidespin and just skidded on. I didn't play as well as I could. That was just decent bowling," Smith told reporters in a virtual media interaction.

"Playing in Australia and playing in India are completely different. The ball probably doesn't spin as regularly as it does in India...at times he got over the top of the ball and at

other times, in my dismissal for instance, he came rounded and tried to skid it on. So, a good piece of bowling," added Smith.

The Australian's failure to get going in the first Test was a rare occasion when he failed against India. The visitors go into the next Test, starting on 26 December, as a depleted side.

Skipper Virat Kohli will be missing as he returns home to attend the birth of his first baby.

Smith was asked by an Indian reporter about what India should do to make a comeback.

He replied: "I think it is important to keep moving forward. Look at yourself individually at what you could have done better which I think is important enough after any game...whether you bat well or you don't. You reflect what

you can do in the next game or in the rest of the games for the series to have an impact...Again every individual is different. The way they take their dismissals, how they think about their game after it is finished."

The 32-year-old also said the Indian team still had plenty of quality in their bowling despite the absence of Mohammad Shami. But he says Shami and Ishant Sharma's absence will be a big loss for the Indian team.

"They have obviously lost some experience and some quality players. So obviously we will take some confidence with the way we played in the end and keep moving forward...I still think they have got some quality bowlers here. I think Saini or Siraj, if they go down that route. I think they

are two quality bowlers that can have some good Test careers. Obviously they are missing Shami and Ishant as well which is a big loss for them," said Smith. "We are not thinking about India and how they are going to come back. It is just about executing the things that we need to do in the middle and doing it to the best of our ability," the former Australia skipper said.

Smith revealed he was still struggling with a stiff back that he had feared would keep him out of the first Test against India. He said he was struggling to sit for long, although he hoped to get fit by the time the second Test would begin.

"I just can't sit down for too long really. If I am up and about and moving around, I am pretty good. If I sit down, I am pretty stiff. If I am moving around or lying down then good. If I sit around for too long then it is not great for it. So I am not worried. Everything will be fine. It will be good to go," Smith said.

"Initially when I (had a stiff back), I did have some fears (of missing the first Test). But I have had a few back issues in the past and they are generally two- or three-day things where I do a lot of physiotherapy, get myself into extension. It is just having someone like a physio to push in my back. It is still a bit stiff but it didn't hamper me

throughout the game. It was all good. It is something I have to manage whenever it does. I haven't had an episode since 2014. Hopefully they can be six years apart if they come," he added.

The right-handed batsman is looking forward to the Boxing Day Test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, where he has an exceptional batting average. Compared with his career average of 62.31, Smith's average in the seven Tests he has played at the MCG, since his debut in 2010, is 113.5 with four centuries. He played one Test against India at the venue, in 2014, scoring 192.

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Apex council should appoint selectors, says Vengsarkar

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 22 DECEMBER

Apex council appointing selectors will be fairer than a CAC appointing them, "Vengsarkar said.

"The 60-year cap is nowhere in the BCCI constitution; it is 70 years. This 60-year rule was brought in – in 2016 as well as 2020 – by office-bearers to push the people into selection committees. This is absolutely absurd, and is not good for cricket. And, first and foremost, the BCCI's CAC should be scrapped completely," said the former captain Dilip Vengsarkar.

Vengsarkar, 64, said the new Supreme Court-approved constitution of the Board of Control for Cricket in India mentions an upper age limit of 70 years for office-bearers, and which can be applied to selectors, too, and not the 60-year bar, which is an "absurd rule" and "detrimental to Indian cricket."

The master batsman of yesterday threw his weight behind his 1983 World Cup-winning team-mate Kirti Azad when he applied for a selector's position in the Delhi and District Cricket Association only to be ignored.

"I like batting at the MCG. On big occasions, I try to make the most of them and help the team out. There is nothing like the sort of thrill or I guess you get the shivers down the spine when you walk out to bat on Boxing Day," said the 31-year-old.

"The CAC should be scrapped and selectors should be appointed by the apex councils, both of the BCCI and the state associations. After all, the selectors are appointed by the BCCI president indirectly. So, it is better to get rid of the CAC."

Cole's goal settles point for Odisha despite NorthEast's rally effort

AGENCIES
GOA, 22 DECEMBER

It could have been another defeat but Odisha FC clawed back a point despite taking the lead early against NorthEast United, drawing 2-2 in a Hero Indian Super League game at the GMC Stadium, here on Tuesday.

Odisha took the lead through Diego Mauricio (26') before Benjamin Lambot (45+1') drew parity. Kwest Appiah (65') then converted a penalty to put the Highlanders ahead but soon saw his goal canceled out by Cole Alexander (67').

Odisha named an unchanged eleven from the side that lost to Bengaluru FC while NorthEast coach Gerard Nus reacted in four changes with Federico Gallego handed a start.

The first half saw a cagey contest with both sides heading into the break level after creating plenty of chances.

The first big chance of the game arrived during the 10th minute but Odisha keeper Arshdeep Singh produced a save to deny an opener for the Highlanders.

Gallego picked up Kwest Appiah with a long ball, and the latter made space for himself between two markers but saw his shot blocked by Arshdeep.

Minutes later, Odisha carved

out a great chance at the other end from a set-piece and should have bagged the lead.

Diego Mauricio had two attempts on goal and his second one seemed to be heading into the net before Dylan Fox pulled off a fine goal-line clearance to keep it goalless.

But the Brazilian redeemed himself with a wonder-strike to hand his side the lead. Mauricio, receiving the ball from outside the box, cut inside before drilling a low shot that trickled into the back of the net.

The ball went in following a light deflection off Lalengmawia, leaving the keeper with no chance.

NorthEast piled on the pressure after conceding and missed three chances from set-pieces. However, a lapse in concentration from Odisha instigated times when the conceding.

Lambot made a run at the far post and picked up Ashutosh Mehra's cross before heading home. Nus' side began the second half from where they left off and deservedly took the lead. They won a penalty after Appiah was tripped in the box by Arshdeep. The Ghanaian stepped up to take the spot-kick and struck it with venom to notch his third ISL goal.

Their lead didn't last long as Alexander equalised for Odisha by beautifully curling his shot at the far post.

Shami injury

MELBOURNE, 22 DECEMBER

India pacer Mohammed Shami is unlikely to play the opening Test against England in February as a six-week rest cum rehabilitation programme awaits him after suffering a wrist fracture.

The fast bowler suffered the fracture on his bowling hand during the series-opening day/night Test against Australia in Adelaide last week.

Shami was hit on the elbow by Pat Cummins short ball during India's second innings last Saturday, which ended at a record lowest score of 36 for nine at the Adelaide Oval. He was taken to a hospital for scans, which revealed a fracture.

"He is not likely to play the first Test versus England as rest and rehab will take six weeks. Once the plaster is off, he will do his rehab at the NCA (National Cricket Academy in Bengaluru)," a BCCI source told PTI.

Already ruled out of the remainder of the ongoing four-match Test series against Australia, Shami left for India on Tuesday.

India's home series against England begins on February 5, with the first of the four Tests scheduled to be held at the MA Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai. PTI

Pakistan wins third T20 for morale boost before Tests

AGENCIES
NAPIER (NEW ZEALAND),
22 DECEMBER

New test captain Mohammad Rizwan (in photo) showed his leadership quality in a bold innings of 89 which steered Pakistan to a four-wicket win over New Zealand in the third Twenty20 on Tuesday.

Rizwan will lead Pakistan in the two-match test series against New Zealand starting on Sunday in place of Babar Azam, who is injured.

In Azam's absence he also opened the batting in all three T20s, making 17 in Auckland and 22 in Hamilton before achieving a maiden half-century and career-best 89 from 59 balls on Tuesday. Rizwan beat his previous best of 33 not out.

With Rizwan's leadership, Pakistan surpassed New Zealand's moderate total of 173-7 with two balls to spare.

Rizwan batted his team within sight of victory when he was out in the final over at 171-6. Pakistan still needed three runs to win with four balls left. Iftikhar Ahmed settled the issue when he hoisted the fourth ball of the last over out of the ground for six, lifting Pakistan to 177-6.

New Zealand had already secured the series but Pakistan's win at McLean Park sends it into the test series in a much more positive frame of mind.

Pakistan won the toss in all three matches, batting first in the first two. A change of tactics on Tuesday to bowl first on a tricky pitch proved successful.

Rizwan put on 40 for the first wicket with Haider Ali (11), then 72 in a match-winning partnership with Mohammad Hafeez. Coming off his unbeaten 99 in the second T20, Hafeez made 41 from 29 balls with two fours and three sixes.

When he was out, Hafeez was just 12 runs short of equaling Shoib Malik's record of 2,335 runs for Pakistan in T20s.

Pakistan had nervous moments near the end of the innings, especially when Tim Southee dismissed Faheem Ashraf and Shadab Khan with consecutive deliveries with the

total 163. Iftikhar survived the

hit trick ball and struck the winning runs an over later.

"We lost the series but the last match is very important for the next series," Rizwan said.

"We wanted to create energy in this match so we take momentum into the test match."

"It's a big honor for me to be named captain of Pakistan. It's a dream for me and I can't explain my happiness."

New Zealand's innings progressed in fits and starts. While partnerships were created, few endured. The pitch was two-paced and the slower ball or cross-seamer was especially effective against batsmen trying to settle in.

Martin Guptill and Tim Seifert looked strong in a 40-

Playing without fans horrible and ugly: Messi

AGENCIES
BARCELONA, 22 DECEMBER

Barcelona's Lionel Messi (in photo) has explained how tough it has been to play without fans in the past year due to the novel coronavirus pandemic, likening the experience to a training session.

"It's terrible to play without fans, it's a very ugly sensation," Barcelona captain Messi told the ***Marca*** on Monday after receiving the Pichichi award for the top scorer in La Liga last season.

"Seeing no-one in the stadium is like a training session and it is very tough to really get going at the start of a game." The new normal of football in empty stadiums has certainly taken its toll on Messi and Barca.

The Catalans were top of La Liga with 11 games to go when the last season was disrupted by the pandemic but they surrendered the title to

Real Madrid when play resumed in empty stadiums.

They then suffered a humiliating 8-2 defeat by Bayern Munich in the Champions League in an empty Estadio da Luz in Lisbon in August.

This season they have made their worst start in 33 years and are currently fifth in La Liga, way off the pace of leaders Atletico Madrid, while they failed to finish top in their Champions League group for the first time since 2006.

The 33-year-old Messi is having his worst individual season since the 2007-8 campaign, scoring only nine goals in all competitions, five of

which have been penalties. "The truth is it's very ugly and that's why we are seeing such evenly matched games. It's very difficult to win, regardless of who you are playing against," Messi added.

"The pandemic has caused football to change a lot, and for the worse. You can see it in the matches, and I hope this all ends soon and we can get fans back