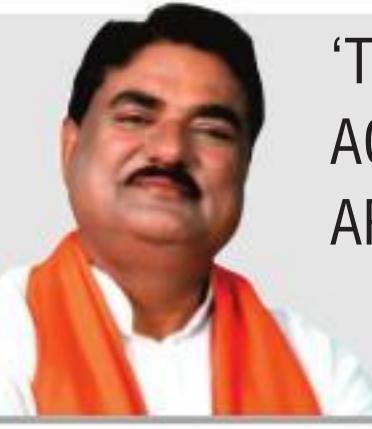




'FARM LAW ROW CAN
BE SOLVED IN 5 MINS
IF PM STEPS IN'

P5



'THESE PROTESTING
AGAINST AGRI LAWS
ARE MIDDLEMEN'

P5



BIDEN PICKS RIVAL
BUTTIGIEG AS SECY
OF TRANSPORT

P10



FIRST PINK-BALL
TEST AWAY
FROM HOME

P12

WEATHER

Mainly clear sky. Cold day conditions at a few places. The maximum and minimum temperatures would be around 18 and 05 degrees Celsius respectively.

RAINFALL: NIL

RELATIVE HUMIDITY

Max: 100% Min: 52%

TEMPERATURE

Max: 18.6°C (4) Min: 5.8°C (-3)

SUN RISES

07:08 hrs

MOON RISES

10:39 hrs

SUN SETS

17:28 hrs

MOON SETS

20:13 hrs

THUMBNAILS



An artist gives finishing touches to a statue of Santa Clause ahead of Christmas celebrations, in Kolkata on Wednesday.

IANS

Suvendu resigns as TMC MLA, BJP welcomes move: Ending weeks of speculations, TMC heavyweight Suvendu Adhikari resigned as an MLA of the Bengal Assembly Wednesday further fuelling the theory of him switching over to the saffron camp. Adhikari, who has resigned from the state cabinet last month and has been maintaining distance with the party leadership, arrived at the state assembly this evening and submitted his resignation to the Assembly secretary. He was TMC MLA from Nandigram assembly constituency of the East Midnapore district.

PTI

Cabinet approves auction of spectrum: The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved a proposal for the auction of 2,251.25 megahertz of spectrum worth ₹ 3.92 lakh crore at the base price. The telecom ministry plans to issue a notice to invite bids in December and hold the spectrum auction by March, telecom minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said.

Covid-19: India records 26,382 new infections, 387 new fatalities

SNS & PTI
NEW DELHI, 16 DECEMBER

India's Covid-19 caseload rose to 99.32 lakh with 26,382 infections being reported in a day, while the number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 94.56 lakh, according to data updated by the Union Health Ministry on Wednesday.

The total coronavirus infection tally mounted to 99,32,547, while the death toll rose to 1,44,096 with 387 new fatalities, the data updated at 8 am showed.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 94,56,449, pushing the national recovery rate to 95.21 per cent, while the Covid-19 case-fatality rate stands at 1.45 per cent.

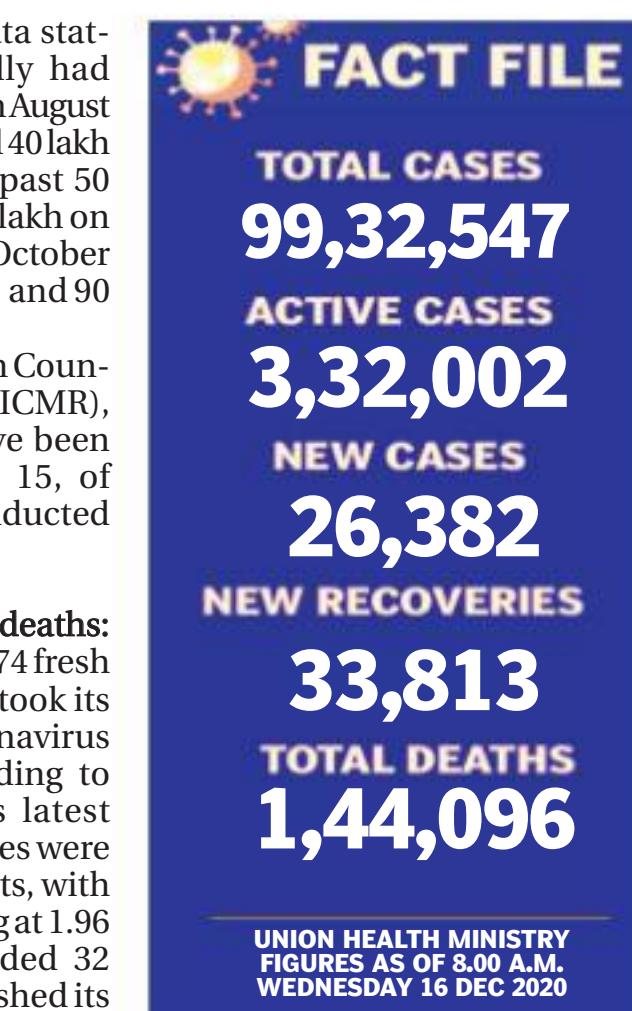
The Covid-19 active caseload remained below four lakh for the 10th consecutive day.

There are 3,32,002 active coronavirus infections in the country which constitute 3.34 per cent of the total caseload, the data stated. India's Covid-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 30 lakh on August 23, and 40 lakh on September 5. It went past 50 lakh on September 16, 60 lakh on September 28, 70 lakh on October 11, 80 lakh on October 29, and 90 lakh on November 20.

According to the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), 15,66,46,280 samples have been tested up to December 15, of which 10,85,625 were conducted on Tuesday.

Delhi adds 1,574 cases, 32 deaths:

Delhi today identified 1,574 fresh cases of Covid-19, which took its cumulative tally of coronavirus cases to 6,11,994, according to the Delhi government's latest health bulletin. These cases were detected out of 79,042 tests, with the positivity rate standing at 1.96 per cent. The city recorded 32 Covid fatalities, which pushed its toll to 10,147 now.



our armed forces that resulted in a decisive victory for our nation in the 1971 war. On this special Vijay Diwas, had the honour of lighting the 'Swarnim Vijay Mashaal' at the National War Memorial," Modi tweeted later.

Four 'Victory Mashaals' (flames), which were lit on the occasion, will now be carried to various parts of the country, including villages of Param Vir Chakra and Mahavir Chakra Awardees of the war. Soil from those villages and from areas where major battles were fought in 1971 will be brought to the NWM.

Paying tributes to the soldiers, the Defence Ministry said in a statement, "In December

1971, the Indian armed forces secured a decisive and historic victory over the Pakistan Army, which led to the creation of a nation - Bangladesh - and also resulted in the largest military surrender after the World War - II.

From today, the nation will be celebrating 50 years of the war, also called 'Swarnim Vijay Varsh'. In a Twitter post, he said, "Today, I salute the valour of the Indian Army on the occasion of Vijay Diwas. I remember the brave soldiers who wrote a new chapter in the 1971 war. Their sacrifice is a source of inspiration for all Indians. This nation will always remain grateful to them."

President Ram Nath Kovind, the supreme commander of the Armed Forces, said, "On Vijay Diwas, let us recall the valour of our soldiers that affirmed our nation's unwavering commitment to defend

our sovereignty and protect human dignity. Their martyrdom in (the) 1971 war had shown unparalleled grit and prowess of our forces. The nation is eternally indebted to them."

The defence minister unveiled the logo for the 'Swarnim Vijay Varsh'. In a Twitter post, he said, "Today, I salute the valour of the Indian Army on the occasion of Vijay Diwas. I remember the brave soldiers who wrote a new chapter in the 1971 war. Their sacrifice is a source of inspiration for all Indians. This nation will always remain grateful to them."

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar congratulated the

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, 16 DECEMBER

Telecom equipment from China may face fresh curbs after the Cabinet on Wednesday cleared a proposal to secure telecom infrastructure by designating a "trusted source" for the purchase of equipment by service providers.

Briefing reporters after the meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Security headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Law, Telecom and IT Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said a National Security Directive on Telecommunication Sector has been framed keeping in mind the national security.

"Considering the need to ensure India's national security, the Cabinet has accorded approval for the National Security Directive on Telecommunication Sector," Prasad said.

In recent months, India has banned the import of equipment from China for use in sectors ranging from telecom to power citing national security reasons. These bans were driven by concerns such as spyware or malicious software - known as "malware" - being embedded in the imported products," Prasad said.

The government will also create a list of designated sources from whom no procurement can be done.

"The present directive does not envisage mandatory replacement of the existing equipment already inducted in the network of TSPs," the minister said.

Last year, the government banned imports of Chinese handsets without the International Mobile Equipment Identity, or IMEI, number.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, 16 DECEMBER

Under the provisions of this directive, the government will declare a list of trusted sources and trusted products for installation in the country's telecom network.

"The methodology to designate trusted products will be devised by the designated authority, the National Cyber Security Coordinator. Telecom service providers are required to connect new devices that are designated trusted products," Prasad said.

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US Bill on Indo-China standoff

WASHINGTON, 16 DECEMBER

The US Congress has officially passed the \$740-billion defence policy Bill, which among other things include calling out Chinese aggression against India along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

The National Defense Authorisation Act (NDAA), included key components of Indian-American Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi's resolution language urging the Chinese government to end its military aggression against India along the LAC.

The development comes after Johnson's office earlier announced that it had extended the offer to Indian, South Korean and Australian leaders to take part in the G7 meeting, "delivering the Prime Minister's ambition to work with a group of like-minded democracies to advance shared interests and tackle common challenges".

Recalling his recent telephone conversation with British Prime Minister, Modi stressed the importance of the India-UK partnership in the post-Covid world.

Modi also conveyed his keenness to receive Johnson in New Delhi next month, on the occasion of India's 72nd Republic Day celebrations.

During his visit, Johnson will be just the second British leader since Indian independence to attend India's Republic Day parade in New Delhi as a guest of honour, after John Major in 1993. IANS

PM lights 'mashaal' to start 50th year celebrations of 1971 war win

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 16 DECEMBER

Prime Minister Narendra Modi today launched the 50th anniversary celebrations of the 1971 India-Pakistan war that led to the creation of Bangladesh.

In the morning, Modi visited the National War Memorial (NWM) in Delhi where he lit the 'Swarnim Vijay Mashaal' and paid homage to the fallen soldiers of the war. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Chief of Defence Staff, Gen Bipin Rawat, the three service chiefs also laid wreaths and paid tribute to the soldiers.

"On Vijay Diwas, we recall the unwavering courage of

our armed forces that resulted in a decisive victory for our nation in the 1971 war. On this special Vijay Diwas, had the honour of lighting the 'Swarnim Vijay Mashaal' at the National War Memorial," Modi tweeted later.

Four 'Victory Mashaals' (flames), which were lit on the occasion, will now be carried to various parts of the country, including villages of Param Vir Chakra and Mahavir Chakra Awardees of the war. Soil from those villages and from areas where major battles were fought in 1971 will be brought to the NWM.

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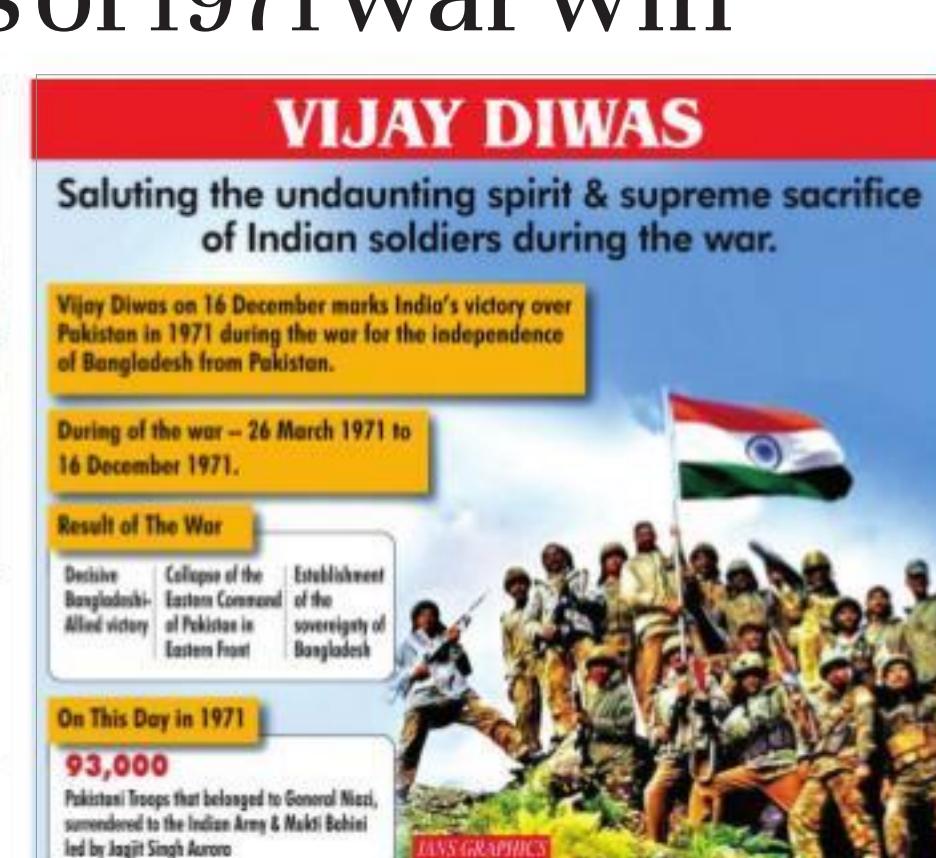
From today, the nation will be celebrating 50 years of the war, also called 'Swarnim Vijay Varsh'. In a Twitter post, he said, "Today, I salute the valour of the Indian Army on the occasion of Vijay Diwas. I remember the brave soldiers who wrote a new chapter in the 1971 war. Their sacrifice is a source of inspiration for all Indians. This nation will always remain grateful to them."

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar congratulated the



PM Narendra Modi pays homage at the National War Memorial in New Delhi on Wednesday. ■ IANS

Bangladesh government and the people on 'Bijoy Dibosh' (Victory Day).



Capital logs 1,574 fresh Covid cases, 32 deaths

Jain points out that positivity rate is below 2 pc, lowest since May; says DJB, electricity deptt employees to be included in 'frontline corona warriors' list for vaccination

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 16 DECEMBER

Delhi today identified 1,574 fresh cases of Covid-19, which took its cumulative tally of coronavirus cases to 6,11,994, according to the Delhi government's latest health bulletin.

These cases were detected out of 79,042 tests, with the positivity rate standing at 1.96 per cent.

The national capital recorded 32 Covid fatalities. This figure was 41 yesterday. The city's coronavirus toll has climbed to 10,147 now.

The Covid patients who recovered during the past 24 hours numbered 2,734 with the cumulative count of such recoveries in the city now mounting to 5,88,586, the health bulletin said. The recovery rate was 96.17 per cent.

According to the health bulletin, the count of active cases stood at 13,261 with 3,969 patients remaining hospitalised. Those undergoing treatment under home isolation numbered 7,745.

Delhi now had 6,415 containment zones, the bulletin added.



Meanwhile, Delhi's Minister for Health and Family Welfare Satyendar Jain said the Arvind Kejriwal government has issued orders to add the Delhi Jal Board and the Electricity Department workers to the list of "frontline warriors", who would receive the available Covid vaccine in the first phase.

He pointed out that the positivity rate was, for the first

time since May, below 2 per cent and that this was a sign of relief. The third wave of Covid-19 cases was not over, but it was "definitely on the wane", he said.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) parameters, Delhi was in the "safe zone". Jain said that 1,617 new Covid cases were logged in Delhi yes-

terday and the positivity rate was below 2 per cent. The WHO reportedly states that the positivity rate should be below 8 per cent and the optimum should be 5 per cent. If a city/state has a 5 per cent positivity rate, then it means the tests being carried out were enough, he claimed.

For the past five days, the positivity rate has been less than 3 per cent and for the past 15 days, it has been less than 5 per cent, the minister said.

"It is quite relieving that the effect of the coronavirus in Delhi has been dwindling for the past one month. For the first time since May, the positivity rate was 1.9. per cent," he said.

"Definitely there is a downtrend. Five per cent is supposed to be good enough, and being at 2 per cent, the situation is ideal. I would still urge Delhiites to continue taking all the precautions. I lay stress on wearing a face mask without fail. The coronavirus will live with us. It's not going to completely go. The effect of the outbreak definitely has come down. According to the WHO parameters, Delhi is in the safe zone," Jain added.

Rai: Centre is 'stubborn' towards farmers' stir

PTI
NEW DELHI, DEC 16

The Centre should give up its "ego" and "stubbornness" and accept the demands of farmers who are protesting against the new farm laws at Delhi's borders despite the biting cold, the city's Development minister Gopal Rai said on Wednesday.

Rai, also convener of the Delhi unit of the AAP, said the Arvind Kejriwal-led government and his party stand firmly with the farmers and have been making certain arrangements for them during their protest.

After a visit to the Singh road, blocked by thousands of farmers camping there for nearly three weeks now, Rai said the Kejriwal government has arranged a Langar Seva (community kitchen), water and toilet facilities for them.

"Our volunteers, MLAs and councilors are also serving here. The AAP and its government fully support the farmers," he said.

The farmers are protesting against the three farm laws passed recently by the Central government, even as they face hardships and the cold weather during their demonstrations, Rai said. He described their protest as "unfortunate", saying farmers are the ones who feed the nation.

"The farmers have been protesting here for twenty days. The Central government should give up its ego and stubbornness and accept their demands," he said.

Rai said the Centre could have avoided the stalemate and road blocks by permitting the farmers to stage their protest at the Ramleela Ground in Delhi.

"The government will have to accept the demands of the farmers sooner or later. The Modi government will not be allowed to ruin the country," he asserted.

WEST BENGAL GOVERNOR JAGDEEP DHANKHAR

SAYS 2018 PANCHAYAT POLLS WOULD NOT BE REPEATED

COLOURS OF WINTER



Youngsters wear warm clothes to beat the cold in the Capital on Wednesday.

DEEPAK

CM asks officials to expeditiously allot flats built for EWS and slum-dwellers

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 16 DECEMBER



Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday chaired a review meeting of the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB) and instructed the officials present to expeditiously allot the flats that have been constructed for the economically weaker section (EWS) and slum-dwellers.

The CM ordered the officials to ensure the allotment of the flats within 5 km of where their slums were located for which land should be allotted as soon as possible. He also said that all obstacles in the allotment of land required for the construction of these flats should be removed.

These 89,400 flats will be constructed in three phases in a 237 acre area with the deadline being 2022-2025, Kejriwal said.

The meeting was also attended by Delhi Urban Development Minister and DUSIB Vice-Chairperson

for the construction of EWS houses. Second, the land use of the land available with the DUSIB will be changed by the MCD, the DDA or any other authority. Third, the construction project will also be carried out on the vacant land from where these people have been shifted.

The architect-consultants will be appointed for the project in two months. The 89,400 houses will be constructed in three phases. In the first phase, 41,400 houses will be constructed by 2022. In the second phase, 18,000 houses will be constructed. In the third phase, 30,000 EWS houses will be constructed across Delhi.

The houses will be multi-storyed, and five separate tenders will be called each in a lot of 8,000 houses. The time frame for the construction of houses in the first phase is 24 months, with a construction cost of Rs. 3312 crore for 41,400 flats (Rs 8 lakh per flat), the officials added.

Classified



PROCLAMATION REQUIRING ATTENDANCE OF DEFENDANT (Order 5, Rule 20 of the Code of Civil Procedure) In the Court of Ms. Pooja Talwar Additional District Judge-01 (South)

Saket Courts, New Delhi CS. No. 8905/2016

Manish Gurung Versus

Secretary Land & Building Deptt. & Ors.

To,

Sh. Jagbir Singh, s/o Sh. Umed Singh, r/o B-98, Panchsheel Vihar, Khariki, Malviya Nagar, New Delhi.

Whereas you are intimated that a suit is hereby filed that if you shall not defend the case through video conferencing via CISCO WEBEX on 13-01-2021, the day fixed for the final will be heard and determined ex parte.

Given under my hand and the Seal of the Court on this 16-12-2020.

Additional District Judge-01 (South)

Saket Courts, New Delhi

Seal of the Court

IN THE COURT OF SH. SUNENA SHARMA Addl. District Judge-04 New Delhi District Patiala House Courts, New Delhi PC No. 05/2020

Urvashi Charan, w/o Dr. Prabhat Chandra, r/o Flat No. 945, Sector A, P.D.B. and C, Vasant Kunj, South West Delhi, Delhi-110070.

— Petitioner

Versus

State (General Public)

— Respondent

Whereas an application for grant of Probate/Letters of Administration under Section 278 of the Indian Succession Act, 1925 to the petitioner in respect of the movable/immovable property of the deceased late Smt. Asha Mehta, who died on 30-06-2018 at 9164, LIG Flats, Masoodpur B-9, Vasant Kunj, New Delhi-110070, has been filed before this court.

Notice is hereby given to the general public that any person having objection for the grant of Letters of Administration in her favour in respect of the estate of the deceased may file the same personally or through counsel on or before the next date of hearing 06-01-2021.

SI. No. 2.

Description of the Property : Flat No. 9164, LIG Flats, Masoodpur B-9, Vasant Kunj, New Delhi-110070.

Approximate Value : Rs. 46,36,800/-

SI. No. 2.

Description of the Property : Locker No. 510 in Building ID 3162751 in Lavinge Industrial A/M No. 00100131419, DPFC Bank Ltd. D-1, Shopping Complex Centre, Vasant Vihar, New Delhi-110097.

Approximate Value :

Given under my hand and the Seal of this Court on this 06th day of November, 2020.

Addl. District Judge-04

New Delhi District

Patiala House Courts, New Delhi

Seal of the Court

IN THE COURT OF SH. DHEERAJ MITTAL Addl. CCJ/ARC Room No. 03, Ground Floor Patiala House Courts, New Delhi Petition No. SC-41/2020

Kiran Choudhary Versus

The State & Ors. (Petitioner)

FOR SUCCESSION CERTIFICATE UNDER INDIAN SUCCESSION ACT, 1925

To,

All concerned

Whereas in the abovementioned petition, the applicant/petitioner has applied for Succession Certificate to the

AIR-SURCHARGE: Kathmandu - Re. 2, Eastern Region - Re. 1 All other stations in India - Re. 1

As governor my biggest task is to ensure that the 2021 polls are conducted in a free and fair manner. Central forces will come on time

WEST BENGAL GOVERNOR JAGDEEP DHANKHAR

SAYS 2018 PANCHAYAT POLLS WOULD NOT BE REPEATED



Countries, without actually doing their own bit, are asking other countries to revise upwards, ratchet upward their ambitions. I see this as flawed

PRAKASH JAVADEKAR
UNION ENVIRONMENT MINISTER

NEW DELHI, THURSDAY 17 DECEMBER 2020

03

Our fight for justice is not over: Nirbhaya's parents

Eight years after the horrific gangrape-and-brutalisation of Nirbhaya, her parents say nothing has changed while asserting that their fight for justice will continue for other victims of sexual assault cases

PTI
NEW DELHI, 16 DECEMBER

Eight years after a harrowing incident changed her life and the uphill battle that followed to ensure that her daughter's culprits were punished, Nirbhaya's mother Asha Devi has bravely resolved to fight for bringing justice to survivors and victims of sexual assault.

"My fight for justice isn't over with the hanging of my daughter's convicts and will continue for getting justice for other rape victims as well," she said.

On the intervening night of December 16 and 17, 2012, a 23-year-old physiotherapy intern, who later came to be

known as Nirbhaya - the fearless one, was raped and brutally assaulted in a moving bus in south Delhi by six men including a minor before being thrown out on the road in a savagely injured state.

She died a few days later in a Singapore hospital where she was shifted for life-saving treatment.

Four of the six accused were convicted and hanged on March 20 this year. One of them, Ram Singh, allegedly committed suicide in the Tihar Jail days after the trial began in the case and another, a juvenile, was released in 2015 after spending three years in a correctional home.

"My daughter may have got justice but the struggle killed us everyday. Every time the

hearing was posted further, a part of me broke down but I gathered courage," Devi said.

"It took eight years to get justice, imagine what happens to those victims where cases are not highlighted or there aren't enough evidences. My fight will continue for them," she said on eighth anniversary of the gruesome gangrape that led to widespread outrage and massive protests by thousands of people across the country.

Devi said the entire nation followed her daughter's case and is witness to the tactics the defence lawyers used and the kind of immunity the accused got for a very long time "in name of human rights".

"I pledge to keep fighting

for swift justice delivery to rape victims," she said.

Mukesh Singh (32), Pawan Gupta (25), Vinay Sharma (26) and Akshay Kumar Singh (31) were executed on March 20 for the savage assault on the young woman.

After raping and brutalising her, they dumped her on the road and left for dead on the cold winter night. Her male friend who was with her in the bus was also severely beaten and thrown out along with her.

Nirbhaya's father, who also joined an online petition which was started by NGOs Save the Children and Yuva to mark the eighth anniversary of the gangrape case, said "the fight is not over yet".

"You have probably never heard from me. Today, I felt

it was necessary for you to hear my voice. My name is Badrinath Singh. But since the night of 16th December, 2012, I am known as 'Nirbhaya's father'. This is how I will be known for the rest of my life," he said in a statement on Tuesday.

Eight years ago, when "my daughter was snatched away from us in the most brutal way, crowds led by women came out on the streets" and they made "my family's fight for justice", he said.

"I thought this case would change us as a country for good. But when I turn on the news, there is a new case of another daughter being brutally assaulted every day. Nothing has changed," Nirbhaya's father said.

Centre of Excellence for Tourism & Hospitality & IT to come up in HP

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
SHIMLA, 16 DECEMBER

Himachal Pradesh chief minister Jai Ram Thakur on Wednesday laid the foundation stone of Centre of Excellence for Tourism and Hospitality and Information Technology to be constructed at a cost of Rs 85 crore in Gram Panchayat Chausa near Wakhnaghat in Solan district.

Thakur said that this centre would provide a sound and trained manpower to the tourism and hospitality industry. He said that this Centre of Excellence would have an Information Technology Centre, Centre of Excellence for tourism and Hospitality, Training Hotel, Teaching Staff Residence, Students Hostel, Staff Quarters and Directors Residence.

He said that the Centre would produce some of the best trained youth as per the demand of the industry.

Thakur said that the Corona pandemic has forced the state to take a few strict decisions to check the spread of the virus.

He said that at the same time the Government was also ensuring that the pace of development goes uninterrupted, therefore, foundation stones and inaugurations of projects were being done virtually.

He said that the government has now decided that in actual functions gathering of not more than fifty persons would be allowed.

He said that this building would be constructed with pre-fabricated structure, which would be completed by June, 2022.

The chief minister said that the state government was also endeavouring to develop this whole area from



such Centre in the Country and would be completed within 18 months. He said that this Centre would prove a boon to the youth of the State for their skill upgradation.

MLA and former Minister Dr. Col. Dhani Ram Shandil said that it was vital that the youth of the State get best possible training for their skill upgradation so that they could provide them skill to earn their livelihood.

BJP Executive Committee Member Dr. Rajesh Kashyap while welcoming the Chief Minister said that this Centre of Excellence would go a long way in providing employment-oriented education to the youth of the state.

Technical Education and Information Technology Minister Dr. Ram Lal Markanda said that this Centre of Excellence for Tourism and Hospitality would be the fourth

Centre trying to raise farmers' income, says UP BJP chief

PTI
LUCKNOW, 16 DECEMBER

leading the farmers. The BJP government is trying to ensure that the income of farmers is increased," Singh said.

He was addressing a 'Kisan Sammelan' in Banda, one of the several such farmer meetings held by BJP leaders in Uttar Pradesh to counter opposition claims on the agri-marketing laws enacted at the Centre.

After Narendra Modi became the PM, the government has taken historic decisions and is working in the interest of the farmers, the BJP leader said.

"The Opposition is mis-

Air quality deteriorates in Ghaziabad, Noida, Gurgaon and Faridabad

PTI
NOIDA (UP), 16 DECEMBER

The air quality deteriorated to reach "very poor" level in Ghaziabad and Greater Noida, while "poor" in Noida, Gurgaon and Faridabad, according to a government agency data on Wednesday.

Presence of pollutant PM 2.5 and PM 10 also remained high in the five immediate neighbours of Delhi, according to the air qual-

ity index (AQI) maintained by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB).

According to the index, an AQI between zero and 50 is considered 'good', 51 and 100 'satisfactory', 101 and 200 'moderate', 201 and 300 'poor', 301 and 400 'very poor', and 401 and 500 'severe'.

The average 24-hour AQI at 4 pm on Wednesday was 319 in Ghaziabad, 331 in Greater Noida, 280 in Noida, 222 in Farid-

abad and 221 in Gurgaon, according to CPCB's Sameerapp.

On Tuesday, it was 282 in Ghaziabad, 290 in Greater Noida, 243 in Noida, 196 in Faridabad and 184 in Gurgaon.

It was 243 in Ghaziabad, 256 in Greater Noida, 176 in Noida, 120 in Faridabad and 101 in Gurgaon. On Sunday, it was 318 in Ghaziabad, 332 in Greater Noida, 322 in Noida, 303 in Faridabad and 239 in Gurgaon, according to the app.

HP minister urges workers to get registered with Welfare Board to avail benefits

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
SHIMLA, 16 DECEMBER

Himachal Pradesh Industries Minister Bikram Singh on Wednesday urged the workers working in the state to get registered in maximum number with the Himachal Pradesh Building and Construction Workers Welfare Board so that they could avail the benefits being provided under the Board.

He said that the state government is committed to the welfare of the workers. He said that 72,857 MNREGA workers and 50,176 other construction workers have been registered during the period of present government for which Rs 139.45 crores have been spent under various welfare schemes.

The minister said that 72,857 MNREGA workers and 50,176 other construction workers have been registered during the period of present government for which Rs 139.45 crores have been spent under various welfare schemes

accounts of 1,26,039 registered workers. He said that through the Workers Welfare Board, the Labour Department organized camps for labourers in which induction, cookers, gas stoves, bicycles etc. were distributed as per their requirement.

He said efforts would be made that the amount of assistance being given by the government to the work-

ers for their own and their two children's marriage will be increased from Rs 35,000 to Rs 51,000. Apart from this, the assistance of Rs 7,000-35,000 per year being given for the education of girl child from class one to Ph.D. level which will be increased to Rs 8,000-Rs. 36,000. For boys, this amount will be increased from Rs 3,000-Rs. 25,000 to Rs 5,000-Rs. 27,000.

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Punjab discontinues old vehicles registration numbers

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
CHANDIGARH, 16 DECEMBER

To end "VIP culture" and taking safety considerations into account, Punjab Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh has ordered discontinuation of old registration numbers that were still in use even after enforcement of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988.

The CM has asked the transport department to issue alternative valid numbers to owners of vehicles with such numbers, which were already banned in neighbouring states like Haryana and Himachal Pradesh, as per Section 217 read with Section 41 of the Motor Vehicles Act.

Besides promoting VIP culture, as these vehicle owners preferred to retain old registration numbers as a status symbol, the use of old numbers had become a security hazard in the border state of Punjab, an official spokesperson said.

with these so-called VIP numbers were often misused by anti-social elements to carry out subversive activities as these vehicles were not stopped or checked by police.

Further, with such registration numbers used on multiple vehicles over the years, identification of original owners was difficult since old records were either untraceable or destroyed to accommodate VIPs, the spokesperson added.

Har Ghar Nal Yojna: 2 Haryana dists get 100 pc functional tap connection

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
CHANDIGARH, 16 DECEMBER

Two districts of Haryana, Panchkula and Ambala, have bagged the title of 'Har Ghar Nal Se Jal' (tap water in each household) districts' with 100 per cent functional household tap connection (FHTC) in rural households under the Jal Jeevan Mission.

The Mission aims to ensure access to sustainable drinking water through piped water connection to every rural household by 2024.

While stating this on Wednesday, additional chief secretary, public health engineering department, Devenender Singh said Haryana is committed to provide FHTC to every rural household in the State by December 2022, way ahead of the national target of 2024.

Singh said that Panchkula and Ambala have become districts having 100 per cent FHTC in rural households. While Panchkula with 34,433 FTHCs in four Blocks namely Pinjore, Raipur Rani, Morni and Barwala becomes the first district of the State hav-

ing 100 percent FHTCs in rural households.

Thus Ambala with 1,19,431 FTHCs in six blocks namely Ambala I, Ambala II, Barara, Shahzadpur, Naraingarh and Saha secures the second position by having 100 per cent FTHCs in rural households.

He said that since the inception of this programme, the public health engineering department has provided FHTCs to more than 80 per cent rural households of the state.

The additional chief secretary said that as per annual action plan, it was targeted to achieve one district with 100 per cent FHTC by 26 January, 2021 but this mile-

HP youths at forefront of giving sacrifices for country: Jai Ram

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
SHIMLA, 16 DECEMBER

Himachal also created a history of valour in this war," he added.

The Chief Minister said the brave soldiers of Himachal had shown indomitable courage in every war and had not even shied away from making supreme sacrifice while protecting the borders of the country.

Himachal had the honour of being called 'Devbhoomi' but the state was also known as 'Veer Bhoomi' as lakhs of soldiers were serving the Indian Army.

In the Kargil war out of the total 527 martyrs, 52 were from Himachal and two 'Paramveer Chakra' were conferred on Himachali soldiers.

Thakur added that not only this, a provision has also been made by the Union Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas to provide petrol pumps and gas agencies for the dependents of the soldiers killed in various military operations.

It is a matter of pride for us that the brave soldiers of the state had received 1096 gallantry awards so far, he added.

He further stated that the state government was committed for the welfare of its brave soldiers and

many schemes were being implemented for the welfare of ex-servicemen.

All the dependents of 52 martyrs were given an amount of Rs 5 lakhs and employment has been provided to the dependent of 48 families out of these families.

Besides, ex-gratia grant amount of Rs 20 lakh was being provided to the next of kin of the soldiers and paramilitary forces who laid down their lives during the war and Rs 5 lakh to the soldiers belonging to Defence and paramilitary forces who had suffered over 50 percent physical disabilities during wars.

Former Uttarakhand Chief Minister Harish Rawat will be hosting the 'Malta Khao' competition in Dehradun on 18 December.



Each participant will be provided five minute time and the winner will be decided on the number of citrus fruits they consume during the fixed time. Winner will purse Rs 1000, runners up will get richer by Rs 500 and third place winner will get 300. Consolation prize of Rs 250 will also be provided. Harish Rawat will provide treats to the spectators. The audience will get a chance to eat Malta, tea with jaggery from Senior Congress leader and ex-Uttarakhand CM Harish Rawat having corn.

Haridwar/Udham Singh Nagar and Pakoda of Kandali (stinging nettle leafs).

Harish Rawat says, "I am pained with the negligence faced by Malta and lemon."

People are asked to sell their Malta for Rs 7 per kilo and lemon Rs 3 per kilo and they need to bring their product to the sale outlet. The farmer will not even

get the expenses made for ferrying Malta/Nimbu from their village to the sale outlet. The government should provide a Rs 2-3 bonus amount per kilo."



Preparations for Christmas celebrations in full swing, in Chennai on Wednesday. IANS

Emergency mock exercise at Guwahati Airport: An emergency mock exercise was conducted at the Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport in Guwahati to check the preparedness of all stakeholders to handle all eventualities, a release said.

PTI

Conference on disability: Sarthak Educational Trust and National Ablympic Association of India will host the 7th National Conference on Disability on 18 and 19 December, through video conferencing. The theme of the conference is Digital Inclusion ~ Pathway to Empowerment of People with Disability. Jitender Aggrawal, founder, Sarthak Educational Trust shared, "The 2-day event will also see the launch of a mobile app ~ CapSarah ~ a joint initiative by Sarthak Educational Trust and Capgemini, a global leader in consulting & technology services."

Road mishap: At least eight people were reported killed and 22 others injured when a bus hit a gas tanker on Aligarh-Moradabad in Sambhal district on Wednesday. SNS

LDF wins big in Kerala local body elections

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
16 DECEMBER

Overcoming a slew of charges levelled against it in connection with the sensational gold smuggling case, the CPI-M-led ruling Left Democratic Front (LDF) in Kerala on Wednesday won big in local body polls, considered a curtain raiser for the Assembly elections due next year.

Of the 941 gram panchayats, the LDF has won 518, the Opposition Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) won 373 and the BJP-led NDA got 23 panchayats.

The LDF was also leading in 10 of 14 district panchayats, while the UDF was leading in four district panchayats.

Chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan said the local body poll results have proved that there is no room for caucuses of communal powers in Kerala. "LDF's popular voter-base has expanded. More people have supported the LDF than ever before. That's chiefly because Kerala's mindset has allied with the protection of secularism," the CM said.

Senior Congress leader and former CM Oommen Chandy said poll results would be discussed by the party in detail tomorrow. Congress MP Tint Prathapan said that reasons for the party's defeat should be scrutinised.

one. BJP's hope of wresting power in Thiruvananthapuram corporation has come a cropper with LDF winning an absolute majority here. Here, the LDF got 52 of the 100 seats, while the BJP won 35 seats and UDF 10.

BJP-led-NDA has registered a marginal increase in its tally in grama panchayats and municipalities. It got absolute majority in Palakkad and Pandalam municipalities and improved its tally in corporations and municipalities.

"We are issuing notice with a great caution," said the bench which also comprised Justices A S Bopanna and V Ramasubramanian after hearing senior advocate Meenakshi Arora for sometime.

The plea seeks direction to govt to take appropriate steps to remove prevailing anomalies in system

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 16 DECEMBER

The Supreme Court on Wednesday sought a response from the Centre on a plea seeking laying down of gender and religion neutral uniform grounds of award of maintenance and alimony for all citizens in matrimonial disputes as per the spirit of Constitution and the international conventions.

A bench headed by Chief Justice S A Bobde issued notices to the Union Ministries of Home Affairs, Law and Justice and the Women and Child Development on the PIL filed by BJP leader and lawyer Ashwini Upadhyay.

"We are issuing notice with a great caution," said the bench which also comprised Justices A S Bopanna and V Ramasubramanian after hearing senior advocate Meenakshi Arora for sometime.

The plea seeks direction to

the government to take appropriate steps to remove the prevailing anomalies in the grounds of maintenance and alimony and make them uniform for all citizens without discrimination on the basis of religion, race, cast, sex or place of birth.

At the outset, Arora said, "the religion may treat gender differently but the Constitution will not allow women to be treated differently". She was responding to court's question asking her to justify the comparison of Hindu and Muslim women in cases relating to maintenance and grant of alimony.

The senior lawyer referred to the provisions of the Constitution and said the government can make a special legislation on the issue. She said the apex court has passed orders when issue of gender rights has come to fore as the legislation making process has been "too slow".

Taking not of her submissions, the bench said "we are conscious of what we have done and what we have not done. We are asking you a pure question of law. We are talking about grounds of divorce which are accepted by particular religion."

The bench referred to earlier apex court verdict given in the Catholic church matter and asked whether it is discriminatory if states apply fundamental rights of equality and gender justice under Articles 14 and 15, respectively in such matters.

Arora responded: "State has to ensure that rights and dignity of an individual is protected. State is required to step in when there is violation

of rights and dignity."

She said that practices in a religion is one thing but there are fundamental rights also which have to be protected.

"When religious practices impinge upon fundamental rights, such practices can't be allowed to remain in force,"

the senior lawyer said. The bench was seeking government's response on the plea.

The petition, filed through advocate Ashwani Kumar Dubey, said that despite the eloquent provisions in the Constitution, the central government has totally failed to provide even gender-neutral, religion-neutral uniform grounds of maintenance and alimony for all citizens.

Maintenance and alimony is the only source of livelihood hence discrimination on the basis of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth is a direct attack on the right to life, liberty and dignity, guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution, it said.

"Even after 73 years of Independence and 70 years of India becoming a socialist secular democratic republic, laws relating to maintenance and alimony are not only complex and cumbersome but also against the constitutional mandate of being equal, rational and just," it said.

"Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, Jains are governed by the Hindu Marriage Act 1955 and the Hindu Adoption & Maintenance Act 1956. Muslims are dealt as per status of valid marriage & prenuptial agreement and governed under the Muslim Women Act 1986. Christians are governed under the Indian Divorce Act 1869 and Parsis under the Parsi Marriage & Divorce Act 1936, but none of these laws are gender neutral," it said.

The plea has sought directions to declare that the discriminatory grounds of maintenance and alimony are violative of Articles 14, 15, 21 of the Constitution.

Unable to bear 'farmers' plight', Sikh cleric shoots himself dead

PTI
CHANDIGARH, 16 DECEMBER

ers".

The note is being verified by police.

An official of the Sonipat police said they had received a call that Sant Ram Singh (65), who hailed from Singhra village in Nising area of Karnal district, allegedly shot himself.

He was rushed to a hospital in Panipat where doctors declared him brought dead.

Police said as per prelimi-

nary reports, the cleric shot himself in his car near the protest site. Police are in the process of recording statements of the deceased's family members.

The body was taken to Karnal for a postmortem examination in an ambulance. His followers raised slogans against the Union government.

Later, the body will be taken to the Nanaksar Gurdwara in Singhra village, where a large

number of his followers have gathered.

Karnal SP Ganga Ram Punia told PTI that police have been deployed in the area.

The situation is peaceful and under control, he said.

Reacting to the incident, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said the Modi government should quit its "stubbornness" and withdraw the laws.

"Sant Baba Ram Singh Ji of

Karnal committed suicide after seeing the plight of farmers on the Kundli border. My condolences and tribute in this hour of grief. Many farmers have sacrificed their lives. The brutality of the Modi government has crossed all limits. Quit stubbornness and immediately withdraw the anti-agriculture law," he said in a tweet in Hindi.

Congress chief spokesman Randeep Surjewala also blamed the government for the incident.

government fails to listen to their grievances, he said in another tweet.

Shiromani Akali Dal president Sukhbir Singh Badal too

said he was anguished to hear that the cleric committed suicide.

Sant ji's sacrifice won't be allowed to go in vain. I urge GOI not to let the situation deteriorate any further & repeal the 3 agri laws, he said.

TENDER

NORTHERN RAILWAY TENDER NOTICE

For and on behalf of the President of India, the Deputy Chief Mechanical Engineer (Train Set), Northern Railway Charbagh Workshop, Lucknow invites following e-tender from reputed firms for works as given below:- Tender No.: W-CB- POH RMPU-2020-21-02R, Name of Work: AMCA & POH (18 Month Schedule) for Train-18 RMPU Sidharh Make. Estimated Cost of Work : ₹ 3,61,85,976/- (exclusive of GST). Earnest Money : ₹ 3,30,900/- only (accepted through net banking on payment gateway only). Cost of Tender Form : Rs. 10,000/- only (accepted through net banking or payment gateway only). Period of Contract: 18 Months. Date & Time for Submission of Tender: from 28.12.2020 to 11.01.2021 up to 15:00 Hrs. Date & Time for Opening of Tender: after 15:15 Hrs. on 11.01.2021. • The tender form may be submitted on the website www.irrps.gov.in from 28.12.2020 to 11.01.2021 (up to 15:00 Hrs). • Manual offers are not allowed against this tender, any such manual offer received shall be ignored. • Contractors are allowed to make payment against this tender towards tender document cost and earnest money only through online payment modes available on IRPSS portal like net banking, debit card, credit card etc. Manual payments through Demand draft, Banker's cheque, Deposit receipt, FDR etc are not allowed. • The tender will be opened on specified date and time as above. In case the above date is a holiday the tender opening would be conducted at the same times on the next working day. • No post tender correspondence for submission of additional documents shall be entertained after opening the technical & commercial offers. Even sub-moto post letter of the tender shall be treated as NULL & Void. Tender Notice No: NR/CB Workshop/December/POH RMPU-2020-21/02R Date: 15.12.2020 28/12/2020
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

PUNJAB STATE POWER CORPORATION LTD OFFICE OF CHIEF ENGINEER/METERING C-3, SHAKTI VIHAR, PSPCL, PATTALA, PUNJAB-147001				
Tel. No. 0175-2218871, Fax No. 0175-220284, e-mail: semetering@patala@gmail.com				
Corporate Identification Number (CIN): U44109PB2010SCG033813				
Registration Number: 33813, Website: www.pspcl.in				
e-tendering page : https://eproc.punjab.gov.in				
NOTICE INVITING TENDER				
Tender Specification No.: MQP-168/2020-21/PR				
Short Description: Procurement of 4-in-1 Metal Meter Boxes (Cabinets) for incorporating Single Phase Energy Meters				
Start date of downloading of tender documents/Bid submission start date: 17.12.2020 at 11:00 Hrs				
Last date of downloading/Bid submission: 18.01.2021 till 11:00 Hrs				
Bid opening date (Part-I & II): 25.01.2021 at 11:30 Hrs				
Intending officer and Contract No.: SE/HMC, PSPCL, Pattala 96461-18774				
Detailed NIT and set of specification/tender documents can only be download from website https://eproc.punjab.gov.in . Tender ID is 2020_POWER_56657-1				
Note : Corrigendum, if any, after the publication of this tender enquiry shall only be uploaded on site and will not be published in any newspaper.				
490/C372/2020-2021				
SE/HMC PSPCL, Patiala				

Principal Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru Govt. Medical College & Hospital Chamba, H.P.

Phone: 01899223956, 01899223959, Fax: 01899223958

Website: [https://www.hptenders.gov.in](http://www.hptenders.gov.in)

Email: gmchchamba@gmail.com

NOTICE INVITING TENDER (NIT)

Dated:

Tender Ref. No. GMC/CBA/Accnt/Tender/Purchase/20.

E-Tenders are invited from the Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEM) or their established, reputed and experienced authorized dealer/representatives for the procurement of machinery and equipments for the departments of ENT, Radiology, Anesthesia and general surgery in Pt. JLNMGCH Chamba. The detailed tender document can be viewed and downloaded from website [https://www.hptenders.gov.in](http://www.hptenders.gov.in) from 15-12-2020 to 11:00 AM. The last date and time for submission of tender documents is 11-01-2021 at 11:00 AM. The Tender will be opened on 11-01-2021 at 11:30 AM. Only completed tender form along with cost of tender document Rs. 500/- (five hundred only) and Earnest Money Deposit of Rs. 2, 50,000/- (two lakh fifty thousand only) by way of DD/FDR/Demand draft duly pledged in favour of Principal Pt. JLNMGCH Chamba along with other required documents should be uploaded on the website [https://www.hptenders.gov.in](http://www.hptenders.gov.in) or before the date of opening of the tenders. All subsequent corrigenda, modifications and clarifications in respect of tender will be published only on aforesaid website. The bidders are advised to visit the aforesaid website regularly. The undersigned reserves the right to reject any or all the tender offers at any time without assigning any reason.

Principal, Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru Govt. Medical College, Chamba, District Chamba, (H.P)

HIMACHAL PRADESH PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT "NOTICE INVITING TENDERS"

Sealed item rate tender on PWD Form No. 6 & 8 are hereby invited by the Executive Engineer, Una Division HPPWD Una H.P. on behalf of Governor of H.P. for the following works from the approved and eligible contractors/ firms enlisted in PWD Department so as to reach in this office or before 06.01.2021 upto 11.00 A.M. and will be opened on the same day at 11.30 A.M. in presence of the intending contractor or their authorized representatives who may like to be present. If it happened to be holiday on the day of opening of tender the same will be opened on next working day at the same time. The application for obtaining the tender forms will be received latest by 02.01.2021 upto 12.00 Noon against cash payment (non-refundable) and the tender form can be had from this office upto 05.01.2021 during the office hours.

The earnest money in the shape of F.D. Rs if any of the Nationalized Bank in H.P. duly pledged in the favour of the Executive Engineer, Una Division HPPWD Una , will be received along with the applications for obtaining tender forms. The applications received without earnest money shall summarily be rejected. The Executive Engineer reserves the right to reject any tender without assigning any reason. The conditional / telegraphic tenders shall also be rejected. The scope of the work can be

Sr. No	Name of work	Estimated cost	Earnest Money	Time Limit	Cost of tender	Eligible class of contractor
1	Construction of office accommodation Hall for Deputy Director Higher Education at Third floor, Una District Una (HP)	14,86,100/-	30,000/-	Three months	500/-	Class- C & D
2	Construction of link road from Polian Janani road to Harijan basti RD.0/0 to 0/240(SH: Cutting work P/L GSB & Paver block and R/wall and edge wall RHS at RD.0/0 to 0/150)(Under SCCP)	13,64,610/-	28,000/-	Two months	500/-	Class- C & D
3	Construction of link road Nagholi to Harizan basti (via Mohalla Brahma, Guran Choot khad km.0/0 to 3/345 (SH: P/L premix carpet with seal coat km.2/115 to 2/910 and R/wall in various RD.s) (Under SCCP)	9,20,000/-	18,400/-	Two months	500/-	Class- C & D
4	Construction of link road to Ispur Mohalla Sainyan upto Swan khad (SH: C/O Solid Causeway at RD.1/165 to 1/245) under OTMPN	6,25,682/-	12,600/-	One month	500/-	Class- C & D
5	Renovation of HPPWD, Rest House at Bankhandi Tehsil Harioli Distt.Una(HP)	5,18,623/-	10,500/-	Three months	500/-	Class- C & D
6	Construction of Steel Shed in the residence of Superintending Engineer, 15th Circle, HPPWD, Una	4,50,000/-	9,000/-	One month	500/-	Class- C & D



...Raising Rs 100 in 15 days is too much and shows how Govt remains insensitive to people's problems

RAJASTHAN CHIEF MINISTER ASHOK GEHLOT
TARGETING CENTRE OVER LPG PRICE HIKE

The Statesman
NEW DELHI, THURSDAY 17 DECEMBER 2020

05

THUMBNAILS



Filmmaker Boney Kapoor at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport in Mumbai on Wednesday.

Ram temple funds: The Ram temple in Ayodhya will be built using domestic funds collected from the general public through a mass contact programme as its trust doesn't have the required approvals for accepting donations from abroad, general secretary of the trust Champat Rai said on Wednesday.

Elective surgeries: The CovidSurg Collaborative research study based on a 12-week period of peak disruption to hospital services due to COVID-19, has predicted that around 28 million elective surgeries across the globe could be cancelled or postponed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic - leading to patients facing a lengthy wait for their health issues to be resolved, said a Press release statement.

Scindia school: The Scindia School again topped the rankings in the annual Education World India School Rankings (EWISR) for the year 2020-21. This is the second year in succession that the Scindia School has been rated the best boys boarding school in India. The School has also created a safe environment for the children once it reopens, said a Press release statement.

Satellite countdown: The 25-hour countdown for the launch of communication satellite CMS-01 on board launch vehicle PSLV-C50 commenced on Wednesday, ISRO said.

PTI

Deadline for states to implement citizen-centric reforms extended till 15 Feb

RAKESH KUMAR
NEW DELHI, 16 DECEMBER

The government today extended the deadline for the states till 15 February to complete citizen reforms like one-nation-one-ration card in various sectors. In a Press statement the finance ministry informed that if the recommendation from the nodal Ministry concerned regarding implementation of the reform is received by 15 Feb-

ruary, 2021, the state will be eligible for reform-linked benefits.

In May to meet the extra fund requirements of states on account of Covid-19 pandemic, the government had decided to raise the borrowing limit of the states by 2 per cent of their Gross States Domestic Product (GSDP), over and above the 3 per cent limit set under the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act.

These states were required to complete four specific reforms - implementation of one nation one ration card, ease of doing business reform, urban local body/utility reforms and power sector reforms - by 3 December, 2020, to get the benefits.

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi joined a host of party leaders in saluting the armed forces and remembering Indira Gandhi, who was Prime Minister at the time. "Greetings to people of the country on the celebration of India's historic victory over Pakistan in 1971 and salutations to the valour of our armed forces," he said in a

tweet in Hindi.

Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said India gave a befitting reply in 1971 to those giving threats of the "seventh fleet" by its victory over Pakistan and planted the flag of India's power and sovereignty.

Homage to patriotism inspired Indira Gandhi and the brave Indian Armed Forces offi-

cers, she said.

Congress' chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala also extended greetings to the people of the country. The country is indebted to its brave soldiers and 'Iron lady' Indira Gandhi, he said.

On the 49th anniversary of India's victory in the war against Pakistan, messages by several Congress leaders were posted on the party's Twitter handle.

L-G Sinha pays tributes to martyrs of 1971 war:

Lieutenant-Governor, Manoj Sinha on Wednesday paid tribute to the martyrs who laid down their lives for the Nation during the 1971 war.

In his message, the Lt-

Governor said: "On Vijay Diwas, let us remember the valour of our soldiers and their unwavering commitment to defend India's sovereignty and protect human dignity".

ers have the opportunity to redraw the map of the region and yet that is what Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and her brave Army did in liberating Bangladesh, he added.

The victory over Pakistan was a national triumph, not that of any party or individual and the nation today stands united and rejoices in the true nationalism of Vijay Diwas, he said.

Messages by other senior leaders, including P L Punia and Pramod Tewari, were also posted on Twitter handle.

TENDER

NORTH WESTERN RAILWAY

E-Tender Notice

For and behalf of President of India the Dy. Chief Engineer / Bridge Line-1/ North Western Railway, Jaipur invites online E-tendering system (single packet) for the following works on prescribed terms & conditions:

Tender No.: DCEBriLine-1JP-20, S.No.2, Name of work with its location: Assembling of steel members of 30.5m under slung girders (Six spans) at suitable site near bridge no. 845 as per RDSO drawings, raising of girders and approaches by 525mm and launching of these girders as per railway's approved launching scheme on abutments & piers, laying and linking of railway tracks and bridge spans as per railway standards to make track fit for railway services.

Approx Cost of works: Rs. 5,90,57,224.45/- S.No.4,

Earliest Money to be deposited: Rs. 4,45,300.00, S.No. 5, Completion Period: 06 (Six) Months, Date & Time of submission of on line E-Tender:

On line e-tender for works tender in electronic form will be submitted to 05.01.2021 between 15 hrs., S.No.7,

Website particulars and notice board location where complete detail of tender can be seen: The complete information along with tender document shall be available in prescribed electronic form in Indian Railway E-Tendering website www.reps.gov.in, upto 15.00 hrs. S. No. 8, Similar Nature of Work: Erection and Launching of Open Web or Semi, Through-type Girders

Please join us on [@NWRailways](https://www.facebook.com/NWRailways)

Farm laws row can be solved in 5 mins if PM steps in: Raut

Says BJP-led NDA govt should have a dialogue with farmers who are protesting for the past 21 days

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI/NEW DELHI,
16 DECEMBER

The issues flagged by agitating farmers can be solved in five minutes if Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself steps in, Shiv Sena MP Sanjay Raut said on Wednesday.

Raut said the BJP-led NDA government should have a dialogue with the farmers who are protesting for the past 21 days outside Delhi demanding scrapping of the Centre's three new agri-marketing laws.

The government can solve the issue in 30 minutes sitting with the (agitating) farmers, if it wants... I think the issue will be solved in five minutes if the Prime Minister himself intervenes, he told reporters over the phone from New Delhi. The Sena leader said the protesters are India's own farmers and the government should have a dialogue with them.

Speaking to a Marathi news channel, Raut said the government has stretched the issue far. Stretching the issue this far, is like paving way for a new anarchy, Raut said.

Enacted in September, the three farm laws have been projected by the Centre as major reforms in the agriculture sector that will remove the middlemen and allow cultivators to sell their produce anywhere in the country.

However, the protesting farmers have expressed apprehension that the laws would pave the way for eliminating the safety cushion of minimum support price and do away with the mandis, leaving them at the mercy of big corporates.

Raut criticised the Centre over the decision of not holding the winter session of Parliament due to the Covid-19 pandemic. We will have to see why they are not holding the session... because the session has to be held as there is democracy, the Rajya Sabha member said.

Without naming the BJP, he said it protested in Maharashtra seeking reopening of temples, but has now kept the



temple of democracy (Parliament) shut. How will this work? he asked.

To a question, the Rajya Sabha MP exuded confidence that the Shiv Sena will retain its control over the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) in the 2022 civic polls. The BJP had earlier said it will dislodge the Shiv Sena, its former ally, from power in the cash-rich BMC.

Protest outside Ambani corporate house: Shetti

Organisations in Maharashtra will take out a march on "Ambani corporate house" in Mumbai on 22 December in solidarity with protesting cultivators, former MP Raju Shetti said on Wednesday.

Besides the Swabhimani Shetkari Sanghatna (SSS) headed by Shetti, organisations like the Prahar Sanghatna, Farmers and Peasants Party and Lok Sangharsh Morcha will take part in the protest, he told reporters.

Shetti demanded that President Ram Nath Kovind intervene in the matter and issue orders to the Centre for scrapping of the three legislations.

Vice-President M Venkaiah Naidu on Wednesday expressed hope that a "reasonable solution" will be found to the issues raised by agitating farmers as they and the government are willing to talk to each other.

Speaking at an event in Muchintal, Hyderabad, Naidu referred to media reports on the demands of the agitating farmers and the response of the representatives of the Centre, saying he sees the possibility of a "certain meeting ground", an official statement said.

"As these laws are hitting the middlemen, who were associated with one party or the other, they are agi-



Farmers at a protest site at Delhi-Haryana border on Wednesday.

SNS

Those protesting against agri laws are 'middlemen': Patel

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Bhopal, 16 DECEMBER

Madhya Pradesh agriculture minister Kamal Patel on Wednesday claimed those protesting against the Centre's three new farm laws are "middlemen" and not real farmers.

Patel asserted that the new farm rules will give cultivators the real price for their produce and an opportunity to trade, export, and set up food processing units and warehouses.

"As the three new laws have hit hard the middlemen, who have captured the entire market and given donations to political parties, they are agitating on the issue and demanding their rollback," the minister claimed.

"As these laws are hitting the middlemen, who were associated with one party or the other, they are agi-



tating on the issue. They are not real farmers," he added.

The new farm laws are totally for the benefit of farmers and give them the facility to get loans against their properties and lands, he said.

"With these laws, the cultivators have a big opportunity to produce, trade, export and set up food processing units and warehouses to enhance their incomes," the minister said.

The new laws will give

'Till now, middlemen used to buy crops of farmers at very low prices and sell them to end users at ten times higher rates by grading the purchase as per the quality of crop'

farmers an opportunity to sell their produce directly to the end user, bypassing the middlemen, he said.

After the implementation of the Pradhan Mantri Swami Vitthal Yojna, farmers are now in a position to get loans against their properties and have money in their hands to spent on doing business on their own, he said.

Terming implementation of the Swamini Yojna as a "historic step", Patel said, "It gave real independence to rural folks after the country was liberated over 70 years ago, as now they have become owners of their land and have documents to show to financial institutions."

Sukhbir 'spreading poison' in Punjab: BJP leader Chugh

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
CHANDIGARH, 16 DECEMBER

BJP's national general secretary Tarun Chugh on Wednesday hit back at SAD chief Sukhbir Singh Badal, accusing him of spreading poison and igniting communal passions in Punjab under the garb of farmers' cause.

Chugh hit back at Badal a day after the chief of the BJP's former NDA ally SAD dubbed the saffron party as the real *tukde* and accused it of setting Hindus against Sikhs in Punjab.

Reacting to the SAD chief's allegations, Chugh said the way Sukhbir Singh Badal is trying to create a divisive and disruptive narrative after parting ways with BJP is strongly reprehensible.

He also accused the Shiromani Akali Dal president of trying to play cheap politics.

"All Punjab should wake up to the nefarious designs of Sukhbir Badal and his party", said Chugh in a statement here.

The three farm laws are meant to double farmers' income by 2022, he asserted. Chugh said the Modi government has accepted all the demands raised by farmer leaders during their talks with the Union ministers.

The issues like the minimum support price, mandis and civil suits have all been adequately resolved to farmers' satisfaction. The Centre is still open to talks on various clauses in the bills. We hope the farmers would soon withdraw their protest, he said.

Stating that the BJP is a firmly rooted party in Punjab, Chugh said the party's base is, in fact, expanding because of Prime Minister Modi.

Even during the times of militancy in Punjab, the BJP made sure that the Hindu-Sikh relations did not suffer and the spirit of Punjabiyat was kept alive, he recalled.

Even at a time when silver spades were distributed for digging the Sutlej Yamuna Link canal and the copies of the nation's Constitution were burnt, the BJP made sure that bad blood did not spread in the society, said Chugh.

The BJP has always kept the Punjabi spirit of Hindu-Sikh



unity alive even during the times when the massacre of Hindus was taking place in a planned manner, he said.

Taking on the SAD chief, Chugh asked, Now, when many singers are singing communally provocative songs, why is Sukhbir Ji silent on them? On farmers' front, he said the BJP was committed to doing everything for their welfare.

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Ever since the farmers' agitation has started, more than 3,000 persons from other political parties have joined the BJP he claimed.

We are expanding our base steadily to contest all the 117 assembly seats in Punjab and will come victorious after the elections and form the government in the state, said Chugh.

APPEAL FOR IDENTIFICATION

General public is hereby informed that one male was found dead at 40 Feet Road, Near Mother Dairy Booth, JJ Colony, Bindapur, New Delhi on 28.11.2020 at 11.56 AM. In this regard a DD No. 43A, Dated 28.11.2020 has been registered at P.S. Dabri, Delhi. The description of the dead body is given as under:

Name: Unknown, S/o: Unknown R/o: Unknown, Age: about 50-55 years, Height: 5'5" Face: Round, Complexion: Wheatish, Hair: White, ID Mark: A mole over right side eyebrow, Wearing: Black Colour Jacket, Pink Colour Shirt, Red Colour Half Pant and Brown Colour Blanket.

Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out the information about the dead male but no clue has come to light so far. If any one is having any information about this dead male please inform the undersigned.

S.H.O
P.S. Dabri, Delhi

Ph.: 011-25635178, 25630178

DP/410/DW/2020

A stunted world

Reports emerging this week suggest that the grim forebodings expressed at the start of the coronavirus epidemic were if anything understated, and the devastation wrought on vulnerable societies will be immense. A study by a consortium of 30 international organisations, Standing Together for Nutrition, estimates that the epidemic will kill 168,000 children from malnutrition alone before any global recovery takes place. The consortium includes the World Bank, the World Food Programme, UNICEF, USAID, private foundations and universities and thus must be considered an authoritative voice. Most worrying is a conclusion reached by the consortium that the gains of the past decade or so to battle malnutrition may have been wiped out in the past few months. The number of stunted children had dropped from 199.5 million in 2000 to 144 million in 2019, while numbers of children suffering from wasting had reduced from 54 million to 47 million last year. Now, the consortium's research estimates that an additional 11.9 million will suffer from stunting and wasting, mostly in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, as a result of the epidemic. These are shocking figures and ought to ignite the conscience of those who are capable of intervention. While UNICEF has pledged to spend \$700 million annually on nutrition programmes over the next five years, that is \$224 million more than it did over the past five years, this alone will not be enough. International aid organisations, national governments and philanthropic foundations will all have to contribute in the cause of the world's children.

This, though, is easier said than done. An Oxfam study has concluded that a third of the world's population ~ 2.7 billion people, or to put this in context, a number twice the size of India's population ~ did not receive any government aid during the epidemic. The yawning gap between wealthier and poorer countries is brought out by the finding that while the former spent \$695 per person, the latter spent between \$2 and \$28 per person. At the same time, the aid from the wealthy to the poor dwindled leading an Oxfam official to conclude that "the coronavirus united the world in fear but has divided it in response." The United Nations has concluded in a separate report that the numbers of people needing humanitarian aid to meet basic needs such as food, water and sanitation will go up by 40 per cent in 2021. Already several experts, including Nobel laureate Abhijit Banerjee, have warned that the rich-poor divide will get exacerbated by the distribution of Covid vaccines, once they are deemed viable and reach bulk production stage. With wealthier countries having cornered supplies, the poorer ones must reconcile themselves to being last in the queue, and thus continue to be vulnerable to the ravages of disease and malnutrition. In other words, it isn't only daily infections, recoveries and fatality rates we should worry about. The worst is yet to come.

Secular spaces

Catch 'em young. Assam cannot be faulted in its approach towards building an ethos of civic ~ as opposed to religious or ethnic ~ nationalism by starting with the first public space Indian citizens interact in: schools. The state government has moved to ensure that all state-run schools including madrasas and Sanskrit tuls (schools) will now operate on the lines of other general education institutes. This would end religious education imparted in schools with government funds. The proposition that schools need to be secular spaces and, over time, become the building blocks for a notion of citizenship which transcends the narrow confines of identity is unexceptionable. Indeed, it can be termed a categorical imperative for the country to achieve its true potential ~ celebrating its diversity of faiths, languages and cultures but unified in its Indianess. To that extent, the decision of the Assam Cabinet earlier this week ~ a Bill to give effect to it is expected to be tabled in the upcoming winter session of the state legislature ~ is a welcome one. State Education Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said the move was aimed at "making education secular", adding that as part of the move some 700 madrasas and close to 100 tuls in Assam would no longer give admission to students for theological studies.

There are, however, two points of caution that merit consideration in the drafting of the Bill and its implementation in the coming days. First, there are around 48,000 government lower and upper primary schools in Assam, but dwindling enrolment has forced the state education department to take drastic measures like school amalgamation in the recent past. The state of infrastructure at these educational institutions is in the main pathetic. So, to defend itself from the charge of having misplaced priorities, the state government needs to ensure that simultaneously with secularising school education it augments the quality of education imparted in these schools and incrementally adds to their quantity especially in far-flung areas.

Secondly, and this is vital given the political party ruling the state is the BJP even though it will not like hearing it, the administration must proactively communicate to the minority community the rationale and intent behind the initiative. Under no circumstances must the issue be allowed to be painted as an anti-Muslim measure by the ruling dispensation's political opponents and/or radical outfits. Equally, there can be no triumphalism among the saffron faithful as that would be entirely counter-productive. With great reform comes even greater responsibility.

The core liberal value that individual rights can never be trumped by group rights in the public space is the key to this reform. It must stay true to that.

Targeting Love

Marriage is more a legal and social institution rather than a religious one, and any attempt by the state to interfere in the union between two consenting adults reeks of nothing but religious prejudice, vendetta and wilful disruption of social harmony



Religion may or may not be the opium of the people but a saviour to populist politicians it sure is. So, the UP Government has now targeted love. On 24 November, the UP Cabinet cleared the Uttar Pradesh Unlawful Religious Conversion Prohibition Ordinance, 2020, that makes religious conversion a non-bailable offence which may attract a prison term of up to 10 years and a fine of up to Rs 50,000 if such conversion is found to be "effected for marriage or through misrepresentation, force, undue influence, coercion, allurement or other fraudulent means", and even social organisations arranging mass marriages of couples can be booked under the draconian law.

The scope of the ordinance is so wide and amorphous that any motive can be attributed and established by the state's police, not particularly renowned for professional conduct. What makes the ordinance more dangerous, especially to the minorities, is that the burden of proof is on the accused and the convert, making a mockery of one's rights to be considered innocent unless proven guilty. The ordinance further mandates that a person seeking to convert to another religion for marriage would have to inform the district magistrate two months in advance seeking permission for such marriage; otherwise it may entail a jail term up to three years and a fine of Rs 10,000.

Ironically, a September 2020 judgment by a single-bench of the Allahabad High Court in a case involving an inter-faith couple ruling against religious conversions only for the sake of marriage, which the Yogi Adityanath government has cited as justification for this ordinance, was overturned by a division bench of the same High Court only on 11 November.

The ruling by the division bench of Justices Pankaj Naqvi and Vivek Agarwal emphasised the values of our Constitution. "We do not see Priyanka Kharwar and Salamat as Hindu and Muslim, rather as two grown up individuals who out of their own free will and choice are living together peacefully and happily over a year."

Quoting the 2017 Supreme Court Judgment in KS Puttaswamy vs Union of India, the learned Judges said that the "right to choose a partner irrespective of caste, creed or religion, is inherent under right to life and personal liberty, an integral

part of the Fundamental Right under Article 21 of the Constitution of India." The judgment further said, "To disregard the choice of a person who is of the age of majority would not only be antithetic to the freedom of choice of a grown up individual but would also be a threat to the concept of unity in diversity. An individual on attaining majority is statutorily conferred a right to choose a partner, which if denied would not only affect his/her human right but also his/her right to life and personal liberty, guaranteed under Article 21."

On 1 December, Karnataka High Court gave a similar ruling upholding individual choice in a case involving an inter-faith couple, saying that the "liberty relating to personal relationship of two individuals can't be encroached upon by anybody irrespective of caste or religion." There are other cases, like Shafin Jahan v. Asokan K.M (2018) in which the apex court had consistently upheld the liberty and choice of an adult individual. But the short-sighted UP government seems blind to such a clear constitutional position regarding the liberty of personal choice. There is no evidence on the ground that large scale religious conversion of Hindu women is rampant anywhere. Hardly a handful of cases have emerged and in most of these cases, the girls have refuted the allegation of any love jihad angle. In any case, inter-faith marriages are to be celebrated and not criminalised; they celebrate the unity and diversity of the country and usher in larger integration between religions and communities.

The ordinance strikes at the root of this diversity, as well as individual liberty and freedom of religion which are fundamental rights under the Constitution. Clearly the ordinance targets religious minorities and is likely to be misused to their disadvantage, marginalising them further. Soon after the ordinance was promulgated on 28 November, the police arrested a Muslim youth in Bareilly district, allegedly on a complaint by a girl's father. Arrests and harassment of Muslim youth married to Hindu women are now being reported every day. Meanwhile other states are also readying themselves to join the love-jihad bandwagon.

Undoubtedly, the pandemic is still here. Precautions, as taken during the monsoon session, are required as the safety of our honourable MPs and others is paramount. But at the same time, there are many important issues confronting the nation such as the position of Covid-19, security situation on our borders, farmers' agitation, slowdown of economy, etc. which the nation wants Parliament to discuss.

Covid-19 cannot be the pretext not to hold the Parliament session. Every activity where the BJP's interest is involved like the victory meeting for Bihar held in the midst Covid goes on. At that meeting, thousands of party

on ~ like Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Karnataka and Assam. Indian states are about to replace the notorious Khap Panchayats, they are likely to become even more tyrannical.

Soon, harassment by police or vigilantes and state persecution of interfaith couples will become the standard operating procedure in society ~ damned be the right to privacy and individual liberty. Obviously, such unlawful encroachment into citizens' lives by the state will not end with inter-faith marriage but will progressively extend to more areas of individual rights and choices. Hindus can be married under the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, which also applies to Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists; the marriage involves rituals and the Saptapadi. Muslims are married under the Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act, 1937. An inter-faith marriage between Hindus and Muslims or Christians will therefore

call for conversion of either of the spouses under these laws.

The only way such an inter-faith marriage can take place without necessitating religious conversion is through the Special Marriage Act, 1954, which applies to all Indian citizens irrespective of their religion. This Act has some strange and archaic provisions, like the requirement of 30 days' advance notice to the Registrar of Marriage, during which period the notice along with photographs of the marrying couples are prominently displayed at the Marriage Register's Office for anyone to raise valid objections, possibly to prevent misuse or fraud.

But the actual purpose it is serving is to alert the vigilant groups and relatives for hounding the consenting couple which may result even in their murder, especially when the union is against the wishes of the family. Now this UP ordinance is serving the same purpose; only a few days ago, based on complaint by a vigilant Hindu outfit, police prevented the marriage between a Hindu girl and a Muslim boy that was about to be solemnised in Lucknow with the sanction of both families, on the ground that it needed the sanction of the District Magistrate under the ordinance, even though it was not a forced conversion or caused any

offence mentioned in the ordinance. The locus standi of the vigilante group is also mystifying. It cannot get more absurd than this.

Marriage is more a legal and social institution rather than a religious one, and any attempt by the state to interfere in the union between two consenting adults reeks of nothing but religious prejudice, vendetta and wilful disruption of social harmony by pitting one religion against another. It is nothing but a frontal assault upon the Constitution. The UP Government should have considered the Supreme Court judgment in Hadiya's case overturning the Kerala High Court's annulment of her marriage to a Muslim boy after converting to Islam, in which the court reminded that the freedom to choose a religion or a life partner is at the heart of Indian plurality and must be guarded overzealously.

Love between couples belonging to different faiths is a cause for celebration, especially when distrust and cleavages run so deep in our society between members of different communities. Love unites and is the only antidote against hatred. But it is this love that is increasingly being targeted by the fundamentalist vigilante groups that operate outside law with impunity, often with the State's tacit support, to disturb social harmony that ultimately affects economic development in many ways. One has not forgotten about the sad case of the wonderful Tanishq advertisement for jewellery featuring an inter-faith couple that was meant to celebrate our unity in diversity; it had to be withdrawn due to the backlash by radical right-wing elements in the social media.

Only last month, Netflix had to face their wrath for showing a Hindu woman and a Muslim man share a kiss for its TV series A Suitable Boy. In all these cases, the standard response of the political executive is that it hurt the "religious sentiments" of the majority community, as if they are the sole guardians of their sentiments and emotions. When such attempts at lumpenisation of society get official approbation rather than unequivocal opprobrium, who can prevent society's slide down a steep slippery slope? Like on many occasions, Indians can only pin their hopes on the Supreme Court to rescue our cherished democracy from such brazen onslaught by short-sighted politicians who not only lack imagination but have abandoned their reason as well.

A MEMBER OF THE **ANN**
ASIA NEWS NETWORK

ASIAN VOICES
A moment to reflect

The majestic Punghang Dewachenpo Phodrang will come alive tomorrow as it welcomes the lineage of the Wangchuck Dynasty that the Palace of Bliss, 113 years ago, stood witness to the installation of this great dynasty.

It was in the sacred Kuenrey or congregation hall of the dzong that representatives of the people, the clergy and the officials installed Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck as the first hereditary monarch of Bhutan. The celebrations, owing to the Covid-19 pandemic will be quieter this year, but not in terms of significance.

In celebrating the National Day this year, the Punghang Dewachenpo Phodrang will witness the presence of three generations of the Wangchuck Dynasty.

His Majesty The Fourth Druk Gyalpo, His Majesty The King and His Royal Highness the Gyalsey Jigme Namgyel Wangchuck together with the royal family will grace the National Day making it yet another significant national event.

The celebration in the dzong is significant as it stands witness to the success of the endorsement of a leader 113 years ago.

In the last 113 years we saw how we have transformed and how we have grown as a unique nation that we are today. We saw how our great nation changed under the successive monarchs who personify selfless leadership and placed the interest of the nation and people above all.

Every year we celebrate the National Day. We celebrate the great journey we made under the wise and

KUENSEL
benevolent leadership of our Kings.

The National Day is also an occasion to come together and celebrate the blessings and achievements of the past as we anticipate the future and rededicate ourselves to the service of the Tsawa Sum. The lottery draws, the entertainments and the opportunity to see their King up close makes it a special day.

For many, it is not the colours or the festive mood that make them wait for the special Day. It is the Royal Address of His Majesty The King to the nation.

His Majesty The King, through the National Day addresses had been providing the guidance, both in a broad perspective that helps prioritise national governance and specific ideas to provide clear direction.

It is becoming more profound and pronounced as many of us tend to miss the nuances or are not being able to understand or appreciate the full significance of the royal advice.

In the last many years, the royal addresses established a clear path for the future of Bhutan and the Bhutanese. From the role of civil servants, the need of an economic road map to leveraging technology to harnessing the energy of the young population, His Majesty The King had been charting out the path with utmost clarity.

At a time when short-term populist decisions blur longer-term vision, the royal address once a year on the National Day becomes the guiding principle.

Those who can grasp the significance are convinced that we need one royal address to chart out the long-term priorities for the people and the country. Fortunately, even if the celebrations are confined inside the walls of the Punakha Dzong, His Majesty will address the nation.

The wisdom will reach out to those in power, to the bureaucracy, the business community, and the general population. How much we comprehend and follow the wisdom will determine how we progress as a nation.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

editor@thestatesman.com

Is Parliamentary Democracy dying?

SIR, Owing to Covid-19, the last budget session of Parliament ended abruptly in March. The Monsoon session that started on September 14 was scheduled to end on 1 October after 18 sittings, but it was cut short by

eight days with some legislation passed hurriedly. Even during this session question hour was abolished. Now Parliament is to skip the winter session, the reason being offered by the Government is Covid-19.

Undoubtedly, the pandemic is still here. Precautions, as taken during the monsoon session, are required as the safety of our honourable MPs and others is paramount. But at the same time, there are many important issues confronting the nation such as the position of Covid-19, security situation on our borders, farmers' agitation, slowdown of economy, etc. which the nation wants Parliament to discuss.

Covid-19 cannot be the pretext not to hold the Parliament session. Every activity where the BJP's interest is involved like the victory meeting for Bihar held in the midst Covid goes on. At that meeting, thousands of party

workers and leaders assembled even without observing SOPs. Today's leaders and their enablers play by their own rules. Under this piquant situation, the skipping of the Parliament session, displays an authoritarian streak. Undermining the legitimacy of institutions is aimed at confusing the public and is a tactical move to undermine democracy. The liberal democratic structure is thus vulnerable to those who subvert the system. The tragic paradox of the electoral route to authoritarianism is that democracy's assassins use the very intuitions of democracy gradually, subtly and even legally to kill it.

Yours, etc., S K Khosla,
Chandigarh, 16 December



UNJUSTIFIED

SIR, This refers to your today's Editorial "Unresolved conflict". The Union government's decision to ask for deputation of three Bengal-cadre IPS officers is not justified. True, these three officers were involved with law and order arrangements for the BJP President's West Bengal programme. But how can the Union government pinpoint officers' lapses without conducting an investigation? Did the Centre receive any adverse reports from the state government or any other central agency?

Ordinarily the Centre doesn't requisition the services of all-India cadre officers without consulting the state. Necessary consent from the individual officials is to be obtained in advance too. Also Bengal cadre officers cannot take up Central deputation without being relieved by the state government.

West Bengal is facing severe problems at present because of pandemic and upcoming municipal elections. It has been making do with fewer IPS officers than its sanctioned quota. With assembly elections looming, law and order challenges will increase. So an unnecessary tussle between the Central and state government may demoralise officers. Hence, they should sit together and find an amicable solution.

Yours, etc., Khokan Das, Kolkata, 16 December.

VIKRAM KHANNA

Economic crises have a tendency to morph. After a crisis gets underway, its epicentre can shift and it can turn contagious in unpredictable ways, impacting areas previously presumed relatively safe.

For example, what starts as a domestic crisis can take on regional dimensions, affecting even healthy economies, as we saw in Asia in 1997, or go global, as happened after the United States subprime mortgage crisis of 2007-2008. Crises can also spread quickly from one sector to another and then engulf entire economies. Europe's real estate crises in 2008 morphed into banking crises a year later and then into a euro zone-wide sovereign debt crisis by 2012.

Covid-19 started out as a health crisis, which it still is. But it quickly became an economic crisis in the face of lockdowns, supply chain disruptions and the near-total closure of industries such as international travel and tourism, parts of retail and hospitality, live entertainment and nightlife.

With vaccines being rolled out, economic recovery is now within sight. Yet, there is reason to believe that we may still be only at the end of the beginning of what could become yet another rolling crisis.

In an interview, Mr Alfonso Garcia Mora, vice-president for the Asia-Pacific at the International Finance Corporation (IFC) - the World Bank's private-sector lending arm - provided some clues as to what might lie ahead, and what needs to be done.

The immediate impact of Covid-19 on companies, he pointed out, was a shortage of liquidity because of the collapse of demand and the disruption of supply chains, which led to severe cash flow problems. This was largely resolved, mostly by central banks, which pumped huge amounts of liquidity into economies.

But central banks can't deal with solvency issues, which are the next threat. The demand shock has led to solvency problems because many companies can't pay their essential expenses. "This is what is unfolding now," said Mr Garcia Mora, especially in the sectors worst impacted by the crisis, such as tourism, which in some countries accounts for as much as 10 per cent of gross domestic product.

Across economies, about half of firms won't be able to service their loans. Bankruptcies could increase by 30 per cent in the Asia-Pacific over the coming year, he said.

So far, bankruptcies resulting from the Covid-19 downturn have remained largely bottled up, mainly

An economic crisis that could morph



because of government assistance, relaxed bankruptcy laws and forbearance by banks. In Singapore, for example, besides providing financial support, the Government has mandated moratoriums on legal action over rents and contracts, and raised the thresholds for bankruptcy and insolvency proceedings. Banks have been allowing small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to defer repayments since April. They might extend the deferrals beyond this year on a case-by-case basis. Many other countries have adopted similar measures.

But when the economic recovery gets under way, the forbearance by banks will end and laws will revert to normal. The lagged effects of negative growth will also start to be felt. That is when bankruptcies could start to take off.

Rising bankruptcies could deliver a rude shock to many banks, which may not have been monitoring the solvency of their borrowers during the forbearance period. So while, right now, banks' non-performing loans (NPLs) may seem low and manageable, the picture could change dra-

matically once forbearance ends, and the later it ends, the more dramatic will be the change.

"When forbearance was announced, we thought it would last three months to six months," said Mr Garcia Mora. "But we have already passed nine months, and there may be three to four months more to go before forbearance ends." When that happens, banks could discover that their NPLs are not 2 per cent to 3 per cent as they were six months earlier, but in double digits.

"The banking sectors of some countries could become stressed, especially those that entered the crisis with already weak financial sectors," said Mr Garcia Mora. "As of today we don't have enough information to say whether banks will need to be bailed out, but we expect there will be cases which will need support."

Covid-19 has already morphed from a health crisis into a crisis of negative growth and rising unemployment. It could morph further into a corporate debt and banking crisis. So what needs to be done? The first order of business should be for countries to

create strong frameworks to deal with insolvencies. Many countries in the Asia-Pacific don't have one, Mr Garcia Mora pointed out.

The goal should be to ensure, first, that firms which are still solvent, but facing cash flow problems, restructure so they can continue operations; and second, that firms which have become unviable go into bankruptcy and get liquidated.

Mr Garcia Mora proposed that ideally, these issues should be tackled through out-of-court processes. "There shouldn't be a need to go through the judicial system, which can be slow and cumbersome," he said. "Formal bankruptcy proceedings might be appropriate for large corporations with complex structures. But the structure of most SMEs is relatively simple. So what is needed are fast processes that can be implemented immediately."

He is hesitant to recommend that governments take equity stakes in troubled companies. One problem is that having already run up huge fiscal deficits during the Covid-19 crisis so far, most governments lack the fiscal

space to bail out companies on a large scale. Another is that mechanisms for the government to unwind its investments can be problematic. "There are many cases where governments have bailed out private firms and there was no way for those governments to exit for a long time," Mr Garcia Mora said.

A preferable solution, he suggested, would be for governments to "crowd-in" the private sector to take over viable but troubled companies, by providing seed financing or guarantees. Only in cases where private capital is not forthcoming, there are clear pathways to exit, and bailouts are in the public interest, should governments take equity stakes.

Once insolencies are dealt with, the next priority should be to accelerate the economic recovery by channelling liquidity selectively to deserving sectors. What will be needed, Mr Garcia Mora said, is "a massive reallocation of capital". This will be a tricky exercise. The general manager of the Bank for International Settlements, Mr Agustín Carstens, has pointed out that while economic growth will eventually return, "the engines will not be the same... the economic landscape may have fundamentally changed".

There will be more digital adoption in several sectors, and consumer attitudes will have changed and may never return to what they were, pre-pandemic. There will, for example, be more remote work, less travel, less offline shopping and less eating out. While such trends will strengthen some sectors, "they will also turn once-thriving sectors into deadwood". If policymakers try to prop up businesses in these sectors, they could add pressure to the banking system and exacerbate the economic contraction as well as job losses.

Deciding which sectors merit support won't be easy, Mr Carstens added. "Pre-crisis performance alone will not provide an accurate guide." Banks can help identify the appropriate targets. But they too would need to revise the types of clients they lend to. Thus, as the Covid-19 crisis morphs, the responses to it - from governments, banks and companies - will also need to change.

The Straits Times/ANN

100 YEARS AGO

OCCASIONAL NOTE

At the present time a considerable proportion of the population of rural Bengal and Bihar have forsaken their dwelling-houses and are living on their threshing floors, threshing and winnowing their crops by day, and keeping watch over them by night. The threshing floor is one of the institutions in the East that does not change. The threshing floor to be found in the neighbourhood of each cultivator's house today is just the replica of the threshing floor in which Boaz was spending the night at the time of the barley harvest when Ruth went to him. There in a corner you see the rudely constructed booth of branches of trees and straw in which Boaz was sleeping.

Visit the place during working hours and you see the reapers bringing in the sheaves of grain from the field - in Bihar it is the rule that the reaper gets one sheaf out of sixteen as his pay - and you see the bullocks, un-muzzled, treading the grain, and you see the worker with his fan in his hand, purging the floor, driving away the chaff and sweeping in the grain. There are many cultivators in India, however, who cannot afford to have their grain threshed by bullocks. They tread it with their own feet, or the grain is threshed by hand by being beaten against a large stone or any other convenient article.

NEWS ITEMS

ARRESTED ON SUSPICION

Bangalore, Dec 16

Particulars of the arrest of an Indian passenger at the City Railway Station show that he is stated to have given his name as Subedar Major Gulam Hussain, Khan Bahadur, and is stated to have represented himself as the son of Sir Mahomed Malik Ayyub Khan of Quetta, and nephew of the Hon. Mr. Shafi. He was dressed in the uniform of a 2nd Lieutenant and had four ribbons stitched on his uniform, which he is stated to have said were given him for active service in the Baghdad Bakula Force. He travelled from Dhanwar to Bangalore along with the Hon. Mr. Lalbhaji Samaldas. The latter lost a purse containing of Rs 398, and made a complaint to the police. The railway police arrested the former on suspicion. The accused was placed before Railway Magistrate, who has remanded him pending further enquiries.

BUCKINGHAM MILLS DISPUTE

A statement submitted to the Buckingham Mill authorities by the Labour Union, signed by 3,956 workmen, repudiates the allegation that the present situation is brought about by the evil advice of politicians. Mr. Bentley, Manager of the Buckingham Mills, says that the management is prepared, and has always been prepared to recognise the Labour Union in Madras, provided the constitution does not include any person outside the workers. Apropos the official report of the Commissioner of Police with regard to the attacks on police, by the workmen of Buckingham Mills and the circumstances in which orders were given to open fire on their assailants. The narrative thus furnished indicates that this extreme action was forced upon the police as a measure of self-protection.

ENGLISH AND FOREIGN PIECE GOODS

At an extraordinary meeting the Bombay Piece Goods Merchants Association passed the following resolutions: As our trade has been in danger owing to the unrest prevailing throughout the country in consequence of the action of the authorities and wide fluctuations in the exchange, our brother merchants are involved in big losses. It is therefore hereby resolved that until the authorities concerned do take steps to remove the difficulties coming in the way of our trade, and until a further resolution is made by our Association no merchant shall order out by indent or buy from stock or from auction or through any other channel any English or foreign piece goods. They shall however be free to buy from and sell goods to merchants trading in the present local markets.

ZEMINDAR'S DEPOSIT FORFEITED

The Punjab Government has forfeited under the Press Act the security of Rs 2,000 deposited by the keeper of the Muslim printing press, where the Zemindar is printed, on account of an article on the Lieut.-Governor's speech published in the issue of the paper, as in the opinion of the local Government, the article is likely or may have a tendency to bring into hatred or contempt the Government established by law in British India, or to incite disaffection towards the Government and to bring into hatred or contempt British soldiers who are His Majesty's subjects in British India. All copies of this issue of the paper have also been forfeited.

NO 28167

Assure income, not price, to farmers

A AMARENDER REDDY

It may be the time to consider guaranteeing minimum basic income to farmers through an act of Parliament instead of repealing the new farm laws and guarantee Minimum Support Price (MSP). The new farm bills are pro-market and in line with the changing times. We are in a globalised and free market era. As a leading agricultural player, India sooner or later has to open its agricultural markets to world markets to take advantage of global demand for agricultural commodities. Legalising the Minimum Support Price (MSP) goes against the free markets in agricultural sector.

In these changed times, ensuring farmers' incomes through price policy is not practical, it will lead to inefficiencies in agriculture and India may lose competitive advantage in the ever-expanding global economy. However, it is the obligation of the government to ensure farmers' incomes and livelihoods. Most of the countries are shifting from price policies to income policies to ensure farmers' incomes by adopting a sort of Universal Basic Income (UBI).

UBI is a regular, unconditional cash payment given to all households of a country. The idea of UBI originated in the West to ensure a minimum guaranteed income to every citizen of the country. Most of the developing countries are also using a modified form of it to ensure farmers' incomes. It is expected to protect farmers from looming threat of highly fluctuating

and also declining agricultural prices. Basic advantage of the scheme is it does not intervene in functioning of agricultural markets and allows free markets. Unlike loan weavers, it does not impair credit culture and unlike MSP for crops, it does not encourage one crop against other. It also avoids enormous, complex and costly administrative procedures, leakages and lethargies in implementing schemes like procurement of grains and distribution under the Public Distribution System.

International experience shows that UBI makes people happier and healthier and everyone benefits. A modified version of the UBI scheme, targeted basic income scheme (PM-KISAN) was already working in India. Under the PM-KISAN scheme, a specified sum of money is directly transferred to farmers' bank account based on land records every season. Many state governments also implement similar targeted basic income schemes; they include Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Odisha.

The Central government scheme PM-KISAN (PM Kisan Samman Nidhi scheme) has pan-India coverage. It benefits more than 12 crore farmers who own less than 5 acres of land with a total budget of Rs.72,000 crore per year on the assumption that land records can be used as means of verification to identify farmers. The main opposition Congress Party had promised a similar scheme in its election manifesto in 2019, a 'Minimum

Income Guarantee Scheme' (MIGS), formally called Nyuntam Aay Yojana (NYAY), to five crore 'poorest' families by assuring them a guaranteed minimum income of Rs 6,000 per month or Rs 72,000 a year. All households with a monthly income below Rs 12,000 are eligible. The total budget is estimated to be Rs 3.6 lakh crore, which is 1.9 per cent of GDP.

As a first step in shifting from price policy to income policy, there is a need for enhancing benefits under PM-KISAN to cover some basic needs of farmers such as input costs including fertilizer, irrigation, pesticides and also cover periodic losses due to floods, droughts and price fluctuations. However, the scheme should not become an excessive burden on exchequer. It seems benefits under some of the state schemes like Rythu Bandhu of Telangana government are much better by transferring Rs.10,000 per acre to each farmer. If all states wish to implement a Rythu Bandhu type of scheme in its current form, it will cost 1.85 per cent of GDP. For these schemes to be sustainable in the long run, they need to be targeted well. Small farmers should get at least equal if not more benefits than large farmers whereas Rythu Bandhu benefits large landlords more than the small farmers. The means verification needs to be standardised with no opportunity to inflate the targeted beneficiaries by the local administration.

Some farmer's organisations complain that the PM-KISAN or simi-

lar schemes are benefiting absentee landlords rather than real farmers. These schemes are prone to inclusion and exclusion errors. The inclusion error covers the proportion of those selected under a scheme who are not really farmers (like absentee landlords with 40 acres of land getting benefit of Rs. 4 lakh per annum under Rythu Bandhu). The exclusion error covers the proportion of those intended to be benefited who are excluded as a result of improper design (as in Rythu Bandhu scheme, tenant farmers, whose share is about 25 per cent in the state but who are not eligible to get benefits although they are actual cultivators who bear all risks of agriculture). These inclusion and exclusion errors can be effectively reduced by proper design of the scheme and by using means-verification tools like online land records or Aadhar-linked bank account, tenancy certificates etc.

To implement any form of PM-KISAN type of income support to farmers, governments have to identify farmers correctly without any scope for errors. For example for implementation of PM-KISAN, land records are the basis for identification of beneficiary farmers. However, digitization of land records is still a work in progress; this needs to be speeded up. Computerization of land records has been completed only in 87 per cent of the villages in India. Only three states (Karnataka, Telangana and Odisha) have completed 100 per cent computerization of land records, while the remaining states have com-

puterized between 80-90 per cent of the records.

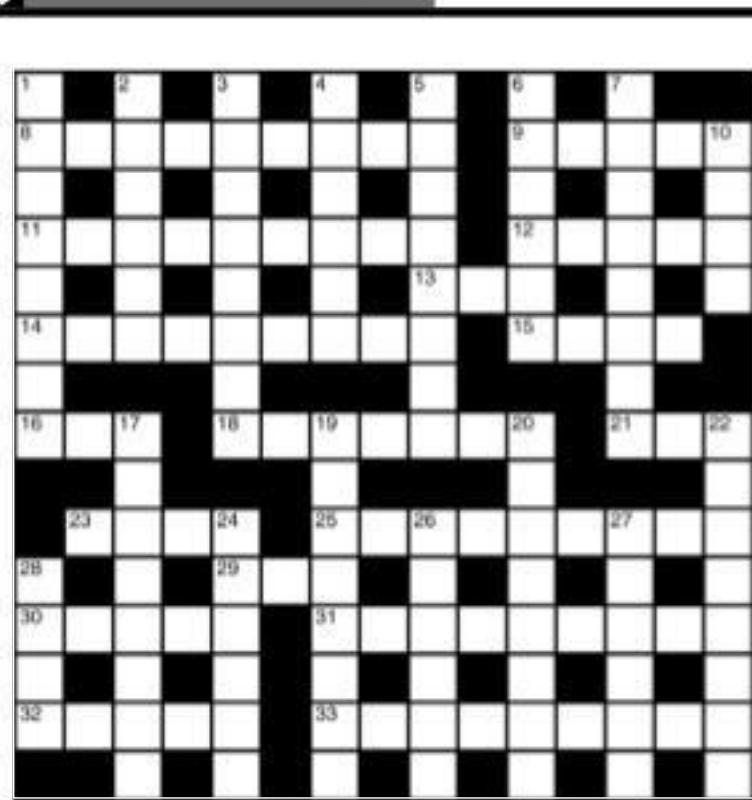
In particular, land records in states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and north-eastern states are not updated. With the initiation of the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY), now almost every farmer has a Aadhar-linked bank account. Under PMJDY about 35.5 crore Aadhar-linked bank accounts were created as against 24.8 crore households in India, which can be used for Direct Money Transfer to farmers.

Budget allocation to an enhanced scheme (modified PM-KISAN) should not be at the cost of reducing public expenditure on agriculture and other subsidies. The high fiscal costs may force government to roll back some subsidies like free electricity, subsidised fertilizers and food etc. If the state retreats from these public provisions like Public Distribution System (PDS), it is doubtful how far the private sector with profit motive will fill this gap. It may be possible that prices of some of the inputs may go up in open market and become out of reach of small farmers.

In the past, government's retreat in primary education and health care led to proliferation of private schools and hospitals with extortionate fees, which were unaffordable to the poor. State provision of agricultural and rural infrastructure is a more cost-effective, socially just, redistributive and sustainable way of meeting the farmers' needs than leaving them to depend on the free market.

The writer is Principal Scientist, ICAR-Centre Research Institute for Dryland Agriculture.

CROSSWORD



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

ACROSS

- 8 Be enthusiastic about Democrat leading US state transmission (5,4)
- 9 Contribution to run in the last inning? (5)
- 11 Biscuit for one turned over in the midst of turning out (6,3)
- 12 Complete club ousting leader (5)
- 13 Completely ousting leader of college (3)
- 14 Road movie? I had little hesitation after years at sea (4,5)
- 15 Time of disturbance moved forward for small group (4)
- 16 Drink a lot of salt water? (3)

DOWN

- 1 Newspaper employees blocking newspaper? Just a little (8)
- 2 Short film sequences giving one various impressions (6)
- 3 Shabby party ready to roll? (3-5)
- 4 Fellow gave assistance after one dropped out tired (5)
- 5 Active gear ripped or lasted (8)
- 6 Medical injury? Put under protection, avoiding A & E (6)
- 7 Note risk when playing at the crease? (2,6)

France and England (9)

- 10 Present: something received by the recipient (4)
- 17 Nobleman, mostly bent, importing diamonds to European country (8)
- 19 Instruction to give'em tonic? (4-2-2)
- 20 Pushchair getting wave at end of street (8)
- 22 Border row? French willing to be above that (8)
- 24 Magistrate with money giving ride to daughter in car (6)
- 26 Good to stir up complaint (6)
- 27 Smooth support, a tiny bit short (6)
- 28 Historic leader disengaged from area (4)

NOTE: Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required. (By arrangement with The Independent, London)

'Instagram Lite' test in India



NEW DELHI, 16 DECEMBER

Photo-sharing platform Instagram on Wednesday said it is testing 'Instagram Lite' app in India that occupies less space on Android phones and consumes lesser data, before it rolls out the offering globally.

Over the past many months, the Facebook-owned company has tested and rolled out a number of features in India first, including its short video offering - Reels.

"India is an important market for us and has been a testing ground for innovation... India was one of the first few countries where we tested Reels, and the first country where we launched the Reels tab... In order to expand the appeal of Instagram to users across the country, today we're announcing the test of Instagram Lite in India," Vishal Shah, VP of Product, Instagram at Facebook, said at the Facebook Fuel for India 2020 event.

He added that 'Instagram Lite' is less than two megabytes in size, and has been built to provide access and high quality experience to users in India, irrespective of the device, platform and network that they are on.

The experience on the new app is similar to the core Instagram app experience, though there are some features that are not currently supported such as Reels, Shopping and IGTV.

The app will be available in Bangla, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Punjabi, Tamil and Telugu.

Facebook and other Internet companies like LinkedIn and Twitter offer similar lighter apps to help users access key features of the platform with lower data usage and quicker loading time.

Shah noted that India is setting global trends as well with two out of the five songs shared most globally on Reels coming from Indian artists. PTI

Cyber, data security must to aid financial inclusion: Das

Imperative to build trust in formal financial services among the hitherto excluded population

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 16 DECEMBER



NEW DELHI, 16 DECEMBER

Issues concerning cyber security and data protection must be addressed to gain confidence of the excluded section in use of technology, which is necessary for promoting financial inclusion, Reserve Bank Governor Shaktikanta Das said on Wednesday.

"Technology, though being a great enabler, can also lead to exclusion of certain segments of society," Das said in his keynote address at a webinar on 'Investing in Investor Education in India: Priorities for Action', organised by the NCAER.

The RBI Governor added that it was imperative to build trust in formal financial services among the hitherto excluded population.

"Adequate safeguards need to be reinforced to address issues of cyber security, data confidentiality, mis-selling, customer protection and grievance redress through appropriate financial education and awareness. These

cast great responsibility on financial education providers," he emphasised.

Financial inclusion in the country, he said, is poised to grow exponentially with digital savvy millennials joining the workforce, social media blurring the urban-rural divide and technology shaping the policy interventions.

For harnessing the near universal reach of bank accounts across the length and breadth of the country, there needs to be greater focus on penetration of sustainable credit, investment, insurance and pension products by addressing demand side constraints with enhanced customer protection, Das said.

The interventions in financial education would have to be customised in local language and local settings keeping the different target audience in mind, he pointed out.

The scaling up of Centre for Financial Literacy (CFL) projects across the country at the block level would be the cornerstone of community-led participatory approaches in the journey towards greater financial literacy, he added.

The Governor also stressed that in a large country like India with an aspiring population, financial education cannot remain just the responsibility of financial sector regulators.

This aspect has been highlighted in the National Strategy for Financial Education (NSFE 2020-2025) document which recommends a multi-stakeholder led approach to achieve financial wellbeing of all. "Going forward, increasingly, educational institutions, industry bodies and other stakeholders like think tanks, research institutions should come forward to shoulder the responsibility of increasing financial literacy through appropriate awareness campaigns," Das said.

Financial inclusion initiatives in India started in the aftermath of first All India Rural Credit Survey in 1954 with promotion of cooperatives.

This was followed later by

expansion of branch network after nationalisation of major private sector banks, launch of Lead Bank Scheme, promotion of Self Help Groups (SHGs), Joint Liability Groups (JLGs), implementation of Banking Correspondents (BC) model, expansion of banking outlets, creation of payments banks and small finance banks, among others.

The largest impact in recent years came from the opening of Jan Dhan accounts and implementation of the Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana (PMMY).

The launch of the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) in 2014 has resulted in almost every household having access to formal banking services along with a platform for availing low value credit, insurance and pension schemes, the governor said. "This has been ably supported by initiatives to ensure last-mile delivery of banking services through innovative banking channels like the BC model. Thanks to technology there has been massive improvement in deepening digital financial services," said.

The Jan Dhan, Aadhaar and Mobile ecosystem has made a significant difference in the universe of financial inclusion, Das added. NCAER said it was the inaugural event for a five-part virtual workshop series with financial regulators on investor education and protection.

Fiat Chrysler lines up \$150 mn to set up global digital hub in Hyderabad



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 16 DECEMBER

Auto major Fiat Chrysler Automobiles (FCA) on Wednesday said it will invest \$150 million (around Rs 1,103 crore) to set up a global digital hub in Hyderabad to help the group develop new technologies to cater to its automotive operations across the globe.

The facility, which is FCA's largest digital hub outside of North America, would create nearly 1,000 jobs by the end of next year.

"While reviewing our strategy last year, we knew the next step for us to set up a global digital hub which would serve as transformation and innovation engine for Fiat Chrysler and drive global technology

strategy and delivery experience through robust platform, technology and service centres of excellence," FCA North America and Asia Pacific CIO Mamatha Chamarthi said at a virtual event.

The digital hub would help to digitalise every aspect of Fiat Chrysler's automotive operations globally and within India, drive the shift from legacy technologies to digital and modernise the company's existing applications and product portfolio, she added.

The Hyderabad centre would operate as a fully integrated part of Fiat Chrysler's global team and attract best digital talent in India, Chamarthi said.

"It will focus on niche technology areas like connected vehicle services, data sciences, cloud services among others," she added.

In the digital era, data is the new currency and the company aims to build an innovation powerhouse that harnesses the intelligence enabled by data to build exciting new products and services to deliver at the speed of customers' expectations, Chamarthi said.

Sebi imposes two-year ban in Timbor Home IPO



NEW DELHI, 16 DECEMBER

Sebi has barred two individuals from accessing the securities market for two years for irregularities in the IPO of Timbor Home Ltd back in 2011.

The individuals, Anant Sureshchandra Maloo and Manan Vidhyapati Patel, were the directors of the company during the period of Initial Public Offer.

The regulator had conducted an investigation for the period of June 22 to July 8, 2011 into the scrip of Timbor Home Ltd. The company came out with its IPO in 2011.

According to Sebi, the company had failed to disclose its pre-existing liabilities amounting to around Rs 7 crore related to working capital expenses in the Red Herring Prospectus and on the contrary, it made an affirmative disclosure that there is no pre-existing liability related to working capital expenses.

Further, it was revealed that the company had failed to disclose about an amount of Rs 7 crore which was in the nature of a bridge loan. However, the company had made an affirmative disclosure that it has not raised any bridge loan against the proceeds of the IPO.

As per an order passed on Tuesday, the company had also inflated its purchases and sales figures for the years 2010-11 and 2011-12, which included the financial information contained in the prospectus.

Ashok Leyland introduces two passenger bus models in Saudi Arabia

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI, 16 DECEMBER

Hinduja Group flagship firm Ashok Leyland on Wednesday introduced two passenger bus models - the 70-seater Falcon Super and 26-seater Gazl - in Saudi Arabia.

Manufactured at the company's Ras Al Khaimah facility in the UAE, Falcon buses will be predominantly marketed to corporate entities. Gazl's market will be more focused on the hospitality and tourism sector, Ashok Leyland said in a release.

Saudi Arabia already has 3,500 Ashok Leyland buses plying on the roads, it said at the virtual launch, adding that the launch of two buses was done in partnership with the company's exclusive dealer in Saudi Arabia, Western Auto of Al Ghurair Group.



"Falcon Super and Gazl comes from our state-of-the-art manufacturing base in Ras Al Khaimah, and is made to the specific parameters of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) transportation and mobility stipulations, with in-built advanced technology and safety solutions, for a comfortable journey," said Nitin Seth, Chief Operating Officer, Ashok Leyland.

Established in 2007, the Ras Al Khaimah plant exports buses to Europe, Africa and the Middle East. The plant has manufactured over 20,000 buses so far, a large share of it plying on the roads of GCC countries, including in the Saudi Arabia, Seth said.

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), a leading regional

organisation, comprises of - Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Oman and Kuwait.

"Our plant in Ras Al Khaimah (RAK) and increasing market share in GCC countries, will play a key role in achieving our vision to be in the Top 10 Global CV makers," he added.

"Ashok Leyland has a growing market share for passenger buses in the Saudi Arabia. Currently out of the total fleet of the brand's vehicles in the Kingdom, 3,000 buses are used by corporate entities in addition to school buses.

"Ashok Leyland's success in the Kingdom has been bolstered by the reliability of its products, excellent after service provided in time, utility value and cost-efficiency," said Arturo Lujan, Chief Executive Officer of Western Auto.

CCEA approves revised cost of ₹6.7k cr for power project for 6 North Eastern states

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 16 DECEMBER

The central government on Wednesday approved the revised cost estimate of Rs 6,700 crore for North Eastern Region Power System Improvement Project for six states to strengthen intra-state transmission and distribution systems.

"Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has approved the Revised Cost Estimate of North Eastern Region Power System Improvement Project at an estimated cost of Rs 6,700 crore," an official statement said.

This is a major step towards the economic development of the North Eastern Region through the strengthening of intra-state transmission and distribution infrastructure in the region.

Implementation of this scheme will create a reliable power grid and improve

NER states' connectivity to the upcoming load centres, and thus extend the benefits of the grid-connected power to all categories of consumers/beneficiaries in the north-eastern region. The scheme will also increase the per capita power consumption of these states, and contribute to the total economic development of the region. Implementing agencies are hiring a considerable number of local manpower during their construction work, generating a lot of employment for skilled and unskilled manpower of north-eastern states utilities.

The main objective of the project is the government commitment for the total economic development of North Eastern Region and to strengthen the intra-state transmission and distribution infrastructure in the region.

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As per an order passed on Tuesday, the company had also inflated its purchases and sales figures for the years 2010-11 and 2011-12, which included the financial information contained in the prospectus.

WhatsApp to help users in India buy 'sachet-sized' health insurance by year-end

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 16 DECEMBER

WhatsApp on Wednesday said it expects to facilitate the purchase of "affordable sachet-sized" health insurance through its platform by the end of the year as part of its efforts to provide users in India with greater access to financial solutions.

The Facebook-owned company noted that its 'Payments' feature is now available to users across the country (currently up to 20 million users) with support from banking partners - State Bank of India, HDFC, ICICI and Axis Bank.

"WhatsApp is deeply committed to India with over 400 million active users, this is our largest market. Our primary

focus will always be to provide the most simple, reliable, private and secure experience for people to connect with each other.

However, in India we are also building on four other pillars," WhatsApp India Head Abhijit Bose said at the Facebook Fuel for India 2020 event.

He added that WhatsApp wants to help further digitise and scale the small business ecosystem of India, make it easier for consumers to connect with and buy from their favourite businesses, and build digital payments across all segments, especially for underserved users in India.

It will also continue to deepen its investments in India by developing and scaling social impact pro-

grams, he said. "WhatsApp has proactively been working on several pilots to help ensure that every adult has access to the most basic critical financial

and livelihood services through their mobile device. By the end of this year, we

expect that people will be able to buy affordable sachet-sized health insurance through WhatsApp," Bose said.

He added that these pilots, along with others in sectors like edutech and agri-tech, would help support the government's focus on a more digitised economy, especially for rural and underserved segments.

In a statement, WhatsApp said by the end of this year, buying affordable health insurance coverage from SBI General leveraging WhatsApp, will be a reality.

Similarly, with HDFC Pensions and pinBox solutions, WhatsApp will be leveraged to help enable savings for retirement that will be especially beneficial for people who do not have organised employ-

ment benefits or a retirement corpus to fall back on.

WhatsApp has designed its payments feature on National Payments Corporation of India's (NPCI) Unified Payment Interface (UPI) system and was granted approvals to go live recently in November this year on a peer-to-peer (P2P) basis enabling people to transfer money.

"We have been approved to launch payment services using UPI, which is truly a revolutionary platform from India, which I believe will become a template for the world," he said.

Last month, Facebook-owned WhatsApp received approval from NPCI for rolling out its payment services in India. In 2018, WhatsApp



started testing its UPI-based payments services in India, a global first, with about a million users.

Following the NPCI approval, WhatsApp has started its payments service in the country in a "graded" manner, starting with a maximum registered user base of 20 million in UPI.

WhatsApp, which counts India as its biggest market with over 400 million users, will compete with players like Paytm, Google Pay, Walmart-owned PhonePe and Amazon Pay in the country.

Bose said while developing WhatsApp Pay, it put huge efforts to ensure its safety. "As a result, WhatsApp Pay is secure and highly reliable, and making sure that your life's capital is safe," he said.



This is now a case of being so close and yet being so far...

EU COMMISSION PRESIDENT URSULA VON DER LEYEN
SEEING PROGRESS ON BREXIT TALKS

WEATHER

CITY	MAX (°C)	MIN (°C)
SINGAPORE	30	24 R
HONG KONG	18	13 H
TOKYO	09	02 S
LONDON	11	09 S
DUBAI	27	18 S
SAN FRANCISCO	14	07 H
NEW YORK	02	-04 R
MOSCOW	02	-02 H

S=sunny, CL= clear, H=hazy, R=rainy...

THUMBNAILS



People wearing face masks walk past a red telephone box in central London, Britain. ■ IANS

Indian-American selected for SpaceX Crew-3 mission:

Indian-American US Air Force Colonel Raja Chari has been selected as the Commander of the SpaceX Crew-3 mission to the International Space Station (ISS) by NASA and the European Space Agency. Chari, 43, will serve as the commander while NASA's Tom Marshburn will be pilot and ESA's Matthias Maurer will serve as a mission specialist for the SpaceX Crew-3 mission to the ISS, which is expected to launch next year. ■ PTI

UN Resident Coordinator in China: UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has appointed senior UN official Siddhartha Chatterjee of India as the United Nations Resident Coordinator in China. Chatterjee's appointment follows confirmation from the Host Government, where he will take up his post in the middle of January of next year, Spokesman said. ■ PTI

Trump asking about special prosecutor for Hunter Biden

WASHINGTON, 16 DECEMBER

President Donald Trump is considering pushing to have a special counsel appointed to advance a federal tax investigation into the son of President-elect Joe Biden, setting up a potential showdown with incoming acting attorney general Jeffrey Rosen.

Trump angry that outgoing Attorney General William Barr didn't publicly announce the ongoing two-year investigation into Hunter Biden has consulted on the matter with White House chief of staff Mark Meadows, White House counsel Pat Cipollone and outside allies.

Beyond appointing a special prosecutor to investigate the younger Biden, the sources said Trump is interested in having another special counsel appointed to look into his own baseless claims of election fraud.

After months of making a virtue of the cautious approach his campaign and transition team have taken toward Covid-19, Biden's prudence will be tested by technology and tradition when he arrives on

January 20. White House computers don't allow the popular video conference software Zoom or rival systems like Google Meet and Slack. Government-issue cellphones only gained texting capabilities a few years ago. And many employees will need to be present at the White House to access classified information.

Biden's team has limited experience with staffing a physical office during the pandemic. His campaign went all-virtual in mid-March, clearing out its Philadelphia headquarters and sending staff back to their families in Washington, New York and beyond.

The closest Biden's team has come to experimenting with in-person work was election night, when a small selection

of masked and socially distanced aides in Wilmington, Delaware, monitored returns in hotel conference rooms, a far cry from running a White House 24/7.

Even now, the most prominent use of the 100,000-plus square feet (9,290 square meters) of office space reserved for the transition is for Vice President-elect Kamala Harris to receive the highly classified President's Daily Brief.

Telework is possible for some White House staff, and improvements in both secure and unclassified videoconferencing have been made over the last two decades. But the lack of in-person coordination could pose an additional challenge to the new government facing a multitude of crises.

Further complicating matters, the Biden team must devise health and safety protocols from scratch. The Trump

administration was, at best, a cautionary tale in how not to run a workplace during a pandemic.

Despite relying on an aggressive testing regimen that is not available in other workplaces, the West Wing under President Donald Trump has been the locus of at least two significant outbreaks of Covid-19 since Trump himself came down with the virus five weeks before Election Day.

In addition to the first family, the dozens in Trump world who have tested positive include the White House chief of staff, the vice president's chief of staff, the White House press secretary and the president's campaign manager. Still more aides have had to isolate after potential exposure. The full scale of the infections is not publicly known.

Hack may have exposed deep US secrets

It will take weeks, maybe years in some cases, for digital sleuths combing through US government and private industry networks to get the answers

ASSOCIATED PRESS
BOSTON, 16 DECEMBER

Some of America's most deeply held secrets may have been stolen in a disciplined, months-long operation being blamed on elite Russian government hackers. The possibilities of what might have been purloined are mind-boggling.

Could hackers have obtained nuclear secrets? Covid-19 vaccine data? Blueprint for next-generation weapons systems?

It will take weeks, maybe years in some cases, for digital sleuths combing through US government and private industry networks to get the answers. These hackers are consummate pros at covering their tracks, experts say. Some theft may never be detected.

What's seems clear is that this campaign- which cybersecurity experts says exhibits

the tactics and techniques of Russia's SVR foreign intelligence agency - will rank among the most prolific in the annals of cyberspies.

U.S. government agencies, including the Treasury and Commerce departments, were among dozens of high-value public- and private-sector targets known to have been infiltrated as far back as March through a commercial software update distributed to thousands of companies and government agencies worldwide. A Pentagon statement Monday indicated it used the software. It said it had "issued guidance and directives to protect" its networks. It would not say - for "operational security reasons" - whether any of its systems may have been hacked.

On Tuesday, acting Defense Secretary Chris Miller told CBS News there was so far no evidence of compromise. In the months since the

update went out, the hackers carefully exfiltrated data, often encrypting it so it wasn't clear what was being taken, and expertly covering their tracks.

Thomas Rid, a Johns Hopkins cyberconflict expert, said the campaign's likely efficacy can be compared to Russia's three-year 1990s "Moonlight Maze" hacking of U.S. government targets, including NASA and the Pentagon. A U.S. investigation determined the height of the documents stolen if printed out and piled up would triple the height of the Washington Monument.

In this case "several Washington Monument piles of documents that they took from different government agencies is probably a realistic estimate," Rid said. "How would they use that? They themselves most likely don't know yet." The Trump administration has not said which agencies were hacked. And so

far no private-sector victims have come forward. Traditionally, defense contractors and telecommunications companies have been popular targets with state-backed cyber spies, Rid said.

Intelligence agents generally seek the latest on weapons technologies and missile defense systems anything vital to national security. They also develop dossiers on rival government employees, potentially for recruitment as spies.

President Donald Trump's national security adviser, Robert O'Brien, cut short an overseas trip to hold meetings on the hack and was to con-

vene a top-level interagency meeting later this week, the White House said in a statement.

O'Brien had been scheduled to return Saturday and had to scrap plans to visit officials in Italy, Germany, Switzerland and Britain, said an official familiar with his itinerary who was not authorized to discuss it and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Earlier, the White House said a coordinating team had been created to respond, including the FBI, the Department of Homeland Security and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence.

At a briefing for congressional staffers Monday, DHS did not say how many agencies were hacked, a reflection of how little the Trump administration has been sharing with Congress on the case.

Critics have long complained that the Trump admin-

istration failed to address snowballing cybersecurity threats—including from ransomware attacks that have hobbled state and local governments, hospitals and even grammar schools.

"It's been a frustrating time, the last four years. I mean, nothing has happened seriously at all in cybersecurity," said Brandon Valeriano, a Marine Corps University scholar and adviser to the Cyber Solarium Commission, which was created by Congress to fortify the nation's cyber defenses. "It's tough to find anything that we moved forward on at all."

Trump eliminated two key government positions: White House cybersecurity coordinator and State Department cybersecurity policy chief.

Valeriano said one of the few bright spots was the work of Chris Krebs, the head of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, whom he expected many more to learn in coming days that they, too, were compromised.

Republicans acknowledge Biden's victory

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON, 16 DECEMBER



More than a month after the election, top Republicans finally acknowledged Joe Biden as the next US president on Tuesday, a collapse in GOP resistance to the millions of voters who decisively chose the Democrat. Foreign leaders joined the parade, too, including Russia's Vladimir Putin.

Speaking from the floor of the US Senate where Biden spent 36 years of his career, Majority Leader Mitch McConnell congratulated his former colleague as president-elect.

The two men spoke later in the day. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, meanwhile, was to meet with his likely successor in the new administration, Antony Blinken. And GOP Sen.

Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, one of President Donald Trump's closest allies, said he'd spoken with some of Biden's Cabinet picks.

A similar shift unfolded in capitals across the world, where leaders including Russia's Putin and Mexico's Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador acknowledged Biden's win.

The moves come a day after electors nationwide for-

mally cast votes affirming Biden's victory in last month's presidential election. And while that clears a more stable path for Biden to assume the presidency, it does little to stop Trump from continuing to try to undermine confidence in the results with baseless allegations that have been rejected by judges across political spectrum.

The growing acknowledgement of reality in Washington was triggered by the Electoral College formally voting on Monday to seal Biden's win with 306 votes to Trump's 232, the same margin that Trump pulled together four years ago.

The normally humdrum political ceremony didn't change the facts of the election, but was nonetheless used as political cover by leading Republicans.

Many of us had hoped the presidential election would

yield a different result, McConnell said. But our system of government has the processes to determine who will be sworn in on Jan. 20.

The Electoral College has spoken. The bureaucratic transition from Trump's government to Biden's actually began weeks ago, despite the president's legal challenges. Still, the suddenly conciliatory stance from many Republicans could thaw the political deep freeze that has gripped Washington lately.

Biden has been trying to build momentum as he prepares to assume the presidency while facing the historic challenge of vaccinating hundreds of millions of Americans against the coronavirus.

In some of his most forceful remarks since the election, Biden is calling for unity but also calling Trump's attacks on the voting process unconscionable and insisting it is time to turn the page. We need to work together, give each other a chance, and lower the temperature, Biden said in a speech Monday.

Still, the shift coming so late in the tone from Republicans has left the president-elect with barely a month to finish building out key parts of his new government. Some say the GOP about-face won't mean much at this point.

tion of masked and socially distanced aides in Wilmington, Delaware, monitored returns in hotel conference rooms, a far cry from running a White House 24/7.

Despite relying on an aggressive testing regimen that is not available in other workplaces, the West Wing under President Donald Trump has been the locus of at least two significant outbreaks of Covid-19 since Trump himself came down with the virus five weeks before Election Day.

In addition to the first family, the dozens in Trump world who have tested positive include the White House chief of staff, the vice president's chief of staff, the White House press secretary and the president's campaign manager. Still more aides have had to isolate after potential exposure. The full scale of the infections is not publicly known.

Biden picks Pete Buttigieg to be Secretary of Transportation

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
WASHINGTON, 16 DECEMBER

US President-elect Joe Biden has chosen Pete Buttigieg to be his transportation secretary, elevating the former mayor of Indiana and a one-time rival to a top post in his Cabinet.

The first openly gay major presidential candidate in American history, and one of the youngest-ever to win a state primary or caucus, Buttigieg, 38, is a barrier-breaking public servant from the industrial Midwest with a track record of trailblazing, forward-thinking executive leadership.

Buttigieg vaulted to national prominence due to his success in revitalising his hometown of South Bend, Indiana. First elected at the age of 29, Buttigieg worked inclusively and creatively to bring together public, private, and community leaders to restore pride to South Bend and turn the city

- once called one of America's "dying cities" - into a bustling hub of innovation and growth.

"Mayor Pete Buttigieg is a patriot and a problem-solver who speaks to the best of who we are as a nation. I am nominating him for Secretary of Transportation because this position stands at the nexus of so many of the interlocking challenges and opportuni-

nities ahead of us," Biden said in a statement on Tuesday.

"Jobs, infrastructure, equity,

and climate all come together at the DOT, the site of some of our most ambitious plans to build back better. I trust Mayor Pete to lead this work with focus, decency, and a bold vision. He will bring people together to get big things done," he said.

Buttigieg termed his nomination as a moment of "tremendous opportunity" to create jobs, meet the climate challenge, and enhance equity for all.

If confirmed as Transportation Secretary, Buttigieg will work to improve the lives of all Americans, and he will bring the same vision and policy acumen that reinvigorated South Bend to the task of implementing President-elect Biden's Build Back Better agenda, including rebuilding modern, sustainable infrastructure nationwide, creat-

Biden set to pick Gina McCarthy as US climate czar

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON, 16 DECEMBER



President-elect Joe Biden is expected to tap former Environmental Protection Agency chief Gina McCarthy to spearhead his ambitions for a massive, coordinated domestic campaign to slow climate change.

That's according to a person familiar with the plans who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity to avoid publicly preempting the president-elect's announcement. McCarthy's selection is in line with Biden's pattern of picking tested, familiar figures from his time as vice president, passing over potentially more exciting and younger figures from the progressive movement.

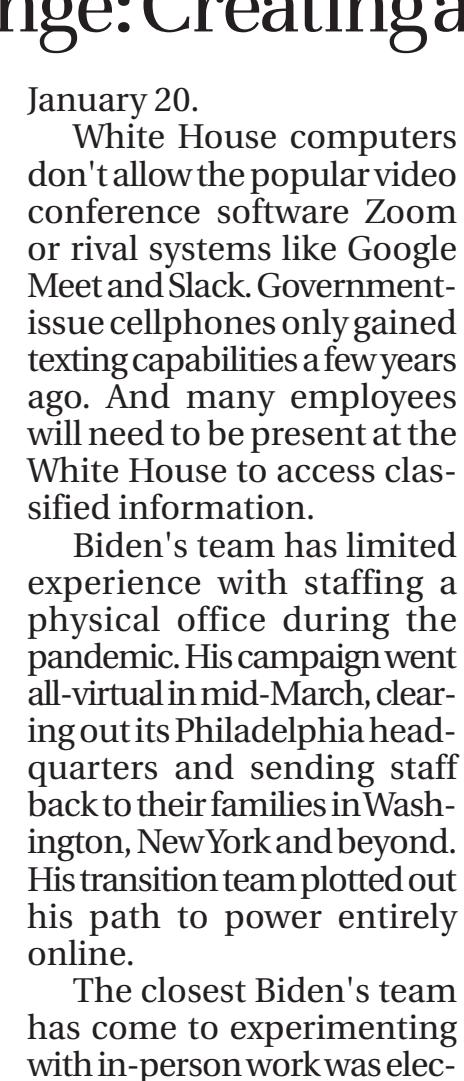
McCarthy's counterpart in climate efforts will be former Secretary of State John Kerry, earlier named by Biden as his climate envoy for national security issues.

ing millions of good-paying union jobs, and tackling the climate crisis by helping to

deliver an equitable clean energy future, the transition said.

Biden's challenge: Creating a Covid-19-free White House

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON, 16 DECEMBER



Three blocks from the White House, office space for more than 500 Biden transition staffers sits mostly idle. The government is shipping out laptops so staffers can work from home. President-elect Joe Biden, surrounded by just a handful of aides in Delaware, is using Zoom to oversee his plans to assume power.

But Biden soon will be entering a no-Zoom zone at the White House just one sign of the challenges his new administration will face when it moves to Washington in the midst of a pandemic.

After months of making a virtue of the cautious approach his campaign and transition team have taken toward Covid-19, Biden's prudence will be tested by technology and tradition when he arrives on

January 20. White House computers don't allow the popular video conference software Zoom or rival systems like Google Meet and Slack. Government-issue cellphones only gained texting capabilities a few years ago. And many employees will need to be present at the White House to access classified information.

Biden's team has limited experience with staffing a physical office during the pandemic. His campaign went all-virtual in mid-March, clearing out its Philadelphia headquarters and sending staff back to their families in Washington, New York and beyond.

In the closest Biden's team has come to experimenting with in-person work was election night, when a small selection

of masked and socially distanced aides in Wilmington, Delaware, monitored returns in hotel conference rooms, a far cry from running a White House 24/7.

Despite relying on an aggressive testing regimen that is not available in other workplaces, the West Wing under President Donald Trump has been the locus of at least two significant outbreaks of Covid-19 since Trump himself came down with the virus five weeks before Election Day.

In addition to the first family, the dozens in Trump world who have tested positive include the White House chief of staff, the vice president's chief of staff, the White House press secretary and the president's campaign manager. Still more aides have had to isolate after potential exposure. The full scale of the infections is not publicly known.

CHRISTMAS MOOD

In a Writ Petition pending for adjudication before the Supreme Court of India and even before adjudicating the matter finally, the Court has directed all High Courts to appoint special judges to fast track cases against elected representatives – apparently with the objective of sanitising “democratically elected institutions”. It intends to fast track not just cases under special legislations like Prevention of Money Laundering Act and Prevention of Corruption Act etc but all sorts of criminal cases against them including Indian Penal Code offences, regardless of their gravity. That's holy!

It would be more interesting to watch out how the matter unfolds during arguments and how the Court finally gives it a piece of its mind. A relevant Prayer clause in the Petition reads: “direct the Respondent- 1 (Union of India) to take appropriate steps to set up Special Courts to decide the cases related to people's representative and public servants within one year and implement the important electoral reforms, proposed by the National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution, Law Commission of India in its 244th and 255th Report and Election Commission of India”.

Going by the Prayer Clause, it seems the Petitioner takes only elected representatives into its circumference. But legally speaking the term “Public Servant” takes a wide range of people into its girth, as defined in Section 21 of IPC and Section 2 of the Prevention of Corruption Act.

However, both the litigators and the Court have selectively narrowed the task to elected representatives. This is evident from the Court's own words: “The Court was of the opinion that such special consideration was required not only because of the rising wave of criminalization that was occurring in the politics in the country, but also due to the power that elected representatives (sitting or former) wield, to influence or hamper effective prosecution. Additionally, as legislators are the repositories of the faith and trust of their electorate, there is a necessity to be aware of the antecedents of the person that is/was elected. Ensuring the purity of democratically elected institutions is thus the hallmark of the present proceedings.”

It is strange that Caesar is under suspicion and Caesar's Wife is beyond suspicion. It's a biblical truth that there's an iron welded nexus between politicians and bureaucrats. Honesty needs no friends, but dishonesty needs a group.

Though speedy justice is part of the edifice of any civilised society and this right accrues to everyone, every time the governments shrug their shoulders citing funds constraints to augment the inadequate judicial infrastructure.

Former Chief Justice of India TS Thakur once expressed his helplessness regarding arrears and scarce infrastructure with a lump in his throat, breaking the judicial oath of not getting emotional. The Court may justify fast tracking a category of cases like the rape and POCSO cases or now a class of people's cases on the anvil of “intelligible differentia” - this is an exception to Article 14 which guarantees every person the right to equality before the law or the equal protection of the law. While Article 14 forbids class legislation, the doctrine of intelligible differentia permits classification or differentiation supported by reasonable grounds of distinction.

Politicians yes, but bureaucrats too

However the test for the intelligible differentia principle is that there must be a substantial basis for making the classification and there should be a nexus between the basis of classification and the object sought to be achieved.

The Court has already spoken its mind on the rationale behind fast tracking cases involving elected representatives, but what it seems to have overlooked is that the definition of Public Servant takes a wide range of people into its fold and fast tracking cases only of elected representatives would be unjust application of intelligible differentia. Even if this wider definition of Public Servant is not pleaded before the Court, it must rise to the occasion to involve bureaucrats in this class trial to meet the full objective.

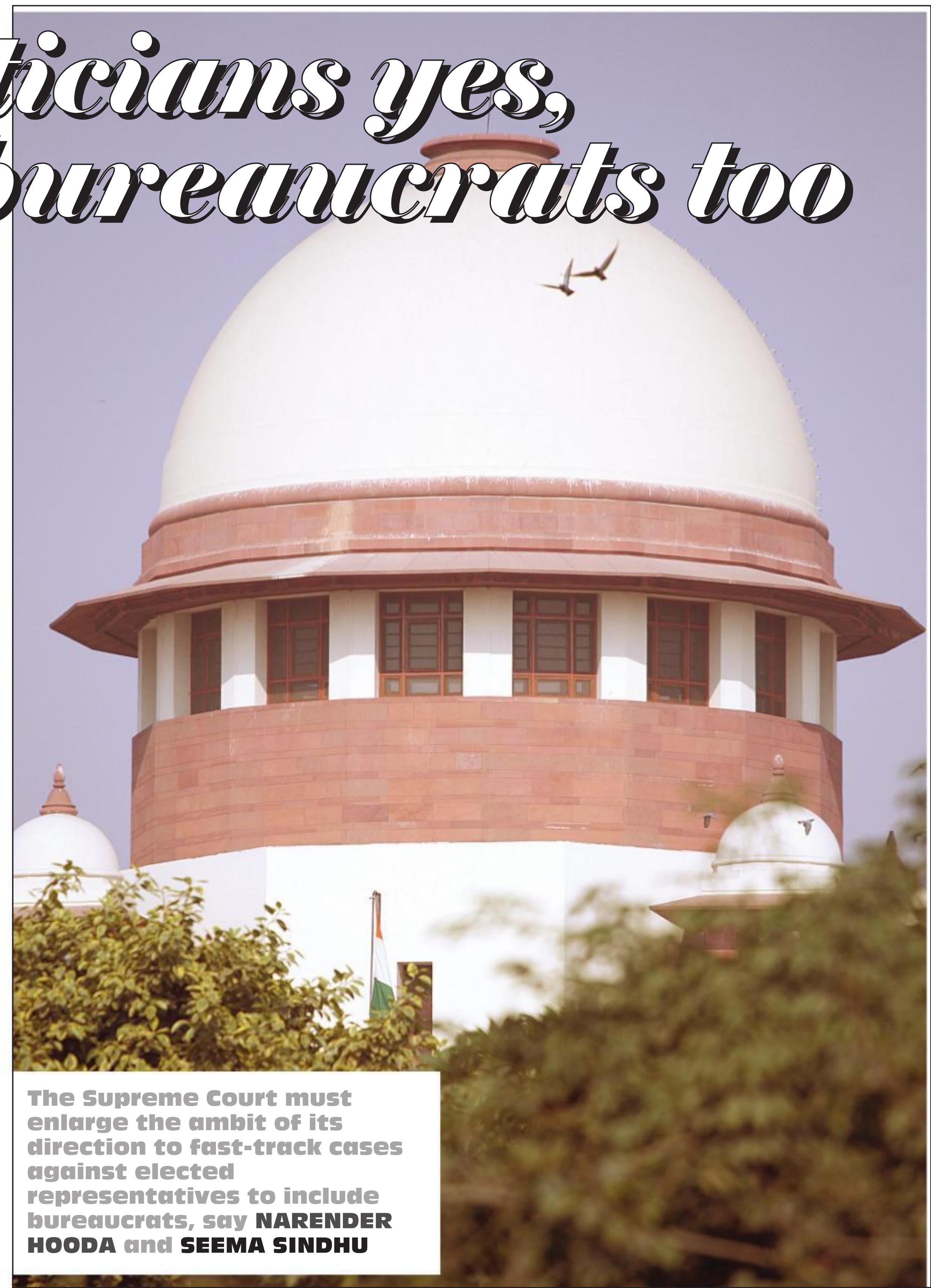
It would be pertinent to mention here the most early and most famous conviction in the history of politics of former Chief Minister of Haryana OP Chautala in the JBT teachers' recruitment scam. Interestingly, the scam was opened up for legal scrutiny by a bureaucrat, Sanjeev Kumar who went to Court saying that the CM had forced him to change the original list of selected candidates. It was argued by Chautala that the bureaucrat was incited by his political rivals to annihilate him. It is ironic that bureaucrats remain silent when it is their duty to speak. Becoming whistle-blowers only after retirement has become fashionable.

Not going behind their motives, the moot point is that corruption involves teamwork between politicians and bureaucrats, and it would be unfair to leave bureaucrats out of the net of fast track courts. It takes two to tango and sometimes yes three to tango. It would only partially solve the purpose of the Court to sanitise the system, netting only elected representatives into speedy justice.

Further, it's a gospel truth that Indian judicial system is breaking under immense work pressure and in that scenario, cognizant of scarce resources, the Court may also consider speedy trial of cases against “Public Servants” on basis of gravity of offence. Elected representatives are vulnerable to vexatious and vindictive accusations and a gravity-based fast track trial would save the judiciary's time and resources for dispensing justice to ordinary people whose faith in the judicial system is chipping off like plaster from unrenovated walls.

George Orwell had famously said: “All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than the others.” Politicians and bureaucrats together belong to the latter category and the Court must deal with them with an equal hand.

The writers are Senior Advocate and Advocate, respectively, practicing at the Supreme Court.



The Supreme Court must enlarge the ambit of its direction to fast-track cases against elected representatives to include bureaucrats, say NARENDER HOODA and SEEMA SINDHU

WORKING WOMEN AND THEIR BENEFITS

Maternity benefits under the Code on Social Security must be made universal, says ALOK RAY

Social security without appropriate maternity benefits for all working women - whether daily wagers in a brick kiln or in agriculture or in other unorganized sectors or as manual scavengers - will remain an incomplete scheme for crores of women who are foot soldiers of development. During the post-Covid period, this requirement is a national urgency. The total number of female workers in rural and urban areas is around 122 and 30 million respectively. Not more than 10 per cent of them are in the organized sector.

The Maternity Benefits Act, 1961 is a social welfare legislation and women working in factories, plantations, mines, circuses, industries and shops or establishments employing 10 or more people except employees covered under the Employees State Insurance Act, 1948, are entitled for certain statutory benefits. The ESI Act is applicable to an establishment having 10 or more employees.

The Maternity Benefits Act was amended in 2017 to raise the paid leave benefit period to 26 weeks for up to two surviving children and a medical bonus of Rs 3,500 was also provided. Benefits of 12 weeks' paid leave are available for miscarriage or medical termination of pregnancy also. There are other benefits including provision for safe and light work. A woman is entitled to these benefits only after working not less than 80 days in the 12 months immediately preceding her delivery. A new Section 11A was inserted to provide facility of crèche in every establishment having fifty or more employees.

Now the provisions of this legislation have been included in Chapter VI of the Code on Social Security, 2020 and the 1961 Act has been repealed by the Code. The Union Government is considering implementation of four labour Codes with effect from 1 April 2021.

In the Code and in notified draft Rules of the Code on Social Security, it has been provided that in every establishment where fifty



or more women employees are ordinarily employed, a crèche will be provided and maintained for the use of children under the age of six. As in the Code on Industrial Relations, the Code on Social Security has also provided that employees who are in ‘fixed term employment’ shall be entitled to same wages, allowances and other benefits as available to the permanent employees. This is a welcome improvement and women employees would be benefitted during maternity period as income security

and other benefits are guaranteed.

In this context, the provisions of Section 70 of the Code on Social Security should be reviewed at an appropriate time. It provides for forfeiture of maternity benefit in a situation where a woman who works for remuneration during the period she has been permitted by an employer to absent herself for availing maternity benefits. The Rules should have prescribed medical advice to decide whether it is safe to permit the woman to continue her work or to

avail the benefit and take rest.

The Code on Social Security has been enacted with a goal to extend Social Security to all employees and workers in the organized, unorganized or any other sector. Under Section 2(78) of the New Code, Social Security includes protection afforded to unorganized workers, gig workers and platform workers to ensure access to health care and to provide income security in case of maternity.

Under the Code, Unorganized Sector means an enterprise owned by individuals or self-employed workers and engaged in the production or sale of goods or providing service of any kind and when the enterprise employs less than 10 workers. But the ambit of definition of unorganized worker is much wider. An unorganized worker means a home-based worker, a self-employed worker or a wage worker in the unorganized sector and includes a worker in the organized sector who is not covered by the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947 or Chapter III to VII of the Code.

A gig worker means a person who performs or participates in a work arrangement and earns from such activities outside of traditional employer-employee relationship. A platform worker means a work arrangement outside of the traditional employer-employee relationship in which organisations or individuals use an online platform to access other organisations or individuals to solve specific problems or to provide specific services. Chapter IX of the Code provides Social Security for unorganized workers, gig workers, and platform workers. The Code has empowered the Central Government to frame and notify suitable welfare schemes for unorganized workers, gig workers and platform workers on matters including health and maternity benefits. The State Unorganized Workers Board has also been empowered to recommend welfare schemes. Details of funding and scope of the schemes have also been prescribed in the Code. Every such worker is required to register either electronically or otherwise to avail the benefits.

PM Matru Vandana Yojna (PMMVY) is a much-publicised scheme to provide compen-

sation to women workers in unorganized sectors for wage losses in terms of cash incentives so that the woman can take adequate rest before and after delivery of the first living child. This scheme was envisioned to implement the National Food Security Act, 2013. Under PMMVY, the provision of Rs.6000 in three instalments as a maternity entitlement for all expecting mothers not covered in the 1961 Act has the mission to create an enabling environment for motherhood. However, without at least the minimum wage for a period of 26 weeks, how can there be any justice to majority of mothers and their newborn babies?

Presently this scheme of Rs 5000 (came into effect from 1.1.2017) and then Rs 1000 under the Janani Suraksha Yojana is also not universal in reality and lengthy documentation is apparently cumbersome. This is not income security as mentioned in the Code. Single women and victims of child marriage have been impliedly excluded from this scheme. Many State Governments have various schemes but none of these are comparable to the benefits available in the organized sectors.

Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan is a commendable scheme to provide timely and quality antenatal care, free of cost universally to all pregnant women and can complement the Maternity Benefits scheme under the new Code. There is a provision for social security fund in Chapter III of the Code on Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions, 2020 for welfare of the unorganized workers and amount of this fund can be transferred to any fund established under any other law for their welfare.

The responsibility is on the Central Government to frame a universal maternity benefit scheme to ensure better health care and a guaranteed income security during pregnancy and thereafter, as there is no job security in these sectors. Since most of these women workers in unorganized sectors are engaged in manual arduous work, they need more rest and better nutrition. Considering their financial vulnerability, the Social security scheme should provide comprehensive social security umbrella so that births can take place with peace of mind.

The writer is a labour law expert and author.



HISTORY-MAKER

Giannis Antetokounmpo (photo, left) says he is staying with the Milwaukee Bucks for five more seasons. Although he did not announce the terms of his new deal, word was he had agreed to a five-year contract worth \$228.2 million that included an opt-out clause in 2025, the richest contract in National Basketball Association history.

For more updates

www.thestatesman.com

THUMBNAILS

Malik shines: Anshu Malik on Tuesday reached the final of the wrestling Individual World Cup in Belgrade, Serbia. The 19-year-old beat Russian Veronika Chumikova 7-4 to seal a silver medal. She now faces Moldova's Anastasia Nichita in the final set for Wednesday.

Azhar's tip: Mohammad Azharuddin on Tuesday said India should go in with five bowlers and five batsmen against Australia in the first Test at Adelaide. He also said Hardik Pandya should have been in the Test squad as India needed his kind of batsmen in Australia.



Race case: Former Yorkshire captain Azeem Rafiq has filed a case against the English team after claiming direct discrimination and harassment on the grounds of race. Rafiq played for Yorkshire in two spells between 2008 and 2018 and also claims victimisation.

Ferguson injured: New Zealand paceman Lockie Ferguson has been diagnosed with a partial stress fracture to his lumbar spine and will require between four and six weeks of rest. The injury surfaced after the Twenty20 series against the West Indies.

Tour announced: The West Indies will play three One-Day Internationals and two Tests on their tour of Bangladesh next month. The ODI series will start on 20 January and the first two matches will be played in Dhaka before the final match in Chattogram on 25 January.

Torch relay: The torch relay for the Tokyo Olympic Games will begin on 25 March, 2021, almost along the same route set before the event was postponed owing to the Covid-19 pandemic. The relay starts in Fukushima, once hit hard by an earthquake and a tsunami.

City held: Manchester City's hopes of closing the gap on the Premier League pace-setters were frustrated as they were held to a 1-1 draw at home by lowly West Bromwich Albion on Tuesday. City took the lead on the half hour when Ilkay Gundogan struck.

Chelsea upset: Wolverhampton's Pedro Neto struck a last-gasp winner as they rallied to beat Chelsea 2-1 in the Premier League on Tuesday. Frank Lampard's side had the better of the first half and Kurt Zouma powered a header against the bar just before the break.

Luxemburg ill: Former Brazil and Real Madrid manager Vanderlei Luxemburgo is in a stable condition in a São Paulo hospital after contracting Covid-19 for a second time. The 68-year-old was admitted to the clinic on 11 December after complaining of severe pains.

Profitably selfish: Roy Hodgson believes Wilfried Zaha's new "selfish" streak has helped the Crystal Palace forward boost his Selhurst Park goal tally. Zaha has fired seven goals in 12 Premier League matches this term but mustered just four in total last season.

IFA Shield: George Telegraph will take on Real Kashmir in the Indian Football Association Shield Final set for 19 December. George Telegraph came from behind to shock United Sports Club 2-1.

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

ADELAIDE, 16 DECEMBER

India will step into an unknown territory when they play the four-match Test series-opener against Australia with the pink ball underlights at the Adelaide Oval from Thursday.

While Australia are the most experienced side in day-night Tests, having played and won seven matches underlights, four of them at the Adelaide Oval; India played their first and only win late last year against Bangladesh at the Eden Gardens. That pink-ball Test came four years after Australia had played their first.

However, India will be inspired by the fact that some of their best performances, especially in recent times, have come in Adelaide including a Testwin in the first match during the last tour in 2018-19.

Skipper Virat Kohli on Wednesday told reporters that the day-night Test match is completely opposite to the normal day game played with red ball as the pink ball does little in the first session and starts to move in the final one.

"The pink ball Test brings a lot more variables like the twilight period, a tricky period to bat in, then bowling in the first session (is tough) and then at night you have more on offer for the bowlers. Actually it is the other way around when you compare it with the normal Test match something we have to analyse and monitor as we go into the Test match," said Kohli while admitting his team's inexperience.

India played a three-day warm-up game under lights with the pink ball at the Sydney Cricket Ground. However, the team did not include many of the Test cricketers who are all part of the playing XI for the Adelaide Test.

The Australians have spent a lot of time practising at the centre-wicket underlights over the past week, something that Tim Paine acknowledged will be a huge advantage for Australia come the Test match.

"Look, we have been actually very lucky to come to Adelaide Oval early and we trained three nights in a row on the centre-wicket at the Adelaide Oval which is I think a huge advantage for our team," said Paine on the eve of the Test match.

He said that the fact that you play pink ball games so few and far between makes it a hard proposition.

"The hardest thing about pink ball is that you normally get it once a year sometimes with a Shield game or sometimes without it, you are learning pretty much on the job every time you walk out in the middle to try and adjust to the conditions that are just so foreign to us with the lights on, with the pink ball and in the whites. So, it is foreign but as I said we managed to get three nights on the centre-wicket at the Adelaide Oval which has been terrific for our group, batters and bowlers to get a sense of what it is like again and rejoin your memory from last year as I think it is going to be a huge advantage for us come tomorrow," he added.

While the Aussies have finalised their playing eleven, they are yet to disclose it. Indians, on the other hand, have already named their playing eleven.

There were questions over who would open with Mayank Agarwal in the first Test and India have picked Prithvi Shaw for that spot, despite the batsman failing to get runs in the two warm-up games. He aggregated just 62 across four innings of that warm-up, averaging just 15.5. He had also failed to get runs in New Zealand early this year, making just one half-century. However, it seems that prior Test match experience has helped him get the nod.

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