

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

COIMBATORE | THURSDAY 3 | DECEMBER 2020

WEATHER



Max: 26°C
Min: 22°C
Rainfall: 8 mm

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Karthigai 18
Tithi: Thrithiyai
Star: Thiruvathirai/
Punarpusam
Rahukalam:
1.30 pm to 3 pm
Yamagandam:
6 am to 7.30 am

PRAYERS

Fajar: 5.00 am
Zohar: 12.03 pm
Asar: 3.14 pm
Maghrib: 5.40 pm
Isha: 6.55 pm

SUNSET TODAY 5.41 PM

SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.17 AM

MOONRISE TODAY 8.14 PM

MOONSET TOMORROW 9.30 AM

CORONA COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+31,357)	(+467)
95,31,109	1,38,627

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+1,428)
TN: 7,84,747 11,733

WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

6,45,26,022

DEATHS

14,93,487

218

worldometers.info

PM briefed on internal security situation at DGPs meet

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi was Wednesday briefed on the country's internal security situation and how to improve it by taking people-friendly initiatives.

A review of the internal security situation was presented to the prime minister and Union Home Minister Amit Shah at the 55th annual DGPs and IGP's conference, being held virtually, on the inaugural day.

Exports dip 9% in Nov; trade deficit narrows to US\$ 9.96 bn: Govt data

New Delhi: India's exports fell 9 per cent to US\$ 23.43 billion in November due to a drop in shipments of segments such as petroleum products, engineering and chemicals, even as the trade deficit narrowed to US\$ 9.96 billion during the month, according to official data released on Wednesday.

Imports also slipped 13.33 per cent to US\$ 33.39 billion in the month under review.

2,000 pilgrims to be allowed in Sabari; 3,000 on weekends

Thiruvananthapuram: The Kerala government has decided to increase the number of pilgrims visiting Sabarimala temple on weekdays from 1,000 to 2,000. On Saturdays and Sundays, the number has been raised from 2,000 to 3,000.

COUNTER POINT



The EC should give us the 'Vote From Home' option!

STATE | 4

CM's ex-gratia to kin of cyclone victim



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■ **Protesters threaten to block other Delhi roads**

Farmers demand special session to repeal farm laws

SANJAY KAW & RAJNISH SHARMA | DC NEW DELHI, DEC. 2

With support pouring in from various quarters, the farmers protesting on the borders of Delhi seem all set to go for their meeting with Union ministers on Thursday in a belligerent and not a conciliatory mood.

On Wednesday, a day before their second round of talks with the Union government, the protesting farmers asked that a special session of Parliament be convened to repeal the three farm laws. They reiterated that if their demands are not met, they will intensify their stir by blocking all entry points to Delhi and hold a nationwide protest on December 5.

Union agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar along with minister of commerce and industry Piyush Goyal held a marathon meeting at home minister Amit Shah's residence to discuss ways to resolve the ongoing crisis. After the meeting, Mr Tomar said, "We will hold discussions with farmers' leaders tomorrow. Let's see to what extent issues can be resolved." On Tuesday, his meeting with 35-odd farmers' union leaders was "inconclusive". The protesting farmers rejected the government's offer to be part of a panel to look into their concerns.



Police use water cannons and barricades to stop Youth Congress workers who were marching towards Haryana CM Manohar Lal's residence in protest over new farm laws, in Chandigarh, on Wednesday.

Security officials said that the farmers are prepared for a long haul and seem prepared to continue their agitation for several months.

While Mr Tomar hopes to address the farmers' concerns at Thursday's meeting, the home ministry is taking no chances and has kept 50 additional companies of paramilitary forces on standby to meet any eventuality.

The All-India Motor Transport Congress (AIMTC), an umbrella body of goods' vehicles operators, on Wednesday expressed solidarity with the protesting farmers and threatened to halt the movement of goods across north India and subsequently the entire country if their demands are not

met. AIMTC also called for a strike from December 8 in support of the farmers' protest.

"From December 8 onwards we will shut all our operations across North India and stop all our vehicles across North Indian states and Union territories, including Delhi, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Himachal, and Jammu & Kashmir. We have decided that if the government still does not agree to the demands of the protesting farmers, then we will call for a Chakka Jam all across India and stop all our vehicles," said AIMTC president Kultaran Singh Atwal.

As the standoff between the Centre and farmers continued for the seventh day, commuters faced a harrow-

ing time on Wednesday with long traffic jams reported from various parts of the city.

Farmers are currently camping at five spots around Delhi, with tractors, trucks and trailers packed with food, water, medicines and essential goods blocking key entrances to the city. Heavy deployment of police force and barricades at various other entry points into the city worsened the traffic snarls in and around Delhi.

While police kept the Haryana-Delhi border at Singhu and Tikri closed for traffic, farmers from various districts of western Uttar Pradesh continued their sit-in at the Noida-Delhi border for the second day on Wednesday, leading to closure of a key route that connects the state with the national capital.

In Chandigarh, the police had to use water cannons to prevent Punjab Youth Congress workers from marching towards Haryana chief minister M.L. Khattar's residence.

More farmer groups and unions from Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh are scheduled to reach Delhi by the weekend. With the number of protesting farmers likely to reach three lakh, reinforcements have been kept ready so that they can be deployed at a short notice at Delhi borders.

TN allows holy communion, PG classes to resume

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, DEC. 2

The Tamil Nadu government on Wednesday allowed more relaxations in the lockdown, including allowing eucharist/holy communion in churches and opening of research and post-graduate courses in colleges.

"In modification of the standard operating p procedures issued for Christian religious places, the government hereby permits the eucharist/holy communion with the condition that eucharist should be offered to the devotees only in individual cups," an order issued by chief secretary K. Shanmugam said.

Classes for final year undergraduate students pursuing arts, science, technical engineering, medicine, agriculture, fisheries, and veterinary sciences will also reopen on December 7. The students can attend classes in all colleges wearing face mask and after undergoing thermal tests.

Sasikala seeks remission, may be freed by early Jan

Bengaluru, Dec. 2: Late Tamil Nadu Chief Minister J. Jayalalithaa's close aide V.K. Sasikala, serving a four-year jail term on graft charges, has sought remission and early release from prison, official sources said on Wednesday.

Ms Sasikala, lodged at the Parappana Agrahara prison here, is expected to come out on January 27, 2021 after she deposited Rs 10 crore fine at a special court.

However, she has applied for remission of her jail term to come out early, sources close to the leader said.

The prison authorities have forwarded her application to higher officials.

"She has applied for remission of her jail term and it has been forwarded to the head of the department for their consideration," a source said.

Authorities are yet to take a call on it.

After the Supreme Court restored the trial court judgment in toto against ms Sasikala and two of her close relatives in the dispropo-



● **As per norms, three days of remission for good conduct is available for every month in jail and so far, Sasikala has completed 43 months, making her eligible for a reduction of 135 days in prison.**

portionate assets case, she surrendered before the court in Karnataka on February 15, 2017 and has been lodged in Parappana Agrahara Central Jail since then.

Her two relatives are also undergoing four years simple imprisonment and all three of them were slapped with a fine of Rs 10 crore each. ith the death of Jayalalithaa in 2016, who was the first accused in the case, the appeal by Karnataka against her stood abated.

As per norms, three days of remission for good conduct is available for every month in jail and so far, she has completed 43 months,

making her eligible for a reduction of 135 days in prison.

"As per the Karnataka Prison Manual, I strongly believe that she will be released by the month end," her advocate N. Raja Senthoo Pandian had earlier said.

When the remission of 129 days is applied, the release will be during the month end and not the previously expected date of January 2021, he had said.

Ms Sasikala has already spent a total of 35 days in jail in 1997 and 2014 and availed a 17 day parole in 2017, which is deducted from the period she already served, he had said. — PTI

Former judge Karnan held for abusive video

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, DEC. 2

Former judge of the Madras and Culcatta High Courts Justice C.S. Karnan was arrested at Avadi in Chennai on Wednesday, nearly a month after a case was registered against him for an abusive Whatsapp video in which he made allegations against judges of the High Court and the Supreme Court.

Justice Karnan, who was presented before a magistrate, was remanded in judicial custody. He has been lodged in Puzhal prison. In the video which went viral on social media platforms, the former judge had alleged that the Supreme Court and High Court judges "sexually assaulted" women staff. He even revealed the names of the alleged survivors.

The video triggered wide protests and a group of 10



women lawyers had submitted a letter to the Chief Justice of India seeking action against the judge. They also demanded action against those involved in recording and circulating the video. The lawyers requested the Chief Justice of India to instruct the website and social media platforms to take down the video.

Following this, the cyber crime wing of Chennai police on October 28 registered a case against Justice Karnan under various sections of Tamil Nadu Prohibition of Harassment of Women Act and Information Technology Act, apart from sections of Indian Penal Code.

CHINA PLANNED GALWAN CLASH, SAYS US REPORT

PAWAN BALI | DC NEW DELHI, DEC. 2

Chinese government had planned the violent clash with the Indian army in Galwan Valley in the Ladakh sector in June "including the possibility for fatalities," said a US commission report.

"Some evidence suggested the Chinese government had planned the incident, potentially including the possibility for fatalities," said the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission in its annual report to US Congress.

For instance, the report said, several weeks prior to the clash, Chinese Defense Minister Wei Fenghe made his statement encouraging Beijing to "use fighting to promote stability." "Satellite images depicted a large Chinese buildup in the Galwan Valley, including potentially 1,000 PLA soldiers, the week before the deadly skirmish," said the report. In June 2020, the PLA and Indian troops engaged in a massive physical brawl in the Galwan Valley, located in the far-western Ladakh region along the LAC separating the two countries. ■ P5

SC rejects Vedanta plea for opening Thoothukudi plant

New Delhi, Dec. 2: The Supreme Court on Wednesday dismissed the interim plea of mining major Vedanta Ltd seeking permission to inspect its Sterlite copper unit at Thoothukudi in Tamil Nadu, which has remained closed since May 2008 over pollution concerns, and to operate it for four weeks to assess the pollution level.

Vedanta had sought handing over of the plant for three months saying it requires two months to start the unit and the company should be allowed to

run it for four weeks to ascertain whether its polluting or not.

The interim plea by Vedanta was opposed by Tamil Nadu government which claimed before a bench headed by Justice R.F. Nariman that the plant had been "polluting consistently".

Senior advocate A.M. Singhvi, appearing for the mining major, told the apex court that it is a "case of mala fide closure of the plant" and Vedanta is producing 36 per cent of copper demand of the country.

● **"Allow us to run (the plant) for four weeks and it can be proved whether we are polluting beyond the point," Mr Singhvi told the bench, also comprising Justices Navin Sinha and K.M. Joseph**

"Allow us to run (the plant) for four weeks and it can be proved whether we are polluting beyond the point," Mr Singhvi told the bench, also comprising Justices Navin Sinha and K.M. Joseph. Senior advocate Colin



Gonsalves, appearing for some villagers who are residing nearby the plant, claimed that the unit should not be allowed to operate as water is getting contaminated there and people are suffering from diseases like cancer.

The bench, while holding that interim plea of Vedanta cannot be allowed, said that final hearing in the matter can be heard after physical hearing starts in the apex court.

In August, Vedanta had moved the apex court challenging the Madras High Court order refusing to allow reopening of the plant. The High Court had upheld the orders of Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board (TNPCB) directing closure of the unit in May 2018. Vedanta

had approached the High Court in February 2019, seeking to reopen Sterlite plant which was closed following a May 23, 2018 order issued by the TNPCB in the backdrop of violent protests against the unit which left 13 people dead in police firing on May 21 and 22, 2018.

It had filed the petition in the high court as suggested by the Supreme Court, which had on February 18 last year set aside the National Green Tribunal order that allowed opening of Sterlite plant. — PTI



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IN BRIEF



Physically challenged persons stage a protest over several demands at Vellore collectorate on Wednesday.

— K. Senthil Nathan

Six flights cancelled in Chennai airport

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 2

Owing to Cyclonic storm Burevi, six domestic flight services were cancelled at the Chennai Airport on Wednesday.

According to airport sources, three flights from Chennai Airport to Tuticorin, Kochi and Trichy and three incoming flights from these three destinations were cancelled.

The IMD issued a cyclone warning for south Tamil Nadu and south Kerala coasts on Wednesday. It said cyclone Burevi is likely to cross Tamil Nadu coast between Kanyakumari and Pamban during December 3 night and December 4 morning. However, Burevi is unlikely to be as intense as Nivar.

Public foil ATM robbery bid

DC CORRESPONDENT
PUDUKOTTAI, DEC. 2

The public foiled an ATM robbery attempt by a miscreant at Aranthangi in Pudukkottai district late on Tuesday night.

The police said the attempt by one Sivakumar of Arasarkulam, to break open the ATM of IDBI Bank with the help of a brick chamber, was spotted by passers-by who caught hold of the miscreant and alerted the police. Police arrested the accused and started the investigation.

VAOs suspended for misbehaviour

DC CORRESPONDENT
ARIYALUR, DEC. 2

Ariyalur revenue divisional officer Ms Jothi on Wednesday suspended two village administrative officers who allegedly misbehaved with the general public in an inebriated condition during the office hours.

According to Ms. Jothi, the suspended VAOs are Purushothaman of Periyannagalur village and S. Sivarasan of Kamarasvalli village in Ariyalur district. The general public gave a complaint to the district collector, Ms. T. Ratna, against the VAOs' behaviour. Following this, Ms. Ratna ordered the Ariyalur RDO to suspend the VAOs. As per the collector's order, they were suspended, Ms. Jothi added.

Tourists prefer own vehicles, shun public transportation

T. SUDHEESH | DC
CHENNAI, DEC. 2

With the state government deciding to open up the tourism sector, private travelling has started gaining momentum as families are still hesitant to use public transport. The sector, still reeling under the Covid-19 impact, was ordered to fully open up in the latest phase of unlocking rules issued by the government a couple of days ago.

Senthan Amuthan, a leading tour operator in Chennai, said they were getting many enquiries about accommodation facilities instead of tour packages after the government opened up the sector.

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“People want to be safe. Hence they choose their own vehicle to travel. I hope there will be a strong momentum in the industry by next April”, he said.

As per the latest lockdown guidelines, the beaches and tourism spots in the state will reopen by mid-December.

M.K. Ajit Kumar,

spokesperson of the South India MICE Association (SIMA), said the hospitality business in Puducherry, one of the tourism spots in south India, had already seen brisk business during weekends. “We came to know that almost all resorts there are fully occupied by tourists during weekends. The hotels have started charging special prices due to the demand for weekend rooms. The tourists there are mainly from Chennai and Bengaluru who want to spend quality time with family. But travellers are very cautious of travel safety. So they are neither travelling by aircraft nor cabs. They choose their

own vehicle to ensure safety”, he said.

According to him, the MICE (Meetings Incentives Conferences and Exhibitions) industry in India had expected 8 per cent growth in pre-Covid-19 scenario. Approximately 12,000 MICE conventions would have taken place during the pre-Covid period. So the reports from tourism destinations like Puducherry is a positive sign for the industry”, he said.

The opening up of all destinations is expected to see a steady footfall in popular hill stations like Kodaikkannal, Ooty and Coonoor or temple towns like Madurai, Kancheepuram and Tiruvannamalai.

Gold, gadgets and cigarettes seized by customs dept

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 2

Chennai air customs on Wednesday seized gold, iPhones, cigarettes, used desktops worth ₹ 22.66 lakh and arrested one person in connection with the smuggling.

According to the official press release from the Commissioner of Customs, Chennai Airport, on Wednesday based on intelligence two passengers Sathik Abdul Mannan (46) and Thameemun Ansari Abdul Rashid (34) of Ramanathapuram, who arrived from Dubai by Air India Express Flight IX 1644 were intercepted at the exit on suspicion of carrying gold.

On their search two cut bits weighing 98 grams, and one gold paste bundle of 169 grams which yielded 142 grams gold. Total 240 grams of gold of 24 K purity valued at ₹12 lakh was seized. On examination of their check in baggage eleven pieces of iPhone 12.45 cartons of cigarettes of brands Gudang Garam and Benson & Hedges and 11 refurbished Lenovo desktops valued at ₹10.66 lakh were recovered and seized.

Thameemun Ansari Abdul Rashid was arrested as he had a previous offence against him. In total goods valued at Rs. 22.66 lakhs seized under the Customs Act. Further investigation is under progress.

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Taking charge



The newly elected office-bearers of the Tamil Film Producers Council assume charge in the city on Wednesday. Minister Kadambur Raju hands over the certificate to winners including president Murali Ramasamy, VPs R.K. Suresh and Kathiresan, secretary Radhakrishnan, treasurer Chandraprakash Jain and 21 EC members.

— DC

‘Take Me Back’ launched in city

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 2

‘Take Me Back’, an initiative for efficient waste segregation and recycling of used cartons, was launched in the city.

Conceived by Wasted 360 Solutions and Tetra Pak, a Chennai-based creative waste management social venture in consultation with the Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC), the initiative is expected to be not just a solution to an environmental challenge, but also a catalyst for socio-economic development of the underprivileged.

Inaugurating the initiative, Mr G. Prakash, Commissioner, GCC, said that programmes like ‘Take Me Back’ will go a long way in making people aware of waste segregation and help recover recyclable material that can continue to serve the society in the form of new recycled utility products. It can also help to bring

“We have been on the journey of building and strengthening the carton recycling ecosystem in the country for over 16 years, and through partnerships with various stakeholders, around 40 per cent cartons sold are already being recycled”

about a behavioural change among the people of Chennai,” he said.

As part of this city-wide campaign, consumers will now have over 20 deposit points for their used beverage cartons at various retail stores across the city. All collection centre details are available on the website www.takebackcampaign.com. Citizens can also reach out to Dunzo, the logistics partner for the initiative, to provide free doorstep pickup of 50 or more used cartons.

“We have been on the journey of building and strengthening the carton recycling ecosystem in the country for over 16 years, and through partnerships

with various stakeholders, around 40 per cent cartons sold are already being recycled,” said Jaideep Gokhale, sustainability director, Tetra Pak South Asia.

For sorting of used cartons, Tetra Pak has associated with Arpanam Trust, a local NGO working for the empowerment of women and children. Through the partnership, women at the trust will have the opportunity to earn a living and augment their household income. Finally, the collected cartons will be recycled into various useful items like furniture, infrastructure and more and donated to lesser-privileged communities.

Actor Gautham Karthik’s phone snatched while he was cycling

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 2

Unidentified persons on a bike snatched the mobile phone of Gautham Karthik, while he was cycling in TTK Road on Wednesday morning.

According to police, Gautam Karthik, 31, actor and son of veteran actor Karthik, was cycling on TTK Road around 5:30 am on Wednesday. Two men on a bike came from



behind him and snatched his mobile phone and sped away. He lodged a complaint with the police after the incident. Based

on a complaint, the Mylapore police have launched a hunt for the suspects with the help of CCTV footage.

An officer said that Gautam had kept the phone on the handlebar while using it to navigate which made it easy for the accused to snatch it away. The actor did not suffer any injuries in the incident, said the police. Investigations are underway.

Israeli delegation visits Thally centre of excellence

DC CORRESPONDENT
KRISHNAGIRI, DEC. 2

An Israeli delegation, headed by Mr. Jonathan Zadka, consul general to south India, visited the centre of excellence for cut flowers at Thally in the district.

Mr Zadka told reporters that the centre is an example of Indo-Israel friendship and collaboration in promoting scientific farming methods.

The centre, inaugurated in 2017, not only promotes scientific cultivation methods and but also enables both countries to work together in agricultural research activities.

The centre also gives farmers from across the country training in cut-flower cultivation. They are also updated about the modern methods

Mr Zadka told reporters that the centre is an example of Indo-Israel friendship and collaboration in promoting scientific farming methods

introduced in this sector.

Thally is the first centre in the country for cut-flowers. Another centre at Reddiar Chattram in Dindugal district was started for the benefit of vegetable farmers.

These two centres were started as part of ‘Indo-Israel cooperation in agriculture’, an agreement signed between the two countries in 2008.

Other states including Haryana, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Punjab, Gujarat, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Bengal and Bihar also have similar centres.

Burevi: Cargo handling at VOC Port hit

DC CORRESPONDENT
THOOTHUKUDI, DEC. 2

The cargo handling at the VOC Port in Thoothukudi has been affected in view of the Burevi cyclone that is expected to cross the southern coast of Tamil Nadu by December 3.

Steps have been taken to secure all shore cranes and equipment used for cargo handling operation at the VOC Port. Port public relations officer Sasirajan, however, said the cargo handling was not completely stopped and a cautious handling of cargo has been maintained on Tuesday.

The dust cargoes were not spilled at the berth. Instead they were directly loaded in the trucks from the hopper.

HC quashes GO restoring accelerated seniority to accelerated promotees involved in nabbing forest brigand Veerappan

J. STALIN | DC
CHENNAI, DEC. 2

The Madras high court has quashed a Government Order, amending Rule 11 of the Special Rules for Tamil Nadu Police Service, by which the government had once again restored accelerated seniority to the accelerated promotees, who were involved in the Special Task Force operation in exterminating the dreaded Forest Brigand Veerappan and his gang members in 2004.

Justice V.Parthiban quashed the G.O dated July 24, 2013, as unconstitutional and illegal while allowing a batch of petitions from S.Radhakrishnan and others, challenging the G.O.

According to petitioners, by a G.O dated October 29, 2004, the government had granted accelerated promotions to the police personnel and officers from one rank above due to their involvement in the STF operation



in exterminating the dreaded forest brigand Veerappan and created supernumerary posts in various ranks in order to accommodate them. Thereafter, the government realized that what was intended originally was to accord accelerated promotions as one time measure and it was never meant to provide accelerated seniority also, as provided for in the 2004 G.O. With a view to address the anomaly, in creating two sets of police personnel namely, accelerated promotees and regular promotees in the police

rank, the government issued another G.O dated October 3, 2007, by which it had made it clear that the accelerated promotees cannot be given accelerated seniority also. Aggrieved, the accelerated promotees challenged the G.O and a single judge dismissed their petitions. Challenging the same, they filed appeals and a division bench dismissed the same. While so, the government issued the present 2013 G.O amending Rule 11 of the Special Rules. Therefore, they filed the present petitions, they added.

The judge said the impugned action was completely silent about what was the object and reasons of the policy of the government for bringing about an amendment to the Rule. When the issue which was the subject matter of the impugned amendment was a lis before this court and the division bench found that grant of accelerated

seniority was improper and impermissible, the government cannot over-rule the judgment by a simple amendment. “In the opinion of this court such cavalier approach by the government to the important issue tantamount to caricaturing its constitutional power vested in the State under Article 162 of the Constitution of India”, the judge added.

The judge said this court finds it incomprehensible and was unable to appreciate as to how the government could even think of overruling the judgment of this court in the manner as adopted and seek to remove the primacy of the Constitution Court as a final arbiter of interpretation of laws. The government by coming up with a contrived remedy ostensibly on the basis of the ill-advised cursory amendment has eventually proved to be proverbial remedy

becoming worse than the disease itself. “It is trite in law to hold that it is the prerogative of the legislature to amend the existing Rules in furtherance of the policies of the government, but at the same time the manner and procedure adopted while bringing in an amendment cannot escape from the judicial review of the Constitution Court. Any act or amendment has to be tested on the touch tone of its Constitutionality and its conformity to the law declared under Article 141 of the Constitution of India. The decision relied on by the division bench while dealing with the validity of G.O dated May 3, 2012 and the decisions relied on by the counsel would only lead to an inexorable conclusion that the impugned amendment cannot be countenanced in law at all and hence G.O dated July 24, 2013 is liable to be set aside”, the judge added.



SHORT TAKES

CM's ex-gratia to kin of cyclone victim

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 2

Chief Minister Edappadi K Palaniswami announced an ex-gratia payment of Rs 10 lakh to the family of Saravanan of Genkavaram village of Gingee taluk of Villupuram district, who was electrocuted when a pandal collapsed in the winds brought by Cyclone Nivar.

Of the total amount to be paid, Rs four lakh would be from the State Disaster Relief Fund and the other Rs six lakh would be from the Chief Minister's Relief Fund, an official press release said on Wednesday.

Four others, who were killed in Cyclone Nivar related incidents despite the precautionary measures taken by the government, had been paid ₹10 lakh each on the basis of orders issued by the Chief Minister on November 27 itself.

Chennai metro rail bags safety award

CHENNAI An International award instituted by the World Safety Organization (WSO), USA for companies or corporations in recognising strict safety standards was presented to Chennai Metro Rail Limited (CMRL). According to CMRL, Only six companies are selected every year for this award among many applicants at the global stage.

New Nissan Magnite launched

CHENNAI: The Nissan Motor India Pvt Ltd has launched all new Nissan Magnite with the new HRA0 TURBO engine in Chennai on Wednesday. The Nissan Magnite is the most fuel-efficient (20kmpl) and powerful 'Made in India' engine in the market, the HRA0 1.0-litre Turbo, which delivers maximum power of 100PS and maximum torque of 160Nm. With Nissan's signature cruise control and wider gear range, Magnite delivers seamless performance in city's speak traffic.

PMK protest fizzles out the second day

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 2

The PMK's protest to press for 20 per cent exclusive reservation for Vanniars fizzled out on the second day on Wednesday with just about 200 persons turning up for the agitation in Chennai and subsequently dispersing after raising slogans.

As per the agitation schedule drawn up by PMK founder S Ramadoss and publicized over a period of time, a four day protest was planned, in the first phase, from Tuesday in front of the Tamil Nadu Public Service Commission (TNPSC) office in Chennai.

But the party functionaries and cadre who had gathered near the Thomas Munro statue to march to the TNPSC were not allowed to proceed further, leading to their dispersal from the spot and top leaders, including



youth wing leader Anbumani Ramadoss, visiting the Secretriary to hold talks with the Chief Minister.

Though a call was made to continue the agitation on Wednesday, too, not many cadre turned up. Most of the electronic media, too, did not visit the venue for coverage. On the first day, some media persons had a spat with Anubamani Ramadoss accused of portraying PMK as a violent party.

When a reporter asked Anbumani Ramadoss if throwing stone on trains was not violence, he reported shot back that it was not by his party

cadre. When he was told that those who indulged in violence were dressed in the PMK's yellow T-shirts and were holding the party flag, the PMK leader lost his cool and walked away.

It is also said that the police warned the PMK leaders that they would crack down on those indulging in violence and threatened to book them the NSA or Goondas Act. Perhaps that could have come as a dampener, keeping many cadre away from the agitation. Also the Railway police had booked 300 PMK cadre for alleged vandalism at Perungulathur.

Chennai City Police also registered a case for various Sections of the IPC and also Section 3 of the Epidemic Diseases Act for unlawful assembly, wrongful restraint and so on against 1000 cadre, including 56 women. Anbumani Ramadoss has also been named as an accused in the case.

Kanyakumari fishers land safely in Maha, K'taka

DC CORRESPONDENT
KANYAKUMARI, DEC. 2

Around 300 Kanyakumari fishermen onboard 25 fishing vessels that remained unreachable till December 1 have reportedly landed safely at the ports at Ratnagiri in Maharashtra and Karwar in Karnataka, while 12 more boats returned safely to Kanyakumari till Tuesday morning, according to the fisheries department sources.

Hundred more boats that went for deep sea fishing from Kanyakumari district are yet to be contacted, according to special cyclone monitoring officer B Jothi Nirmalasamy, who, in her meeting with the fishermen repre-

sentatives in the district, said the government had taken all possible measures to rescue the fishermen.

Marine enforcement wing SP S Maheswaran, responding to the demand of the fishermen leaders in the district to involve Coast Guard and Navy ships, said the chief secretary has sent a letter to the union home ministry and defence ministry seeking the services of Coast Guard and Naval ships and aircrafts to identify and rescue the 124 boats that still remain unreachable even through satellite phones.

Most of the 124 fishing vessels yet to return shore belong to the coastal hamlets of Poothurai,

Thoothoor, Chinnathurai, Iraviputhanthurai and Vallavilai in Kanyakumari district. They ventured for fishing from the harbours of Thengaiyattinam, Muttom and Colachel in the district and from Kochi in Kerala.

Rev Fr Churchill, general secretary of South Asian Fishermen Fraternity, said they had contacted 25 Kanyakumari-based deep sea fishing vessels through the fishermen associations in Maharashtra and Karnataka and got the information that around 300 fishermen onboard the 25 fishing vessels safely reached the Ratnagiri port in Maharashtra and Karwar port in Karnataka.

Congress-DMK talks on seat-sharing begin

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 2

A delegation of Congress leaders called on DMK president M. K. Stalin and others at the Anna Arivalayam on Wednesday, triggering speculations that negotiations relating to seat-sharing between the parties for the 2021 Assembly elections have started.

The Congress team, comprising AICC leader in charge of Tamil Nadu Dinesh Gundu Rao, TNCC president K. S. Alagiri, leader of the Congress party in the Assembly K. R. Ramasamy and media cell head A Gopanna, were closeted with the DMK leaders for over half an hour.

Emerging from the meeting, Gundu Rao denied that they discussed anything relating to seat sharing. He claimed that the talks were on the strategy the alliance should adopt for the elections and about the campaigns to be undertaken.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi was planning to visit the State for campaigning and we had to discuss certain things connected to that with their alliance partner, Alagiri said.

Gundu Rao is planning to hold a meeting with Congress functionaries at the Sathyamurthy Bhavan on Thursday when he would be eliciting their views on the elections.

A DMK statement described Gundu Rao's visit to their party office as a 'courtesy call' and said that general secretary Duraimurugan, treasurer T. R. Baalu, principal secretary K. N. Nehru, deputy general secretary K. Ponnudi, organization secretary R. S. Bharathi and information secretary T. K. S. Elangovan were present during the meeting.



TN Congress cadres protest with ploughs on Wednesday against the Central government over new farm laws.

— DC

Congress, DMK condemn move to stop post-matric scholarship

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 2

TNCC president K. S. Alagiri and DMK treasurer T. R. Baalu condemned the decision of the BJP government at the Centre to stop the post-matric scholarship given to students belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes since 1944 and sought Prime Minister Narendra Modi's intervention.

In separate statements on Wednesday, both Alagiri and Baalu said the scholarship given to students who had passed their tenth standard was an important scheme that

helped children from Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe homes pursue their higher education.

The scholarship was paid under various heads like maintenance allowance, fees, educational tours and preparation of research papers for children whose parents' annual income was up to Rs 2.5 lakh per annum.

Alagiri said the income ceiling had already restricted the number of students availing of it to 60 lakh all over the country and added that the BJP government with a view to scrapping the scheme

had been reducing the funding for it since 2017.

Of the total ₹18,000 paid to the beneficiaries annually, the Centre contributed 60 per cent of the scholarship and the States the remaining 40 per cent, Alagiri said.

Discontinuing the scholarship would be a big blow to social justice and hence the Prime Minister should ensure that it was continued, both the leaders said.

Baalu also said that the scholarship was a charity by the BJP government but a right of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe people of the country.

COFFEE-BREAK

Your day today By Dr C.V.B. Subrahmanyam



Aries: Your work will be recognised. Business will expand. Relations with influential people will strengthen. You will be surprised by a development in your love life.



Taurus: Some delay in completion of projects is likely. A trip comes your way. Enjoy! Authority figures may create problems. Social activities will be high on the agenda.



Gemini: You strive to sort out differences with friends. Have a system to do better in investments. Avoid slander at work. Interacting with strangers might not bring positive results.



Cancer: Positive thinking will help you feel better. Control your passions. You will not compromise your principles and values in the face of distress. Health issues may crop up.



Leo: You make a commitment to people who look up to you for help. If you are anxious or depressed, remember, humour offers a permanent cure.



Virgo: Both positive and negative vibrations are present. The relationship with your beloved will improve. Female colleagues will be highly supportive. You may win a competition. Take care not to waste money.

You share your b'day with

Konkona Sen Sharma, an Indian actress, writer, and director. She is best known for her roles in Mr. and Mrs. Iyer, Page 3, Omkara, Life in a... Metro, Lipstick Under My Burkha and Goyar Baksho.



Libra: Social activities will prove useful. A good time to open up lines of communication with relatives you haven't been seeing eye-to-eye with. It is time to forget past grudges.



Scorpio: Romance seems to be in the air as you explore new friendships. Your imagination and enthusiasm will help sort out a family member's problem.



Sagittarius: Parents' health will improve and they will shower their love on you. A good time for planning your social life. You are likely to change your residence.



Capricorn: A promising day for self-employed professionals like auditors, creative writers and physicians. A gathering with relatives will be highly enjoyable. Don't splurge unnecessarily.

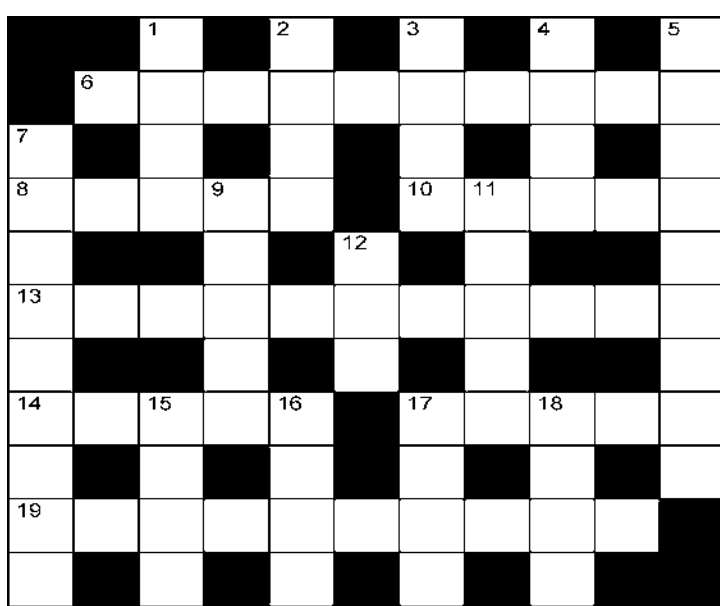


Aquarius: A favourable day for negotiations but not for monetary transactions. Don't sign important documents blindly. Your domestic problems may be settled automatically.



Pisces: Those with kidney problems need to take extra care. Increase savings for emergent needs. You will realise that true love is not an infatuation. Some strain in romantic relations are likely. Don't pay heed to gossips.

QUICK CROSSWORD



Across

6. Cause for complaint (10)

8. Duck valued for feathers (5)

10. Navigation aid (5)

13. Temperament (11)

14. Cricket fielding position (5)

17. Curtain (5)

19. Bigoted (10)

Down

1. Dry (4)

2. Scoff at (4)

3. Gala (4)

5. Vinegarish (4)

5. Garden set (anag) (9)

7. Green rust (9)

9. Oust (5)

11. In search of (5)

12. Invite (3)

15. Overdue (4)

16. Shout (4)

17. Challenge (4)

18. Spots (4)

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

Across: 1. Trowel, 3. Shed, 7. Sick, 8. Sialom, 10. Mislead, 13. Prolong, 16. Sauer, 17. Ship, 18. Seer, 19. Salmon.

Down: 1. Task, 2. Orchid, 4. Hale, 5. Domino, 6. Pliable, 9. Alerted, 11. Crisis, 12. Anthem, 14. Fuse, 15. Span.

Word Mine

V
D S I
U E D B I

TODAY'S RATINGS: 3 AVERAGE; 4 GOOD; 5 OUTSTANDING

How many words of four or more letters can you make from the letters shown in today's puzzle? In making a word, each letter may be used once only. Each word must contain the letter at the top of the pyramid. There should be at least one nine letter word. Plurals, foreign words and proper names are not allowed.

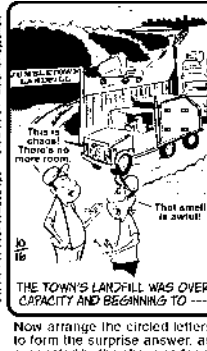
jumble

BEALF
FROEF
CUVAMU
SKURNH

Answer here:

Yesterday's Jumbles: MILKY, OUNCE, ABRUPT, GRASSY

Answer: He was having pain in his lumbar region, and the chiropractor wanted the BACKS FOLLY

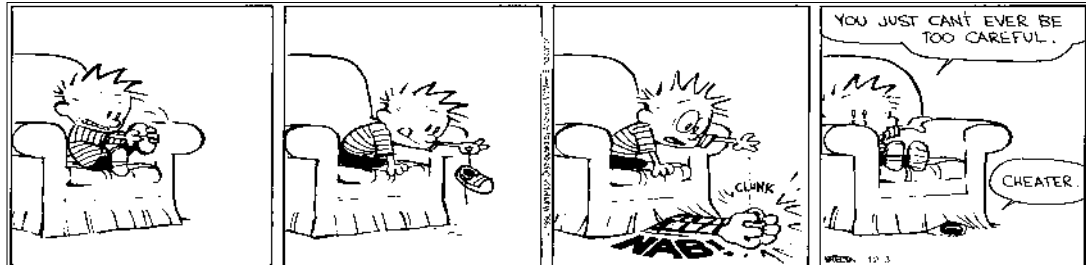


Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

(Answers tomorrow)

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CALVIN AND HOBBS | Bill Watterson



THE WIZARD OF ID | Parker and Hartsd



ARCHIE | Bill Henry Scarpelli & craig boldman



BLONDIE | Dean Young and John Marshall



ANDY CAPP | Reg Smythe



TARZAN | Edgar Rice Burroughs



bridge

PHILLIP ALDER

IS IT EASIER WITH TWO, NOT THREE?

Don Marquis, a dramatist, humorist, journalist and poet who died in 1937, said, "I never think at all when I write. Nobody can do two things at the same time and do them both well." That is interesting -- but how did he decide what words to put into the paper? When you are the declarer, you should worry about all four suits, though occasionally one or two will look after themselves. What about today's deal? How should

South play in five diamonds after West leads a top-of-nothing spade seven? If the vulnerability were different, perhaps West would have continued with five spades over five diamonds. Note that five spades goes down two, which is fine except when vulnerable against nonvulnerable opponents. Declarer ruffed the spade on the board, led a trump to his hand, ruffed his last spade and played a club to

his king. West won with his ace -- gulp one -- and returned the club 10 -- gulp two. Now, when East got in with his heart king, he cashed the club jack to defeat the contract. North was unhappy. He pointed out that East had to have either the heart king or club ace for his opening bid. So, as is often the case with this holding, it was right to lead toward the heart jack, not to take the normal finesse. If the jack lost to

West's king, East would have the club ace and all would be well. Here, though, if East ducked his heart king, he would lose it. Or, if he took the trick, in a moment, declarer would cash his heart jack, cross to the dummy with a trump and discard his two low clubs on the heart ace and queen.

SHORT TAKES

MEA MUM ON R-DAY INVITE TO BORIS

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC 2

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) on Wednesday did not comment on reports that said British Prime Minister Boris Johnson had been invited by India to be the chief guest at the Republic Day parade on January 26 and that he had accepted the invite.

It may be recalled that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had spoken on phone to Mr. Johnson just last week on November 27 in which the two “leaders agreed that officials from both sides would continue their work to quickly finalise an ambitious long-term roadmap for the India-UK partnership”.

The MEA had then said, “The two leaders exchanged thoughts about the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, and reviewed the promising cooperation between India and UK in the area of vaccine development and manufacturing.”

The MEA had added, “The leaders reiterated their shared desire to impart a quantum jump to the India-UK partnership in the post-Covid, post-Brexit era, and agreed that there was tremendous potential for enhancing collaboration in trade and investment, scientific research, mobility of professionals and students, and defence and security. They laid particular emphasis on India and UK joining hands in the fight against Climate Change, and appreciated their collaboration under platforms like the International Solar Alliance and the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure.”

British Acting High Commissioner Jan Thompson had recently said there was a lot of potential for collaboration in the Indo-Pacific region between her country and India, adding that there has been an increased focus by her country on the crucial region.

SHOWIK CHAKRABORTY GRANTED BAIL

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC
MUMBAI, DEC. 2

A special Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substance (NDPS) Act court on Wednesday granted bail to Showik, brother of actress Rhea Chakraborty, in a drugs case linked to Bollywood actor Sushant Singh Rajput's death.

The NDPS court and the Bombay High Court have rejected his bail applications in the past but he had sought bail claiming there is change in circumstances, as the Supreme Court recently held that the NCB officers are also police officers and statements given to them by accused or co-accused cannot be considered as confessional statements during the trial.

Showik had filed a fresh bail application through advocate Abad Ponda, Ayaz Khan and Anandini Fernandes claiming change in circumstances.

After rejection of bail plea by the trial court on September 11, he approached the high court which also rejected his bail application on October 7 this year. The HC while rejecting his plea for bail had noted his alleged involvement in five instances of drug transactions.

According to the applicant, all these transactions were mentioned in police remand applications or replies filed by the prosecution. However, it was pointed out to the court that all these instances were solely based on statements of co-accused recorded under section 67 of NDPS Act.



Morning walkers at Botanical Garden in Shibpur of Howrah on Wednesday after it reopened for visitors amid the Coronavirus pandemic.

— PTI

Centre's new SOP: Open shops on alternate days

Fresh guidelines for retail, wholesale markets, malls, supermarkets issued

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 2

With marketplaces being a bigger source of crowding and virus spread, the Union government on Wednesday issued Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) on the precautionary measures to be followed to contain the spread of Covid-19 in these areas. The SOPs recommend opening shops on alternate days, having special teams to monitor Covid appropriate behaviour among customers and shopkeepers, and imposing penalty on violators.

India's Covid-19 tally on Wednesday reached 95 lakh with 36,604 new detections. The total deaths so far have been 1.38 lakh out of which 501 fatalities are fresh. However, India's total active caseload had significantly dropped to 4.28

lakh and this is the lowest after 132 days. The total active cases were 4.26 lakh on July 23. Health ministry officials said there has been a sustained decrease in the number of active cases and India's present active caseload consists of just 4.51 per cent of its total positive cases. The daily new cases have stayed at around 30,000 for the past three days now and India's Recovery Rate is 94.03 per cent.

“The health ministry in recognition of the fact that marketplaces are visited by a large number of people for their daily needs, shopping, entertainment, and food has designed a protocol to contain the spread of Covid-19. Amid the pandemic, with gradual opening of economic activities, markets are witnessing high footfalls. Such large gatherings, without observance of Covid-19 appropriate behaviour have the potential to spread Coronavirus disease,” Union health ministry officials said.

These guidelines are for retail, wholesale markets, malls, supermarkets etc. As per new guidelines, market places in containment zones shall remain closed and only those outside the containment zones will be allowed to open-up. Employees who are at higher risk — older employees, pregnant women and employees who have underlying medical conditions — must take extra precautions and the market associations shall be advised that such persons should not be exposed to any front-line work requiring direct contact with the public.

Covid-19 appropriate

behaviour has to be followed in market places, which include physical distancing, use of face covers and masks, frequent hand washing with soap, use of alcohol-based hand sanitisers. Spitting is strictly prohibited in public places.

The guidelines further said that in normal times, markets are usually crowded with high footfalls, suffer from lack of adequate sanitation amenities and have poor hygiene conditions. To prevent the risk of transmission of Covid, it is crucial that healthy environment is maintained at marketplaces.

This includes all work areas inside the shop should be sanitised by shop owners before beginning their day, cleaning and regular disinfection of frequently touched surfaces at regular intervals.

lar intervals.

The health ministry officials said Covid-19 appropriate behaviour in marketplaces may be self-regulated by market associations through a number of measures, such as creation of a sub-committee to monitor implementation of Covid-19 appropriate behaviour in marketplaces, mask dispensing kiosks at government approved rates may be set up at entry points and parking lots, provision of distribution of free masks for those who cannot afford, establishing hand washing stations in public utility areas and ensuring availability of soap and water, use of foot operated taps and contactless soap dispensers, providing mass thermal screening provisions at the entry/access points to the market.

Cyclone Burevi: Red alert in four districts of Kerala

DC CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, DEC. 2

Red alert has been sounded in four districts of Kerala with the MET department forecasting Cyclone Burevi to cross Neyyattinkara taluk in Thiruvananthapuram district between December 3 night and December 4 morning.

The red alert was issued for Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Pathanamthitta and Alappuzha district for December 3. As many as 26 relief teams have been deployed in Tamil Nadu and Kerala by NDRF.

Based on the central met departments forecast, Kerala State Disaster Management Authority said the cyclone might pass

Thiruvananthapuram district on December 4.

People have been asked to remain on high alert and take precautionary measures as directed by the administration. Venturing into the sea

● **THE RED** alert was issued for Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Pathanamthitta and Alappuzha district for December 3.

● **AS MANY** as 26 relief teams have been deployed in Tamil Nadu and Kerala by NDRF.

● **PEOPLE HAVE** been asked to remain on high alert and take precautionary measures as directed by the administration. Venturing into the sea from anywhere along Kerala coast has been prohibited.

from anywhere along Kerala coast has been prohibited. The ban is applicable to all fishing boats.

Those who have already ventured into the sea for fishing activities should return to the nearest coast. “No one will be allowed to venture into the sea till Kerala State Management Authority

assesses the progression and path of the cyclone and gives the nod,” an official said here.

Meanwhile, the MET department has warned of heavy to very heavy rainfall in many parts of the state between December 2 and 4.

Very heavy rainfall is expected in Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Pathanamthitta, and Alappuzha on December 3. These districts are expected to get more than 204.5 mm of rainfall within a period 24 hours.

These districts are also likely to have high velocity winds during this period. KSDMA has directed the departments concerned to take all required precautionary measures and people have been asked to comply with the instructions of authorities.

The Kerala State Disaster Management Authority (KSDMA) is closely monitoring the progress of the cyclone and the path.



Research and PG students of Queen Mary's College which opened on Wednesday undergo thermal scanning for Covid-19 test before entering the classrooms. — DC

China had planned clash: US report

FROM PAGE 1

“The clash, which followed a series of stand-offs beginning in early May along multiple sectors of the LAC, led to at least 20 Indian deaths and an unconfirmed number of Chinese casualties, the first time since 1975 that lives were lost in fighting between the two sides,” said the report.

“In the aftermath of the clash, Beijing asserted sovereignty over the entire Galwan Valley, a new claim and significant change to the territorial status quo,” it said.

The report said China and India have engaged in multiple physical clashes along their border for decades, but since President Xi Jinping assumed power in 2012 the two countries have seen five major altercations along their border.

It said that the exact motivations behind the

Chinese government's provocative behavior on the LAC this year remain unclear. “The proximate cause of the clash appeared to be India's construction of a strategic access road to support troops stationed along the LAC. China has also built extensive infrastructure along the LAC in recent years,” said the report.

The report pointed out that tensions have increased since the initial clash, with China reportedly building up its troop presence along the LAC since July. “In September, shots were fired for the first time since 1975 along the border around Pangong Tso, a strategic area near the site of the clash in June. Although no injuries were reported, both sides accused each other of violating a 1996 agreement barring the use of firearms along the LAC,” it said.

Sabarimala to receive more devotees now

GILVESTER ASSARY | DC
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, DEC. 2

The Kerala government has decided to increase the number of pilgrims visiting Sabarimala temple on weekdays from 1,000 to 2,000.

On Saturdays and Sundays, the number has been raised from 2,000 to 3,000. The decision was taken in the wake of growing demand for allowing more pilgrims to have darshan at the famous hill shrine.

Devaswom minister Kadakapally Surendran said that the online bookings for the additional number of pilgrims will begin from Wednesday evening. The bookings are completely via online system. The pilgrims can make the bookings online through sabarimalaonline.org website.

The mandala season pilgrimage is being conducted

● **THE DECISION** was taken in the wake of growing demand for allowing more pilgrims to have darshan at the famous hill shrine.

ed complying with all Covid safety norms. All pilgrims visiting the shrine should produce Covid-19 negative certificate obtained within 24 hours of reaching Nilakkal base camp. Facilities have also been put in place for testing at Nilakkal.

The pilgrims can also get tested at the recognised Covid kiosks set up by government and private agencies en-route temple. The hill shrine was opened for devotees on November 16 for the 62-day annual pilgrimage season. The auspicious mandala pooja will be held on December 26. The Makaravilakku is on January 14. The temple will be closed on January 20.

Phase III trials of Covaxin starts in WB

Kolkata, Dec. 2: West Bengal urban development minister Firhad Hakim became the first volunteer to take a shot of the Covid-19 vaccine, Covaxin, in the Phase III trial here on Wednesday.

The Phase-III regulatory trial of Covaxin started at the city-based ICMR-National Institute of Cholera and Enteric Diseases (NICED), which functions under the department of health research, Union ministry of health and family welfare.

“I feel I am quite lucky to be part of the trial. I am absolutely okay after taking the shot. I do not care even if I die while undertaking this trial,” the 62-year-old minister told reporters.

Hakim said that he will

be very happy if his contribution helps in the research for the vaccine.

Hakim, also the chairperson of board of administrators of the Kolkata municipal corporation, went through necessary check-ups to find out whether he was having any comorbidity.

“His blood pressure, body temperature and blood sugar level were checked along with other parameters,” an official of the NICED said.

Hakim was also briefed by Principal Investigator of the trial, Dr Suman Kanungo, about the steps he requires to follow after being administered the vaccine, he said. The minister will be under close observation for the next seven days.

— PTI

INTERNAL | DISPUTES

TMC MLA Adhikari resigned 4-days ago in a revolt

Rebel MLA denies truce with TMC

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC
KOLKATA, DEC. 2

In a major political drama, Trinamul Congress MLA of Nandigram Shubhendu Adhikari on Wednesday punctured his party's overnight claim of foiling his defection bid to the BJP and persuading him to continue in the party at a secret meeting in north Kolkata on Tuesday.

Expressing anguish over the leak of meeting details and his projection to the media, Adhikari, who resigned from West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's government four days ago in a revolt, also conveyed his “difficulty to work

unitedly” with the TMC in an SMS to senior party MP Sougata Roy who had claimed of success after the meeting with him.

Stung by Adhikari's rebuttal, Roy however said, “Whatever I said is true. If he has changed his decision later, he will share it. But there is no further chance of another meeting.” On Tuesday night, Roy and another MP Sudip Bandyopadhyay mediated the meeting with the rebel TMC MLA at a house in Shyamabati to hold him back in the party.

Adhikari sought to have a free hand as the TMC observer of five districts, a demand which, according to his aides, remained unfulfilled as and MP nephew of the CM Abhishek Banerjee and TMC's election strategist Prashant Kishor walked into the meeting leaving the former state minister furious since he has grievances against them for interference in his role. Also, Adhikari, his followers claimed, was not told that the duo would also join the meeting.

Still Roy claimed later,

“Shubhendu placed his views. Abhishek responded to him. Kishor also intervened. All the problems were sorted out. Shubhendu agreed to continue with the party actively. It was one step which was big and bold. Shubhendu was, is and will be in our party.”

He added, “I informed the CM on phone then and there about the meeting's success. She asked us to work as a family after I put my mobile on loudspeaker. Later, the CM spoke to Shubhendu on my phone. He greeted her with ‘Pronam.’ The CM told him something. None of them talked of past before Shubhendu told her: Yes, alright.”

DECCAN Chronicle

3 DECEMBER 2020

Trudeau's 'concern' on farmers unwarranted

Canada Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has riled India by making public his observations on the ongoing farmers' protest in this county that had been made through diplomatic channels. This is unconventional to say the least, and the Canadian leader was ticked off, with the Indian spokesman referring on Tuesday to "ill-informed comments by Canadian leaders relating to farmers in India" being "unwarranted". The spokesman also pointed out that it was best that "diplomatic conversations are not misrepresented for political purposes".

There is a point here. Other than an outlier like the current US leader Donald Trump, who is perceived as an all-round embarrassment, heads of state or governments in the democratic world are not known to personally criticise specific policies in one another's country. If they did, meaningful and productive international life will be hard to construct. However, an important issue of concern need not be brushed under the carpet. When such concerns come up, these are taken up and typically raised through diplomatic conversations away from the public glare, and clarifications sought. Taking recourse to an open platform, on the other hand, is part of the armoury of public commentators, civil society actors, and politicians.

If Mr Trudeau had so wished, he could have had questions raised in the public domain on India's controversial farm laws through Canadian eminent persons or politicians of his Liberal Party, which, indeed, boasts 13 of 18 Sikh MPs in the Canadian Parliament. This would have been par for the course. It is his stepping into the fray at the personal level that has raised eyebrows here.

It may be recalled that two years ago Mr Trudeau had been cold-shouldered by the Modi government when he visited India to see the Golden Temple in Amritsar, although the demands of protocol were not breached. There had been some ground to think that pro-Khalistan elements among the large Sikh community in Canada had succeeded in influencing their PM somewhat. Are Mr Trudeau's public comments meant to be a payback of sorts? We hope that is not the case, for such actions can needlessly cast a shadow on otherwise positive inter-state relations.

Interestingly, the Canadian leader brought up his "concerns" regarding the "peaceful" farmers' protest in India at a Sikh gathering in his country when he addressed it on the occasion of the 551st anniversary of the birth of Guru Nanak Dev, the founder of the Sikh faith. In order to appease the Canadian Sikhs, was he overlooking the fact that the ongoing farmers' protest is not a religious issue even if the largest contingent of farmers taking part in it so far are from Punjab? If so, it would appear he was indeed playing politics. An alternative explanation, of course, is that the Canadian mission here was fooled by appearances and failed to keep headquarters informed of the complexity of the farmers' protest.

India cannot deem itself above criticism from international quarters for acts of omission or commission provided the bonafides of the critics are above board. But it is useful to be mindful of protocol when dealing with questions at the official level.

The lingo of Year 2020

It's quite the no-brainer. The lexicographer's choice of the year at first appearance was gratuitous, but on closer examination drove home the understanding that plague and Spanish flu notwithstanding, in terms of scope and impact, Covid-19 was the world's first real "pandemic" which simultaneously gave us a taste of the awful homogeneity technology and globalisation has reduced us to, in a reckoning of sorts.

But that is what the word of the year, or woty, as it is acronymed, and pronounceably so, does; be it lived reality or a culture war, it captures the spirit of the times. For instance, last year's winner was "they", as used to describe a transgender person, someone who does not identify as male nor female, as compared with or, if you like, opposed to the (cis)gender-neutral pronoun in the singular number, itself interred in 2017 in the Chicago Manual of Style.

No doubt, though, "pandemic", voted in by Merriem-Webster and Dictionary.com as Oxford indulged in some good old fence-sitting by picking not one or two but 16 appellations, had good competition. It mainly came from medical lingo like "asymptomatic", "contact tracing", "lockdown" and, of course, "quarantine", as well as neologisms, often at once political and "viral", such as "anti-masker", "the Before Times", "BLM", "Antifa" and "Zoom fatigue", also "Karen" denoting a middle-class white American woman prone to bullying black men in a convenient and self-serving interpretation of women's rights. But good old "pandemic" — the word first was used in the mid-1600s in the sense of "universal" or "affecting everyone" and began appearing in medical texts concerning the plague soon after — won the vocabulary sweepstakes, "cancelling" them all.

Now all this hooah over *una palabra* might infuriate some of us who like to look down on intellectual gifts and make a song and dance about "deed over word". We know who they are but we choose here not to name them. Except that the function of the word, of naming, is critical to our understanding of this difficult, maddening, but yet endlessly beautiful, world.

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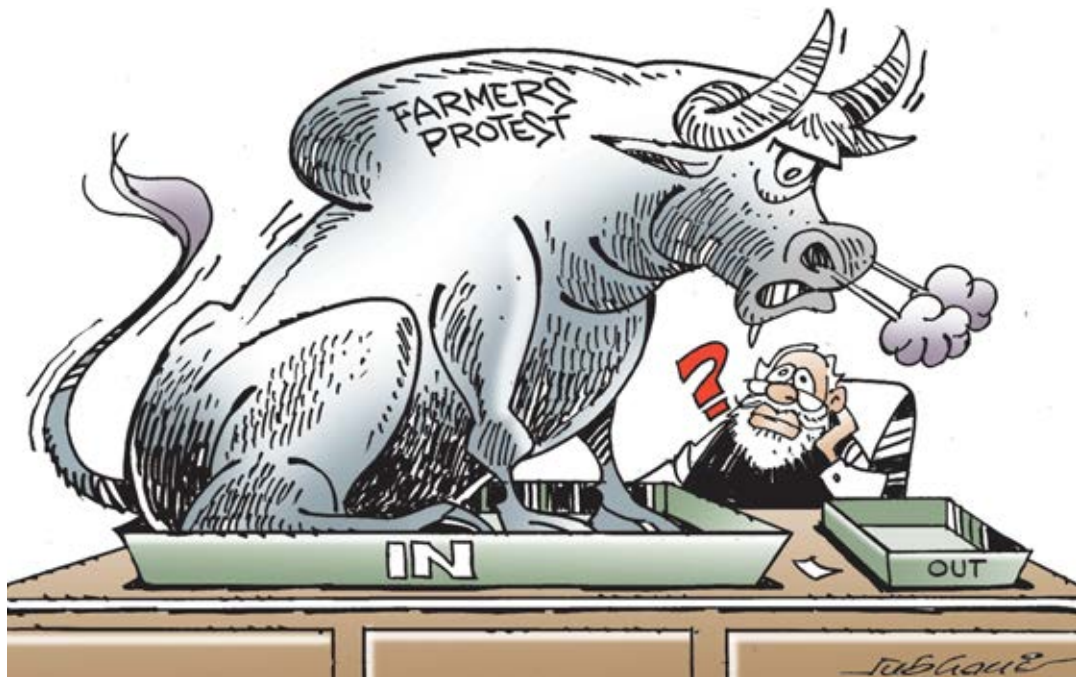
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Subhani



Pay heed to shadow pandemic of hunger



Patralekha Chatterjee

Dev 360

More than 1.3 lakh people have died in India since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. There may be an effective vaccine against the coronavirus in the not-too-distant future. But meanwhile, there is the lengthening shadow pandemic of hunger and malnutrition.

Despite the so-called green shoots of recovery in some sectors, demand remains very sluggish. Livelihoods have been gutted. Millions of informal workers are falling through the cracks.

Last month, the Delhi Rozi Roti Adhikar Abhiyan organised an online public hearing on hunger and malnutrition. At the Hunger Hearings, many of the city's poorest and those without ration cards and access to the public distribution system narrated their stories.

The stories were similar to the ones I have heard in the past several months in walks through this city. Many people are back at work but at a hugely reduced salary.

Kumar, who works in a South Delhi beauty parlour, is not among the city's poorest but his take-home earnings are now a third of what he earned before Covid-19 struck.

"My children used to have fruits. Now, they don't. There is no money," he told me. Kumar is a father of three children and the sole breadwinner in his family.

If this is the situation in India's capital city, imagine the situation elsewhere across the country.

In urban areas, most people have to buy their food and therefore are more vulnerable to price fluctuations. A sudden and sharp decrease in their purchasing power can drastically affect the diets of poor people, especially in times of food inflation.

Worryingly, "food prices do not seem to be moderating contrary to earlier expectations, and from just fruits and veg-

etables the price surge has moved to all the major food components as well," Joseph Thomas, head of research at Emkay Wealth Management, told *Live Mint* newspaper last month.

"The urban poor are particularly vulnerable as the economy stagnates in a post-Covid scenario. It is imperative that the Central government should continue the additional foodgrains being provided under the PDS (public distribution system) for another year and supplement in with free pulses, eggs and oil. Without this minimal package, we are unlikely to be able to stave off hunger and starvation in urban areas," says Biraj Patnaik, executive director of the National Foundation for India and formerly the principal adviser to the commissioners of the Supreme Court in the Right to Food case for close to a decade.

Food security activists have been saying for quite some time now that the impact of the nationwide lockdown and the ensuing economic crisis continue to disproportionately impact the country's poor and unorganised sector workers. They argue that though the Central government has announced relief measures such as the Pradhan Mantri Gareeb Kalyan Yojana and the Atma Nirbhar Bharat, many field studies are showing that a lot more needs to be done by way of social protection.

Hunger Watch, a rapid survey across 11 states, initiated by the Right to

Though the Centre has announced relief measures such as the Pradhan Mantri Gareeb Kalyan Yojana and the Atma Nirbhar Bharat, field studies are showing that a lot more needs to be done by way of social protection

How steeply is malnutrition mounting in India? How severely have children been hit? The short answer: We don't know! There is no official data on this just as there is none on migrant workers who died during the lockdown.

Food Campaign in partnership with several civil society organisations from mid-September to mid-October, has thrown up grim insights.

Compared to February-March, that is before the nationwide lockdown was clamped, the situation between September and October in sampled households showed 50 per cent less cereal consumption, 62 per cent less pulse consumption, 67 per cent less egg consumption, and 70 per cent reduced green vegetable consumption, according to Hunger Watch findings presented at a recent webinar organised by the Peoples' Health Movement.

This is bad news, given that India already had a huge malnutrition problem, especially child and maternal malnutrition, even before the pandemic.

Globally, there is a red alert about the shadow pandemic of hunger in the time of Covid-19. The coronavirus pandemic will see over a quarter of a billion people suffering acute hunger by the end of the year, according to new figures from the World Food Programme (WFP), the food assistance wing of the United Nations. According to the WFP, the latest figures show that the lives and livelihoods of around 265 million people in low and middle-income countries will be under severe threat unless swift action is taken to tackle the pandemic, up from the current 135 million.

How steeply is malnutrition mounting in India? How severely have children been affected? The short answer — we don't know!

There is no official data on this in the public domain just as there is no official data on migrant workers who died during the lockdown.

"At a time when sur-

veys by civil society organisations, such as Hunger Watch by Right to Food campaign, are showing mounting hunger and reduced intake of pulses, vegetables, eggs etc across India, in both villages and cities, it would have been very helpful to have real time data on malnutrition. The Central government promised us real time data on child malnutrition in various districts across India at the click of a mouse, but where is this data?" asks Dipa Sinha, assistant professor (economics), School of Liberal Studies, Ambedkar University, who is part of the Right to Food campaign.

Ms Sinha says that 'the massive nutrition portal that was developed at great cost and was supposed to be providing the Centre and states data on delivery of services to children and mothers across nearly 14 lakh anganwadis is not in the public domain and there is no official data on the magnitude of hunger and malnutrition in the country.'

Nutrition Rehabilitation Centres, which are meant to take care of severely malnourished children (SAM), were also non-functional during the lockdown months, and we don't know what has happened to such children during the lockdown and how well or otherwise they have coped, she adds.

Last month, the Central government issued an order allowing the states to reopen anganwadis outside containment zones with immediate effect.

Hopefully, the anganwadi workers will now be enabled to record the height, weight, body mass index (BMI), body circumferences and other anthropometric data of children and monitor their growth, which took a hit during the nationwide lockdown. This data, if and when it materialises, will be critical for policy interventions for the most vulnerable.

Meanwhile, it is vital to track hunger stories in all their variations and demand action.

The writer focuses on development issues in India and emerging economies. She can be reached at patralekha.chatterjee@gmail.com.

LETTERS

RAJINI'S DILEMMA

Apropos your editorial *Is Rajini under pressure?* (Dec. 2). It is a pity to see Rajini wavering to make a firm entry into politics. While his fans have been waiting for his decision in anticipation, it's high time for him to take a stand and strategise his commitment regarding politics. Over the years, Tamil Nadu has been witnessing rule by movie stars. Not all in filmidom have made a mark in politics. One needs to have the wit and the grit to prove his/her efficiency in terms of political standards. Whether Rajini is under pressure or not, it all depends on his decision on a political career.

Jacqueline Netto, Chennai

PMK'S DEMAND

THERE IS nothing surprising in Dr Ramadoss renewing his favourite demand for caste based reservation for Vanniyars, which according him should be 20% reservation in government jobs plus promotions in the same percentage. On the face of it, the demand appears to be justified. But the question arises as to how many of them are really fit to get a job in government service, possessing the required qualifications and how many of them are willing to appear for qualifying examinations. Simply because a community has some amount of population, jobs cannot be distributed on percentage basis without some kind of test being conducted to test their capacity to discharge their duties when posted in responsible positions.

Kooduthuraiyan, Coimbatore

HISTORY OF RSS

APROPPOS ARTICLE *Bridging the gap between perceptions and reality* (Nov. 30). The RSS is a selfless nationalist organisation with highly disciplined and dedicated cadre who are in the forefront to help the needy and they had indeed proved at the time of natural calamities. For decades, the Leftists and other parties had projected it as a bigoted Hindu fanatical organisation and diehard anti-Muslim to thwart its political gains through the former Jan Sangh and later BJP. The Supreme Court verdict "that Hinduism is a way of life and not communal" had helped and ultimately the electorate realised and voted the BJP to power. Moreover, the RSS was portrayed as a Brahminical outfit. At a public meeting in 1967 (at Abbotsbury, Mount Road, Madras) late Mr A.B.Vajpayee rubbished the false propaganda and thundered that RSS is a selfless, service-minded movement sans caste bias and the Indian Muslims are consanguineous and without them there is no India.

A. Seshagiri Rao, Chennai

Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu



Caste fraud stench in Chhattisgarh secretariat

A "high-level" certification investigation committee set up by the Chhattisgarh government has detected 267 cases of government employees with fake caste certificates. Sources say that chief minister Bhupesh Baghel has given instructions to the state chief secretary, R.P. Mandal, to dismiss all such employees from service, except those who got a stay order from the court.

Most of these cases are pending before the state high court or are adjournment orders. Apparently, in the last two years alone, 75 cases have been detected. Sources say that even after receiving the adjournment order from the court in these cases, several officers and employees are still working in important posts.

The state general administration department has stated that a total

of 758 complaints were received by the investigation committee, of which 267 cases of fake caste certificates were detected.

According to Baghel's instructions, all government servants whose caste certificates are false will be immediately removed from their posts. All such cases will be reviewed department-wise by GAD, which incidentally has 14 employees with fake certificates. The school education department apparently has the highest number of cases — 44!

GEHLOT SEEKS SUPPORT OF RETIRED BABUS

After surviving the Sachin Pilot threat, Rajasthan chief minister Ashok Gehlot is reportedly trying to strengthen his grip on the state administration and neutralise any potential threat. Sources say that

following his appointment of 1989-batch IAS officer Niranjan Arya as the state chief secretary, after superseding 10 IAS officers, Mr Gehlot is now in a placatory mode.

According to sources, Mr Gehlot is now seeking the support of retired scheduled caste officers, in a possible caste twist to an administrative move. He has recently profusely thanked former IAS officers like Mahendra Singh, Lalit Panwar and retired IPS officers Jaswant Sampatram and R.P. Singh, among others, for their acknowledging that Mr Arya's appointment was "a step in the right direction".

This will clearly dilute the eddy currents from many other senior officers. They, of course, are unhappy with Mr Gehlot's rather overt attempt to seek the support of retired officers for the successful tenure of his new chief secretary.

Was Mr Gehlot being merely polite in responding to the retired officers' congratulatory letter on Mr Arya's promotion or is it a step towards garnering support to consolidate his power base in the state administration? As a seasoned politician, he certainly knows the value of ticking off more checkboxes. We'll have to wait and see whether this works.

ED CHIEF GETS EXTENSION

S.K. Mishra will be the first director of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) to serve for three years. The Indian Revenue Service (IRS) officer, who is from the 1984-batch, was appointed to the post in November 2018 for a fixed tenure of two years. But just before his term was to end, the government modified the earlier order to the effect that the tenure will last for three years. The modi-

fication was reportedly done on the legal opinion by the solicitor general since the CVC Act has no mention of extension for the post of ED director.

Initially, sources say the government had considered taking the ordinance route but opted for the CVC committee since the appointment of the ED director is governed by the CVC Act.

As ED chief, Mr Mishra is in charge of several high profile and sensitive investigations including Augusta Westland, Congress leader D.K. Shivakumar, Yes Bank and others. Does the government want to ensure there is no disruption in the probes of these cases by appointing a new ED chief? We can only speculate.

Share a babu experience! Follow dilipthecherian@Twitter.com.

SHORT TAKES 2 INJURED IN DUTCH STORE STABBING

The Hague, Dec. 2: Two people were injured in a stabbing Wednesday in a shop in the centre of The Hague and a suspect has fled the scene, police said. The city's police force tweeted that there also was a fire at the store that was quickly extinguished. The two injured people were being taken to a hospital by ambulance. Police launched an investigation and appealed for witnesses. Further details weren't immediately available and there was no word on a possible motive. A police spokesman didn't immediately return calls seeking comment.

ISRAEL READIES FOR FOURTH POLL IN 2 YEARS

Jerusalem, Dec. 2: Israel took a major step toward plunging into its fourth national election in under two years on Wednesday as lawmakers — supported by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's main coalition partner — passed a preliminary proposal to dissolve parliament. The 61-54 vote came just seven months after the coalition took office in a declaration of national unity to confront the Coronavirus crisis. But since then, the alliance between Netanyahu's Likud Party and Defence Minister Benny Gantz's Blue and White has been locked in infighting.

The vote gave only preliminary approval to ending the alliance and forcing a new election early next year. The legislation now heads to a committee before parliament as a whole takes up final approval, perhaps as soon as next week.

In the meantime, Gantz and Netanyahu are expected to continue negotiations in a last-ditch attempt to preserve their troubled alliance.

MISINTERPRETING CLIMATE: BRAVUS MINING PAYS FINE

Melbourne, Dec. 2: Adani Group's Australian division, Bravus Mining, has paid a fine of 26,000 Australian dollars for "misinterpreting" environmental approval conditions at its Carmichael Coal mine in central Queensland. The Australian Department of Agriculture, Water and Environment issued an official statement on Tuesday, stating that it had fined the mining company and issued two infringement notices in October this year for not meeting a condition attached to their approval received under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999.

"The company failed to meet the requirements of condition 7 of the approval which requires them to implement the approved Species Management Plan. The department found that Adani Mining Pvt Ltd failed to implement the Species Management Plan by not undertaking pre-clearance surveys within the required timeframe prior to clearing," it said.

OSCARS '21 TO BE 'IN-PERSON' TELECAST

Los Angeles, Dec. 2: The 2021 Oscars ceremony will be an "in-person telecast", a representative from the Academy of Motion Arts and Sciences (AMPAS) and its award show's broadcast partner channel ABC has said. There is speculation that the biggest annual film awards show will be a virtual affair as the Coronavirus pandemic continues to rage on. But the representative told *Variety*, "The Oscars in-person telecast will happen."

In June, the Academy had announced that the 2021 Oscars will be held on April 25, 2021, eight weeks later than originally planned because of the pandemic's effects on the film industry. The eligibility window for feature films has also been pushed to February 28, 2021. Sources inside the Oscars say that by pushing the awards ceremony back, the institution hoped that theatres would be open again in the spring, thus allowing for more movies to compete at the ceremony.

But even if movie theatres stay shut, by holding the Oscars later in spring, organisers are now focusing to ensure the event continues as it always has live. It is still uncertain how many people will be allowed inside the 3,400-seat Dolby Theatre in Los Angeles, where the ceremony takes place.

"The Academy has done a walkthrough of the Dolby recently to see all the multiple options," an awards publicist went on to add.

Single dose vaccine shows protection against Covid-19

Researchers at the Rega Institute, Belgium are preparing for its clinical trials

London, Dec. 2: Scientists have developed a new vaccine candidate against Covid-19 based on the yellow fever vaccine, a single dose of which protects hamsters and monkeys from infection with the SARS-CoV-2 Coronavirus.

The researchers at the Rega Institute at KU Leuven in Belgium are currently preparing for clinical trials of the vaccine candidate. To develop the vaccine, tentatively named RegaVax, the researchers inserted the genetic code of the SARS-CoV-2 virus spikes into that of the yellow fever vaccine.

RegaVax is a vector vaccine which uses the genetic code of the yellow fever vaccine virus as a carrier for the genetic code of the Coronavirus spikes.

According to an early version of the research paper accepted for publication in the journal *Nature*,

Virus infections may have hit US as early as Dec. '19

Washington, Dec. 2: The novel Coronavirus may have been introduced into the US as early as December 13 to 16, 2019, suggests a study which assessed archived samples from routine blood donations collected by the American Red Cross.

While the first confirmed case of Covid-19 in the US was identified on Jan-

uary 19, 2020, the scientists, including Sridhar V Basavaraju from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in the US, noted that antibodies reactive against the virus were detected in 106 of the 7,389 specimens.

According to the research, published in *Clinical Infectious Diseases*, 84 of the samples specifically

had neutralising activity against the spike protein of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which enables it to enter host cells. "The presence of these serum antibodies indicate that isolated SARS-CoV-2 infections may have occurred in the western portion of the US earlier than previously recognised," the researchers wrote.

— PTI

the researchers tested the vaccine in healthy hamsters and monkeys, with another group of the animals receiving a placebo. The researchers first vaccinated the hamsters and then dripped the virus into the-

ir noses. They found that 10 days after a single vaccine dose, most of the hamsters were protected against the virus, adding that three weeks after vaccination, all hamsters were protected. "They also didn't

develop any lung infections. The lungs of the hamsters in the control groups, by contrast, showed clear signs of infection and disease," explained Professor Johan Neyts from KU Leuven.

Remembering road terror victims in Germany



Candles and flowers are placed at a makeshift memorial for the victims at the market column at Hauptmarkt square in Trier, southwestern Germany, on Wednesday, one day after a car drove into pedestrians. A baby was among five people killed when a car tore through a pedestrian shopping street in Trier on Tuesday. A prosecutor said that the driver, a 51-year-old Trier native, appeared to be suffering from "psychiatric problems" and had been under the influence of alcohol during the incident, in which 14 other people were hurt.

— AFP

Provisional provincial status to Gilgit Baltistan priority: Imran

Islamabad, Dec. 2: Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan on Wednesday said that his government would work on a priority basis to grant the provisional provincial status to Gilgit Baltistan, according to a media report.

His remarks came after he arrived in the disputed region to attend the oath-taking ceremony of the 14-member Gilgit Baltistan Cabinet. "What will the new government do? First, we will work on granting the region provisional provincial status so that the prevailing sense of deprivation [among the people] can be eradicated," *Dawn* newspaper quoted Khan as saying.

India has slammed Pakistan for its decision to hold elections in Gilgit-Baltistan and said any action to alter the status of the militarily-occupied region has no legal basis. India also clearly conveyed to Pakistan that the entire Union territories of

PAKISTAN LOADING FUEL IN 1,100MW CHINESE-ASSISTED N-POWER PLANT

Islamabad, Dec. 2: Pakistan has started loading fuel to its Chinese-assisted 1,100MW nuclear power plant in Karachi for testing in run-up to its commercial operations in April 2021, according to a media report on Wednesday. The fuel loading for the newly built Karachi Nuclear Power Plant Unit-2 (K-

2) began on Tuesday after obtaining fuel load permit from the Pakistan Nuclear Regulatory Authority. It was witnessed by DG of the Strategic Plan Division Lt Gen Nadeem Zaki Manj, Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission Chairman Mohammad Naeem and Chinese and Pakistani officials. — PTI

Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh, including the areas of Gilgit and Baltistan, are an integral part of the country.

Elections were held on 23 seats of the legislative assembly in Gilgit-Baltistan on November 15. Polling on one seat was postponed after the death of one of the contestants. Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) won most of the seats in the legislative assembly election. — PTI

HK ACTIVISTS SENTENCED TO PRISON TERM

Hong Kong, Dec. 2: Hong Kong pro-democracy activists Joshua Wong, Agnes Chow and Ivan Lam were sentenced to jail on Wednesday on charges related to an unauthorised anti-government protest last year at the city's police headquarters.

Wong, who pleaded guilty to organising and participating in the protest, received 1 1/2 months behind bars.

Chow, who also pleaded guilty to participating in the protest and inciting others to take part, received 10 months, while Lam received 7 months after pleading guilty to incitement. The protest took place on June 21 last year, and saw thousands surround the police headquarters as they demonstrated against excessive force by police against protesters, as well as a now-withdrawn extradition bill. — AP

OVER 3000 PDM ACTIVISTS BOOKED

Lahore, Dec. 2: Over 3,000 activists of the Pakistan Democratic Movement, including three sons of former PM Yousuf Raza Gilani, have been booked by Punjab province police for holding an anti-government rally in violation of the Covid-19 and public safety guidelines. — PTI

Iran President rejects uranium enrichment bill

Tehran, Dec. 2: Iran's President Hassan Rouhani on Wednesday rejected a bill approved by parliament that would have suspended United Nations inspections and boosted uranium enrichment, saying it was "harmful" to diplomatic efforts aimed at restoring the 2015 nuclear deal and easing UN sanctions.

The tug-of-war over the bill, which gained momentum after the killing of a prominent Iranian nuclear scientist last month, reflects the rivalry between Rouhani, a relative moderate, and hard-line lawmakers who dominate parliament and favour a more confrontational approach to the West.

The bill would have suspended UN inspections and required the government to resume enriching uranium to 20 per cent if European nations fail to provide relief from crippling US sanctions on the country's oil and banking sectors. That level falls short of the threshold needed for nuclear weapons but is higher than that required for civilian purposes. Speaking at a Cabinet meeting, Rouhani said his administration, "does not agree with that and considers it harmful for the trend of diplomatic activities."

Rouhani implied the lawmakers were positioning themselves ahead of elections that are planned for June. The President added that "today, we are more powerful in the nuclear field than at any other time."

The bill is expected to have little if any impact, as Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has the final say on all major policies, including those related to the nuclear programme. — AP

Barr says no widespread US Prez election fraud

Washington, Dec. 2: Disputing President Donald Trump's persistent, baseless claims, Attorney General William Barr declared the US Justice Department has uncovered no evidence of widespread voter fraud that could change the outcome of the 2020 election.

Barr's comments, in an interview Tuesday with the *The Associated Press*, contradict the concerted effort by Trump, his boss, to subvert the results of last month's voting and block President-elect Joe Biden from taking his place in the White House. Barr told the AP that US attorneys and FBI agents have been working to follow up specific complaints and information they've received, but "to date, we have not seen fraud on a scale that could have effected a different outcome in the election."

The comments, which drew immediate criticism from Trump attorneys, were especially notable coming from Barr, who has been one of the president's most ardent allies. Before the election, he had repeatedly raised the notion that mail-in voting could be especially vulnerable to fraud during the coronavirus pandemic as Americans feared going to polls and instead chose to vote by mail.

More to Trump's liking, Barr revealed in the AP interview that in October

Washington, Dec. 2: In a huge relief to tens of thousands of Indian professionals and top American IT firms, a US court has blocked two H-1B regulations proposed by the Trump administration to restrict the ability of American companies to hire foreign employees.

H-1B visas is a non-immigrant visa that allows American companies to employ foreign workers in speciality occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise. The US issues up to 85,000 H-1B visas each year. Usually, they're issued for three years and renewable. Most of the nearly 600,000 H-1B visa holders

are from India and China.

In his 23-page order on Tuesday, US District Judge Jeffrey White of Northern District of California blocked the Trump administration's recent policy that required employers to pay foreign workers on H-1B visas significantly higher wages. He also set aside another policy that narrowed the eligibility of H-1B valued by US tech firms and other employers.

As a result of the ruling, the Department of Homeland Security rule on occupations and other issues that was to come into effect from December 7, stands invalid.

— PTI

TRUMP TEASES 2024 RUN AT WH PARTY

Washington, Dec. 2: President Donald Trump teased running again for president in 2024 as he hosted a holiday reception at the White House on Tuesday evening. "It's been an amazing four years," Trump told the crowd, which included many Republican National Committee members.

"We're trying to do another four years. Otherwise, I'll see you in four years." The video of Trump's appearance was streamed live on Facebook by one attendee, former Oklahoma Republican Party Chair Pam Pollard.

It showed dozens of people crammed into the Cross Hall of the White House state floor, standing closely together. Many seen in the video were not wearing masks. The Trumps began hosting holiday receptions this week, intent on celebrating a final season before Trump leaves office on January 20.

— AP

Inauguration panel: Varghese is exec dir

Washington, Dec. 2: President-elect Joe Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris have named Indian-American Maju Varghese in the four-member Presidential Inaugural Committee (PIC), which will organise the activities surrounding their swearing-in on January 20.

The team includes Tony Allen as the Chief Executive Officer, Maju Varghese as the Executive Director, Erin Wilson as the Deputy Executive Director and Yvanna Cancela as its

Deputy Executive Director. "It is an honour to help lead the team that will plan the inaugural activities for President-elect Biden and Vice President-elect Harris while keeping their commitment to protecting the health and safety of Americans and demonstrating the strength and resilience of our nation," Varghese said.

Varghese is the fifth Indian-American to be given key positions by the Biden transition team. — PTI

GENUINE | CLASSIC

'The Patient Assassin: A True Tale of Massacre, Revenge and the Raj' beat six other titles

Anita Anand's Jallianwala Bagh story wins history prize

London, Dec. 2: British Indian journalist and author Anita Anand's book that tells the story of a young man caught up in the 1919 Jallianwala Bagh massacre in Amritsar has won a prestigious history-literary prize in the UK. "The Patient Assassin: A True Tale of Massacre, Revenge and the Raj" beat six other titles for the PEN Hessel-Tiltman Prize for History 2020, awarded annually for a non-fiction book of specifically historical content.

The judges described it

as a "genuine historical classic" which will be read for decades to come. "Anita Anand's 'The Patient Assassin' is the story of a murderer and his victim — a British colonial official assassinated by an Indian avenger more than two decades after the horrific Amritsar massacre of 1919, for which that official was partly responsible. Yet it is much more than the story of two men," said Rana Mitter, chair of judges. "It is an account of how global the spirit of anti-imperialist revolution

was in the early twentieth century. It is also an empathetic account of how categories of good and evil in the context of empire have to be understood in more nuanced and complex ways. For those looking to question empire in the present day, it is a book that provides many answers," he said.

The judges said that in seeking this year's winner, they wanted a book packed with historical rigour, a rich base of research, and an ability to speak to wider historical questions

● Anand, a political journalist who has presented television and radio programmes on the BBC for 20 years, said she is honoured and overwhelmed to be named winner of a prize that was packed with books by esteemed historians. "I will be pinching myself for some time to come," she said.

beyond its immediate subject. "We also hoped that it would be the kind of read

we couldn't put down. Getting all of that in one book might have been too much to ask — but as it turned out, our 2020 winner has displayed all those qualities and more," added Mitter. Anand, who is a political journalist who has presented television and radio programmes on the BBC for 20 years, said she is honoured and overwhelmed to be named winner of a prize that was packed with exceptional books by esteemed historians.

"I will be pinching myself for some time to come.

"The Patient Assassin" is very close to my heart. Having been weaned on the story of Jallianwala Bagh, thanks to our family connection, I wanted to write the history of the massacre and Udhham Singh's revenge as an antidote to the rose-tinted portrayals of the Raj — so popular in film and television," she said. "I also needed to understand how such unspeakable things could be allowed to happen. Faced by complicated characters, contrary accounts, obscure sources, the weight of

folklore and deliberate attempts to hide the truth, I sometimes doubted that I could do justice to this dark episode. I'm so glad I persevered," she said, adding that the recognition for the story would mean a lot to her father and grandfather.

"The Patient Assassin is a compelling and truth-telling portrayal of a dark time in modern history, and we're delighted to be able to throw a light on this impressive title," noted Hannah Trevarthen from English PEN. — PTI

SHORT TAKE

Eze salvages point for Jamshedpur

Vasco: Stephen Eze salvaged a point for Jamshedpur FC with an 85th-minute strike to help his side hold Hyderabad FC to a 1-1 draw in an Indian Super League match on Wednesday. Aridane Santana scored his second goal of the campaign to give Hyderabad a 55th-minute lead. The 'Nizams' remain unbeaten in the competition while JFC are yet to taste victory. It took less than five minutes for Hyderabad to launch their first attack. Quick passing from Hyderabad allowed them to venture deep into Jamshedpur territory but Akash Mishra's final delivery in to the box failed to find Liston Colaco.

Live on TV

CRICKET

Lanka Premier League: Galle vs Jaffna from 3 pm; Dambulla vs Kandy from 7.30 pm on Sony Six

FOOTBALL

Indian Super League: Mohun Bagan vs Odisha from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

Europa League: AC Milan vs Celtic from 11.25 pm on Sony Ten 1; Zorya Luhansk vs Leicester City from 11.25 pm on Sony Ten 3; LASK vs Tottenham Hotspur from 11.25 pm on Sony Ten 2; AZ Alkmaar vs Napoli from 1.30 am (Friday) on Sony Ten 1; Roma vs Young Boys from 1.30 am (Friday) on Sony Six; Nice vs Leverkusen from 1.30 am (Friday) on Sony Ten 3; Arsenal vs Rapid Wien from 1.30 am (Friday) on Sony Ten 2

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Blues pull one back

Hardik, Bumrah win it for India; Australia clinch series

Canberra, Dec. 2: Pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah found his mojo and the Indian team its winning ways in a morale-lifting 13-run triumph over Australia in the third and final ODI on Wednesday, salvaging some of the lost pride in a 1-2 series defeat.

An in-form Hardik Pandya blasted 92 not out off 76 balls and Ravindra Jadeja's useful 66 off 50 took India to a healthy 302 for 5 in 50 overs after an inept show in the first 30 overs.

It was at least 30 runs short of a par-score on a good batting track but a rejigged bowling attack managed to restrict the home team to 289 all out in 49.3 overs.

Shardul Thakur (3/51) and debutant Thangarasu Natarajan (2/70 in 10 overs) did their bit but it was Bumrah's (2/43 in 9.3 overs) controlled effort with some swing upfront and the dismissal of a marauding Glenn Maxwell in the nick of time which ultimately turned the match in India's favour.

Bumrah did the most important thing by bowling one in the block-hole that had the dangerous Maxwell (59 off 38 balls) having his own little "brain fade" moment trying to free his arms exposing the stumps.

The 'Big Show' was in a mood to punish the bowlers and all he needed was to see off Bumrah and attack the others as he was doing.

The cushion provided by his "senior" helped Natarajan to start bowling his yorkers under pressure and Thakur also chipped in with necessary wickets.

The inconsequential



Pacer T. Natarajan celebrates after taking a wicket against Australia during the third One-Day International at Manuka Oval in Canberra, Australia, on Wednesday. — AP

SCORECARD

India: S. Dhawan c Agar b Abbott 16, S. Gill lbw b Agar 33, V. Kohli c Carey b Hazlewood 63, S. Iyer c Labuschagne b Zampa 19, K.L. Rahul lbw b Agar 5, H. Pandya (not out) 92, R. Jadeja (not out) 66. Extras (b-1, lb-1, nb-2, w-4) 8. **Total (for 5 wkts, in 50 overs) 302.**
FoW: 1-26, 2-82, 3-114, 4-123, 5-152.
Bowling: J. Hazlewood 10-1-66-1, G. Maxwell 5-0-27-0, S. Abbott 10-0-84-1, C. Green 4-0-27-0, A. Agar 10-0-44-2, A. Zampa 10-0-45-1, M. Henriques 1-0-7-0.
Australia: M. Labuschagne b T. Natarajan 7, A. Finch c Dhawan b R. Jadeja 75, S. Smith c

Rahul b S. Thakur 7, M. Henriques c Dhawan b S. Thakur 22, C. Green c Jadeja b K. Yadav 21, A. Carey run out 38, G. Maxwell b J. Bumrah 59, A. Agar c Yadav b T. Natarajan 28, S. Abbott c Rahul b Thakur 4, A. Zampa lbw b Bumrah 4, J. Hazlewood (not out) 7. Extras (lb-6, nb-2, wd-9) 17. **Total (all out in 49.3 overs) 289.**
FoW: 1-25, 2-56, 3-117, 4-123, 5-158, 6-210, 7-268, 8-278, 9-278.
Bowling: J. Bumrah 9.3-0-43-3, T. Natarajan 10-1-70-2, S. Thakur 10-1-51-3, K. Yadav 10-0-57-1, R. Jadeja 10-0-62-1.

Schumacher son set for F1 in 2021

Sakhir (Bahrain), Dec. 2: Mick Schumacher, the son of seven-time world champion Michael Schumacher, will drive in Formula One for the first time with Haas next season, the team announced on Wednesday, leaving their new recruit "emotionally exploding" at the realisation of a dream.

Schumacher junior, 21, long tipped for a Formula One spot, will partner Russian driver Nikita Mazepin, also 21, in the Haas lineup.

Haas team principal Guenther Steiner welcomed the two F1 debutants in a tweet: "Super excited about having two rookies in our team for next year! Welcome, Mick!" They replace Haas's current driver pairing of Romain Grosjean — who escaped a fiery crash in Sunday's Bahrain Grand Prix — and Kevin Magnussen.

"I'm really looking forward to next year's challenge...It's really been a dream that I've always dreamed about and now it's finally coming true," Schumacher said in a video posted on Twitter.

"So I'm just really happy and emotionally exploding."

Mick Schumacher currently heads the Formula Two drivers' standings with one race to go in Bahrain this weekend.

● **Mick Schumacher 21, long-tipped for a Formula One spot, will partner Russian driver Nikita Mazepin, also 21, in the Haas line-up next year.**

Haas's new signing will get a taste of what is in store when he takes part in free practice ahead of the 2020 season-ending Abu Dhabi Grand Prix on December 11 before taking part in testing a few days later.

Confirming the news 24 hours after Mazepin's appointment, Haas announced that they had signed Schumacher "in a multi-year agreement".

'EXCELLED'

Schumacher leads the F2 standings by 14 points after achieving 10 podium finishes and feature race victories at Monza and Sochi.

Steiner said the Formula 2 championship had long served as a proving ground for talent to showcase their credentials.

He added: "Mick has won races, collected podiums and excelled against some pretty exceptional talent in 2020. I firmly believe he's earned the opportunity to graduate into Formula 1 based on his performances." — *AFP*



FINANCIAL Chronicle

quick BITES

INDICATORS	%
Sensex	44,618.04 -0.08
Nifty 50	13,113.75 0.04
S&P 500*	3,663.54 0.03
Dollar (₹)	73.80 0.21
Pound Sterling (₹)	98.57 0.18
Euro (₹)	88.92 0.75
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	48,169.675 1.40
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	48.72 1.30
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.920 -0.010
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.955 0.022

* As of 8:30 PM IST

UBI integrates all Corporation Bank branches



Union Bank of India has completed the IT integration after which all the branches of erstwhile Corporation Bank have come fully under its fold as part of the amalgamation exercise, the bank said. With this IT integration, all of Corporation Bank, including service and specialised branches, have been fully integrated with Union Bank of India, it said in a release. All Corporation Bank customers have been migrated.

■ 30% stake could fetch around \$4.8 bn

China's Ant plans Paytm stake sale

SUMEET CHATTERJEE, ADITI SHAH & ANIRBAN SEN
HONG KONG/NEW DELHI, DEC. 2

Chinese fintech giant Ant Group is considering selling its 30 per cent stake in Indian digital payment processor Paytm amid tensions between the two Asian neighbours and a toughening competitive landscape, people with direct knowledge of the matter said.

Financial details of the possible transaction have not been firmed up and Ant, the Alibaba-backed payments-to-consumer credit behemoth, has not launched a formal sale process yet, four people told Reuters.

Paytm, which is also backed by SoftBank Group Corp among others, was valued at about \$16 billion during its latest private fundraising round a year ago. At that valuation, Ant's stake in the Indian firm is worth about \$4.8 billion.

Both Ant and Paytm said that the information was incorrect. A Paytm spokesman said "there has been no discussion with any of our major shareholders ever, nor any plans, about selling their stake."

Ant's possible exit from Paytm would mark another reversal for the Chinese company hot on the heels of the dramatic suspension of its \$37 billion stock listing last month, which would have been the world's largest.

It also would be a step back from its ambitions of becoming a global payments leader. Sources told Reuters in October that Ant was cutting its financial support to many of the overseas affiliated e-wallet firms.

The main trigger for Ant to consider the



divestment of its stake in Paytm is the worsening diplomatic relations between India and China in the past few months, said the people, who declined to be named, as the deliberations are confidential.

Relations between the countries are at a nadir, with troops locked in a border face-off in the western Himalayas for months.

"There is a growing realisation within Ant management that it would not be able to raise its stake in the company," one of the people with direct knowledge said, adding senior managers at Ant have discussed the idea recently.

Even so, Ant was in the middle of an investment review and it could still decide to shelve a divestment if it failed to get the desired valuation, he said.

Two other sources said that as a result of the

review Ant could end up retaining a small stake in Paytm.

Indian start-ups are heavily funded by Chinese investors such as Alibaba and Tencent. Bankers have previously said they were looking to bolster their presence in the country with an aim to grow their revenue outside China.

Alibaba has invested over \$4 billion in India so far and had plans to invest around \$5 billion in 2021, which have now been put on hold, one of the sources said.

Alibaba did not respond to a request for comment.

Ant first invested in Paytm in 2015 and owns its 30 per cent stake in the firm via its parent company, One97 Communications, according to Ant's initial public offering prospectus, which described the Indian firm as a major associate.

— *Reuters*

TWO SAHARA FIRMS FILE CONTEMPT PLEA AGAINST SEBI

New Delhi, Dec. 2: Two Sahara group firms have moved the Supreme Court seeking initiation of contempt proceedings against the Sebi, alleging that the market regulator's demand of ₹62,602 crore from them was not only contemptuous but a mischievous attempt to overreach the directions of the apex court.

The Sebi had moved the apex court seeking direction to the firms to pay the amount in compliance with the court's earlier orders, failing which the group's chief Subrata Roy be taken into custody.

Sahara India Real Estate Corporation Ltd. (SIRECL) and Sahara Housing Investment Corporation Ltd. (SHICL), in their contempt plea have alleged gross, blatant and willful disobedience of the directions of the top court by the regulator.

It said that the Sebi's demand asking the firms to deposit Rs 62,602 crore was in violation of the specific directions of the apex court in its order of February 6, 2017 that at present only the principal amount is to be concerned and the issue of interest will be adverted to later.

It said that Sebi's action of demanding money and filing of contempt against Sahara firms was not only contemptuous but a mischievous attempt to overreach the directions of the court. — *PTI*

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E-com hired over 2.5 lakh temp staff for festivals

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, DEC. 2

In order to meet the delivery requirements of increased online sales during the recently concluded festive season, e-commerce companies had hired around 2.5 lakh to 3 lakh temporary employees. The jobs predominantly catered to delivery and warehouse management.

The festive season this year saw e-commerce players clocking gross sales of \$8.3 billion against \$5 billion last year, according to Bengaluru-based Red-Seer Consulting. This increased sales also reflected in their hiring numbers, which stood around 2.5 lakh to 3 lakh, as per the data from Teamlease Services.

A large part of the jobs were offered by market-place players like Amazon and Flipkart, while smaller players supported the hiring by third-party logistics companies, which are into last mile delivery, as per the data from Teamlease. Post-lock-down, several brands have started selling through their websites, using logistics from third-party players.

"The hiring activity was more predominant in the southern states, while north and west saw



almost similar levels of hiring. The hiring was also more spread out to cover newer locations, though large cities still accounted for a large part of the hiring," said Rituparna Chakraborty, co-founder and executive vice president, Team-Lease Services.

The festive season sales this year saw increased demand from tier-II, III and towns beyond. E-commerce companies were seen ramping up their supply chain in smaller towns as well.

Amazon had added close to 200 delivery stations, including those operated by delivery service partners across the country.

Compared to pre-Covid times, companies this time took a conscious approach towards hiring more women workforce. Prior to the pandemic, women workforce made up for less than 10 per cent and many companies have set the target to take this up to 25 per cent.

Despite remunerations getting affected across industries, e-commerce continued to pay the temp staff as usual. However, Most of the contracts were for a period ranging from 45 days to three months.

Chakraborty says 15 to 20 per cent of the festive season temp staff would be retained by the firms.

China buys first Indian rice in three decades

RAJENDRA JADHAV
MUMBAI, DEC. 2

China has begun importing Indian rice for the first time in at least three decades due to tightening supplies from Thailand, Myanmar and Vietnam and an offer of sharply discounted prices, Indian industry officials said.

India is the world's biggest rice exporter and China the biggest

importer. Beijing buys in around 4 million tonnes a year but has avoided purchases from India, citing quality issues. The rice imports come despite political tensions over a border dispute in the Himalayas.

For the first time China has made rice purchases. They may increase buying next year after seeing the quality of Indian crop," B.V. Krishna Rao, president of the Rice Exporters

Association, said.

Indian traders have contracted to export 100,000 tonnes of broken rice for Dec.-Feb. shipments at around \$300 per tonne on a free-on-board basis. China's traditional suppliers, such as Thailand, Vietnam, Myanmar and Pakistan, have limited surplus for export and were quoting at least \$30 per tonne more compared with Indian prices. — *Reuters*