

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

CHENNAI | WEDNESDAY 23 | DECEMBER 2020

WEATHER



Max: 29°C
Min: 21°C
Rainfall: Nil

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Margazhi 8
Tithi: Navami
Star: Revathi
Rahukalam:
12 noon to 1.30 pm
Yamagandam:
7.30 am to 9 am
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.11 am
Zohar: 12.13 pm
Asar: 3.23 pm
Maghrib: 5.48 pm
Isha: 7.04 pm
SUNSET TODAY 5.49 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.28 AM
MOONRISE TODAY 1.07 PM
MOONSET TOMORROW 1.32 AM

CORONA COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+23,593)	(+311)
1,00,99,021	1,46,458

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+1,052)
TN: 8,09,014 12.012

WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

7,80,58,286

DEATHS

17,16,126

COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES
218

worldometers.info

Board exams not to be conducted till Feb. next year: Education minister

New Delhi: Union Minister of Education Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank' on Tuesday ruled out conducting board examinations for classes 10 and 12 till February next year in view of the Covid-19 situation. Usually, the practical exams are conducted in January and theory exams begin every year in February and conclude in March. The minister said a decision about when the exams will be conducted will be taken later after assessment of the situation and consultation with stakeholders.

Amit Shah recommends Special Operation Medal to 39 police officers

New Delhi: Home minister Amit Shah on Tuesday recommended the Union Home Minister's Special Operation Medal for the Year 2020 to 39 police officers, including 15 from Delhi, six from Karnataka and five from Gujarat.

COUNTER

POINT



Double bonanza... you will get party ticket and Cabinet berth if you bring 2 MLAs along with you!

CITY | 2

Katrina Kaif urges people to donate for Madurai school



WORLD | 5

Probe finds Trump officials attacked CDC virus reports

SPORT | 8

Virat deserves respect: Smith



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

Vol. 16 No. 268 Established 1938 | 8 PAGES | ₹3.00

Progress can't wait; none will be left behind: Modi

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 22

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said ideological differences should take a back seat for the sake of development which should not be seen through a political prism.

Addressing the Aligarh Muslim University's centenary celebrations via video conferencing, the Prime Minister said the nation was on a path today where everyone, irrespective of religion, was assured of their constitutional rights and their future, and where no community was left behind.

The government's schemes for the poor were reaching all sections of the people "without religious bias", he claimed.

"Whatever religion we are born in, it is important to see how to blend our aspirations with national goals. There can be ideological divides in society but when it comes to the nation's development, everything else is secondary. When it comes to the nation, there is no question of ideological differences. It is logical for me to say this here because AMU produced many free-



Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses the centenary celebrations of Aligarh Muslim University via video conferencing, in New Delhi, on Tuesday. — PTI

dom fighters — they had their ideological differences but they set them aside for freedom. Like freedom united them, we have to work on a common ground for 'Naya Bharat'," he said.

The Prime Minister said that "when our thoughts are focused on a new India foremost, then such elements will have a diminished space. Politics and society can wait, but the country's development cannot wait. In the last century, a lot of time has been lost over differences. There is no more time to lose".

Mr Modi also referred to the law banning triple talaq. "There was a time when the

dropout rate of our Muslim daughters was over 70 per cent. This was a big impediment to the development of Muslims. For 70 years, over 70 per cent of Muslim daughters were forced to drop out. The government got toilets made in schools. The Muslim girls' dropout rate is now reduced to 30 per cent," he said.

The AMU, which was known as the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College initially, was renamed Aligarh Muslim University on December 1, 1920. However, it was formally inaugurated as a university on December 17 that year.

Trump confers 'Legion of Merit' award on Modi

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI
| DC
NEW DELHI, DEC. 22

Sending a strong signal to China, US President Donald Trump on Tuesday conferred the "Legion of Merit", America's highest military decoration, on three leaders of the "Quad" countries, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The other two are Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Japan's former prime minister Shinzo Abe. Mr Modi was conferred the award for his "steadfast leadership and vision for India's emergence as a global power, and exemplary contribution made by him for the advancement of the India-US strategic partnership and promoting global peace and prosperity". The award was received on the Prime Minister's behalf by India's ambassador to the US Taranjit Singh Sandhu.

VERDICT AFTER 28 YEARS

Catholic priest, nun found guilty in murder of Kerala nun-student

DC CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, DEC. 22

A CBI special court in Thiruvananthapuram on Tuesday found a Catholic priest and nun guilty of murdering a nun at a convent in Kottayam district 28 years ago. Sr Abhaya, 21, was found dead in the well of St Pius X convent in Kottayam on March 27, 1992.

The court has found Knanaya Catholic priest Thomas M. Kottoor and Sr Sephy, the first and third accused, respectively, guilty of murder.

The sentence will be pronounced on Wednesday.

The second accused Fr Jose Poothrikkayil was discharged from the case earlier. However, the CBI has decided to file an appeal against his discharge.

● The CBI had contended that Sr Abhaya, 21, then a pre-degree student, was eliminated after she witnessed the illicit relationship of the accused

The CBI had contended that Sr Abhaya, a second year pre-degree student of Kottayam BCM College, was eliminated after she witnessed the illicit relationship of the accused. While Fr Kottoor has been found guilty of murder and trespassing, Sr. Sephy was held guilty of murder.

The Kerala police which investigated the case soon after the tragic incident in 1992 concluded that it was a case of death by suicide.

The CBI took over the probe on the recommenda-

tion of the then state government led by chief minister K. Karunakaran. However, despite carrying out detailed investigations, the CBI could not trace the accused and subsequently attempts were made to close the case.

However, the court declined to close the case and ordered the investigation agency to continue with the probe. The probe team got some crucial leads when the accused were subjected to narco analysis which also led to their arrest in November 2008. The CBI filed the chargesheet in the case a year later.

CBI's findings: On the day when she was found dead, Abhaya had gone to kitchen to fetch drinking water. At that time she saw the priest and nun in a compromising position. ■ P4

Farmers to ask British MPs to stop Johnson visit

SANJAY KAW | DC
NEW DELHI, DEC. 22

The farmers' leaders protesting against the Centre's three agriculture-related laws have decided to write to British political leaders and MPs to ask them to stop Prime Minister Boris Johnson — who has been invited to be the chief guest at next month's Republic Day celebrations — from travelling to India till their demands are met.

"The UK Prime Minister is scheduled to visit India

on January 26. We are writing to British MPs asking them to stop him from visiting India till the time the farmers' demands are not met by the Indian government," one of the farmers' leaders, Kulwant Singh Sandhu, said.

Mr Johnson has accepted India's invitation to be the chief guest. He will become the second British PM at the event, after John Major in 1993. Mr Johnson has invited India to join the G-7 summit in Britain next year.

The agitating farmers have so far given a sense that they will not accept anything other than a complete rollback of the three laws. The farmers' leaders on Tuesday decided to take a call on the Centre's letter inviting them for another round of talks after a meeting on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, at the Singhu border, a group of farmers wrote a letter with their blood to the Prime Minister urging him to immediately repeal the new laws.

● Sources claim what makes this hugely strategic project even more unique is that these "bunker facilities" will not be easily traceable by enemy surveillance

duties at forward location.

But the security infrastructure being developed along the China border is going to be unique and different as not only will it be extremely state-of-the-art but also would be underground so that these "assets and the security per-

sonnel using them can be well protected from enemy forces."

Considering the highly strategic nature of the entire project, it is being kept as a closely guarded secret, especially the location of these bunkers. Even the implemen-

tation of the entire project is being monitored at the highest levels in the government, with senior officials from multiple security forces supervising it. These all-weather bunkers will also provide much-needed respite to the troops who have faced harsh and adverse weather conditions, with temperature at times dropping to -30 degrees, in forward locations at high altitudes.

Chennai suburban trains open to public during non-peak hours from today

New Delhi, Dec. 22: Railway minister Piyush Goyal on Tuesday said the public will be allowed to travel on Chennai suburban trains during non-peak hours from December 23. Currently, Southern Railway has been running suburban train services exclusively for railway employees as workmen's special in the Chennai region after the Covid-19 lockdown was enforced.

"From December 23, Indian Railways permits the general public to travel by suburban train services in Chennai during non-peak hours. With adequate safety measures in place, this will greatly enhance ease of movement & passenger convenience," Mr Goyal said in a tweet. The non-peak hours are from the early hours of the day to 7 am, 9:30 am to 4:30 pm and from 7 pm to the closing hours of the day, the statement said.

During these timings the general public would be allowed to travel duly following all the Covid-19 guidelines issued by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, it said. — PTI

CORRUPTION CHARGES

Stalin meets Guv with dossier; CM trashes it

ARULOLI M. | DC
THOOTHUKUDI, DEC. 22

The trading of corruption charges between the ruling AIADMK and the main opposition DMK ahead of the assembly elections touched a new peak on Tuesday with Opposition leader and DMK president M.K. Stalin submitting an 80-page dossier on the current ministry to the governor and Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palanisami dubbing it a tactics to divert people's attention from the graft cases DMK leaders including 12 former state ministers are facing now.

Earlier in the day, Mr Stalin, accompanied by his party seniors, went to the Raj Bhavan to complain to Governor Banwarilal Purohit about corruption in the administration over the last four years in the Palaniswami regime and presented a memorandum on instances of possible corruption.

The Chief Minister who called them false allegations lost no time hitting back at the opposition, listing out the corruption cases pending in courts against former DMK ministers Durai Murugan, K.N. Nehru, I. Periyasamy, M.R.K. Pann-

● "Mr Stalin has schemed to divert public attention by making baseless charges against our ministers out of fear that his party colleagues would soon be proved guilty," the Chief Minister said

eerselvam, Suba Thangavelan, Ponnudi, K.K.S.S.R. Ramachandran, Suresh Rajan, Tamilarasi, Anbarasu and Thangam Thenarasu.

"The hearing in these cases have been accelerated by setting up special courts as per the Supreme Court direction to deal with cases against elected representatives," the Chief Minister said. "Mr Stalin has schemed to divert public attention by making baseless charges against our ministers out of fear that his party colleagues would soon be proved guilty." Responding to Stalin's charge against him of favouring his relatives in road contract tenders, the Chief Minister said the tender applications are being processed online unlike during the DMK regime. ■ P3

Voters above 80 can opt for postal voting, says EC

A. ARUL PALANI | DC
CHENNAI, DEC. 22

The Election Commission of India secretary-general Umesh Sinha on Tuesday said the commission will make all arrangements to allow postal voting for voters above 80 years and differently-abled people.

Speaking to reporters after reviewing the poll preparedness in Tamil Nadu ahead of the assembly elections due next year, he said they, or any one who faces difficulties, can opt for postal ballots. "It will be like a mobile ballot booth, where EC officials visit their place. They will ensure secrecy in the process and a proper protocol would be developed regarding this," he said.

He said the commission's endeavour is to conduct free and fair, peaceful, inclusive, accessible and ethical participatory poll in the state. It would also ensure Covid-19 and pandemic safe poll. EVM and VVPATs' preparedness process would be completed by January 31, he said.

Noting that all political parties have suggested a single phase polling in the state, Mr Sinha said the Chief Election Commissioner would take a decision on the matter. On whether the elections could be advanced in the state, he said it could not be said at the present juncture.

Recalling the recent elections conducted in Bihar amid pandemic Covid-19, he said the duty of the Election Commission was to ensure a free and fair polling. "It is really challenging to hold elections by following all precautionary measures in view of the pandemic," he said.

Mr Sinha said voter-verified paper audit trail (VVPATs) will be set up in every polling station. Steps would be taken to ensure that each polling booth would have a maximum number of 1,000 voters.

To a question on the bypoll to Kanyakumari Lok Sabha seat, which fell vacant following the death of Congress MP H. Vasantha Kumar due to Covid-19, Mr Sinha said bypolls would be held at the appropriate time.

India plans bunker hospitals on Chinese border

RAJNISH SHARMA | DC
NEW DELHI, DEC. 22

In a first and an unprecedented ramping up of security infrastructure development along the Indo-China border, security agencies are constructing underground state-of-the-art bunker hospitals complete with operation theatres, weatherproof dormitories and storage for arms, ammunition and other equipment.

All these facilities will be in underground "explosion-proof bunkers" that are being constructed all along 3,500 km long Indo-China border. Sources claim what makes this hugely strategic project even more unique is that these "bunker facilities" will not be easily traceable by enemy surveillance. So far bunkers are normally used on other borders, like along with Pakistan and Bangladesh for merely surveillance

Gupkar alliance leads, BJP makes gains in DDC polls

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC
SRINAGAR, DEC. 22

The People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD), a conglomerate of Jammu and Kashmir's mainstream regional Opposition parties and their allies from the national Left parties, is poised to win big in the Union territory's first-

ever District Development Council (DDC) elections.

However, its arch-rival, the BJP, has also performed well, mainly in the Jammu region. What is also spectacular for the saffron party is that it has won an election for the first time from any seat in the predominantly Muslim Kashmir Valley. ■ P4

SHORT TAKES



The Meenakshi Academy of Higher Education and Research, Chennai was awarded a merit certificate and a trophy for the best national institution for spreading yoga globally by Narchinthanai Vattam and Rotary Club of Chennai Harmony. The academy's Vice-chancellor Dr. R. S. Neelakandan receives the award with the faculty head of Yoga Sciences and Therapy, Prof. Dr. R. Elangovan, also present.

Power shutdown

Chennai, Dec. 22: Power supply will be suspended in the following areas on 23.12.2020 from 09.00 am to 02.00 pm for maintenance work. Supply will be resumed before 02.00 pm if the works are completed. **ADYAR AREA:** MCN Nagar, Industrial Road, Pilliar koi road, Ananda nagar, 200 Ft Ring road, Sai nagar, Saravana nagar, Okkiyam Thuraiakkam, IIT colony, Syndicate colony, Sai baba nagar, Meenachipuram, Labour colony, Kamakoti nagar, Perungudi - Ramappa nagar main road, Panchayat road, Thirumalai Nagar. Power supply will be suspended in the following areas on 24.12.2020 from 09.00 am to 02.00 pm for maintenance work. Supply will be resumed before 02.00 PM if the works are completed. **GUMMIDIPOONDI SIPCOT AREA:** Shirupuzhal petai, Pappankuppam, G.R. Kandigai, Billa kuppam, Suravari kandigai, Iyer kandigai, Puthurajakandigai and Gummidipoondi Sipcot III industrial complex area, Sipcot industrial complex New Gummidipondi, Puthupettai, Karumbukuppam, Ramacherikandigai, Ellaimman Nagar.

Katrina Kaif urges people to donate for Madurai school

Mumbai, Dec 22: Actor Katrina Kaif has urged people to donate towards building classrooms for underprivileged children at a school in Madurai, Tamil Nadu.

Kaif took to Instagram on Tuesday and shared a video of the Mountain View School, which has been built with the assistance of the Bollywood star's mother Suzanne. "So proud to present to you all the school built from the ground up by my mom and her charity. Since 2015, Mountain View School in Madurai has actively been working to provide quality English-medium education to lesser privileged children," the 37-year-old actor wrote. Kaif said the school currently teaches 200 students and has classrooms up to grade four. As a part of the campaign by Relief Projects India, the "Bharat" star urged people to fund the school. "Let us do our bit so that more and more children can fulfil their dreams. Considering the tough times we are in, it is even more important to be there for one another," she added. The school's fundraiser page on Ketto stated that there is a need of 14 more rooms to accommodate classes up to eighth standard. Through the initiative, Kaif aims to work towards quality education without discrimination and spread awareness on issues such as female infanticide, foeticide and girl child education. —PTI

German MPs red flag ECR drain project

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 22

Raising serious concerns over the ECR stormwater drain project being implemented by the Greater Chennai Corporation, five members of German Parliament have sent a letter to KfW Development Bank, which is funding the project, to look into the allegations against the project.

The letter sent by Michel Brandt, Heike Hansel, Caren Lay, Eva-Maria Schreiber and Zaklin Nastic state that the project is being hurriedly carried out by the GCC violating various environmental norms.

"We are contacting you due to worrying reports from civil society partners in India over a project funded by the KfW-Development Bank. The project is for 'sustainable rainwater management' in Chennai, being financed with 150 million euros. Reportedly, the project neither has the necessary approval (coastal regulation clearance), nor was an adequate assessment of social

and environmental impact conducted prior to it", they said.

As mentioned in a complaint from numerous civil society players from Chennai, KfW is accused of financing a project that, as per experts, is ecologically unnecessary or could even be harmful by endangering the breeding grounds of the Olive Ridley Sea turtle. KfW is accused of violating its own sustainability guidelines in its assessment and handling of environmental, social and climate

aspects and of not giving the local population adequate opportunities to participate. Funding for the project was apparently approved, even though the National Green Tribunal prohibited construction without its approval.

They said, according to our information, the construction of the project has already started. We therefore beg you to process our request as quickly as possible and, if necessary, advocate for an immediate halt of construction or financing, they added.



SPECIAL INSPECTION

Health secretary Dr. J. Radhakrishnan inspects the special Covid-19 sample taking centre at Chennai airport on Tuesday.

—DC

Chennai city highest in telemedicine service users

T. SUDHEESH | DC
CHENNAI, DEC. 22

With the pandemic year to end in a week, Chennai has witnessed the highest growth of telemedicine service users among metro cities in the country.

A study report 'Rise of telemedicine - 2020', launched by Telemedicine Society of India and Practo, a telemedicine service provider, says that Chennai recorded four times higher growth compared to the previous year while Bengaluru, Delhi-NCR, Mumbai, Pune, Hyderabad and Kolkata grew by more than 300 percent.

The physical appointments went down by 32 percent while online consultations increased three times. Twenty-six percent of the consultations were with

general practitioners, followed by dermatology (20) and gynecology (16) while gastroenterology, ENT and paediatrics stood at 7 percent each. The fastest-growing health concerns included ophthalmology, ENT, orthopaedics, paediatrics and gastroenterology.

Delhi, Mumbai and Chennai saw an average of 16 times growth in queries for ENT specialisation. Non-metros also saw the highest growth in online consultations as compared to the same period in the previous year. At least 7 times growth were reported in the same period last year, the online consultations in metro and non-metro stood at 75:25. This year it grew to 60:40.

Tier-two cities like Manjeri, Arrah, Balasore, Etah, Orai, Khopoli, Jagtial

and Shivpuri used telemedicine for the first time in this time period while cities like Meerut, Jammu, Srinagar, Nellore, Kochi, Gorakhpur, Kakinada, Tirupati, Bhagalpur, Gaya, and Shimoga recorded a 10 times growth, the report says.

Ashvini Goel, president, Telemedicine Society of India, said the report was prepared after extensive research backed by insights from the experience of crores of Indians who used Practo between March and November. "The report provides valuable information and factual evidence for all stakeholders of the healthcare ecosystem. The pandemic had only allowed us to prepare to make our future healthcare convenient, accessible and affordable for people", he said.

PIL against appointment of NGT expert member

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 22

A Public Interest Litigation has been filed in the Madras high court, challenging the notification issued by the Union Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions, approving the proposal for appointment of Girija Vaidyanathan, former Chief Secretary of Tamil Nadu, as an expert member of the National Green Tribunal.

The PIL filed by G.Sundarrajan, an activist, which sought to quash the notification dated December 12, 2020, is likely to come up for hearing early.

According to M.Radhakrishnan, counsel for the petitioner, the NGT was established "for the effective and expeditious disposal of cases relating to environmental protection and conservation of forests and other natural resources including enforcement of any legal

right relating to environment and giving relief and compensation for damages to persons and property and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto". Section 5 of the NGT Act, 2018 provides for the qualifications for appointment of Chairperson, Judicial Member and Expert Member. Section 5 (2) (b) of the Act says that a person shall not be qualified for appointment as an expert member unless he has administrative experience of fifteen years including experience of five years in dealing with environmental matters in the Central or a State government or in a reputed National or State level institution. Contrary to the mandatory requirement of experience of five years in dealing with environmental matters as provided under section 5 (2) (b) of the Act, the proposal for appointment of Girija Vaidyanathan as an Expert Member of the

NGT has been approved by the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet by a notification dated December 12, 2020 issued by the Union Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions. Hence, the petitioner has filed the present PIL, he added.

In his petition, Sundarrajan contended that Girija Vaidyanathan, who has been selected for appointment to the post of expert member in the NGT has not possessed an experience of five years in dealing with environmental matters as could be seen from her "Complete Bio-Data" found in the official website of Union Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions. Therefore, Girija Vaidyanathan who was not qualified under section 5 (2) (b) of the Act ought not to have been considered for the post of Expert Member in the NGT by the Union government, he added.

Subordinate courts to function with full capacity from Jan.18

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 22

The Madras high court has resolved that the subordinate courts should proceed now to function with its full capacity allowing physical hearing, with an option of virtual hearing to the lawyers, subject to the Standard Operating Procedures to be followed in this regard, with effect from January 18, 2021.

A resolution to this effect was passed by the administrative committee of the Madras high court at its meeting held on December 12, 2020. It also sought suggestions from the Principal District Judges/Principal Judge, City Civil Court, Chennai / Chief Judge, Court of Small Causes, Chennai/Chief Judge, Pudukcherry, with regard to the functioning of the subordinate courts on or before December 23, 2020.

According to an official memorandum issued by Registrar General (i/c) R.Poornima, the Administrative Committee of the Madras high court in the meeting held on December 12, 2020, took into account the past functioning of the Subordinate Courts during the entire pandemic period and in view of all other Governmental Institutions as well as other Public Institutions having reopened on full scale, subject to the Covid norms as prescribed, has resolved in principle that the Subordinate Courts should proceed now to function with its full capacity allowing physical hearing, with an option of virtual hearing to the lawyers, subject to the Standard Operating Procedures to be followed in this regard, with effect from January 18, 2021.

Don't pay for fuse off work: Tangedco

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 22

The consumers of Tangedco are requested not to pay any money to any of its employees for attending fuse off call works to their service connections. If any amount is demanded for service connection cable or for other materials by any of the Tangedco employees from any of its consumers, it may be immediately informed to the following officers without any hesitation, a release from Tangedco stated.

If any amount is payable to Tangedco, it may be remitted through online portal or through its counters only with proper receipt. For any fuse off call complaints in the service connection, the consumers may contact the toll-free contact number 1912 working 24x7.

The complaints may be forwarded to the vigilance officer, Tamil Nadu Electricity Board, (mobile number - 9445857593) and the deputy superintendent of police/vigilance, Tamil Nadu Electricity Board, Chennai (mobile number - 9445857594).

A queer year for the Nilgiris

B. RAVICHANDRAN | DC
OOTY, DEC. 22

The Nilgiris is known for its wealth of forests, and it has its own tales to tell of this pandemic-dominated year 2020.

To begin with, forest minister Dindigul Srinivasan ran into trouble for making a tribal boy unfasten his footwear buckles at Mudumalai Tiger Reserve (MTR) early in February when he visited the elephant camp there to inaugurate the rejuvenation camp. This led to unrest among tribes and political parties also went very vocal about the incident. The tribesmen went on to lodge a complaint against the minister in a local



Hoffer, the lone canine sniffer expert at MTR, which died in May. —DC

police station that made the minister extend his



Tamil Yeoman, a butterfly species, in Nilgiris. —DC

stay in the hills for a day to resolve the issue. Finally, the minister made an apology to the tribal



2020 WRAP-UP

buffer zone is the breeding ground for four species of vultures, a critically endangered species, the MTR administration sent a proposal to set up a vulture rescue, rehabilitation and captive breeding centre in Segur. The proposal is said to be under active consideration of the government.

The month of May saw the death of the Belgium shepherd sniffer dog 'Holler', the lone canine sniffer expert in the MTR. The animal was trained to perfection in dealing with wildlife crimes and was helpful in tracing a missing man inside the jungles in 2018.

In late November, two male tiger cubs found abandoned inside the

Singara jungles in MTR were sent to Vandalur zoological park, Chennai.

Wynther Blyth Association (WBA), headquartered in Coonoor near here, an eco-organization that is dedicating its studies on butterflies and their conservation, launched an Anthem for Butterflies christened 'Flutteria', to make it special for this year's Wildlife Week celebrations in October. While Nilgiris registered 57 percent excess rain during the SW monsoon this year, the Avalanche reserve forest near here recorded 581 mm of rain in a day on August 6, making it a record of highest rainfall in a day in 2020.



RINGING IN GOOD NEWS

Greater Chennai Police Commissioner Mahesh Kumar Aggarwal inspects and hands over recovered stolen mobile phone to owners at RR stadium in Egmore on Tuesday.

—DC

Gold and saffron seized by Chennai air customs

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 22

Customs sleuths at the Chennai airport seized gold and saffron worth ₹96.8 lakh in eight cases. Two smugglers were arrested in connection with the cases.

According to airport sources, Thameem Ansari (36) from Thoothukudi, who arrived from Dubai by Fly Dubai FZ8517 was intercepted at the exit. On examination of his check in baggage one toy was found inside which appeared to be unusually

heavy. On opening the back cover one small transformer was found inside. On opening the transformer 49 small gold plates, 25 'E' shaped and 24 rectangular, weighing 349 grams valued at ₹18 lakh were recovered and seized.

In another three cases, Shahul Hameed (38) Kalandar Bahurudeen (29) of Ramanathapuram and Syed Mudaseeruddin (32) of Chennai, who have arrived by flight FZ -8517 were intercepted at the exit.

On personal search 5

gold paste bundles recovered from the rectum, and 2 gold paste pouches were found concealed in shirt sleeves, totalling 730 grams which on extraction yielded 629 grams of gold. 2 gold cut bits were also recovered from hand baggage. Total 701 grams valued at ₹36.74 lakh was recovered and seized. Shahul Hameed and Kalandar Bahurudeen were arrested by the Chennai Customs.

In another case, Bathurudeen (48) of Ramanathapuram who arrived from Dubai by Air

India Express X1644 was intercepted at the exit. During his search 2 gold paste bundles weighing 300 grams were recovered. On extraction 265 grams of gold valued at ₹13.6 lakh was recovered and seized. Based on a tip-off, Emirates flight EK 542 from Dubai was rummaged through. On rummaging 10 strips of gold paste weighing 406 grams were recovered from beneath the cushion of a seat which on extraction yielded 356 grams of gold valued at ₹18.65 lakh. Same seized as unclaimed.

In the last two cases Sarfudeen Abdul Majeed (40) and Mohamed Rahumathullah (30) both of Ramanathapuram who arrived by EK 542 were intercepted at the exit. On search of their handbags 4 kg of grade 1 Saffron, valued at ₹9.80 lakh was recovered and seized.

As per the customs press statement, 1.67 kg gold worth ₹87 lakh and 4 kg saffron worth ₹9.80 lakh, in total ₹96.8 lakh were seized by Chennai air customs. Further investigation is under progress.

Harassed by online loan sharks, man ends life

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 22

A young man who took loans through online apps and unable to pay has committed suicide on Monday evening.

Police identified the deceased as Vivek (27) alias Ranganathan, a resident of Palayanoor Salai near Madurantakam.

He worked at a private pharmaceutical company in Mamandur as a load man.

According to his family sources, Vivek had taken a loan of Rs 4000 from an online website, Get rupee.com, a private instant personal loan website, to cover his father's medical expenses. However, even after the due date, he was unable to repay the amount he borrowed.

On Monday evening, he allegedly jumped into a private well in Palayanoor Salai and ended his life. Sources said, one of the villagers spotted Vivek

and informed the locals and his parents. Police recovered the body from the well and sent it to the Chengalpatt GH for post-mortem.

Padalam police upon investigating the case have found that he has taken a loan of ₹4, 000 from an online platform and could not repay it. After the online platform management has been harassing over the repayment of the loan, Vivek who was unable to bear the pres-

sure has ended his life

Padalam police registered a case. Meanwhile, On Tuesday morning, around 50 friends and relatives of the deceased staged a protest outside the Padalam police station demanding action against the online loan website. After the senior police officials held talks with the protestors and assured to take action against them, they dispersed. Further investigations are underway.

Two contract workers electrocuted

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 22

Two contract workers were electrocuted to death on Tuesday morning after the ladder they were carrying came in contact with a live wire in Thirumudivakkam Sipcot.

The incident took place while the contract workers Murugan, Nagaraj and Anand, all residents of Anakaputhur were carrying a 20-foot iron ladder for repairing a shutter. Police said that the trio was employed by a contractor, Arputhakumar, to do mainte-

nance work in a Private plastic melting unit in Thirumudivakkam Sipcot.

On Tuesday morning, the ladder the workers were carrying came in contact with the live wire, subsequently electrocuting them. Police said Murugan and Nagaraj died on the spot, while the other workers rushed Anand to Chromepet government hospital for treatment.

Somangalam police arrived at the scene and sent the bodies of the deceased to Chromepet GH for post-mortem. Arputhakumar has been arrested and probe is underway.



SHORT TAKES

BOARD EXAMS ON HOLD TILL FEB. 2021: MINISTER

New Delhi, Dec. 22: Union minister of education Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank' on Tuesday ruled out conducting board examinations for classes 10 and 12 till February next year in view of the Covid-19 situation.

Usually, the practical exams are conducted in January and theory exams begin every year in February and conclude in March. The minister said a decision about when the exams will be conducted will be taken later after assessment of the situation and consultation with stakeholders.

"Keeping the current situation in mind, it has been decided that the board exams for classes 10 and 12 will not be conducted till February next year. CBSE is making necessary preparations for conducting the 2021 examinations. A decision on the exam schedule will be taken later after assessment of situation and more consultations with stakeholders," Nishank said in an online interaction with teachers.

With no clarity on the board exam dates yet, several schools have already conducted pre-board exams online to keep the students prepared. The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) had earlier this month announced that board exams in 2021 will be conducted in written mode and not online.

Schools across the country were closed in March to contain the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. They were partially reopened in some states from October 15.

However, a few states have decided to keep them closed in view of a spike in the number of infections. The board exams had to be postponed mid-way in March. They were later cancelled and the results announced on the basis of an alternative assessment scheme.

TRUMP CONFERS LEGION OF MERIT AWARD ON MODI

From Page 2

Earlier, in September, it had been conferred on the Emir of Kuwait, Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. Prior to that, the honour was last conferred nearly decades ago, in 1991, by a US president.

This comes at a time when President Trump has just about a month left in office, after which he will be succeeded by Democratic President-elect Joe Biden. It is a prestigious decoration bestowed by the President, mostly to heads of state or government.

In a statement Tuesday, the ministry of external affairs said: "The President of the United States of America conferred the highest decoration, the Legion of Merit, Degree Chief Commander, to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 21 December 2020. The award is in recognition of the Prime Minister's steadfast leadership and vision for India's emergence as a global power, and exemplary contribution made by him for the advancement of the India-US strategic partnership."

The Legion of Merit, Degree Chief Commander, is a "domed five-pointed American white star plaque of heraldic form bordered in purplish-red enamel 215/16 inches circumscribing diameter with 13 white stars on a blue field emerging from a circle of clouds; backing the star, a laurel wreath with pierced, crossed arrows pointing outward between each arm of the star and the wreath". The reverse is engraved with the words "United States of America".

Eye-witness turns key to conviction

From Page 1

The accused attacked her with an axe. Later her body was thrown in the well inside the convent.

It was a statement given by a petty robber Raju alias Adayka Raju that became a turning point in the case. He told the court that he had entered the convent with the intention of committing robbery in the early hours. But he was stunned to see two priests on the campus premises.

In a bid to derail the probe and mislead the investigating officials, the third accused

allegedly underwent hymenorrhaphy or hymen reconstruction surgery. Of the 130 odd prosecution witnesses in the case, only 49 could be examined. Many witnesses died and several others were too old to appear.

The relentless and valiant fight put up by human rights activist Jomon Puthen-purackal for past 28 years was also one of the reasons that the case remained alive for so many years. He faced threats from several quarters to back out. Sr Abhya's parents Thomas and Leelamma are not alive today to witness the justice for their daughter.

Japan backs India against stand-off with China

Opposes attempts to unilaterally change status quo in the region by coercion or any activities

PAWAN BALI | DC
NEW DELHI, DEC. 22

In a message to China, India and Japan on Tuesday strongly opposed any attempts to unilaterally change the status quo in the region by coercion or any activities that escalate tensions, during defence minister Rajnath Singh telephonic conversation with his Japanese counterpart Nobuo Kishi.

This is seen as a strong backing of India's position that China should restore

status quo at the line of actual control (LAC) in Ladakh where both armies are involved in a military stand-off from last eight months.

In recent years there has been an increase in defence co-operation between India and Japan both of which are dealing with an aggressive China in the region. India and Japan are part of the Quad which Beijing sees as an anti-China alliance. Indian and Japanese navies have been conducting exercise

● **India and Japan are part of the Quad which Beijing sees as an anti-China alliance.**

bilaterally and were also part of "Malabar Naval exercise" along with US and Australia.

During the conversation, Singh and Kishi shared their views on highlighting the importance of a free and open maritime order based on the rule of

law, said a statement by Japanese defence ministry.

The two ministers also exchanged views on regional situations, including the East China Sea and the South China Sea, and reaffirmed their continued close cooperation. "In this context, the ministers affirmed their intention to continue exchanging views in light of the current events occurring in the region and concurred in sending a clear message that they strongly oppose any

attempts to unilaterally change the status quo by coercion or any activities that escalate tension," said the statement issued by Japanese defence ministry.

Singh and Kishi affirmed that they would continue to vigorously promote defence cooperation and exchanges to uphold and reinforce the free and open Indo-Pacific while maintaining close communication between respective defence authorities, said Japanese defence ministry statement.

PAK ARMY SHELLS MORTARS ALONG LOC IN POONCH; NO CASUALTIES

Jammu, Dec. 22:

Pakistani troops opened fire and shelled mortars at forward posts along the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch district on Tuesday, a defence spokesperson said.

There was no report of any damage on the Indian side, he said. "At about 09:30 hours today, Pakistan Army initiated unpro-

voked ceasefire violation by firing with small arms and intense shelling with mortars along LoC in Mankote sectors in Poonch district", the spokesperson said.

He said the Indian Army retaliated befittingly. On December 1, Pakistani troops restored to unprovoked ceasefire violation by shelling mortars. *PTI*

Shah to visit Bengal again on January 12

YOJNA GUSAI | DC
NEW DELHI, DEC. 22

After his recent visit to the poll bound West Bengal when former TMC heavyweight Suwendhu Adhikari along with more than a dozen of ruling party's MLAs joined the BJP, senior BJP leader and Union home minister Amit Shah is expected to visit the state again on January 12, which is Swami Vivekananda's birth anniversary.

In West Bengal, where an aggressive BJP is countering TMC's poll plank of 'Bengali pride' with its vision of 'Asol poribortan,' Shah is expected to address a public meeting and a 'yuva rally' in Howrah during his two day long visit when he will also deliberate poll strategies with the party leaders. Shah is expected to visit the state again on January 23, when the state celebrates freedom fighter and 'Bengali icon' Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose's birthday.

Aggressively campaigning against the TMC government's "bad governance," deteriorating law and order situation, poor economic indicators, corruption, anti-incumbency and Covid-19 mismanagement, the BJP is confident of ousting Mamata Banerjee led TMC and even Shah had expressed confidence about his party's win in the assembly polls scheduled early next year.

While Shah will be visiting the state every month till the assembly polls, he would be spending almost a week in the poll bound

TMC is a company now, says Adhikari

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC
KOLKATA, DEC. 22

Calling the ruling Trinamul Congress a "company", new BJP leader Shubhendu Adhikari on Tuesday declared that he would not need an "MLA ticket" to defeat Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's party in the next year's Assembly election in West Bengal.

At his first BJP rally in Purbasthali of Burdwan East after his induction, Adhikari claimed, "TMC is no more a political party. It has become a company. When I spoke to Union home minister Amit Shah and senior party leaders Dilip Ghosh and Kailash Vijayvargiya before joining the BJP, I set no condition before them except to save Bengal from *Tolabaj Bhaipo* (Extortionist Nephew)."

He added, "Cattle and coal smuggling have been caught. Shah has made their (TMC) situation with the BSF. The sand-

laden trucks in queues are also stuck on the road. Even after all these, if they win this time, only kidney-racketeering will be left for their survival. They have to be immersed anyhow. I will do whatever is needed. I will tell my party there is no need to give me an MLA ticket. I will devote 16 out of 24 hours to ensure TMC's defeat."

Digging up Banerjee's past with the NDA to reply to the TMC's campaign of betrayal against him, Adhikari said, "Those who have been branding me as a traitor and calling me 'Mirzafar' for the past three days, I want to ask them who were with the TMC, after its foundation in 1998, in the Assembly, Panchayat and Lok Sabha polls of that year and Lok Sabha polls in 1999? Had the then prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Lal Krishna Advani not offered shelter to the TMC, the party would have vanished before 2001. None can deny it."

state from February.

Since 2014, the BJP has significantly increased its vote share and organizational base in the state. With the two other opposition parties — Left and the Congress — losing their political grip in West Bengal, the BJP has emerged as a credible contender against the ruling TMC, which has been

marred by anti-incumbency as a result the BJP made a sizable dent in its vote bank during the last Lok Sabha polls by bagging 18 of the total 42 parliamentary seats.

The BJP claims that it has a significant presence at the 78,000 booths spread across the 294 assembly seats in the state.

Kerala Gov. turns down spl session on farm Laws

DC CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
DEC. 22

Kerala Governor Arif Mohammed Khan has declined permission to convene special session of Assembly to discuss Centre's new farm laws.

The Governor rejected the Cabinet's recommendation saying that there is no urgency for convening a special session on December 23. The state government was planning to pass a resolution against the farm laws.

Earlier, the Governor asked the state government

to furnish reasons for convening the session at such a short notice. Even though the reasons were conveyed to him, the Governor reportedly denied permission for second time.

Agriculture minister V.S. Sunil Kumar said that the Governor's action was highly unexpected. He said the Punjab and Delhi governments had convened special sessions of Assembly to protest against the farm laws. Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal had even torn the copies of the bill on the floor of the House in protest.

The opposition Congress

led UDF has also criticised the Governor's decision to decline permission for the special session of Assembly.

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan who was on a tour to Kollam and Pathanamthitta district, returned to Thiruvananthapuram in the evening. However, instead of insisting on the session, the ruling LDF is planning to fight the Governor's action politically.

Earlier, Speaker P. Sreeramakrishnan also sent a communication to the Governor listing out the reasons for convening the special session.



Police personnel use water cannons to stop Jan Adhikar Party (JAP) President Rajesh Ranjan alias Pappu Yadav and his supporters during their Raj Bhavan march against the new farm laws, in Patna, Tuesday.

— PTI

8 passengers found Covid +ve on arrival from Britain

From Page 1

The new SOPs say that all positive cases of incoming passengers have to be sent for genome sequencing, and if the report of the sequencing is consistent with the current SARS-CoV-2 virus genome circulating in the country, the ongoing treatment protocol including home isolation, treatment at facility level as per case severity may be followed.

However, if the genomic sequencing indicates the presence of a new variant of SARS-CoV-2 then the patient will continue to remain in a separate isolation unit. "While necessary treatment as per the existing protocol will be given, the patient shall be tested on the 14th day, after having tested positive in the initial test. In case the sample is found positive on the 14th day, further samples may be taken until his two consecutive samples taken 24 hours apart are tested negative," the SOP said.

Niti Aayog member (health) V.K. Paul said on Tuesday that though the mutation found in the UK is an "adverse development" as it enhances the transmissibility or the spread of the Covid virus by 70 per cent and acts as a super spreader, the mutated virus is of no immediate threat in terms of affecting the disease's severity or increasing deaths of Covid patients.

He added there was no

SONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC
MUMBAI, DEC. 22

The Maharashtra government on Tuesday issued an SOP (Standard Operating Protocol) for the passengers arriving from Europe, South Africa and Middle East countries and flights coming from the airports of these countries. As per the SOP, The passengers, who do not have symptoms, will have to undergo 14 days of 'mandatory paid' institutional quarantine at arrival city.

Even while going to quarantine centers, the passengers need to pay for the transportation facilities. These passengers shall not be allowed outside the designated quarantine facility before 14

days in any condition. The state has also asked municipal commissioners to appoint a nodal officer in order to ensure the implementation of the SOP in a letter and spirit.

The SOP also mentioned that an area at the far end of the airport terminal should be identified and prepared for receiving these flights. The designated area should have adequate air-bridges, so as to receive the flights in a staggered manner, to avoid overcrowding.

The SOP, which has been issued by Maharashtra's chief secretary Sanjay Kumar, stated, "Sudden emergence of a fast-spreading variant of Covid-19 in UK, believed to be up to 70% more transmissible than the original strain is

a cause of concern. In view of this, the Government of Maharashtra has formulated SOP, which will come into effect immediately."

It further said, "Municipal commissioner of the city where an airport is located shall identify different category hotels as institutional quarantine facility and shall also earmark a dedicated health care facility for identified suspects. He shall also appoint a nodal officer to see implementation of these SOPs."

The state has instructed the Airport authorities that the designated area should have adequate separate, immigration, luggage and custom centers/areas for managing these flight passengers.

need to panic as the mutated virus was yet to be traced in India. He said the government had taken the samples of all the passengers from the UK testing positive and sent them for genome sequencing.

"There is no reason for panic, though there is cause for us to be more vigilant. The government is closely monitoring it, but the virus' mutation will have no impact on the

potential of the vaccines," Mr Paul said, adding so far 17 mutations in the Sars-CoV-2 were found so far.

India for the first time had less than 20,000 fresh Covid cases (19,556) — the lowest in 173 days — as overall cases rose to 1,00,75,116. The health ministry said for the first time India's active case-load fell below three lakhs and was the lowest in 163

days. Union health secretary Rajesh Bhushan said the deaths among Covid-19 patients was largely due to the delays in hospitalisation.

On Monday Dr Soumya Swaminathan, WHO's chief scientist, told NDTV that the mutated strain may already be present in other nations like Italy, Australia, Denmark, the Netherlands and South Africa.

POLL RESULTS

BJP won an election for first time from any seat in predominantly Muslim Valley

Gupkar alliance poised to win big in DDC polls

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC
SRINAGAR, DEC. 22

The People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD), a conglomerate of J&K's mainstream regional Opposition parties and their allies from the national Left parties, is poised to win big in the Union Territory's first-ever District Development Council (DDC) elections.

However, its arch-rival, the BJP, has also performed well, mainly in the Jammu region. What is also spectacular for the saffron party is that it has won an election for the

first time from any seat in the predominantly Muslim Kashmir Valley.

The PAGD led by former chief minister Farooq Abdullah won 70 of the 177 seats the results of which were declared till this report was filed and is leading in over 40 seats. A total of 48 seats have gone to the BJP, while its candidates have a comfortable lead over their rivals in over 30 seats.

The Jammu and Kashmir Apni Party (JKAP), known in local political circles as the BJP's tacit ally, has bagged seven seats and the

Congress 14 seats. One seat has gone in favour of the National Panthers Party. The Independents — some known to be proxies of the BJP — and others too have made a mark by winning as many 38 seats so far.

Former chief minister Omar Abdullah termed the results an eye-opener for the BJP and its "proxy political party" (an obvious reference to JKAP), and said the people had rejected the Centre's move to strip J&K of its special status and splitting it up into two Union territories in August last year.

Earlier, in a tweet, he also said: "The trends that have emerged in the DDC polls in J&K are very encouraging for the @JKPAGD. The BJP had made this election a prestige issue about Art 370 & J&K's special status. The people have now spoken & it's for those who believe in democracy to pay heed to these voices"

Among the PAGD winners is Waheed Ur Rehman Parra, a youth leader of its constituent People's Democratic Party (PDP), who was arrested by the National Investigation Agency on

charges of helping separatist militants on November 25, a day after he filed his nomination papers from home district Pulwama.

Parra polled 1,323 votes, defeating his nearest BJP rival Sajad Ahmad Raina by a margin of 1,002 votes. PDP president and former CM Mehbooba Mufti tweeted: "Couldn't be prouder of PDP's @parawahid who won his maiden election by a huge margin of votes. Despite being arrested on baseless charges right after filing his nomination people have shown their love &

trust for Waheed. Hope justice prevails."

The BJP's victors from the Valley are Aijaz Hussain (Khonmoh-II seat in DDC Srinagar), Aijaz Ahmad Khan (Tulail seat in Bandipora district) and Minha Latief (Kakapora (Pulwama).

After being declared winner, Hussain told reporters outside the counting centre: "This is a win for the BJP. The propaganda has been bust as people have shown their faith in the Prime Minister and his policies. This is a message that nationalists are prospering in Kashmir."

SHORT TAKES

PLANE CRASHES
ALONG TEXAS
ROAD, 1 KILLED

Grand Prairie, Dec. 22: At least one person was killed when a small plane crashed along a highway service road in North Texas shortly after taking off Monday afternoon, authorities said.

The Federal Aviation Administration said the single-engine Wheeler Express CT crashed about 1 miles (1.61 kilometres) west of the Grand Prairie Municipal Airport, located in the city just west of Dallas.

Grand Prairie Fire Chief Robert Fite said witnesses said the plane came down rapidly, hit a telephone pole and then struggled another 500 feet (152.40 metres) hitting the concrete multiple times before hitting a pickup truck traveling on the service road.

Fite said the person in the truck was slightly injured and was taken to the hospital.

RIVER SURGE
HITS CANYON
GROUP, 4 DEAD

Mexico City, Dec. 22: Rain unleashed a surge of water that swept away most of a 21-member group on a canyoning expedition in southern Mexico, killing at least four people and leaving three missing, authorities said Monday.

The civil defence office of Veracruz state said five more people were injured in the Rio Oro canyon, near the Gulf of Mexico. The accident occurred Sunday, and the office said searches continued Monday with police, volunteer rescue groups and firefighters participating.

The office did not release the names or nationalities of the victims, but such expeditions are popular among young Mexican tourists.

Canyoning involves hiking, climbing, rappelling and swimming through river canyons. The Rio Oro canyon includes waterfalls and relatively narrow rock passages.

CABINET
RESHUFFLED IN
INDONESIA

Jakarta, Dec. 22: Indonesia's president announced a Cabinet reshuffle Tuesday following the arrest of two of his ministers on corruption charges and his administration's lackluster pandemic response.

The Cabinet shake-up comes amid surging Coronavirus cases in the world's fourth most populous nation. Indonesia's economy has fallen into recession for the first time since the Asian financial crisis more than two decades ago as the country struggles to control the pandemic.

Four ministers lost their jobs, including Health Minister Terawan Agus Putranto, and two others were rotated to more important positions, ending weeks of speculation about the possible changes. President Joko Widodo chose the mayor of Surabaya, Indonesia's second-largest city, to become the social affairs minister, replacing Julianti Batubara, who was detained by anti-corruption commission on December 6. Batubara was accused of taking bribes related to the government's COVID-19 aid distribution.

U.S. POST OFFICE
NAMED AFTER
SLAIN SIKH COP

Washington, Dec. 22: US President Donald Trump on Monday signed into law a legislation to name a Texas post office after slain Sikh police officer Sandeep Singh Dhaliwal, who was gunned down in the line of duty during a routine traffic stop in Houston a year ago.

Trump signed H R 5317, which designates the facility of the United States Postal Service located at 315 Addicks Howell Road in Houston, Texas, as the Deputy Sandeep Singh Dhaliwal Post Office Building, the White House said in a statement.

The post office named after Dhaliwal in Houston is only the second US post office to be named after an Indian American. The first one was named after the first Indian American Congressman Dalip Singh Saund in Southern California in 2006. The House of Representatives and the Senate had recently passed the legislation in this regard. In his remarks on the Senate floor, Texas Senator Ted Cruz had said that Dhaliwal was a hero and a trailblazer whose commitment to his faith will inspire generations of Sikhs and other religious minorities.

Vax may work on UK virus: Pharma

But CEO of BioNTech says further studies are needed to be completely certain

Berlin, Dec. 22: German pharmaceutical company BioNTech is confident that its Coronavirus vaccine works against the new UK variant, but further studies are needed to be completely sure, its chief executive said Tuesday. The variant, detected mainly in London and the southeast of England in recent weeks, has sparked concern worldwide because of signs that it may spread more easily. While there is no indication it causes more serious illness, numerous countries in Europe and beyond have restricted travel from the UK as a result.

"We don't know at the moment if our vaccine is also able to provide protection against this new variant," CEO Ugur Sahin told a news conference the day after the vaccine was approved for use in the European Union. "But scientifically, it is highly likely that the immune response by this vaccine will be effective."

"But we will know it only if the experiment is done and we will need about two weeks from now to get the data," he said. "The likelihood that our vaccine works ... is relatively high." Should the vaccine need to be adjusted for the new variant the company could do so in about 6 weeks, Sahin said, though regulators might have to approve the changes before the shots can be used.

Having to adjust the vaccine would be a blow for the rollout of immunisation campaigns and rein in the pandemic that has so far killed more than 1.7 million people worldwide. BioNTech's vaccine, which was developed together with US pharmaceutical company Pfizer, has been authorised for use in more than 45 countries, including Britain, the United States and the EU.

Hundreds of thousands of people have already received the shots. The companies submitted data to regulators showing the vaccine, which goes by the brand name COMIRNATY in Europe, is 95 per cent effective in preventing infection with Covid-19.

"All countries across the EU that have requested doses will receive them in the next five days, the very initial supply, and that will be followed up next week with further supplies," said Sean Maret, BioNTech's chief commercial officer. Several EU countries have said they plan to start vaccinating on Sunday.

Germany's health minister, Jens Spahn, said he expects the country to receive more than 1.3 million doses by the end of this year. Germany is among European countries that have banned flights from the UK because of the new variant there. — AP

We don't know at the moment if our vaccine is also able to provide protection against this new variant. But scientifically, it is highly likely that the immune response by this vaccine can deal with the new virus variants.

— UGUR SAHIN
BioNTech CEO



US President-elect Joe Biden receives a Covid-19 vaccination from Tabé Mase, Nurse Practitioner and Head of Employee Health Services, at the Christiana Care campus in Newark, Delaware on Monday. — AFP

Probe finds Trump officials
attacked CDC virus reports

Washington, Dec. 21: Trump administration political appointees tried to block or change more than a dozen government reports that detailed scientific findings about the spread of the Coronavirus, a House panel investigating the alleged interference said Monday.

Rep. James Clyburn, D-S.C., said his Coronavirus committee investigators have found evidence of a "political pressure campaign" to "bully" professionals at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in what may have been an attempt to "cripple the

● INVESTIGATORS HAVE found evidence of a "political pressure campaign" to "bully" professionals at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in what may have been an attempt to "cripple the

nation's Coronavirus response in a misguided effort to achieve herd immunity."

ety can be best protected by allowing younger people to get infected and develop natural immunity until vaccines are widely available.

Accusing Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar and CDC Director Dr. Robert Redfield of stonewalling his investigation, Clyburn issued subpoenas compelling them to turn over reams of documents and emails by Dec. 30. The committee's findings were detailed in a letter to Azar and Redfield that centred on the actions of two political appointees earlier this year. — AP

Spain holds Christmas lottery

Madrid, Dec. 22: Children from Madrid's San Ildefonso school have begun calling out prize-winning numbers in Spain's bumper Christmas lottery known as "El Gordo" (the fat one), which is being held under tight conditions because of the Coronavirus

pandemic. The lottery will shell out 400,000 euros (\$489,000) or some 325,000 euros after tax, to holders of 20-euro tickets bearing the top prize number.

The incredibly popular lottery dishes out a total of 2.4 billion euros in prizes

this year, much of it in small prizes. Other lotteries have bigger individual top prizes but Spain's Christmas lottery, staged each year on Dec. 22, is ranked as the world's richest for the total prize money involved. — AP

Scientists probe virus variant's spread in kids

London, Dec. 22: Scientists in the UK are investigating the impact of a new mutant variant of Coronavirus, named VUI-202012/01, on children and whether its faster transmission in parts of England is down to the younger segment of the population.

The government's New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group (Nervtag) is monitoring the data to analyse this arc of the variant,

which has led over 40 countries, including India, to suspend travel to and from the UK in order to try and contain the more infectious mutation.

Earlier strains of Coronavirus found it harder to infect children than adults, with one explanation being that children have fewer of the doorways called the ACE2 receptor the virus uses to enter a human body's cells.

Professor Wendy Barclay,

● EARLIER STRAINS of Coronavirus found it harder to infect children than adults, with one explanation being that children have fewer of the doorways called the ACE2 receptor the virus uses to enter a human body's cells.

from Nervtag and Imperial College London, said the mutations to the virus appeared to be making it eas-

ier to breach those doorways. "Therefore children are equally susceptible, perhaps, to this virus as adults, and therefore given their mixing patterns, you would expect to see more children being infected," she explained.

Experts do not believe that the new version is any greater threat to children's health and the scientist behind the world's first approved vaccine against Covid-19 has said the

Pfizer/BioNTech jabs will work against the strain, though further investigation remains underway.

"The likelihood that our vaccine works is relatively high," said Ugur Sahin, chief executive of the German co-developer of the vaccine BioNTech.

Speaking on Bild TV in Germany, Sahin said his company would investigate the mutation in the coming days and that he viewed the matter with a

degree of soberness.

His message of some confidence comes as the UK reached the half a million milestone for vaccinations of the jabs, delivered to the elderly and most vulnerable sections of the country's population.

"I can today announce that over half a million people, more than 500,000 people in the UK, have now received their first dose," Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced. — PTI

EDUCATION | AFFECTED

Drop in kindergarten enrolment is 30% of total reduction across the 33 states

Covid-19: Enrolment in US public schools dips

Washington, Dec. 22: Fearful of sending her two children back to school as the coronavirus pandemic raged in Mississippi, Angela Atkins decided to give virtual learning a chance this fall.

Almost immediately, it was a struggle. Their district in Lafayette County didn't offer live instruction to remote learners, and Atkins' fourth grader became frustrated with doing worksheets all day and missed interacting with teachers and peers. Her seventh grader didn't receive the extra support he did at school through his special education plan and started getting failing grades. After nine weeks, Atkins switched to home

schooling.

It got to the point where it felt like there was no other choice to make, she said. I was worried for my kids' mental health. By taking her children off the public school rolls, Atkins joined an exodus that one state schools chief has warned could become a national crisis. An analysis of data from 33 states obtained by Chalkbeat and The Associated Press shows that public K-12 enrolment this fall has dropped across those states by more than 500,000 students, or 2%, since the same time last year.

That is a significant shift considering that enrolment overall in those states has typically gone up by

● AN ANALYSIS of data from 33 states obtained by Chalkbeat and The Associated Press shows that public K-12 enrolment this fall has dropped across those states by more than 500,000 students, or 2%, since the same time last year.

around half a percent in recent years. And the decline is only likely to become more pronounced, as several large states have yet to release information. Chalkbeat and AP surveyed all 50 states, but 17 have not released comparable enrolment numbers yet.

The data, which in many states is preliminary, offers the clearest picture yet of the pandemic's devastating toll on public school enrolment a decline that could eventually have dire consequences for school budgets that are based on headcounts.

But even more alarming, educators say, is that some of the students who left may not be in school at all. I would like to hope that many of them are from homes where their parents have taken responsibility on their own to provide for their education, said Pedro Noguera, the dean of the University of Southern California's Rosier School of Education, adding that affluent fami-

lies will have an easier time doing that. My fear is that large numbers have simply gotten discouraged and given up. So far, many states have held off on making school budget cuts in the face of enrolment declines. But if enrolment doesn't rise, funding will be hit.

We've been trying to scream from the hilltops for quite some time that this is happening, Kirsten Baesler, North Dakota's schools superintendent, said of the enrolment declines. And it could be a national crisis if we don't put some elbow grease into it.

The declines are driven by a combination of factors brought on by the pandemic. Fewer parents enrol-

led their children in kindergarten, and some students left public schools for other learning environments. At the same time, students who are struggling to attend classes, as many are right now, may have been purged from public school rolls for missing many days in a row. That is a typical practice, though there is some more flexibility now.

The Chalkbeat/AP analysis shows that a drop in kindergarten enrolment accounts for 30% of the total reduction across the 33 states making it one of the biggest drivers of the nationwide decline. Kindergarten is not required in over half of states. — AP

4.6K FROM UK
QUARANTINED
IN TURKEY

Ankara, Dec. 22: Turkey has identified and quarantined 4,603 airline passengers who arrived from the United Kingdom on and after December 14, Turkish Health Minister Fahrettin Koca said Tuesday.

Flights from the UK, South Africa, Denmark and the Netherlands were suspended on Sunday evening in response to a new strain of Coronavirus said to be circulating there. Koca tweeted that 335 passengers flying from those countries at the time of Sunday's announcement were tested for the virus on arrival in Turkey and isolated. — AP

DECCAN Chronicle

23 DECEMBER 2020

Act quickly to stave off new virus strain threat

The decision of the Union government to take pre-emptive steps against the spread of a mutated version of SARS-CoV-2 that plunged Britain into an unprecedented crisis and the rest of the world into the fear of another wave is welcome. The stoppage of the air traffic to and from Britain till December 31 and the strict conditions on those who travel to India after a visit to that country should be able to help India save itself from another devastating attack of the virus. Several other European nations, which are already into the second phase of national lockdown due to surge in the Covid numbers, are also taking early steps to keep the new virus off its limits by virtually stopping all contacts with the island nation.

India has of late been witnessing a steady decrease in the daily number of caseload though states such as Maharashtra and Kerala show no signs of a thaw. In fact, Maharashtra, which has the highest total caseload, has imposed night curfew and tightened some other controls. Kerala, which managed to contain the virus in the initial stages and has kept the fatality rate low even now, has already warned of a major spike in the coming days. The state government fears that the elections to the local bodies held last week could turn a super spreader event. Delhi government has already imposed a slew of controls and augmented the healthcare facilities to successfully ward off a major outbreak. Fortunately, India looks like having averted a major outbreak which experts feared would visit us after the festival season.

It is in this background that the new threat has emerged. The mutant version, now referred to as VUI (Variant Under Investigation) 202012/01 or known as B.1.1.7, is not more dangerous than the original one but can spread faster, according to experts. Scientists are yet to decode the virus, first noticed in Southern England in December, whether the mutation makes it spread faster. According to Public Health England, the executive agency of the British department of health and social care, the mutations in the spike protein of the virus can change how the micro-organism interacts with human cells. Scientists insist that the vaccines, which have been given emergency authorisation, and those which are in the pipeline, will work against the new variant, too.

While science and scientists grapple with the pandemic and its causes, the non-medical measures come into the focus more than ever. Public health experts insist on the importance of Covid-appropriate protocols such as social distancing, wearing of masks and washing of hands to keep the virus away. The governments should not hesitate to impose restrictions on gatherings wherever necessary before it gets too late; political, social and religious events and festivals offer no excuse to be lax. The message the mutated virus would like to pass on to humanity is that no amount of caution is too much until such time when vaccines have been made available and a sufficient number of people are inoculated to attain herd immunity.

The governments should not hesitate to impose restrictions on gatherings wherever necessary before it gets too late; political, social and religious events and festivals offer no excuse to be lax

Tumble and roll

The reports of the emergence of a new highly-transmissible strain of coronavirus in the United Kingdom and a resultant suspension of air connectivity to London by several countries, including India, sent shockwaves across the global financial world. Being a part of the global financial system, India's key stock market indices — the Sensex and the Nifty — too suffered blow-backs, wiping out over ₹6.5 lakh crore worth investor wealth in just one day.

For the general public, the market reaction may appear insane. Having grown phenomenally after the worst crash during the pandemic, one may wonder as to why should investors be so panicky. However, since the investors bet their money on the foreseeable future, the investors always react ahead of the curve. Similarly, the Monday mayhem in the stock markets too could be a premature panic-driven reaction to the new strain of coronavirus. They may return to the stock markets soon as reports suggest that the new strain may be highly transmissible, but it is not more virulent than the previous versions.

While the world's toughest lockdown had wiped out nearly a quarter of economic productivity in the April-June quarter, the country's economic growth showed a robust recovery in the quarter ending in September. While full recovery of the Indian economy may take some more time, the green shoots have ended the talk of doomsday scenarios since the economy is largely driven by domestic consumption. While the developments in the UK may not have an immediate impact on India, full economic recovery, however, is predicated on the successful containment of coronavirus. Until normal economic activity remains unchecked in the country, external developments may not have a lasting impact on the economy. The government and people, therefore, must not lower their guard against the highly-transmissible pathogen.

DECCAN CHRONICLE

KAUSHIK MITTER
Editor

K. SUDHAKAR
Printer & Publisher

R. MOHAN
Resident Editor

DECCAN CHRONICLE offices are located at:
Chennai: SP 3 Developed Plot, Industrial Estate, Guindy, Chennai 600032. Phones: (044) 22254747, 22254748

Coinbatore: 77 Vivekananda Road, Rammagar, Coinbatore 641009. Phone: (0422) 2231255, 2231256
Hyderabad: 36, Sarojini Devi Road, Secunderabad 500 003. Phone: (040) 27803930-4. Fax: (040) 27805256

Bangalore: 5th Floor, BMTC Commercial Complex, 80 Ft. Road, Koramangala, Bangalore-560095. Ph: 080-3460500, Fax: 080-22960551/52/55

Visakhapatnam: Survey No. 1/3A Beach Road, Near Kailasagiri Roadway, Sector-9 MVP Colony, Visakhapatnam - 530 017. Phones: (0891) 2552333/2552334. Fax: (0891) 2755285

Vijayawada: No. C 3 & 4, Patamata, Industrial Estate, Auto Nagar, Vijayawada (A.P.). Phones: (0866) 2555284/ 2555287, Fax: (0866) 2555234

Rajahmundry: Vemagiri, Dhawleswaram Rd, Rajahmundry 533125. Phones: (0883) 2417208, 2417618
Anantapur: Thapovan Colony, Bangalore Bye-Pass Road, Anantapur 515004. Phones: (08554) 276903, Fax: 08554-276904

Nellore: Survey No. 527/2, Burranpur Village, Venkatachalam (M), Chemudugunta Panchayat, Nellore. Phone: (0861) 2348581/ 82, Telefax (0861) 2348580

Karimnagar: Survey No. 1341, Vavilalapally Colony, Jagityala Road, Karimnagar 505 001. Phone: (0878) 2228908; Telefax (0878) 2220433

Kochi: No. 3-B, 3rd Floor, DD TRADE TOWER, Kaloor-Kadavanthara Road, Ernakulam, Ph: 0484-4039408

Kozhikode: No 6/1002 E, First Floor City Mall, Opp. YMCA Kannur Road, Kozhikode - 673 001

Thiruvananthapuram: St Joseph Press Thycaud post, Cotton Hills, Thiruvananthapuram-14, Ph: 0471-2735105/6/7, Fax: 0471-4016112 Gram: CHRONICLE Postal registration no: No. H/SD-348/2006-08ss

Subhani



Bhoomi putra for Bengal: Has BJP made a mistake?



Shikha Mukerjee

The man for all election seasons, Amit Shah, Union home minister and the BJP's craftiest leader, came to West Bengal and radically revised the strategy for conquest. The state's saffronisation has been Mr Shah's goal for years. With the acquisition of a "bhoomi putra" — an experienced, violence-hardened, mass leader with charismatic appeal in Suwendu Adhikari from Trinamul Congress, Mr Shah has found a face to challenge Mamata Banerjee. Bengali identity, Mr Shah has had to acknowledge, transcends all the different ways in which the BJP slices and splices Hindutva issues to produce electoral victories with remarkable regularity.

It's a belated realisation that neither the communal card, nor polarisation, nor verbal assaults against dynastic politics, would pose a serious threat to the fiery, feisty political war veteran Mamata Banerjee, who has charisma in loads and local knowledge that can outmatch the collective brains of the BJP machine. It's also an admission that lightweight Bengalis as proxies for Narendra Modi would be dismissed with contempt by a culturally and politically fanatically proud people.

From one visit to the next in the space of a month, Mr Shah has finally realised that he has to back away from two issues he had identified as bestsellers in the West Bengal election market. The first is aggressively selling the Citizenship Amendment Act and National Register of Citizens as a cleanup mechanism to weed out Muslim illegals on the plea that it will be "considered" for action only after the Covid-19 vaccines are rolled out. The second is shooting down the idea that President's

Rule was being seriously considered before the West Bengal elections. Pulling no punches, Mr Shah seems to have told BJP state party chief Dilip Ghosh and West Bengal governor Jagdeep Dhankhar to pipe down. These are sure signs that Mr Shah is only now beginning to gauge that West Bengal is the most complex undertaking he has ever had to handle. There is no template in the BJP's playbook that can be copied and pasted over West Bengal.

To convince the voter that the BJP is not indeed an "outsider", Mr Shah had to roll out Mr Adhikari and set him to work, the day after Christmas. The speed with which Mr Shah and the home ministry approved "Z" category security for Mr Adhikari even before he was formally inducted into the party at the Midnapore rally is an indication that it has a lot of catching up to do.

If the BJP was too complacent that its formula of communal polarisation, identity politics, homogenisation and mainstreaming within the Hindutva fold would be enough to convert the Bengali into a loyalist and thus reliable voter, the Trinamul Congress was just as smug. Obviously Mamata Banerjee can read the pulse of the people better than the BJP, which has inadequate leaders in West Bengal and out of state bosses who are clueless about the fiercely proud Bengali.

For both the TMC and the BJP, the defection of Suwendu Adhikari and nine other MLAs and MPs, as well around 100 lesser functionaries, is a turning point. As a young leader who led the Nandigram movement against the CPI(M)-led Left Front's strategy for industrialising West Bengal, Mr Adhikari shot into the limelight. He became known for his capacity to

Bengalis can be a fanatically proud and snooty people. Suwendu Adhikari may be too local, too small time as a CM face. Every chief minister of West Bengal has been a national leader first and a local leader as well. Most were at loggerheads with the Centre, including Siddhartha Shankar Ray on occasion. Has the BJP made a mistake in stooping to conquer?

match violence with violence and for his capacity to mobilise, equip and deploy the small army of TMC loyalists. He was rewarded for his work and elevated as a youth leader, as part of the successor generation to be groomed for the party after Mamata Banerjee. So indispensable was he, that in the 2016 Assembly elections, when Mamata Banerjee needed a robust organisation to win her seats in Purulia, Bankura and Jhargram and she felt Mukul Roy, now with the BJP, would not be as effective, Mr Adhikari was given responsibility for 60-plus seats. It was also her way of placating Mr Adhikari after the induction of Abhishek Banerjee, her nephew. The move angered many, including Mr Roy, who saw it as heaping favours on the Adhikari clan. Regardless of how her preference annoyed others in the TMC, Ms Banerjee continued to pamper Suwendu with greater responsibilities, like observer for the 2019 Lok Sabha polls for crucial districts in Malda and Murshidabad, long considered Congress bastions.

The network that Mr Adhikari built across at least seven districts out of a total of 23 in West Bengal, and his popularity, made him an asset for the Trinamul Congress. The BJP's gain is thus the TMC's loss. To capitalise on this, Mr Shah has drastically revised the BJP's campaign content and strategy.

The plan is crude, and the BJP hopes it will be effective — luring Mamata Banerjee into a personal fight against Mr Adhikari, who she was wont to see as a loyalist turned disgruntled defector with an insider's knowledge of how the TMC government and organisation failed, its corruption, its depen-

dence on a partisan bureaucracy and the police. It would challenge Mamata Banerjee's credibility and her legitimacy as a leader.

The other advantage of a Mamata Banerjee versus Adhikari fight would mean there would be two foes against the lone chief minister. It would serve to situate the BJP's best star campaigner, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, above the fray, with a solution to the problems of West Bengal by mainstreaming the marginalised, deviant locals.

The insider-outsider game set up by the BJP is theoretically neat. The question is — will it be effective? West Bengal has always seen itself as a leader in national politics. To sink to the ranks of laggard followers could be unsatisfactory. The state's chief ministers have always punched way above their weight, as they were politically important national leaders to begin with. Even though Mamata Banerjee was not a member of the social elite to which all her predecessors in office belonged, she was still a national leader, the successful leader of a party that she had founded, when she became chief minister. In contrast, Mr Adhikari is a local, perhaps too local.

The localisation of the BJP is far from complete. Adding a *bhoomi putra* is a design element and does not indicate a structural transformation. If localisation has indeed begun, it was difficult to find it, when Mr Shah's roadshow snaked through Bolpur, with a DJ managing the event, and dancers and bands preceding the leader as though it was a carnival, and not a political rally.

Shikha Mukerjee is a senior journalist based in Kolkata

LETTERS

NEW COVID-19 STRAIN

The news of detection of a new variant of coronavirus while scouring its genetic sequences and the spike in infections in the UK has caused consternation across the world. It has come at a time when vaccines have begun to be rolled out. The UK government has responded by imposing tougher measures and many countries have imposed travel restrictions on the UK. It is possible that it may be circulating in other parts of the world too. A lot remains to be known about the new Covid-19 strain, which is a setback in the global fight against the pandemic. The ability of viruses to mutate into new forms is known. The new strain of SARS-CoV-2 is not something unnatural or unexpected. It is a cause for worry that it has emerged as a dominant strain and is rapidly replacing other versions of the virus.

G. David Milton, Maruthancode

PEOPLE ARE still under the threat of Covid-19 with the vaccine or medicine yet to reach them. They have been suffering job losses too. Now a mutated strain of coronavirus has been detected in the UK compounding people's fears. The UK government along with WHO should control the virus spread. Also the people should follow the SOPs issued.

Sravana Ramachandran, Chennai

HONEST POLLS IN TN

POLITICAL PARTIES in Tamil Nadu, among other things, are battling for single-phase elections to be held in 2021. It's plausible. Many have expressed their concern over the dubious practice of distributing cash for votes (to electorate) to the Election Commission of India in the meeting held on Monday. A huge task is cut out for the EC to stop the practice. It needs to strengthen its infrastructure (say, for instance, installing CCTV cameras in all vantage points across the state, deploying honest election officers/ managers in all the booths) to ensure fair and smooth election. If people do not get lured by money, what can the parties do? The reformation should start with the electorate. Then we can see the renaissance of honest elections in Tamil Nadu.

S. Ramakrishnasayee, Chennai

Mail your letters to editor@deccanmail.com

Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu



Centre spars with Mamata in bid to turn Bengal babus into stool pigeons

The battle for the West Bengal Assembly elections looms ahead but skirmishes have already started. After the attack on BJP president J.P. Nadda's convoy in the state, the Centre retaliated against the Trinamul government by recalling three IPS officers from the state on Central deputation. Further, to perhaps underline the "message", the ministry of home affairs summoned state chief secretary Alapan Bandopadhyay and director general of police Virendra to Delhi to explain the law and order situation in Bengal.

A defiant chief minister Mamata Banerjee refused to comply with the summons. Also, she declined the Centre's demand to send the three IPS officers — Bholanath Pandey, Rajeev Mishra and Praveen Kumar Tripathi — on deputation saying there was a dearth of good officers in the state, and the state could not spare the

three officers.

There is a precedent here. The then chief minister of Tamil Nadu J. Jayalalithaa had similarly denied the Centre in 1991 when the state police had conducted a raid on the house of former state chief minister and DMK leader M. Karunanidhi, her archrival. The Centre had asked the Tamil Nadu government to relieve the three officers involved for Central deputation. Like Mamata now, she had refused to spare those officers.

Apparently, there is little the Centre can do against civil service officers who are posted under the state government. For any action to be taken on an officer, the state and the Centre both need to agree.

REBELS FOR A CAUSE?

Outliers are far and few between in the civil service, which runs on obedience rather than resistance. But sometimes momentous events reveal "rebels" with a cause.

Punjab DIG (Prisons) Lakhminder Singh Jakhar has resigned from service in support of farmers who are in Delhi protesting against the three new farm laws. There are politicians, sports people, even ex-defence forces officers who have renounced their awards and medals in protest, but an IPS officer resigning from service for the farmers' cause is a first in the state.

Of course, IAS officer Kannan Gopinathan resigned from the service to protest against the restrictions imposed in Jammu & Kashmir following the abrogation of Article 370. Similarly, Shah Faesal, the young IAS officer from J&K resigned from the service in 2019 to start a political party. And just a few months ago, the DGP of Bihar Gupteshwar Pandey opting for VRS in a bid to contest the state Assembly poll (his position his still vacant), but that was not for a public cause.

Meanwhile, Jakhar who had served the Army joined the IPS as a 1994-batch officer and was slated to superannuate in August 2022. Interestingly, he had been suspended in May earlier this year on alleged corruption charges but was reinstated within a month. Clearly, outliers defy easy definition!

TN WON'T LET GO OF CHIEF SECY

By seeking the extension of the tenure of Tamil Nadu chief secretary K. Shanmugam, the state government has stirred up a hornets' nest in the upper echelons of the administration. An extension of tenure for Shanmugam could mean that several senior Tamil Nadu cadre officers eligible to succeed him may find their chances fading.

According to sources, Shanmugam, a 1985-batch IAS officer, has already received two

extensions.

Meanwhile, there are 30 IAS officers in the state in the additional chief secretary rank, including four who are secretaries to the Central government. For them, the third extension for Shanmugam seems to indicate that the state government doubts their abilities to handle the top job.

Interestingly, when chief minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami first sought an extension of tenure for Shanmugam, it was for one year, but the Centre granted approval only for three months. The second extension was for another three months. Now the state government has requested a six-month extension for the babu who reportedly is playing a "critical role in Covid management in the state". Will the Centre oblige again?

Share a babu experience! Follow dilipthecherian@Twitter.com. Let's multiply the effect.

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	46006.69	0.99
Nifty 50	13466.30	1.03
S&P 500*	3,692.94	-0.05
Dollar (₹)	73.84	-0.05
Pound Sterling (₹)	99.31	-1.81
Euro (₹)	90.28	-0.48
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	49,936▼480	0.95
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	50.21	-0.70
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.951	-0.005
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.923	-0.018

* As of 9:30 PM IST

Trust AMC eyes ₹10,000 cr AUM in next 2 years

Trust Asset Management Company, the latest to enter the already cluttered ₹30-lakh-crore mutual fund industry with 44 payers, plans to launch its maiden fund within a couple of weeks and garner an AUM of around ₹10,000 crore in the first two years of operations, says a top official. The fund house, which had announced a soft launch earlier this month, is awaiting the Sebi nod for its maiden scheme.

Gold prices fall amid weakness in global mart



Gold prices fell ₹243 to ₹49,653 per 10 gram in Delhi on Tuesday, reflecting the weakness in global price of the precious metal. In the previous trade, the yellow metal had closed at ₹49,896 per 10 gram. Silver prices also declined Rs 216 to ₹67,177 per kg from ₹67,393 per kg in the previous trade. In the global market, gold and silver were trading lower at \$1,868 per ounce and \$25.70 per ounce, respectively.

Manappuram raises ₹400cr via issue of bonds

Manappuram Finance on Tuesday said it has raised ₹400 crore by issuing bonds on private placement basis. The Financial Resources and Management Committee of the board of directors of the company has approved the allotment of 4,000 rated, secured, redeemable non-convertible debentures aggregating to ₹400 crore, Manappuram Finance said in a regulatory filing.

Reliance Capital gets 10 more bids for subsidiaries

Reliance Capital Ltd, part of the debt-ridden ADAG Reliance Group, has received 10 more bids, including from SBI Life, for its subsidiaries, sources said. Earlier this month, the Committee of Debenture Holders had extended the last date for submission of expression of interest to December 17. Following this, 10 new bids have come in for Reliance Capital's assets, taking the total number of bids to 70.

Printed & Published by K Sudhakar on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited. Printed & Published at Deccan Chronicle Presses situated at SP-3 Developed Plot, Industrial Estate, Guindy, Chennai. Editor: T.Venkatram Reddy, RNI Reg. No. TNENG/2008/25473 Air surcharge Re 1. © All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission of The Editor, Financial Chronicle ® is prohibited.

Apple eyes car rollout by 2024

iPhone maker's self-driving car will have battery with better technology

New York, Dec. 22: Apple Inc is moving forward with self-driving car technology and is targeting 2024 to produce a passenger vehicle that could include its own breakthrough battery technology, people familiar with the matter told Reuters. The iPhone maker's automotive efforts, known as Project Titan, have proceeded unevenly since 2014 when it first started to design its own vehicle from scratch. At one point, Apple drew back the effort to focus on software and reassessed its goals. Doug Field, an Apple veteran who had worked at Tesla Inc, returned to oversee the project in 2018 and laid off 190 people from the team in 2019.

Since then, Apple has progressed enough that it now aims to build a vehicle for consumers, two people familiar with the effort said, asking not to be named because Apple's plans are not public.

POWER BATTERY

Central to Apple's self-driving car strategy is a new battery design that could radically reduce the cost of batteries and increase the vehicle's range.

The tech major plans to use a unique "monocell" design that bulks up the individual cells in the battery and frees up space inside the battery pack by eliminating pouches and modules that hold battery materials.

The company is also examining a chemistry for the battery called or lithium iron phosphate, which is inherently less likely to overheat and is thus safer than other types of lithium-ion batteries.

Central to Apple's strategy is a new battery design that could "radically" reduce the cost of batteries and increase the vehicle's range, according to a third person who has seen Apple's battery design.

Apple declined to comment on its plans or future products.

Making a vehicle represents a supply chain challenge even for Apple, a company with deep pockets that makes hundreds of millions of electronics products each year with

parts from around the world, but has never made a car. It took Elon Musk's Tesla 17 years before it finally turned a sustained profit making cars.

"If there is one company on the planet that has the resources to do that, it's probably Apple. But at the same time, it's not a cellphone," said a person who worked on Project Titan.

It remains unclear who would assemble an Apple-branded car, but sources have said they expect the company to rely on a manufacturing partner to build vehicles.



And there is still a chance Apple will decide to reduce the scope of its efforts to an autonomous driving system that would be integrated with a car made by a traditional automaker, rather than the iPhone maker selling an Apple-branded car, one of the people added.

Apple has decided to tap outside partners for elements of the system, including lidar sensors, which help self-driving

cars get a three-dimensional view of the road, two people familiar with the company's plans told Reuters.

As for the car's battery, Apple plans to use a unique "monocell" design that bulks up the individual cells in the battery and frees up space inside the battery pack by eliminating pouches and modules that hold battery materials, one of the people said.

Apple's design means that more active material can be packed inside the battery, giving the car a potentially longer range. Apple is also examining a chemistry for the battery called LFP, or lithium iron phosphate, the person said, which is inherently less likely to overheat and is thus safer than other types of lithium-ion batteries.

"It's next level," the person said of Apple's battery technology. "Like the first time you saw the iPhone," he said. — Reuters

Centre begins process to sell stake in SCI

New Delhi, Dec. 22: The government on Tuesday invited expressions of interest for strategic disinvestment of its 63.75 per cent stake in Shipping Corp of India along with the transfer of management control.

The Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) has issued Preliminary Information Memorandum (PIM) inviting Expressions of Interest (EoI) from potential buyers by February 13, 2021.

Shares of Shipping Corp were trading at ₹86.30, up 4.54 per cent over its previous close on the BSE. At the current market price, the government's stake sale in Shipping Corp is valued at about ₹2,500 crore.

The government has appointed RBSA Capital Advisors LLP as its transaction advisor to manage the disinvestment process.

Shipping Corporation of India is largest Indian shipping company with a fleet strength of 59 vessels. It operates a fleet of 59 ships, including crude oil tankers, very large crude carriers, petroleum product carriers, liquefied petroleum gas carriers, bulk carriers, container ships and off-shore support vessels.

The state-owned shipping company owns and operates around one-third of the Indian tonnage, and has interests in practically all areas of the shipping business; servicing both national and international trades.

Prominent among the companies that have shown interest in acquiring a stake in Shipping Corporation of India are Vedanta Resources Ltd and Dubai's DP World.



● Shipping Corporation of India is largest Indian shipping company with a fleet strength of 59 vessels. It operates a fleet of 59 ships, including crude oil tankers, very large crude carriers, petroleum product carriers, liquefied petroleum gas carriers, bulk carriers, container ships and offshore support vessels.

Recently, Vedanta Resources has teamed up with Centricus Management Ltd to create a warchest of \$10 billion to acquire the state-run companies.

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs in November last year gave in-principle approval for the strategic divestment of Shipping Corp.

However, the plans were delayed due to the pandemic. The 2020-21 Budget has set a record divestment target of ₹2.1 lakh crore.

The government has so far raised ₹12,380 crore through minority stake sale in Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) and share buybacks this fiscal year. Strategic sale process of Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL) and Air India is ongoing and both the companies have received "multiple" EoI from potential buyers. — Agencies

Sebi to rope in agency to conduct risk assessment

New Delhi, Dec. 22: Capital markets regulator Sebi is looking to rope in an agency for performing in-depth risk assessment of its IT infrastructure.

The risk assessment needs to include identification of foreseeable threats, assessment of the likelihood and potential damage of these threats, and the sufficiency of controls to mitigate risks.

In a notice last week, the regulator has invited expression of interest (EoI) from solution providers to conduct risk assessment of IT infrastructure, prepare policy documents, standard operating procedures (SOPs), documentation of procedures and processes and other IT documents.

In addition, design specification document need to be prepared for all the selected processes for automation, the regulator added.

"Bidder is supposed to conduct risk assessment of IT infrastructure deployment at Sebi annually, calculate risk score accordingly, review controls and its impact on policies and SOPs and changes required in the reviewed policies and SOPs," the regulator said.

Sebi noted that IT risk and assessment helps to determine the vulnerabilities in information systems and the broader IT environment, assess the likelihood that a risky event will occur, and rank risks based on the risk estimate combined with the level of impact that it would cause if it occurs.

It will also help in identifying controls and measures required to be included in IT policies and SOP, it added. — PTI

Industry bodies to ask Centre to relook at new wage definition

New Delhi, Dec. 22: Representatives of industry bodies, including from CII and Ficci, will hold a meeting with the labour ministry top brass on Thursday to make a case for holding back implementation of new definition of wages, which would increase social security deductions and reduce take-home pay of workers.

"The representatives of CII and Ficci among other industry bodies would meet union labour ministry top brass on December 24, 2020 to discuss the new definition of

● Lobbyists want the government to hold back the new definition and fear that this would result in major cut in take-home salaries and also put additional burden on employers.

● The new definition will lead to a cut in workers' take-home pay while an increase in the employer's provident fund contribution liability.

wages which is likely to be implemented by April 1, 2021," an industry source said.

The source also said that lobbyists want the government to hold back the new definition and fear that this would result in major cut in take-home salaries

and also put additional burden on employers.

The new definition of wages is part of the Code on Wages, 2019 passed by Parliament last year. The rules to enforce the law was also firm up last year. Now, its implementation is planned from April

Firms step up hiring after Covid impact

New Delhi, Dec. 22: Adapting to the new hybrid normal of remote and office work, cautiously optimistic corporates are looking to hire more people and provide better appraisals in the new year as they step out of the pandemic-ravaged 2020.

The coronavirus pandemic emerged as the biggest inflection point for the Indian job landscape. For the corporates, work-from-home and remote workers became the new normal and for the professionals, online learning and digital skills took the centre-stage.

In 2020, most companies "deprioritised" their hiring plans amid uncertain economic outlook while industries like travel, hospitality, retail, aviation, real estate, construction and automobile were severely hit.

Nevertheless, there is a cautious optimism among

corporates and it is getting reflected in their recruitment plans for the new year. "Yes, the market is showing positive signs of recovery with almost all industries showing growth in hiring but with caution. Overall, the intent to hire recovered smartly from 11 per cent during the lockdown period to 18 per cent for HY (half year) and this number is growing," Deval Singh, business head, Mobilization (hiring) at TeamLease Services.

While there is caution in hiring, the market is displaying optimism.

He said there is a 50 per cent increase in employment opportunities from the lockdown days.

Pay cuts have been reversed since Diwali in most organisations and bonuses were issued in few. Some IT companies even declared early appraisals, he noted. — PTI

Daimler AG picks Infosys to manage automotive IT infra

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, DEC. 22

German auto major Daimler AG and Infosys on Tuesday entered into a long-term strategic partnership to drive hybrid cloud-powered innovation and IT infrastructure transformation in the automotive sector. Daimler is the company that manufactures Mercedes-Benz cars.

"After the receipt of all regulatory approvals, Daimler AG will transform its IT operating model and infrastructure landscape across workplace services, service desk, data centre, networks and SAP Basis together with Infosys," said a joint statement issued by the two companies.

"The partnership will enable the company to deepen its focus on software engineering and to



establish a fully-scalable on-demand digital IT infrastructure and any-time-anywhere workplace. The collaboration will empower Daimler to strengthen its IT capabilities, and Infosys, its automotive expertise."

"Daimler will work towards a model that ensures a robust IT infrastructure across its plants and regions, and supports consolidation of its data centers, scaling its IT operations, and bringing innovations to the fore," the joint statement said.

"As a part of this partnership, automotive IT

3.75 CR ITRs FILED FOR 2019-20 FISCAL

New Delhi, Dec. 22: As many as 3.75 crore taxpayers have already filed their Income-Tax returns for Assessment Year 2020-21 (fiscal year 2019-20) till December 21, the Income Tax department said on Tuesday.

"Do you know that 3.75 crore taxpayers have already filed their Income Tax Returns for AY 2020-21 till 21st December, 2020? Have you filed yours yet? If not, File NOW!", the Income Tax department tweeted.

This includes 2.17 crore taxpayers filing ITR-1, 79.82 lakh filing ITR-4, 43.18 lakh ITR-3 and 26.56 lakh filing ITR-2. The deadline to file I-T returns by individual taxpayers for 2019-20 fiscal (Assessment Year 2020-21) ends on December 31, 2020, while

the same for taxpayers whose accounts require to be audited is January 31, 2021.

The due date has been extended from July 31 and October 31, 2020, respectively in view of the Covid pandemic.

At the close of deadline for filing ITR without payment of late fees for fiscal 2018-19 (assessment year 2019-20), over 5.65 crore returns were filed by taxpayers.

The deadline last year too was extended till August 31.

Giving a comparative analysis of the ITRs filed, the Income Tax department said 3.63 crore income-tax returns were filed till August 21, 2019, compared to 3.75 crore filed till December 21, 2020. — PTI

BIG | BUCKS

Tech firms Glance and VerSe Innovation crossed \$1-billion valuation Google backs two social media unicorns

Mumbai, Dec. 22: Google investments helped create India's two youngest technology unicorns: a pair of startups that feed personalised news and entertainment to the world's fastest-growing smartphone population.

Glance, which feeds news and sports scores to phone-lock screens, is said to have reached a valuation of more than \$1 billion after completing a funding round led by Google. And VerSe Innovation Pvt, the daily hunt news site and TikTok-like Josh app, said it passed that threshold after winning more than \$100 million from Google and Microsoft Corp.

Google and its Ameri-



can internet peers are steadily amping up their investment in India, latching onto the only other country with a billion-plus population after getting shut out of China.

From Amazon.com Inc. to Facebook Inc., they're hoping to get in on the ground floor of what they envision as a smartphone

and online commerce boom that could eventually create a market to rival the world's No. 2 economy.

The online search leader has struck an alliance with Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Industries Ltd. to invest \$4.5 billion and cooperate on technology initiatives including the development of afford-

able mobile phones. But they're also teaming with smaller outfits to target more local audiences.

"In the last two years alone, 100 million new internet users have come online from rural India," Google vice-president Caesar Sengupta wrote in a blog post on Tuesday, announcing its investment in VerSe. "But many of these internet users continue to have trouble finding content to read or services they can use confidently, in their own language."

Of the two, Bengaluru headquartered Glance Digital Experience Pvt is the more nascent outfit. It's the second unicorn to emerge from the group that created InMobi, a

cloud marketing platform that became India's earliest tech startup to reach the milestone. That group was founded by 43-year-old Naveen Tewari, alumnus of the prestigious IIT and the holder of an MBA from Harvard Business School. On Tuesday, his 18-month-old firm announced it had scored \$145 of investment from Google and billionaire Peter Thiel's Mithril Capital.

Glance currently has 115 million daily active users who average 25 minutes on the app each day. The app operates only in the Android ecosystem and has partnered with leading device makers including Samsung Electronics, Xiaomi Corp., Oppo and Vivo. — Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Cole's goal settles point for Odisha

Goa: It could have been another defeat but Odisha FC clawed back a point despite taking the lead early against NorthEast United, drawing 2-2 in a Indian Super League game at the GMC Stadium, here on Tuesday. Odisha took the lead through Diego Mauricio (26') before Benjamin Lambot (45+1') drew parity. Kwesti Appiah (65') then converted a penalty to put the Highlanders ahead but soon saw his goal cancelled out by Cole Alexander (67'). Odisha named an unchanged eleven from the side that lost to Bengaluru FC while NorthEast coach Gerard Nus rang in four changes with Federico Gallego handed a start. The first half saw a cagey contest with both sides heading into the break level after creating plenty of chances. The first big chance of the game arrived during the 10th minute but Odisha keeper Arshdeep Singh produced a fine save to deny an opener for the Highlanders.

Don's Test cap sells for \$340k

Sydney: An Australian businessman has purchased Donald Bradman's first baggy green Test cap for 450,000 Australian dollars (\$340,000) at auction, the second-highest price paid for a piece of cricket memorabilia. Peter Freedman, the founder of Rode Microphones who earlier this year paid 9 million Australian dollars (\$6.8 million) at an auction for a guitar used by Nirvana front man Kurt Cobain, plans to tour Bradman's Test debut cap around Australia. "The price for Bradman's 1928 Australia cap sits behind the 1,007,500 (\$760,000) paid at auction for Australian leg-spinner Shane Warne's Test cap earlier this year the world-record price for an item of cricket memorabilia," auction officials said. — AP

CAC to interview new selectors

New Delhi: The BCCI's general body on Thursday will form a new Cricket Advisory Committee (CAC), which will pick three national selectors ahead of the series against England, starting February. It is learnt that the committee headed by Madan Lal was appointed for one meeting and after the Board's upcoming Annual General Meeting (AGM) in Ahmedabad, a new CAC will take over and conduct the interviews.

"Madan Lal, Rudra Pratap Singh and Sulakshana Naik were appointed for one meeting where Sunil Joshi and Harvinder Singh became selectors," a senior BCCI source told on conditions of anonymity. "Since all cricket committees will be formed after the AGM, the new CAC will be formed and then the interview process is expected to start after that," he added. — PTI

Pakistan win third T20 in NZ

Napier, New Zealand: New Test captain Mohammad Rizwan showed his leadership quality in a bold innings of 89 which steered Pakistan to a four-wicket win over New Zealand in the third Twenty20 on Tuesday. Rizwan will lead Pakistan in the two-match Test series against New Zealand starting on Sunday in place of Babar Azam, who is injured. With Rizwan's leadership, Pakistan surpassed New Zealand's moderate total of 173-7 with two balls to spare. Rizwan batted his team within sight of victory when he was out in the final over at 171-6. — AP

Brief scores: New Zealand 173/7 (Conway 63, Ashraf 3-20) lost to Pakistan 177/6 (Rizwan 89, Southee 2-25).

Live on TV

CRICKET

Big Bash League: Brisbane Heat vs Adelaide Strikers from 1.45 pm on Sony Six, HD

FOOTBALL

Indian Super League: Jamshedpur vs Goa from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

Italian League: Verona vs Inter Milan from 11 pm; AC Milan vs Lazio from 1.15 am (Thursday) on Sony Ten 2; Napoli vs Torino from 1.15 am (Thursday) on Sony Ten 1; Roma vs Cagliari from 1.15 am (Thursday) on Sony Six, HD

WWE

NXT: Bouts from 6.30 am (Thursday) on Sony Ten 1, HD

KOHLI SIGNS OFF

After pep talk, Virat leaves Australian shores for India

Adelaide, Dec. 22: Indian captain Virat Kohli left Australian shores on Tuesday after a pep talk with his beleaguered teammates, handing over the mantle of leading the side to Ajinkya Rahane in the remaining three Tests.

Kohli is coming back to India for the birth of his first child in January.

Before boarding his flight back home, the star batsman met his teammates and encouraged them to give their all in the remainder of the series, which the visitors trail 0-1 after the heavy defeat in the opening Test.

Long before setting foot on Australia, Rahane had been entrusted with the responsibility of leading in the team in Kohli's absence after the star had approached the BCCI for paternity leave.

The idea behind organising the pep talk was to boost the confidence of the players and keep them in a positive frame of mind heading into the crucial Boxing Day Test in Melbourne.

India lost the lung-opener here inside three days after crumpling to their lowest Test score of 36.

The second Test is scheduled to be held at the iconic Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) from December 26-30.

Kohli, who has been leading the Test team since 2014, urged his players to show intent and express themselves on the field without any inhibition.

While Kohli has departed for India, his white-ball deputy Rohit Sharma is quarantining in Sydney.

Kohli was India's best performer with the bat in the series opener, top-scoring with a sedate 74 in their first innings before being run out following a misunderstanding with Rahane. — PTI

● **Before boarding his flight back home, Virat Kohli met his teammates and encouraged them to give their all in the remainder of the series**

ENGLAND TOUR STILL ON DESPITE NEW COVID WAVE

Colombo, Dec. 22: The new strain of Covid-19 that has hit the United Kingdom will not jeopardise England's upcoming tour of Sri Lanka even though the development is a cause of concern, the country's cricket board (SLC) said on Tuesday. Sri Lanka Cricket's (SLC) medical team feels that the tour starting January 14 is on schedule but additional Covid-19 protocols might be enforced for the visitors either before leaving their country or after arriving here.

According to a report in *ESPNCricinfo*, SLC's medical team is expected to hold discussions with their English counterparts on Tuesday on the matter. "I don't think we should (look at the new strain as something that jeopardises the

tour)," said Sri Lankan team's doctor Daminda Attanayake.

"We might have to take extra precautions, but we don't need to stop the tour."

As per the itinerary, the England squad is scheduled to fly to Sri Lanka on a chartered flight on January 2.

After their arrival here, the tourists would be required to undergo a three-day isolated quarantine, and will only begin their training after testing negative.

The English players will mingle with their Sri Lankan counterparts only after 10 days.

"When they come in they will not be in contact with my local people or the local providers, and they will be in quarantine. I don't see why we need to restrict them coming." — PTI



Australia's Steve Smith (left) and Virat Kohli during the first Test in Adelaide.

— AFP

Virat deserves respect: Smith

Adelaide, Dec. 22: Australian batsman Steve Smith on Tuesday said Virat Kohli deserves credit for prioritising the birth of his child over cricket as "there would have been a lot of pressure" on the India skipper to stay for the entire duration of the ongoing Test series.

India are 0-1 down in the four-match rubber after losing the opening Test by eight wickets during which they also collapsed to their lowest Test score. Kohli will head home on

Tuesday. "Obviously, it's a big loss for India, not having him for the rest of the series. We just have to look at the way he played in the first innings. That was a pretty class display against some good bowling on a wicket that was doing a bit," Smith said during a virtual press conference.

"I just fist-pumped him at the end (of first Test) and said 'Mate safe travels, hope everything goes well with the baby, and pass on my best to your wife.' That was about it,"

Smith said.

"I'm sure there would have been a lot of pressure for him to stay but to stand up and want to go home for the birth of his first child, it's a credit for him. It's a milestone that he certainly wouldn't want to miss."

Kohli's 74 was the highest score by any batsman on either side in the first innings of the pink-ball day/night Test while Smith was out for 1.

Smith was also asked about legendary Australian spinner Shane

Warne's view that red ball is "pathetic" and pink ball should replace it in all Tests. He disagreed with the idea.

"Personally I'd like to keep red-ball cricket alive. I think one series or something like that is a good amount. We've seen in Adelaide for instance it's worked exceptionally well, it's a great spectacle. We played some really good day/night games."

"But I think overall, I'd like to personally play red ball cricket a lot," Smith said. — PTI

MUMBAI NIGHTCLUB | RAID

Raina sorry for Covid violation

Mumbai, Dec. 22: Former India cricketer Suresh Raina, who was among 34 people arrested and released on bail by Mumbai Police for violating COVID-19 social distancing norms at a club here, has regretted the "unintentional and unfortunate" incident.

A statement issued by the former batsman's management team said the 34-year old was not aware of the local timings and protocols at the time of the incident.

"Suresh was in Mumbai for a shoot which extended to late hours and was invited by a friend for a quick dinner post the same prior to him taking his flight back to Delhi. He was not aware of the local timings and protocols," said the statement.

"Once pointed out, he (Raina) immediately complied with the procedures laid out by the authorities and regrets the unfortunate and unintentional incident."

"He (Raina) always holds rules and laws laid down by governing bodies with the highest regard and will continue to do so in the future as well," it added.

Thirty-four people including Raina and Bollywood celebrity



Suresh Raina

Sussanne Khan were arrested after a raid at a posh club near the Mumbai airport on Tuesday for violating social distancing norms.

According to the police, those arrested in the raid at the Dragonfly Experience included seven staffers of the club.

The 13 women, who were arrested, were allowed to leave after being served notices. The men were shown as arrested and granted bail later.

Police said the raid was conducted after the club remained open beyond the permissible time limit and violated Covid-19 norms.

Raina, who has played 18 Tests, 226 ODIs and 78 T20s, announced retirement from international cricket in August earlier this year. — PTI



P.V. Sindhu

Sindhu hopeful of travelling from UK

New Delhi, Dec. 22: Unfazed by the worsening Covid-19 situation in England where she is training right now, world champion shuttler P.V. Sindhu on Tuesday said that she remains hopeful of travelling to Thailand for tournaments in January despite countries increasingly banning flights from the UK.

Sindhu, who has qualified for the Tokyo Olympics, has been training in London for the last two months and is scheduled to play her first tournament since the break in Thailand. She will have to be in Bangkok by January 3 to compete in the two Super 1000 events (January 12 to 17 and January 19 to 24).

"I plan to travel in the first week of January. There is no travel ban from UK in Thailand, so I can travel from Doha. The idea is to use the Gulf route to reach Thailand," said Sindhu, who is managed by sports management firm Baseline Ventures.

Several countries around the world, including India, have imposed bans on

flights on the UK because of a new and seemingly more contagious strain of the coronavirus in England.

The 25-year-old had left for London in October to focus on her nutrition and fitness at the Gatorade Sports Science Institute (GSSI) and also has been training alongside British shuttlers Toby Penty and Rajiv Ouseph at the National Training Centre.

"Thankfully, my training is going on pretty well. The national center is not closed. It is run as a bubble center, so I have been able to practice ahead of the events in Thailand," Sindhu said.

The Thailand leg will mark the return of international badminton but the country has been dealing with pro-democracy protest movements and has recently seen a spike in Covid-19 cases as well.

Last Saturday, health officials in Thailand reported 548 new cases, most victims being migrant workers of the seafood industry in Samut Sakhon province, 34 kilometers southwest of Bangkok. — PTI

Waugh sees 'no hope' of India bouncing back

Melbourne, Dec. 22: The Indian cricket team has "no hope" of making a comeback after the humiliation in Adelaide and will suffer a 4-0 whitewash in the four-match Test series against Australia, feels former batsman Mark Waugh.

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

Asked if India could bounce back after losing the first Test, Waugh said: "No hope, no hope."

"I thought Adelaide was the Test that they could win on paper and with Virat Kohli here for just the one Test. I thought the conditions would suit them."

"I just can't see how they can bounce back (after) Australia whitewashed them on the third day. So



Mark Waugh

'no' is the answer four-nil to Australia," he said on *Fox Cricket*.

CA SAYS SMITH NOT ONLY CAPTAINCY CANDIDATE

Batting mainstay Steve Smith's reappointment as Australia's Test captain is far from certain as the sport's governing body in the country feels there are

some "great young leaders" coming through the system.

Smith was removed from captaincy due to his involvement in the 2018 ball-tampering scandal, with Cricket Australia (CA) appointing Tim Paine to the top job.

However, there have been speculations recently that Smith could be reinstated as skipper.

Asked about the board's view, CA chairman Earl Eddings told *ESPNCricinfo*: "First of all we've got three great captains in Meg, Aaron and Tim. We've got some great young leaders coming through. So it's not just about should Steve take over; it's about what's best overall."

"Steve's a great young man and he was a good captain when he was there. Like any succession there's planning in place." — PTI

Abraham hammers West Ham

London, Dec. 22: Tammy Abraham hit a quickfire late double on Monday as Chelsea beat West Ham 3-0 to reignite their Premier League challenge after a consecutive defeats.

The Hammers proved tricky opponents at an empty Stamford Bridge but lacked the firepower to hurt Frank Lampard's men, who led early through Thiago Silva's bullet header.

Chelsea enjoyed a strong start to the season before losses to Everton and Wolves checked their progress but the victory at the London Stadium lifts them into fifth spot.

Champions Liverpool have opened up a five-point gap at the top of the table but behind them, just seven points separate second-

placed Leicester from 11th-placed Wolves.

"It was nice to see that at the end because we had a period at 1-0 where it was tough, we dealt with that well," Lampard told the BBC.

"We dropped off slightly and it was important tonight we came back," he added.

"There were loads of things for the team to show their character — we want more."

West Ham had the ball in the net in the seventh minute after a cleverly worked free kick but Declan Rice was denied by the off-side flag after an impressive finish from a tight angle.

Three minutes later Chelsea were in front when

THE RESULTS

Burnley (Barnes 35, Wood 51)	2
Wolves (Silva 89-pen)	1
Chelsea (Silva 10, Abraham 78, 80)	3
West Ham	0

Silva powered home a header from Mason Mount's corner.

WERNER GOAL DROUGHT

Timo Werner, who has not scored for Chelsea since early November, had a golden chance to double their lead in the closing minutes of the first period but got

the ball caught under his feet and Fabianski saved comfortably.

The win lifts Chelsea to 25 points — one behind fourth-placed Everton — while West Ham stay in 10th place.

— AFP

Regd. No. TNENG/2010/35692
Printed & Published by K. Sudhakar on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited and Printed at Deccan Chronicle Presses situated at SP 3, Developed Plot, Industrial Estate, Guindy, Chennai - 600 032. RNI Registration No: TN ENG/2005/14987 Ph Nos: 22254747, 22254748, 22254750, 22254751 Editor: KAUSHIK MITTER



Chelsea's Tammy Abraham celebrates after scoring his team's second goal during their English Premier League match against West Ham at Stamford Bridge in London on Monday.

— AP