

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

COIMBATORE | SATURDAY 19 | DECEMBER 2020

WEATHER



Max: 28°C
Min: 17°C
Rainfall: Nil

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Margazhi 4
Tithi: Panchami
Star: Avittam
Rahukalam:
9 am to 10.30 am

Yamagandam:
1.30 pm to 3 pm

PRAYERS

Fajar: 5.07 am

Zohar: 12.09 pm

Asar: 3.19 pm

Maghrib: 5.45 pm

Isha: 7.01 pm

SUNSET TODAY 5.47 PM

SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.26 AM

MOONRISE TODAY 10.32 AM

MOONSET TOMORROW 10.23 PM

CORONA COUNT

CASES

(+26,786)
1,00,04,620

DEATHS

(+338)
1,45,167

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+1,134)

TN :8,04,650 11,954

WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

7,56,33,879

DEATHS

16,74,511

COUNTRIES,
AREAS WITH
CASES 218

worldometers.info

Amid growing rebellion in TMC, Shah on two-day visit to Bengal

Kolkata: Home Minister Amit Shah will arrive in Kolkata on Friday night on a two-day visit to Bengal and take stock of the BJP's affairs and activities in the districts, ahead of 2021 assembly elections. Amid a growing rebellion in the ruling TMC, speculation is rife that Suvedu Adhikari, who quit the party and gave up cabinet portfolios in the Mamata Banerjee government, may join the BJP along with a slew of disgruntled leaders.

Re-opening of schools in Karnataka to be decided today

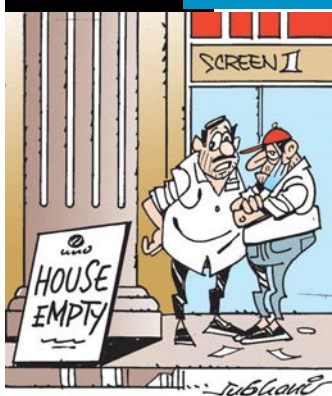
Bengaluru: A decision on re-opening of schools in Karnataka would be taken at a high-level meeting on Saturday, officials said on Friday. The meet would be attended by Chief Minister of the state B S Yediyurappa and Primary and Secondary School Education Minister S Suresh Kumar, the officials said.

Biden advisor Cedric Richmond tests positive for coronavirus

Wilmington: One of President-elect Joe Biden's closest advisors tested positive for the coronavirus on Thursday, according to his transition team. Louisiana Rep. Cedric Richmond, who is set to resign from Congress to join the incoming Biden administration as a senior adviser, tested positive two days after travelling to Atlanta to attend a campaign rally that Biden headlined for Democratic Senate candidates Jon Ossoff and the Rev. Raphael Warnock.

COUNTER

POINT



When will we get to see 'House Full' boards again?

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CM Edappadi to hit campaign trail today



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Biden backs son Hunter after tax probe revealed



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India lead by 62 runs



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POLL SCENE HOTS UP

Kamal hits back at CM with I-T taunt

G BABU JAYAKUMAR | DC CHENNAI, DEC. 18

Makkal Neethi Maiam president Kamal Haasan continued his onslaught on Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami through Twitter, asking 'who is the 'Big Boss' of the highway contractor, from whose house Income Tax officials recovered Rs 170 crore recently.'

Peeved by Mr Palaniswami's snide remarks against him, his films and the Bigg Boss reality show on Thursday at a press meet in Ariyalur, Mr Haasan retorted immediately through a tweet: 'happy to know that the Chief Minister watches Bigg Boss.'

Later in the night, he tweeted lines from an iconic MGR film song titled *Naan Anaittal* from the film *Engal Veetu Pillai*, which refers to people falling at others' feet for their own benefit and calling them as shameless individuals.

The lines quoted end with a vow to 'finish the game of the gang' by the singer, who says that his time would come to do that. Interestingly, Mr Palaniswami, as part of his broadside against Mr Haasan, had mentioned that songs in MGR films had meaning to run down the movies of Mr Haasan. He said unlike MGR's songs, the lyrics of Mr Haasan's film songs lacked meaning and the families that watched his films faced the prospect of ruination.

That the Chief Minister



was impelled to speak disparagingly against Mr Haasan after the actor-politician turned aggressive against the government as the latter has been trying to ride the political wave on an anti-corruption plank, portents a scenario in which the AIADMK could be hauled over the coal by too many parties.

For, On Thursday itself, Mr Stalin also sang a few lines from the same '*Naan Anaittal*' song that Haasan tweeted at a meeting while making a reference to the Chief Minister.

Mr Haasan picking up lines from an MGR film to strike back gives the electoral battle a new dimension as the harsh verbal exchanges till now had been confined to the ones between Mr Palaniswami and DMK president M.K. Stalin.

All these points to the dawn of a colourful election campaign, supported by social media channels dishing out visuals, music and juicy recollections from the past, and even top political leaders showing no restraint in muckraking.



SC notice to Kunal Kamra, Rachita Taneja in contempt cases

New Delhi, Dec. 18: The Supreme Court issued show-cause notices to stand-up comedian Kunal Kamra and cartoonist Rachita Taneja on Friday for their alleged scandalous tweets against the apex court.

A bench of Justices Ashok Bhushan, R.S. Reddy and M.R. Shah sought response from both in six weeks on the notices issued in two separate cases.

It, however, exempted them from personal appearances in the cases.

"Issue notice returnable within Six weeks. The contemptor-respondent not to appear in person," the bench said in its order passed in a plea against Kamra.

Similar order was passed by the bench in the plea against Taneja.

The top court in its two orders noted that Attorney General K.K.Venugopal has given his consent to initiate contempt proceedings against both the comic artists in separate cases.

Venugopal had granted consent for initiation of criminal contempt proceedings against Kamra, saying the comedian's tweets were in 'bad taste' and it was time that people understand that attacking the apex court brazenly would attract punishment. The attorney general had also given consent to initiate criminal contempt proceedings against Taneja, stating that the caricatures posted by her on social media were intended to denigrate the Supreme Court and lower its authority in the eyes of the public. The consent of either the attorney general or the solicitor general is necessary under Section 15 of the Contempt of Courts Act for initiating contempt proceedings against a person. —PTI

Talk about end of MSP biggest lie, ready to discuss all issues: PM

Modi trains guns on Opposition

**DC CORRESPONDENTS
NEW DELHI/BHOPAL, DEC. 18**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched a scathing attack on the Opposition for "peddling lies" to mislead farmers on the new agricultural reform laws, which have triggered nationwide protests, and said he was ready "with folded hands" to "discuss every issue" with the farmers and allay their fears.

Addressing a "kisan samelan" (farmers' conference) at Raisen, Madhya Pradesh, via video-conferencing on Friday, the PM claimed the measures were discussed by every government over the past two decades, and that the talk about Minimum Support Price (MSP) ending with the new laws "is the biggest lie ever".

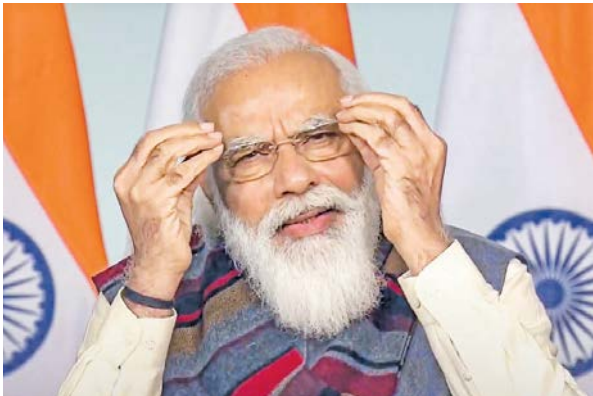
"These laws were not brought in overnight. In the past 22 years, every government, every state has discussed these in detail. Farmers' groups, agricultural experts, economists, scientists and progressive farmers have called for reforms. Parties opposing these laws today promised these reforms in their manifestos," Mr Modi said.

"If anyone has any concerns, then with our heads bowed and our hands folded, with humility, we are willing to discuss with them and assuage their fears," he added.

"The (Opposition) parties are pained today. They are asking themselves how Modi could achieve what they couldn't do in all this time. They are worried Modi will get credit. My reply to them is -- you keep the credit. I don't want credit. I only want farmers' lives to improve. Stop misleading the farmers."

The PM has in most of his recent speeches tried to explain that the laws brought by his government are for the farmers' good. But on Friday, he addressed the farmers directly as part of his government's big outreach amid protests on the highways near Delhi by thousands of farmers. A number of senior ministers are part of this outreach.

Emphasising the need for reforms, Mr Modi said Indian farmers should not lag behind the world in facilities. "Today I want to expose those who have absolutely no care or genuine concern for you -- our annadaata (farmers). I want to caution all those who are being misled, instigated in the name of these farm laws," he added. Mr Modi said the "three biggest lies" spread by the Opposition parties were that the new farm laws would pave way for discontinuance of the existing system of minimum support prices; closure of "mandis" and the loss of agricultural lands due to the contract farming provision.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses the farmers of Madhya Pradesh, in New Delhi, on Friday. — PTI

Solution likely by new year, says farm minister

**SANJAY KAW IDC
NEW DELHI, DEC. 18**

With negotiations between the farmers' unions and the Centre locked in an impasse, agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar on Friday said the government was hopeful of resolving the farmers' agitation over the three new farm laws before the new year and was continuing its informal dialogue with various groups to defuse the crisis.

Speaking to a news agency, Mr Tomar reiterated that the new laws were beneficial for farmers and the government

was ready to give a written assurance that the minimum support price (MSP) and mandi system will continue. He said: "We have constantly been holding discussions with farmers' unions... Overall, our effort is to reach a solution through dialogue with them. We are still open for talks... I hope through dialogue we can move towards reaching a solution."

Asked about his recent remark that he would engage with "genuine" farm leaders, the minister said: "When I say genuine, I mean those who are really concerned about farmers." ■ P4

India's Covid caseload edges close to 1 crore

New Delhi, Dec 18: India's Covid-19 caseload rose to 99.79 lakh with 22,890 new infections being reported in a day, while total recoveries crossed the 95 lakh-mark, according to the Union Health Ministry's data updated on Friday.

With 338 more fatalities, the death toll reached 1,44,789, while the total Covid-19 cases mounted to 99,79,447, the data updated at 8 am showed.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to

95,20,827, pushing the national recovery rate to 95.40 per cent. The Covid-19 case fatality rate stands at 1.45 per cent.

The Covid-19 active caseload remained below four lakh for the 12th consecutive day. There are 3,13,831 active cases in the country which comprise 3.14 per cent of the total caseload, the data stated.

India's Covid-19 tally had crossed the 20 lakh-mark on August 7, 30 lakh on August 23 and 40 lakh on September 5. —PTI

India, China agree to continue work towards complete disengagement soon

**DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 18**

A satisfactory resolution on the ground to the situation in the Ladakh sector between deployed Chinese and Indian troops still remains elusive despite several rounds of talks at the diplomatic and military level in the past several months. Nevertheless, India and China on Friday decided to "continue to work towards ensuring complete disengagement in all friction points along the

LAC in the Western Sector at the earliest" and noted that the 7th and 8th rounds of Senior Commanders meetings held recently "had also contributed to ensuring stability on the ground". At the 20th meeting of the Working Mechanism for Consultation & Coordination on India-China Border Affairs (WMCC) held on Thursday between the two sides at the diplomatic level, it was "agreed to maintain close consultations at the diplomatic and military level",

Mobile phones now have longer reach than missiles: Rajnath

Chandigarh, Dec. 18: Apparently referring to the impact of social media on conflicts between nations, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Friday said the reach of the mobile phone now is bigger than that of a missile.

Addressing the annual Military Literature Festival here, Mr Singh warned that different kinds of security threats may emerge in the future.

"This event is important from another point of view," he said through

video conference. "As times change, the nature of threats and wars is also changing. In the future, other security-related issues may come before us."

He added that conflicts are gradually becoming "comprehensive" in the manner never imagined earlier.

Possibly alluding to the power of social media and mobile apps, he said, "Today the range (marak kshamta) of a mobile has crossed even the reach of a

● **"The enemy can now reach people even without crossing the border. So, everyone should play the role of a soldier. We should remain alive to these dangers"**

—**RAJNATH SINGH,**
Defence Minister



missile," the defence minister said.

He added that the enemy can now reach people even

without crossing the border, and urged everyone to play the role of a soldier. "We should remain alive

to these dangers and save ourselves from wrong and misleading information and save others too, and festivals like this can play a key role in this," he said, urging literary figures to make use of their talent to the full for this.

The defence minister did not specifically refer to China. But in recent months, since the standoff between the two sides began at the Line of Actual Control, India has banned several Chinese mobile apps, citing concerns relat-

ed to national security and privacy. These included the popular TikTok and WeChat apps.

The defence minister said this year's edition of the festival was special as the country is observing the 50th year of 1971 India-Pakistan War.

Mr Singh said there are many veterans around who fought that war and urged the youth to learn from them. He asked them to follow in the footsteps of soldiers who are living legends. —PTI

HATHRAS CASE

CBI files chargesheet against four for gangrape, murder

New Delhi, Dec. 18: The CBI on Friday filed a chargesheet against the four men accused of the gangrape and murder of a 19-year-old Dalit woman in a village in Hathras district of Uttar Pradesh, officials said.

After nearly two months of probe, the agency concluded in its final report that the accused — Sandeep, Ravi, Luv Kush and Ramu — allegedly gangraped and murdered the woman when she had gone to the fields to collect fodder on September 14 in her village Bhulgarhi, they said.

In its findings submitted before the competent

court in Hathras, the agency has slapped Indian Penal Code (IPC) sections pertaining to rape, murder and gangrape apart from those under the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act against the four accused men from the village, they said.

The maximum sentence in the above charges is capital punishment. The agency has based its findings on the dying statement of the woman in which she is understood to have named the accused, besides scientific and forensic evidence collected by the CBI and statements of witnesses and the victim's family members

recorded by it.

The findings submitted by the CBI have left red faced the top officials of Uttar Pradesh Police who had claimed that no evidence of rape was found in forensic tests.

Uttar Pradesh's Additional Director General (Law and Order) Prashant Kumar had said, "The report of the FSL has come. It says clearly that samples did not contain semen. It makes clear that there was no rape or gangrape". The ADG had also claimed that the woman in her statement to police "did not mention rape but talked about "maar-peet" (beating) only". —PTI

Man lynched over cattle theft suspicion

Patna, Dec. 18: A 32-year-old man was lynched to death, on Wednesday, over suspicion of cattle theft at Phulwarisharif, near Patna, in Bihar. Phulwarisharif police said all the accused have been arrested.

The victim, Muhammad Alamgir, was beaten for several hours after he was

seen untying a buffalo from a cattle shed in the wee hours of the morning. He was admitted to hospital, in the afternoon, where he passed away.

There was reportedly another person, with Alamgir, who managed to escape. Six people were named in the complaint, all of whom have been

arrested. The accused were arrested based on a statement by the victim's mother. The victim was from a slum near Patliputra railway station in Patna.

Another case of lynching over suspected cattle theft had occurred in Phulwarisharif in 2015. —Agencies

SHORT TAKES

₹49.6 lakh worth gold seized by air customsDC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 18

The customs officials at the Chennai airport seized 972 grams of gold worth ₹49.6 lakh and arrested a person.

Based on intelligence, Safiullah Abdul Wahith (34) & Sahabtheen Sahubar Sathik (34) of Ramanathapuram who arrived from Dubai by FlyDubai flight FZ8517 were intercepted at exit. On personal search two bundles of gold paste (one from each) weighing 211 grams were recovered from rectum which yielded 182 grams of 24 k purity gold valued at Rs. 9.4 lakh on extraction and the same was seized.

In another case Rawther (44) of Chennai who arrived from Dubai by Flight Indigo 6E-66 was intercepted at exit. On his personal search one 49 gram gold cut bit valued at Rs. 2.50 lakh was recovered from his pant pocket.

Further, three bundles of gold paste weighing 810 grams were recovered from rectum which yielded 741 grams of 24 k purity gold valued at Rs. 37.7 lakh on extraction. 790 grams of gold valued at Rs. 40.2 lakh was recovered from him and he was arrested. In three cases, 972 grams of gold valued at Rs. 49.6 lakh was seized under Customs Act. Further investigation is under progress.

Panel to probe irregularities in computer instructor appointmentsDC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 18

The Madras high court has appointed Justice N. Authanathan, a retired judge of the Madras high court as a one-man commission to conduct a thorough enquiry into the allegations of irregularities in the conduct of online examination for selection to the post of computer instructor grade-I (PG cadre) in three centres in the state, made by the aggrieved candidates, and submit his report to the court by February 1, 2021.

Passing orders on a batch of petitions from the aggrieved candidates, Justice V. Parthiban made it clear that barring these three centres, the authorities are at liberty to go ahead with the appointments of the selected candidates from other 116 centres and in that process, they should ensure that none of the candidates from the disputed three centres should be favoured with the appointments.

To that extent, the petitions, challenging the entire recruitment shall stand dismissed, the judge added.

Alleging various irregularities in the conduct of the online examination, N. Srinanjini and five others filed the present petitions to quash the final selection list for the direct recruitment of computer instructors grade-I (postgraduate cadre) and conduct re-examination for all the candidates who appeared for the examination conducted by Teachers Recruitment Board on June 23 and 27, 2019.

The judge posted to February 2, 2021, further hearing of the case.

**Chidambaram temple cars may be pulled by tractors**A. ARUL PALANI | DC
CHENNAI, DEC. 18

For the first time, cars of the famous Lord Nataraj temple at Chidambaram are likely to be pulled by tractors and giant bulldozer during Arudra darshan this month.

Thousands of devotees from Cuddalore and other parts of the state used to throng the shrine and witness temple car of Sabapathy temple popularly known as Sri Natarajar temple in Chidambaram, as part of the Arudra darshan festivities. The temple administration has proposed to hold the ritual on December 29 this year.

The five temple cars carrying the presiding deity Lord Nataraj and his consort Sivagamasundari, Lord

The five temple cars carrying the presiding deity Lord Nataraj and his consort Sivagamasundari, Lord Vinayaka, Lord Subramaniam and Chandigeswar would be rolled out from the temple premises in the morning. Normally the devotees used to pull the cars through the town, covering the four mada streets

Vinayaka, Lord Subramaniam and Chandigeswar would be rolled out from the temple premises in the morning. Normally the devotees used to pull the cars through the town, covering the four mada streets.

After relaxing norms of Covid-19 pandemic lockdown the temple was opened for

devotees with restrictions prescribed by Central and state governments. Since a large number of devotees were expected to assemble at the temple premises, the district administration had requested the temple authorities to tractor and bulldozer to pull the temple cars instead of involving the devotees.

Based on the suggestions, officials from Neyveli Lignite Corporation India Ltd, Neyveli have inspected the temple premises and route. They have also inspected the cars. Police officers, revenue officials and members from Podhu Deekshidars also assisted the officials. Decision regarding involvement of the tractor and bulldozer will be taken based on the report of NLCIL officials.

Positivity rate falls below 2 per cent in state**Covid tests to be conducted in 161 city college hostels**DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 18

The health department will conduct extensive screening tests for Covid-19 in the 161 hostels of 97 colleges under the Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC) limits.

Health secretary J. Radhakrishnan said that GCC collected over 6,000 samples from students in colleges and hostels within the city limits following the cluster of Covid-19 cases on the IIT-Madras campus. "We have decided to conduct intensive screening across the hostels in the upcoming 15 days. If new clusters are reported anywhere, extensive tests will be conducted," he said.

"The Chief minister has instructed us that there should be no compromise on testing. So we are conducting extensive tests in markets, public places and contact of Covid-19 patients. Due to this effective work, the mortality rate has now come down to 1 per cent," healy secy said

Out of 6,344 samples collected so far, 210 tested positive. As many as 2,361 samples are being processed and results are awaited. Samples have been collected from across the 15 zones that are under the control of the GCC.

"The Chief minister has instructed us that there

should be no compromise on testing. So we are conducting extensive tests in markets, public places and contact of Covid-19 patients. Due to this effective work, the mortality rate has now come down to 1 per cent," he said.

He added that college authorities have been instructed to provide take-away food service or to deliver food in the hostel rooms.

Tamil Nadu on Friday recorded 1,134 new cases of coronavirus and 12 related deaths, taking the overall tally to 8.04 lakh and total fatalities to 11,954. Recoveries outnumbered new infections, with 1,710 being cured of the virus, according to a government bulletin. With

the new infections, the total number of positive cases stood at 8,04,650, while 7,82,915 people have been cured of the infection, it said. The positivity rate in the state was below two per cent. As many as 75,347 samples were tested by RT-PCR while over 1.33 crore specimens have been tested so far. Among the new cases, Chennai recorded the highest of 341, followed by Coimbatore (115) and Chengalpattu at 69.

The active cases stood at 9,781. Perambalur saw no new cases on Friday, while 10 districts saw single-digit fresh infections. All 12 deceased, including an octogenarian, suffered from different comorbidities, it said.

'Resumption of normal train services not yet decided'

New Delhi, Dec. 18: The railways on Friday said it is not possible to provide a definite date for the resumption of normal train services and pointed out that it has seen an 87-per cent drop in the earnings from the passenger segment so far this year, compared to the last year.

Addressing a press conference, Railway Board Chairman VK Yadav said so far in the current fiscal, the railways' earnings from passenger revenue have been ₹4,600 crore and estimates show that by March 2021, the figure is expected to rise to ₹15,000 crore.

Yadav said the railways is currently operating 1,089 special trains, while the Kolkata Metro is running 60 per cent of its services, the Mumbai suburban is running 88 per cent trains and 50 per cent of the Chennai suburban services are in operation. Yadav said senior railway officials are closely monitoring the situation and normal train services will be resumed "slowly" in a phased manner.

Yadav, however, said the loss in the passenger segment will be overcome from the earnings through freight, which is expected to cross last year's figures. — PTI



'Zero violation junction' introduced near Spencer Plaza in the city.

— DC

Traffic police launch 'zero violation junction'DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 18

In order to reduce traffic congestion in Chennai, the traffic police have introduced a new scheme called 'Zero violation junction'. The scheme focuses on prevention of driving without helmet, travelling without wearing seat belt, talking on cell phone while driving, jumping the signal and crossing the white fort.

In the first phase, the project has been implemented at Anna Road

CoP Mahesh-kumar Agarwal has asked inspectors of all police stations in Chennai to inform the public about the project in the next phase

Spencer signal, Anna Memorial Curve signal, Thiruvanniyur signal and Madhavaram roundabout signal.

Chennai police commissioner Maheshkumar

Agarwal has asked inspectors of all police stations in Chennai to inform the public about the project in the next phase.

The traffic police and law and order wing are involved in the surveillance. A fine of up to Rs 500 will be imposed immediately for traffic violations. The police will give advice about the scheme if motorists enter into an argument.

The police have warned that driving licence will be revoked if a person repeats the offence.

Environment department official suspended over corruption chargesDC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 18

A superintendent of the environment department in Chennai accused of possessing ₹1.37 crore of unaccounted cash and 3 kg gold, was suspended from his post on Friday. The Directorate of Vigilance and Anti-Corruption (DVAC) raided multiple premises including the office and residential premises of the Pandian, superintendent of the Environment Department on December 14.

The DVAC also seized unaccounted cash of ₹1.37 crore, including ₹88,500 in cash, from Pandian's office in Panagal Maligai. The officer also moved unaccounted cash of ₹37 lakh under fixed deposit and owned 3,343 grams of silver and diamonds worth ₹5.4 lakh.

He also bought properties worth ₹7 crore. The DVAC officials are also planning to issue summons to Pandian to make him appear before the directorate for inquiry, said reports.

Tourism badly hit this year in NilgirisB. RAVICHANDRAN | DC
OOTY, DEC. 18

Tourism was the worst hit in the Nilgiris this year due to the pandemic. While all the summer shows and autumn shows were cancelled with closure of tourist spots, stakeholders said that the tourism industry incurred heavy losses this year.

The electric vehicle tourism launched in early March by a private organization for eco-friendly rides in Ooty, also failed to make any progress.

Tourism is the backbone of the economy here, particularly in the urban limits where many families rely on tourism for their livelihood.

While the dawn of 2020 began with good hope and a good influx of tourists,

things changed for the worst for the travel and tourism industry as the government ordered closure of all tourist spots here from mid-March, resulting in the cancellation of the summer horticulture shows like the flower show and other events like the summer festival, horse racing, dog show, and autumn shows in the month of September and October.

Though the hills witnessed a record one million tourist influx in the summer of 2019 alone, sadly during the summer of 2020, tourist flow was zero. While tourist influx

Naval pilots awarded 'Wings' at INS Rajali

Eleven officers of the Indian Navy were awarded the prestigious "Wings" by Rear Admiral Puneet Chadha, VSM, Flag Officer Commanding Tamil Nadu & Puducherry naval area during a special passing out parade (PoP) conducted to mark the graduation of the 95th Helicopter Conversion Course (HCC) at Naval Air Station, INS Rajali, Arakkonam on Friday. The PoP was organized adhering to all laid down Covid-19 safety norms and social distancing. The officers of 95th HCC underwent rigorous flying and ground training for 22 weeks at the Indian Naval Air Squadron 561, the Helicopter Training School (HTS).

— DC

5-member family saved from slaveryDC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 18

Five members of a family, employed as bonded labourers at Thirukazhukundram in Chengalpattu district, were rescued on Friday by the authorities of the revenue department in the district and the volunteers of International Justice Mission (IJM).

According to sources, a team of officials led by RDO Lakshmi Priya inspected Vilagam village in Thirukazhukundram taluk early on Friday. A family of five, Valliappan (38), his wife Malliga (30) and three children were rescued after five years of bondage.

Based on a tip-off from an NGO that a family was forced into slavery, the Chengalpattu revenue officials and the local police conducted a surprise inspection rescuing them.

According to sources, a team of officials led by RDO Lakshmi Priya inspected Vilagam village in Thirukazhukundram taluk early on Friday. A family of five, Valliappan (38), his wife Malliga (30) and three children were rescued after five years of bondage

Valliappan had received Rs 1,000 from his employer five years ago and the family was forced into slavery.

They were paid a menial wage of ₹150 a week and were exploited day and night in the work.

Their movement was restricted and not allowed to leave the facility during family functions and festivals. The labourers reported verbal and physical abuse at the work-site," said a source.

The rescued labourers underwent medical checks in the Thirukazhukundram taluk office. They will be sent back to their home. Rehabilitation and other important necessities like an Aadhar card, ration card, etc, will be given, sources said.

Based on the complaint by the officials, the Thirukazhukundram police launched a search for their employer.

Man found hanging inside well near SriperumbudurDC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 18

A 23-year-old man's body was found hanging inside a well in Keevalur village near Sriperumbudur on Friday morning.

The police identified the deceased as Dhanasai Kumar, a native of Bihar. He came to Chennai a few months back and resided with his friends in a rented place in Keevalur village. Police said he recently got a job at a private company in the suburbs.

The incident came to light on Friday morning, after his roommates found him hanging inside a well near their house. Police said, while the others had gone to night shift on Thursday night, Dhanasai Kumar stayed back.

Police said it primarily appears that the victim had committed suicide. The body of the deceased has been sent to the Sriperumbudur government hospital for post-mortem. A case has been registered by the Sriperumbudur police and investigations are on.

NO DEARTH OF MAN-ANIMAL CONFLICT DURING LOCKDOWNB. RAVICHANDRAN | DC
OOTY, DEC. 18

The pandemic and lockdown in no way contributed to lessen incidents of man-animal conflict in the Nilgiris. While there were half a dozen incidents of electrocution of wild animals, including elephants, there were 16 human deaths due to the man-animal conflicts this year.

In November, the forest department initiated a project of studying the wild elephants moving in the human settlements in the Gudalur forest division to provide unique ID code for wild elephants to follow them to tackle man-elephant conflict.

Man-tiger conflict, man-leopard conflict, man-gaur conflict, man-elephant conflict, man-bear conflict, and the man-wild boar conflict here, have been hitting the headlines from January itself. In early December, three persons were killed in Pandalur limits, one in Gudalur limits and one in Ooty limits in a week's time. While this speaks volume of the increasing man-elephant conflict here, the killing of a woman by a tiger in Mudumalai tiger reserve bu-

<<<<

The Government Botanical Garden in Ooty, which went without any tourist influx for half of the year in 2020.

— DC



IN BRIEF

Gang cut b'day cake with sickle, held

Tiruchy, Dec. 18: The police arrested six people for celebrating a birthday event by cutting the cake with a sickle here on Wednesday.

The accused, identified as Gopi (22) of Somarasampettai, celebrated his birthday along with his friends on December 5 and posted a photograph of the event on the social media, which turned viral. Police arrested Gopi and five others on Wednesday and are in search of two more.

MNM moves HC for battery torch symbol

Chennai, Dec. 18: Makkal Needhi Maiam has filed a writ petition before the Madras high court for directing the election commission of India to allot the battery torch symbol in its favour and to restrain MGR Makkal Katchi from using the same. MNM has in its prayer, stated it is entitled to the battery torch symbol for this general election to the TN legislative Assembly as per the provisions of the election symbols (reservation and allotment) order, 1968, according to a press release.

Ban on bath in sea lifted

Tiruchendur, Dec. 18: Devotees to the Arulmigu Subramanyaswamy temple here in Thoothukudi district have been allowed to have a holy dip in the sea at the temple shore, from Friday onwards. The temple, closed for devotees in view of Covid-19 lockdown eight months back in March this year, was opened for a restricted number of devotees registered online for the first five days of the Sashti festival from November 15. The climax event of the festival, Soorasamharam, on the sixth day, was however banned for devotees. Only a few people from nearby areas came to the sea, on Friday. The Naalikinaru (soft water well) in the temple premises has still not been opened.

CM Edappadi to hit campaign trail today

Salem, Dec 18: Chief Minister and AIADMK co-coordinator K. Palaniswami will launch his party's campaign for the 2021 assembly election on Saturday from his Edappadi constituency in this district. "I am going to start the campaign from Edappadi constituency tomorrow following a request from party workers," a beaming Palaniswami told reporters here on Friday.

To a question, he replied that his party's alliance with the existing constituents, including the BJP, will continue for the assembly polls to be held next year also. The existing alliance was forged for



CM Edappadi K Palaniswami greets public at Jagir Ammapalayam near Salem on Friday on his way to his hometown where he is going to launch his poll campaign. —DC

the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. Palaniswami and party coordinator and deputy chief minister O Panneerselvam had announced during a recent event attended by Union Home Minister Amit Shah

that the poll pact between the two will be in place for 2021 election also.

Other parties in the alliance include Vijayakanth-led DMDK and the PMK, founded by Dr S Ramadoss. The ruling

AIADMK is eyeing a hat-trick of electoral victories in 2021, after storming to power in the 2011 elections. Assembly polls in Tamil Nadu are due in April-May next year. —PTI

Palaniswami calls DMK opportunistic

Salem, Dec 18: Tamil Nadu Chief Minister K Palaniswami on Friday accused the opposition DMK of being "opportunistic" and claimed that it wanted only one family to prosper.

While AIADMK stalwarts, the late Chief Ministers M G Ramachandran and J Jayalalithaa had no heirs, it was people of the state and the party supporters who were the heirs, he said at the inauguration of Amma Mini Clinic in the district.

Targeting his party's arch rival DMK, the AIADMK Co-coordinator alleged that "right from the leadership to the last person in the opposition party, they all want only one family to prosper," and said it was not the case with the AIADMK, whose functionaries were keen on people's welfare.

"Unlike the DMK, the

state government and AIADMK (party) have concern for the people. I am the only chief minister in the state to visit each and every district, meeting officials and people and solving their problems, besides reviewing the implementation of government welfare schemes," he said.

However, the DMK was "opportunistic," he said.

In the AIADMK, those who work hard can come up and loyalty will be rewarded with high positions, he said.

This dedication enabled the AIADMK to grow strong enough to defeat the DMK's attempts to dislodge the government and break the party, he said.

On DMK President M K Stalin's repeated criticism on many issues, Palaniswami claimed he was 'intentionally' targeting the state government and even the officials,

who, despite the coronavirus crisis, went to every nook and corner of Tamil Nadu to solve people's problems.

While he, ministers and government representatives were meeting people in person despite the covid pandemic, Stalin was addressing his party workers through video conference meetings, the chief minister said.

"Is it good to meet people or to sit at home addressing videoconference meetings with party workers?" he asked.

Only when one is active on the field can one understand what is affecting the people and accordingly take steps to resolve the problems.

"This is what we are doing. I, my ministers, government officials and even the AIADMK elected representatives are striving for the well-being of the people," he said.

Responding to Palaniswami's remarks, Stalin described as a 'show', the former's review meetings on the covid situation and those on implementation of the government's welfare schemes.

"In the name of review, he runs a show by involving officials and party men," he said in Chennai. In his concluding address at a party-sponsored hunger strike in support of farmers agitating in Delhi against Centre's three farm laws, Stalin said that as LoP, it was his job to 'highlight' the wrongdoings.

Responding to Palaniswami earlier dubbing him as "statement hero" for issuing regular statements against the government on various matters, Stalin said he was now giving the title "corruption hero" to the CM. —PTI

RTI: Tamil Nadu information commission second in India

R. VALAYAPATHY | DC PUDUKKOTTAI, DEC.18

The Tamil Nadu Information Commission stood second among states in providing information to the needy under the right to information act (RTI), said Tamil Nadu Information commissioner R. Pratap Kumar.

Kumar, addressing a press conference at Pudukkottai on Friday on the sidelines of holding inquiries on the appeal of petitions filed by hundreds of applicants of Pudukkottai, Tiruchy, and Karur districts after not getting proper reply for their petitions from officials concerned, said every month as many as 1,300 appeal petitions are taken up for inquiry of which 90 per cent are disposed of and the concerned officials who failed

to provide required information to the rest of the 10 percent are fined, he added.

Mr Kumar expressed his concern over the inadequate awareness about the Tamil Nadu Information commission as well as the RTI Act among the people and called upon the people to know about the Information commission.

On the other hand, the commission has punished the miscreants who misused the RTI Act and threatened the officials for gaining monetary benefits, and the baseless appeal petitions are dismissed, he added.

He said the Tamil Nadu Government has sanctioned Rs 40 crore for constructing an office complex for the commission on Anna Salai, Chennai, and the new building function shortly, he added.

Wildlife survey: 2 killed by jumbo

ZAKEER HUSSAIN | DC ERODE, DEC. 18

A team of two forest rangers and an activist involved in survey of animals in the Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve (STR) on Thursday morning, came under attack by a wild elephant, and two persons were killed by the animal, even as another one managed to escape death.

Sources said the wildlife survey of 10 wildlife sanctuaries under the Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve in the district began on Thursday morning. Two forest rangers and a volunteer had gone into the forest area of the Vilamundi Wildlife sanctuary to survey animals there.

Around 4 pm, a wild elephant suddenly chased away the team who were engaged in a survey in the Singamalai forest area under the Vilamundi forest reserve. Forester Pon Ganesan was first

attacked by the animal. When forest ranger Sathesekumar (24) tried to save injured Pon Ganesan, he was unexpectedly attacked and killed by the elephant.

One of the activists involved in the survey, Muthu Prabhakara Serapandian (27), hailing from Thoothukudi district, tried to escape by climbing a nearby tree, when the elephant pulled him down with his trunk and trampled him to death.

Based on the information provided by surviving forest ranger Pon Ganesan, forest officials rushed to the spot and recovered the bodies of the deceased. They also sent Ganesan to the Sathyamangalam government hospital by ambulance, for treatment.

A pall of gloom descended in the area as word of the double tragedy began to spread. The wildlife accounting has also been suspended.

Man gets 10 years' jail for sexual assault

DC CORRESPONDENT PUDUKKOTTAI, DEC. 18

The Pudukkottai district fast track mahila court on Friday convicted and sentenced a 35-year-old man to undergo 10 years' imprisonment for sexually assaulting a 13-year-old girl at a village near Keeranur in Pudukkottai district in 2013.

According to the prosecution, the accused, S. Packiaraj of Poonaikuthipatti village in the district, was arrested by the all-woman police, Keeranur and a case was filed against him before the mahila court.

Judge Dr. Sathya convicted and sentenced the accused to undergo 10 years' imprisonment and also slapped a fine of Rs 20,000. If the accused failed to remit the fine he should undergo three more months of imprisonment.

The judge also directed the state government to sanction Rs 3 lakh as compensation to the victim.

Transvestism lands youth in trouble

DC CORRESPONDENT VELLORE, DEC. 18

A boy who claimed himself to be a transgender was beaten up by a crowd in the Adukkampara government hospital here on Friday.

Sources said the incident happened near the waiting room of the maternity ward at the Adukkampara government hospital, where relatives of women admitted for delivery were permitted to stay.

Late night on Thursday, a girl wearing a chudidhar was moving in the area in a suspicious manner. A little later, the local people there interrogated the girl.

When the girl started to speak, she spoke in a man's voice. Angry, the people tried to grab the headgear of the girl, and in the melee, the turban fell down.

Realising that it was a boy in the guise of a girl, he was beaten by the public who thought he could be a mobile phone thief or child lifter.

Learning about this, Outpost police rushed in and rescued the boy. Initial investigations revealed that the youth belonged to Ambur. The boy told the police that he was in the process of turning into a transgender, and hence, he was dressed like a girl.

Further, one of his relatives had been admitted at the hospital, and he had come to see him. As he was trying to find his relative, he met with this plight. Police are investigating further.

Govt urged to bring back detained fishers, boats

S. P. LOGANATHAN | DC RAMANATHAPURAM, DEC. 18

The Rameswaram fishermen federation which is on an indefinite strike seeking the immediate intervention of the Union government to release the 36 fishermen detained by the Sri Lankan navy a couple of days ago, in a meeting resolved not to indulge in cross-border fishing.

The meeting convened under the chairmanship of its secretary, P. Jesuraj, at Rameswaram on Friday, warned their fisher folks against fishing across the Sri Lankan border in the Gulf of Mannar region, as it resulted in conflicts

between the Sri Lankan Tamil fishermen from the northern part of the Island nation and the Indian Tamil fishermen. They also wanted the state fisheries department to take stringent action against those indulged in cross-border fishing.

The fishermen also refused to withdraw their indefinite strike until the 36 fishermen and their five boats were released. They have decided to stage a mass demonstration at Rameswaram bus stand on December 21 on the issue, and threatened to intensify their strike by extending it to a state-wide one, if the governments remain complacent.

DMK president Stalin lashes out at Centre

From P1

Lashing out at the BJP-led Centre, Mr Stalin questioned the haste in enacting the laws during the Covid-19 pandemic and also hit out at the Union government over its labour reforms and the draft Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) among others. The government was not standing by the people but corporates, he alleged, and charged the Centre with offering a slew of sops to big private firms.

"Today, the entire country is in a boil against these three (farm) laws, farmers are staying put in Delhi with their families despite the

harsh winter and are opposing the legislations as the legislations are totally against agriculture," he said.

The government should have consulted stakeholders including farmers before enacting the laws or had discussions in the Parliament to safeguard democracy. "The central government did not do any of these. What is the haste? Who did they want to protect with these? They should clarify these before people," the DMK chief demanded.

Mr Stalin termed 'a drama' the Centre's talks with representatives of the protesting farmers and pointed out that the farmers wanted nothing less than a repeal of the laws



and not any amendments to the Acts. He also took objection to the protesters being "branded by the government as anti-nationals, foreign agents, Maoists..." The DMK and its allies support the farmers' demand for repealing the laws, he said and asserted "our protests will continue till then."

the protests near Delhi.

Meanwhile, in neighbouring Puducherry, Chief Minister Naryanasamy, leaders from the Congress, the Left parties and the VCK observed a fast at Odiansalai. The Chief Minister told reporters that the Centre had brought in the controversial laws which would "harm farmers and help corporates."

He appealed to the Centre to immediately repeal the laws and protect agriculture.

Separately, DMK legislators R. Siva, K. Venkatesan and former education minister S.P. Sivakumar and members of different wings of the party went on the hunger strike in Tirukanoor village.



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SHORT TAKES

PM'S VARANASI OFFICE LISTED ON OLX FOR 'SALE'

Varanasi (UP), Dec. 18: Four people have been arrested for allegedly posting an online advertisement listing Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Varanasi office for "sale", police said on Friday.

The accused had taken a picture of the "Jansampark Kaaryalay (public relations office)" of Modi, who represents Varanasi in the Lok Sabha, and put it "up for sale" on OLX website, they said.

The office is located in the Jawahar Nagar locality of the city, and it falls under the Bhelupur police station limits, Varanasi Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Amit Pathak said. "Yesterday, it came to our notice that the Prime Minister's office here has been put up on sale on OLX website. An FIR was immediately lodged at the Bhelupur police station, and the matter is being investigated," Pathak said.

"Four people involved in the case have been taken in custody," the SSP said, adding that the person who took the picture and put it on the website is among them. The accused are being questioned, and further legal proceedings are being carried out, he said.

SHIV SENA MAY OPPOSE PM'S PET PROJECTS IN MAHA

PRASAD PATIL | DC MUMBAI, DEC. 18

The Shiv Sena, rattled by the Bombay High Court's stay on the construction of Metro car shed at salt pan land in Mumbai, is preparing for direct confrontation with the Union government led by the BJP.

The HC stayed the Metro car shed work after the Centre's salt pan department challenged the state's decision in the court. Now, as part of its strategy to take on its erstwhile alliance partner head-on, the Uddhav Thackeray-led party has decided to oppose the proposed port in Palghar district. The ₹65,000 crore project was approved by the Narendra Modi government in February this year.

The Maharashtra government is also considering moving the Metro car shed to a site earmarked for the Mumbai-Ahmedabad bullet train project — another pet project of PM Modi.

The locals are opposing the Vadhan port project, which is part of Centre's Sagarmala initiative, in Palghar district. According to reports, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray met groups opposing the Vadhan port as well Mumbai-Ahmedabad Bullet Train project — another pet project of PM Modi — and assured them that he will not allow any project against the wishes of locals.

KARAN JOHAR DENIES NCB'S DRUG CLAIMS

SAURABH JOSHI | DC MUMBAI, DEC. 18

A day after the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) shot a notice to filmmaker Karan Johar seeking details on a gathering of Bollywood celebrities that was held at his residence, he has responded to the agency claiming it was not a drug party.

The NCB officials stated that the response was received on Friday and the investigators will decide on further steps after due diligence on the filmmaker's response.

The said party, which was thrown by Johar in 2019, came in the eye of the storm after Shiromani Akali Dal leader Manjinder Singh Sirsa tweeted the video, which went viral, which he also sent to the NCB later. The filmmaker had later issued a statement then stating the allegations of drug consumption were slanderous asking why he would tweet a video if it was a drugs party.

The NCB has now sought for further clarity on the said party and the behaviour of the actors that was captured in the video. The agency sent a notice to Johar and may question him soon in connection with the same.

"The response will be looked into and further action will be decided upon based on the findings in the probe in the case of alleged drugs consumption in the film industry," said an officer.

The NCB has already questioned actors Deepika Padukone, Shraddha Kapoor, Sara Ali Khan and Rakul Preet Singh over drug consumption.

Dissent in Bengal BJP over TMC exodus

Babul Supriyo, Agnimitra Paul are up in arms against the TMC deserters' overnight induction to BJP

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, DEC. 18

The sudden trend among heavyweights deserting the ruling Trinamul Congress to join the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) ahead of the Assembly election in West Bengal has triggered strong dissent within the saffron party in the state.

Prominent BJP leaders like Babul Supriyo, Agnimitra Paul and even state president Dilip Ghosh are up in arms against the TMC deserters' overnight induction to their party without any assessment of their past.

They have started voicing their displeasure openly after Jitendra Tiwari, Pandabeshwar MLA and former Asansol Mayor, left the TMC on Thursday.

Referring to Tiwari, Supriyo, Asansol MP and Union minister, wrote on Facebook, "What my Top Bosses decide is a different thing but I will try my very best with all my might & honesty to ensure that NO #TMC leader who tormented, tortured (both physically & mentally) my grass root level BJP colleagues in Asansol, don't get an entry in BJP!"

Paul, the state BJP women wing chief, said, "Suddenly after nine years

● **BJP LEADERS** started voicing their displeasure openly after Jitendra Tiwari left the TMC on Thursday.

Tiwari felt that he could not do his welfare work for Asansol as crores of money for projects were returned. Where were these thoughts in him? These came to his mind four months before the Assembly elections. He opposed Supriyo. Moreover the people of Asansol do not like him. Many told me to ensure he does not come to our party (sic)."

Ghosh, the Midnapore

BJP MP, said, "There is a tiff between Supriyo and Tiwari because when Tiwari was the Asansol Mayor and TMC district president, he did not allow Supriyo to work in his Lok Sabha constituency. Bricks were hurled on Supriyo on the road. So Tiwari was his rival there. Now when he shows a prospect to join the BJP, it is natural for Supriyo to voice his complaint against him."

Tiwari, however, claimed that he had no plan to join the BJP.

On Barrackpore MLA Sibhadra Datta's prospect Ghosh observed, "Quitting the TMC and joining the

BJP are two different issues. We have seen that many leaders left the TMC earlier. That does not mean all of them came to the BJP or they were roped into our party."

In Bankura, a group of BJP workers came out on road and organised a demonstration near their party office after former state textiles minister Shyamapada Mukherjee quit the TMC on Thursday evening and hailed his ex-party colleague Shubhendru Adhikari as his leader with a hope to join the BJP. They made it clear that Mukherjee should not be allowed to join the BJP.

ENSURE ALL COVID HOSP ARE FIRE SAFE: SC

New Delhi, Dec. 18: The Supreme Court on Friday directed all the states to carry out fire safety audit of dedicated Covid-19 hospitals across the country to prevent fire incidents in medical institutions.

The apex court also directed dedicated Covid-19 hospitals to take a no objection certificate (NOC) from the fire department within four weeks and said that failure to do so will invite punitive action.

A bench headed by Justice Ashok Bhushan said that those hospitals, whose fire NOC has expired, will have to get it renewed within four weeks.

The top court said that all the states will follow Covid-19 guidelines, including on wearing of face mask and adherence to social distancing measures, and the standard operating procedure issued by the competent authority.

The SC had earlier taken cognisance of a fire incident in a designated Covid-19 hospital in Gujarat's Rajkot in which several patients had died.

COVID VACCINE IS VOLUNTARY, SAYS MINISTRY

SHASHI BHUSHAN | DC NEW DELHI, DEC. 18

India on Friday registered a landmark achievement in its fight against the Covid-19 when total recoveries in the country crossed a crucial peak of 95 lakh. Union health ministry, meanwhile, said that getting vaccinated for Covid-19 will be voluntary, while emphasising that the vaccine introduced in India will be as effective as any vaccine developed by other countries.

The Union health ministry listed a series of frequently asked questions (FAQs) on Covid-19 vaccine. Replying to a question whether it is mandatory to take the vaccine, the health ministry said that vaccination for Covid-19 is voluntary, however, it is advisable to receive the complete schedule of Covid-19 vaccine for protecting oneself against this disease and also to limit the spread of this disease.

The whole matter is one of "criminal conspiracy ka sandook aur kisano ke kandhe par bandook (a box of criminal conspiracy on farmers' shoulders)", Naqvi said, hitting out at the Opposition parties demanding a repeal of the farm laws.

Farmers have also understood that the issues have been solved and neither the farmers nor the country has any doubts about the honesty of Modi, Naqvi claimed.

Attacking the Congress-led Opposition, the minister alleged that "failed political players" are "misleading" farmers.

"These failed political players who have been rejected repeatedly by the people are acting under their depression of defeat. Farmers are genuine people, we respect them, there is no problem," Naqvi said.

"(This farmers' movement has been going on for long and the BJP was born out of a movement, so we respect it. That is why no force was used and the farmers were facilitated here. Rahul Gandhi does not know much about farming, but is posing as a leader of the farmers," he said.

The Opposition has been accusing the government of working for the interests of corporates by bringing the legislations, a charge denied by the government that has maintained that the laws will be beneficial for farmers in every way.

A delegation of opposition parties including Rahul Gandhi, Sharad Pawar and Left leaders had last week met President Ram Nath Kovind seeking repeal of the three farm laws against which thousands of farmers have been protesting on various borders of the national capital.

—PTI

AMID GROWING REBELLION IN TMC, SHAH ON TWO-DAY VISIT TO BENGAL

Kolkata, Dec. 18: Home Minister Amit Shah will arrive in Kolkata on Friday night on a two-day visit to Bengal and take stock of the BJP's affairs and activities in the districts, ahead of 2021 Assembly elections.

According to a press statement issued by BJP national media in-charge, Anil Baluni, Shah will participate in various programmes and functions during the weekend.

"In the wake of ensuing

Assembly elections, Amit Shah will also hold strategic and preparatory meetings," he said.

Shah will be putting up at a hotel in Newtown after arriving in Kolkata around 11 PM, another BJP leader said.

Shah will also review election management work during a meeting with central ministers from West Bengal, organisation secretaries, zonal observers and BJP state general secretaries.

—PTI

Failed political players misleading farmers, says Naqvi

New Delhi, Dec. 18: Slamming Opposition leaders for their stance against the new farm laws, Union minister Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi has alleged that "failed political players" who have been rejected repeatedly by the people are acting under their "depression of defeat" and "misleading" the farmers.

The minority affairs minister also lashed out at Opposition leaders Rahul Gandhi and Arvind Kejriwal, alleging that the Congress leader was "posing" as a farmers' leader despite knowing little about farming, while the Delhi Chief Minister was "karne mein zero, dharne mein hero (zero in work, but hero in sit-ins)".

Farmers throughout the country are satisfied that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has worked for their empowerment and interests after coming to power, Naqvi said.

The farmers' issue involves Minimum Support Price (MSP), *kisaan mandis* and protection of farmers' land and the government has given a 100 per cent guarantee on the three fronts, he said.

Naqvi asserted that neither the MSP will go, nor the mandis and there was no threat to farmers' lands.

The "Modi bashing brigade" instead of talking about issues of farmers, has started abusing Modi, he said, adding that questions arose with the entry of these "traditional Modi bashers".

On farmers' issues, the government has always believed in talks not 'takraav' (confrontation), Naqvi asserted.

"The government moved forward to resolve the issue through talks. When farmers were also satisfied that what the government was saying was logical and genuine, those people who were indulging in criminal conspiracy thought their game was going awry and they started misleading people," he said.

The whole matter is one of "criminal conspiracy ka sandook aur kisano ke kandhe par bandook (a box of criminal conspiracy on farmers' shoulders)", Naqvi said, hitting out at the Opposition parties demanding a repeal of the farm laws.

Farmers have also understood that the issues have been solved and neither the farmers nor the country has any doubts about the honesty of Modi, Naqvi claimed.

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A delegation of opposition parties including Rahul Gandhi, Sharad Pawar and Left leaders had last week met President Ram Nath Kovind seeking repeal of the three farm laws against which thousands of farmers have been protesting on various borders of the national capital.

—PTI

young woman had gone to VN College, Jajpur Road on December 5 for obtaining her migration certificate. Later in the evening, she went missing while her mobile phone was found to be switched off.

As per the complaint lodged by the young woman's family members, one Shaikh Abdul Sehmat Khan alias Bobby of Choramuhan village under Dharماسala police limits abducted her.

Khan was earlier forcing the girl to have a love affair with him and change her religion. As the girl refused to do so, Khan threatened to kidnap her.

On Thursday, the police had arrested Shaikh Abdul Hamid Khan, father of Shaikh Abdul Sehmat Khan, for his alleged involvement in the abduction and threatening the parents of the girl to kill them.

Protesting farmers plan Republic Day cerebation with tractor rally

SANJAY KAW NEW DELHI, DEC. 18

Despite the government's repeated assurances that the new laws were for the benefit of farmers, thousands of farmers from Punjab and Haryana have been protesting at Delhi's borders for over three weeks. Several protesting leaders have even threatened to step up the agitation and have said they are prepared to celebrate Republic Day next year with a tractor rally on Delhi's borders.

Farmers at the Singhu border have started making further arrangements to face the increasing cold weather conditions. "We're preparing for a longer stay as our fight against the black laws will continue. It is getting colder, so we're putting up more tents," said a protester.

The protesting farmers also faced action in Uttar Pradesh. The Sambhal district administration has issued notices to six farmers' leaders asking them to submit personal bonds of Rs 50,000 each, as a police report has warned of a breach of the peace during the protests. The six farmers who were served notices include Bharatiya Kisan Union (Asli) district chief Rajpal Singh Yadav and Jaiveer Singh,



Muslim farmers offer 'Namaz' during their protest against the new farm laws, at Kundli border in Sonipat, Friday.

Brahmachari Yadav, Satendra Yadav, Raudas and Veer Singh. They have been organising protests in the district. The notices were issued under Section 111 CrPC (magistrate's order against any person who is likely to commit breach of the peace) on the basis of a report submitted by the police.

"We'll not fill the bonds come what may," BKU (Asli) leader Rajpal Singh Yadav said. "They can hang us or send us to jail. We're fighting for the

rights of farmers." BKU (Asli) division president Sanjeev Gandhi said none of them or their family members had signed the bonds. "We're doing peaceful protests, not any crime," he added.

Support for the farmers has also been coming from Bollywood. Swara Bhasker on Friday joined the league of Bollywood stars and Punjabi artistes who have come out in their support. The actress shared a few pictures from the protest site on Twitter. "A hum-

bling day, to see the grit, resolve and determination of protesting farmers and the elderly at #SinghuBorder #FarmersProtests," she tweeted alongside the photos.

Punjabi singer and actor Diljit Dosanjh, who set the Internet on fire with his Twitter fight with actress Kangana Ranaut, had flown back from the United States and had gone straight to the Singhu border to express solidarity with the agitating farmers.

Daggers out in Kerala's Congress, BJP units

DC CORRESPONDENT THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, DEC. 18

Blame game has begun in the Kerala units of Congress-led UDF and BJP following the defeat in local body elections.

The Congress-led UDF which expected to do well riding on the anti-government sentiments, ended up with a disappointing performance.

In the political affairs committee meeting held a day after the results were announced, the leadership drew flak for its failure to cash in on the favourable political conditions.

A two day brainstorming will be held in Thiruvananthapuram on January 6 and 7 in which party's MLAs, MPs, DCC presidents and political

● **THERE AREN'T** many takers in the Congress for the leadership's theory that party's base was intact citing 2015 results.

affairs committee members will take part.

On the demand for leadership change, the KPCC president said that no individual is responsible for defeat. "It's the collective responsibility of all leaders. Success has many fathers but failure is an orphan. We need to put our heads together and work for the victory of UDF in Assembly polls," he added.

Though former chief minister Oommen Chandy, opposition leader Ramesh Chennithala and Pradesh Congress chief

had claimed that party's base was intact citing 2015 results, there aren't many takers for their theory in the Congress.

The only relief for Congress though was BJP's equally dismal performance. The BJP had claimed that it would replace Congress as main opposition in many districts. But barring Thiruvananthapuram corporation, a couple of municipalities and panchayats, the BJP failed to make much inroads into the Congress base.

Quite understandably, daggers are out in BJP as well. At least two factions in the party have demanded the removal of state president K. Surendran accusing him of running the organization in an authoritarian manner.

INTERNAL | TIFF

23 leaders had written to Sonia demanding changes in the party

Sonia to meet 'letter writers' today

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 18

After four months of wait, Congress president Sonia Gandhi will be meeting with a core group of letter writers. The meeting is scheduled to be held on Saturday morning at the official residence of Sonia Gandhi Ten Janpath.

Insiders claim that apart from five or six members from the letter writers camp there will also be General Secretary Organisation K.C. Venugopal, Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok

Gehlot and the senior leader Kamal Nath who played the role of a mediator between the leadership and the group of 23 letter writers.

After the demise of senior leader Ahmed Patel who was the go between the leadership and the letter writers the role is now taken up by Kamal Nath.

Rahul Gandhi and his sister and General Secretary of Uttar Pradesh Priyanka Gandhi are also expected to be at the meeting.

As the internal elections of the party are

approaching the demand to make Rahul Gandhi the president again has gained momentum.

General Secretary Randeep Singh Surjewala said, "party will soon start the procedure to elect a new party president. 99.9% including me want Rahul Gandhi to be elected as Party president."

Interestingly, the Congress is downplaying the entire exercise and is just calling it a meeting with senior leaders as there will also be leaders who are not signatories to the letter that was written

in August this year.

Several issues are expected to find mention in the meeting regarding the functioning of the party especially the demand for an active and visible leadership.

The meeting also assumes significance as the Congress has been facing electoral debacles not only in state Assembly elections and by-elections but also in local body elections.

Several leaders have come out in the open and have said that there is no remedy available within the party hence they are

constrained to speak out in the open. Some have gone ahead and said that the time for introspection is over and now its time for action.

In August this year, 23 leaders of the party had written to Congress president Sonia Gandhi demanding sweeping changes in the functioning of the party.

The letter writers include former union minister Ghulam Nabi Azad, Anand Sharma, Kapil Sibal, Shashi Tharoor, Veerappa Moily, Manish Tewari among others.

SHORT TAKES

15 KIDS KILLED
IN AFGHANISTAN
BOMB BLAST

Ghazni, Dec. 18: At least 15 children were killed when a motorbike laden with explosives blew up near a religious gathering in eastern Afghanistan on Friday, officials said.

The children had gathered at a home in Ghazni province to recite *Quran* verses, a regular activity on the Islamic holy day of Friday, when the blast happened. "Unfortunately, as a result of this incident 15 people, all children, were martyred," said Wahedullah Jumazada, spokesman for the province's governor.

Ghazni police confirmed the blast and that all victims were children. Twenty other people, including some children, were wounded.

Interior ministry spokesman Tariq Arian earlier said the group had gathered in Gilan district to recite the Quran.

SUPER CYCLONE
YASA FLATTENS
VILLAGES IN FIJI

Suva, Fiji, Dec. 18: Super cyclone Yasa flattened entire villages as it tore through Fiji, aid agencies said on Friday, with a baby among two confirmed deaths and rescue workers racing to the worst-hit communities.

Yasa made landfall at the Pacific Island nation late Thursday as a top-of-the-scale Category Five cyclone, lashing Fiji's second-largest island, Vanua Levu.

The storm triggered floods, landslides and blackouts before moving out to sea early Friday, where it rapidly weakened to a Category Three system.

Zalim Hussein of Savusavu, a small town of a few thousand people on Vanua Levu, said he feared for his life sheltering at home in the dark as screeching winds ripped apart houses around him.

"I could hear roofs of neighbouring houses flying, trees falling and branches breaking outside and big waves crushing on the shore," he said.

UN SAYS 'DEEPLY
TROUBLED' OVER
THAI DETENTIONS

Geneva, Dec. 18: The UN human rights body expressed alarm on Friday over Thailand's detentions of democracy activists, including a minor of 16 years, under royal defamation laws.

"We are deeply troubled by the move by Thai authorities to charge at least 35 protesters in recent weeks, including a 16-year old student protester, under Article 112 — the lese majeste provision of Thailand's criminal code," the UN Human Rights Committee said in a statement.

The activists are facing charges for headlining recent demonstrations demanding reforms to the monarchy and more scrutiny of the royal family's financial arrangements. The kingdom's lese majeste laws shield the super wealthy King Maha Vajiralongkorn and the royal family from criticism.

"The offence carries sentences of between three and 15 years' imprisonment for defaming, insulting or threatening the country's royal family," the committee's spokeswoman, Ravina Shamdasani said.

MEGHAN SETTLES
CASE OVER
ARCHIE PHOTOS

London, Dec. 18: Meghan Markle has settled a claim against a news agency which took photographs of her and her young son Archie in a Canadian park, the High Court in London was told on Friday.

The Duchess of Sussex brought privacy and data protection claims against the Splash News and Picture Agency in March over the long-lens photographs.

A lawyer for the American former television actress, who married Prince Harry in 2018, said Splash UK went into administration after the claim was issued and served. Judge Matthew Nicklin told the hearing: "In light of the administration, the parties have agreed to settle the claim against Splash UK."

"The administrators of Splash UK have undertaken that, should the entity come out of administration, Splash UK will not take any photographs of the duke and duchess or their son in the future." The photographs were taken on January 20 this year, showing Markle walking with Archie in a baby sling, and her two dogs, in North Hill Regional Park on Vancouver Island.

Pence gets Covid jab on live
TV, Trump sparks confusion

Don jumps gun on FDA, says Moderna vaccine 'overwhelmingly approved'

Washington, Dec. 18: The US vice president received a Covid-19 vaccine shot live on television on Friday in a public display designed to boost national confidence in the drug even as President Donald Trump sparked confusion over approval for a second anti-Covid drug.

"Building confidence in the vaccine is what brings us here this morning," VP Mike Pence said after being injected at the White House, quipping: "I didn't feel a thing." Pence, his wife Karen and the lead public health official in the country, Surgeon General Jerome Adams, were all given the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine in the annex to the White House. Signalling the importance given to the event, top infectious diseases Anthony Fauci and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention director Robert Redfield were also in the room.

The notable absence was Trump himself. He has sent mixed messages about the seriousness of Covid-19 throughout the crisis, even as the US death toll topped 3,00,000 this month.

However, he has been keen to take credit for the historic speed of vaccine development. Early Friday he tweeted that a second drug made by Moderna had been "overwhelmingly approved" and that "distribution to start immediately." This sparked some confusion — while an advisory panel recommended emergency use approval for Moderna's vaccine on Thursday, the Food and Drug Administration has yet to give the final verdict allowing distribution — expected later Friday.

US President-elect Joe Biden's incoming White House senior advisor, congressman Cedric Richmond, has tested positive for Covid-19 after having open-air "interactions" with Biden, the transition team said on Thursday.

Richmond traveled independently to the state of Georgia to campaign Tuesday with Biden for a pair of Democrats in tight



Sao Paulo Governor Joao Doria, state health secretary Jean Gorinchteyn and Butantan Institute director Dimas Covas pose for photographs holding doses of the CoronaVac vaccine against Covid-19 next to a container unloaded from a cargo plane that arrived from China at Guarulhos International Airport in Guarulhos, Sao Paulo state, Brazil, on Friday. Brazil on Thursday recorded more than 1,000 deaths from Covid-19 over a 24-hour period for the first time since September, according to a government tally.

— AFP

Macron rides out virus,
fever at Versailles retreat

Paris, Dec. 18: As French President Emmanuel Macron rides out the Coronavirus in a presidential retreat at Versailles, French doctors are warning families who are heading for the holidays to remain cautious because of an uptick in infections — especially at the dinner table.

While Macron routinely wears a mask and adheres to social distancing rules, he hosted or took part in multiple group meals in

the days before testing positive on Thursday.

Critics say that's a bad example for compatriots advised to keep their gatherings to six people. Macron is suffering from fever, cough and fatigue, officials with the presidential said on Friday.

They wouldn't provide details of his treatment. He is staying at the presidential residence of La Lanterne in the former royal city of Versailles. Macron's positive test

runoff elections against incumbent Republican senators.

Biden, 78, tested negative for Covid-19 on Thursday, his team said.

The head of the World Health Organisation said on Friday that the UN

health agency's programme to help get Covid-19 vaccines to all countries in need, whether rich or poor, has gained access to nearly 2 billion doses of several "promising" vaccine candidates.

WHO Director-General

comes as French health authorities are again seeing a rise in infections and warning of more as French families prepare to get together for Christmas and New Year festivities. France reported another 18,254 new infections on Thursday and its death toll is just under 60,000. France's Pasteur Institute released a study on Friday suggesting that meal times at home and in public are a major source of contamination. — AP

LOCKDOWN LOOMS
OVER CHRISTMAS
IN BETHLEHEM

Ramallah (West Bank), Dec. 18: The Palestinian prime minister announced a two-week lockdown in the West Bank that appears certain to curtail Christmas celebrations in the town of Jesus' birth.

Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh said that with a Coronavirus outbreak raging, there will be a nighttime curfew from 7 pm to 6 am throughout the West Bank.

On Fridays and Saturdays, the local weekend, the lockdown will be around the clock. The restrictions, which are to be in effect through January 2, will greatly restrict travel throughout the West Bank. Most businesses, with the exception of pharmacies and bakeries, will be forced to close during the curfews, Shtayyeh said. — AP

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said the agreements mean that some 190 countries and economies taking part in the COVAX initiative will have access to vaccines "during the first half of next year." — AFP/AP

Kidnapped boys
freed in Nigeria

Katsina, Dec. 18: Exhausted and dishevelled, several hundred Nigerian schoolboys seized in a mass abduction claimed by Boko Haram experienced their first full day of freedom on Friday after a nearly week-long ordeal.

But relief at their survival mingled with concern that many others could still be captive, and the circumstances of their release remained unclear.

Looking dirty, worn-out and distraught, and most of them without shoes, the boys were brought to the governor's office in Katsina, the capital of Katsina state in north-western Nigeria, after being released late Thursday.

One boy broke down in tears as he was being led into the hall for the reception by state governor

Bello Masari. An official took a handkerchief and wiped the tears.

"I am happy, very happy that I will see my father, mother and junior brothers," said another, 14-year-old Ibrahim Sani, smiling but looking tired.

Hajia Bilikis, a mother who been waiting anxiously with other parents, spoke of her exultation when she caught sight of her boy, Abdullahi Abdurasaq, 15.

"I'm so excited... I have to cry, the cry of joy when I saw him," she said.

Governor Masari said the youngsters had been traumatised by what they had been through.

"You suffered physically, mentally and psychologically, but let me assure you that we suffered more and your parents suffered more." — AFP

US warships to be 'more
assertive' against China

Washington, Dec. 18: The US military warned on Thursday its warships would be "more assertive" in responding to violations of international law, citing in particular Beijing, which has expansionist ambitions in the South China Sea.

In a document setting objectives for the US Navy, Marines and Coast Guard for the coming years, the Pentagon stressed that several countries, notably Russia and China, "are contesting the balance of power in key regions and seeking to undermine the existing world order." "Our globally deployed naval forces interact with Chinese and Russian warships and aircraft daily," the document said, noting their "growing aggressiveness" and calling

for the US to "be more assertive" against China. The latest incident between the US and China naval forces took place in late August, when Beijing said it had driven an American warship from the disputed Paracel archipelago.

The Asian power claims almost all of the islands of the South China Sea, territorial claims disputed by other countries in

the region including Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines and Brunei.

To counter China, the US has been sending ships to the region more frequently to carry out what it calls "freedom of navigation" operations.

To maintain strategic advantage over the Chinese Navy whose "battle force has more than tripled in size in only two decades," the US Navy plans to modernize with smaller, more agile and even remotely piloted ships.

US ships will also "accept calculated tactical risks and adopt a more assertive posture in our day-to-day operations," the statement said. For Navy Rear Admiral Jay Bynum that means being "more responsive, more assertive." — AFP

Biden backs son
Hunter after tax
probe revealed

Washington, Dec. 18: US President-elect Joe Biden has expressed full confidence in his son Hunter, a frequent target of Republican attacks, after it was revealed last week that he was under a federal tax investigation.

During his unsuccessful re-election campaign, President Donald Trump launched repeated accusations against Hunter and said the Bidens were a "corrupt" family and a "criminal enterprise." "We have great confidence in our son," Biden said, sitting next to his wife Jill, in an interview on "The Late Show with Stephen Colbert," which aired Thursday on CBS.

"I am not concerned about any accusations that have been made against him. It used to get to me. I think it's kind of foul play but... as long as he's good, we're good," he said in his first full remarks on the issue since the tax probe became public.

Trump and his allies have regularly assailed Hunter for his business dealings in Ukraine and China.

From 2014 to 2019, while his father was vice president, Hunter, a lawyer and lobbyist, served on the board of Burisma, a Ukrainian gas company.

Trump has accused Biden of seeking the removal of Ukraine's top prosecutor to protect Burisma — and his son — from a corruption investigation.

Hunter, 50, now an artist based in Los Angeles, has admitted to displaying "poor judgment" in some of his business dealings, but denied any wrongdoing.

BIDEN NAMES 1st
NATIVE AMERICAN
TO CABINET

Washington, Dec. 18: US President-elect Joe Biden unveiled his environment team on Thursday, choosing congresswoman Deb Haaland to serve as the first Native American interior secretary and Jennifer Granholm, a former Michigan governor, as energy secretary.

He also nominated Michael Regan, a North Carolina environmental regulator who is Black and brokered the nation's largest coal ash cleanup, to be administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency.

The choices fit with Biden's much-publicised pledge to form the most diverse White House cabinet in history.

"This brilliant, tested, trailblazing team will be ready on day one to confront the existential threat of climate change with a unified national response rooted in science and equity," Biden said in a statement. — AFP

Colbert asked Biden if there was anything he could "sincerely" thank Trump for accomplishing during his time in the White House.

After a short pause, Biden responded: "There are some things... Getting the vaccine moving has been positive, but by and large, he has been a president who's decided that the way he succeeds is by dividing us." — AFP

Human error
behind oil spill
in Mauritius

Tokyo, Dec. 18: The Japanese operator of a bulk carrier that struck a coral reef and caused an extensive oil spill off the coast of Mauritius said Friday that the accident occurred after the ship shifted its course two miles (3.2 kilometers) closer to shore than planned so its crewmembers could get cellphone signals.

Mitsui O.S.K. Lines said its investigation showed the accident was caused by human error, including inadequate nautical charts, navigation systems and risk awareness, and a lack of supervision and safety monitoring. The company said the tanker's nautical chart provided little information about depth and other necessary information.

Crewmembers on duty also failed to conduct safety checks visually or by radar, it said. The captain and crewmembers were also using their cellphones while on duty, the company said. It said it will invest about 500 million yen (\$4.8 million) to provide electronic nautical charts, training to strengthen safety culture and other systems to enhance safety.

The environmental disaster began July 25 when the ship MV Wakashio strayed off course and struck a coral reef a mile (1.6 kilometers) offshore. After being pounded by heavy surf for nearly two weeks, the ship's hull cracked and on Aug. 6 began leaking fuel into a lagoon, polluting a protected wetlands area and a bird and wildlife sanctuary.

The company apologised for the damage and in September offered 1 billion yen (\$9 million) to fund environmental projects and support the local fishing community in Mauritius. — AP

● THE COMPANY apologised for the damage and in September offered 1 billion yen (\$9 million) to fund environmental projects and support the local fishing community in Mauritius.

Israeli peace, sustainability award for Ratan Tata

Jerusalem, Dec. 18: Veteran industrialist Ratan Tata will be honoured by the Indo-Israel Chambers of Commerce for promoting innovation that supports sustainability and peace in the region, including with the Palestinians.

The chairman emeritus of the Tata group will be honoured with 'Global Visionary of Sustainable Business and Peace' award during the launch of the Federation of Indo-Israel Chamber of Commerce's international chapter in Dubai on December 21.

The virtual ceremony will be attended by senior officials from Israel, India and UAE. "Tata has

done a lot for India-Israel ties. He has generously contributed towards promoting innovation that supports sustainability and has been a promoter of peace in the region, including with the Palestinians. He has visited Israel a few times which has been extremely beneficial in promoting ties between the two countries. He very well deserves this honour," Raviv Byron, President of Israel-India Chamber of Commerce, said.

The 82-year-old industrialist and philanthropist is the recipient of two of India's highest civilian awards — Padma Vibhushan and Padma Bhushan. The opening of



Ratan Tata

the Federation of Indo-Israel Chamber of Commerce's international chapter in Dubai is the first such initiative aiming at tapping business opportunities together in other countries, and developing trilateral collaborations.

This is expected to pave the way for several other such international chap-

ters for the bilateral Chamber in other parts of the world, Byron noted. "There is a large presence of Indian diaspora in the UAE and Bahrain which includes top professionals who are well established and respected. Given the close ties between Israel and India, we can definitely work together to develop a framework for trilateral cooperation in the Gulf", he added.

The Tata Group has invested millions of dollars in Tel Aviv University's (TAU) Technology Innovation Momentum Fund. As the lead investor in the fund, Tatas have the right of first opportunity to nego-

ciate licence agreement on areas that have been defined as start-up fields like automotive, point of care for medical devices, cleantech, etc. — PTI

GOVERNMENT OF TAMILNADU
HIGHWAYS DEPARTMENT
Land Acquisition Officer / District Revenue Officer, Namakkal
Rec. No. 12287 / 2017 / H.7 **Amendment to Notification** Dated: 09.12.2020

Where as a Notification under sub section (2) of section (15) of Tamil Nadu Highways Act -2001 was published on 26.05.2017 in Deccan Chronicle (Coimbatore Edition) News paper for acquisition of 10104 Square Meters of Dry House Site lands in Reddipatti Village of Sendamangalam Taluk in Namakkal District to wit for the formation of By-Pass road to Namakkal Town, the following amendment is issued to the above said notification.

Amendment
In the above said Notification, Under the Schedule, In serial Nos. 06 and 07 deleted.

Land Acquisition Officer / District Revenue Officer, Namakkal
DIPR / 713 / LAND / 2020

GOVERNMENT OF TAMILNADU
Virudhachalam Municipality
Tender Notice (Two cover system) Date: 18.12.2020
Bids are invited in works for in Virudhachalam Municipality of Tamil Nadu (Two cover system) Special Road Programme 2020 - 2021 as detailed below.

Works : (1) Kanmani Nagar in w.no.7, Thilagar veethi & South periyar nagar streets in w.no.16, Boothamur old colony in w.no.17, Thilagar nagar main road in w.no.31, Savadikuppam main road (Package-I), (2) Sarojini Nagar in w.no.6, Anthonyar Nagar streets in w.no.7, Krishna nagar in w.no.10, North veerapandiyan street in w.no.12, Thiruvalluvar old colony in w.no.13, Bharathi Nagar & Amutham streets in w.no.16 (Package-II), (3) Apple street, Gangai street, Yamunai street, Calvary street in w.no.16, Thangamangam Garden w.no.24, Palamalai nagar 6th street in w.no.26, Munaiyappar koil street in w.no.27, Ramana nagar nagar, Tamil nagar & Maniore colony in w.no.28, Giti to Mettu colony in w.no.31 (Package-III)

Bid Value (Rs. in lakhs) : (1) 175.00, (2) 150.00, (3) 175.00
EMD Value (Rs.) : (1) 1,75,000/-, (2) 1,50,000/-, (3) 1,75,000/-
Tender Schedule cost : Rs. 17700/- + ST @4% + SC (each work)
Period of completion : 3 Months (each work)

The bid documents can be downloaded from 23.12.2020 @ 11:00 am in the website <https://ntenders.gov.in>, and <http://municipality.tn.gov.in> tenders at free of cost.
Any additional / further details and conditions related to this tender can be had from the Engineering Section at Virudhachalam Municipal Office on all working days during office hours.
Last date and time for submission of bid documents : Upto 07.01.2021 at 4.00 PM
Last date and time for submission of bid documents, including online submission : Upto 08.01.2021 at 3.00 PM
Date and time of opening of the Technical Bid : 08.01.2021 at 3.30 PM

In the event of specified date for submission of bids is declared a holiday, or any interruption in the web site, bids will be received and opened on the next working day at the same time and venue. Other details can be seen in the bid documents.
Pre Bid meeting : 30.12.2020 - 11.00 am in the Office of Virudhachalam Municipality
DIPR/4753/Tender/2020 **Commissioner (JC), Virudhachalam Municipality**

DECCAN Chronicle

19 DECEMBER 2020

Kerala: Big triumph for LDF, Cong rudderless

The brilliant show put up by the Left Democratic Front (LDF) in Kerala in the elections to the local bodies is sure to offer the ruling front a solid base to prepare for the state Assembly elections hardly four months away while raising the bar higher for the Opposition, United Democratic Front (UDF), to win the race. The LDF has won 11 of the 14 district panchayat councils, 108 of the 152 block panchayats (the state has 140 assembly seats), 42 of the 86 municipalities and five of the six municipal corporations. Among the gram panchayats, the leftists won 514 of the 941, leaving 375 to the UDF and 23 to the National Democratic Alliance (BJP).

That the LDF has improved its own tally of 2015 local bodies elections when it was in the Opposition indicates that it faces little anti-incumbency threat in a state which alternates its ruling dispensation in every election without fail ever since 1977. While the Pinarayi Vijayan government's creditable performance in fighting virus attacks, first by Nipah in 2018 and by the coronavirus in 2020, its successful handling of two successive floods in 2018 and 2019, its focus on improving infrastructure especially in education and healthcare, its determined efforts to push through mega projects which includes the natural gas pipeline and the national highway project gave it the image of a government that works, its focus on welfare measures, which includes the construction of 2.5 lakh homes for the poor, the timely distribution of enhanced welfare pensions for the elderly and food kits during the pandemic, Covid-19, convinced the people that it is a government that cares.

This image, coupled with the failure of the central investigation agencies to come up with a credible case against people associated with the government vis-a-vis gold smuggling, has helped the LDF keep its head above water. The smart political manoeuvring with which it got a section of the Kerala Congress which held sway in central Kerala to its side has paid rich dividends for the LDF while denting the prospects of the UDF of which the regional party was a major part for the last 50 years.

The Congress, which leads the UDF, has party machinery that covers the entire spectrum, starting from the booths but a rudderless leadership squandered them all away, thinking that the relentless and one-sided media scrutiny of the government will carry the day for them. The UDF, which recorded a spectacular victory in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections on the back of the entry of then Congress president Rahul Gandhi from Wayanad constituency and the Sabarimala issue which put the LDF in a dock, was a house divided this time. It would take enormous efforts on the part of the leadership to put it in order and take on the resurgent LDF if it were to keep its hope of returning to power. As for the NDA, its hopes replacing the Congress after decimating it lie shattered with the poor showing, especially in the capital Thiruvananthapuram. The party needs to cover a lot of ground before it gains a critical mass to emerge a major force in the state politics.

‘Punishing’ a state

While it is not yet clear what elements attacked the car convoy of BJP president J. P. Nadda at Diamond Harbour near Kolkata recently — one theory points the finger at hooligans sponsored by the ruling Trinamul Congress and the other says it is an internal BJP job to discredit the Mamata Banerjee government as an excuse for punitive action — the Union government brought the hammer down on three IPS officers of the West Bengal cadre. Their services have been compulsorily requisitioned by the Union home ministry.

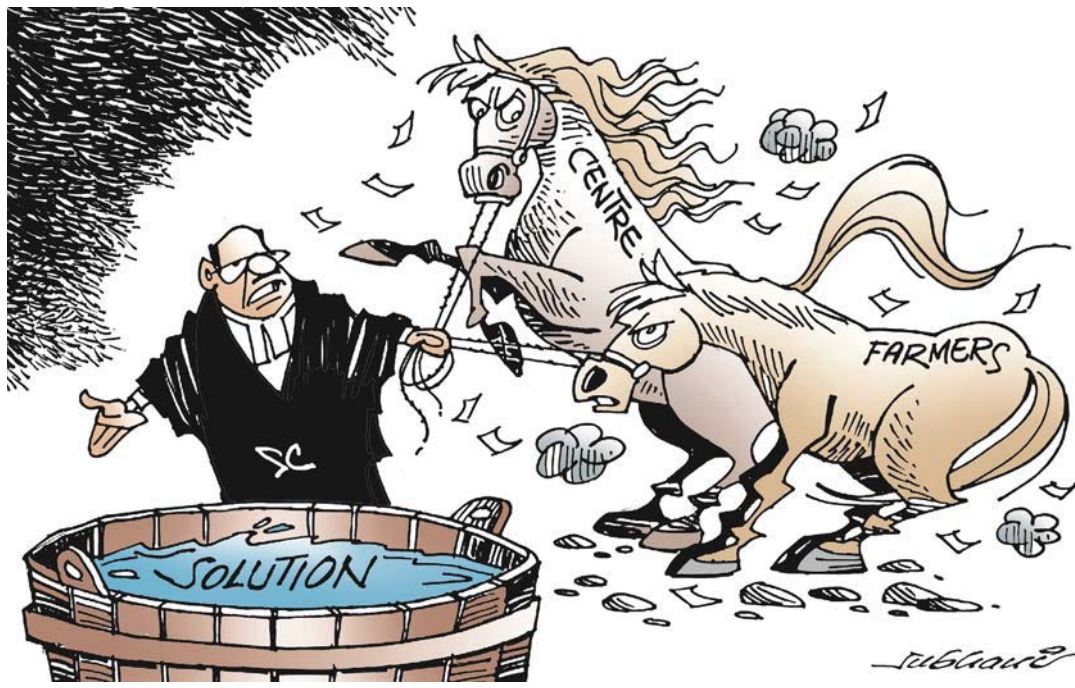
Chief minister Mamata Banerjee has responded with fury. She has threatened to take recourse to legal action. Ordinarily, the Centre requests a state to release a particular officer when there is special need since an officer of the IAS or the IPS is assigned to a state on being selected.

There may be scope for emergency procedures if a particular officer is badly needed with the Centre. But here the Union home ministry is forcing three IPS officers out of the state in one go. Is this dictatorial? Is it a “colourable” exercise of power, as the CM has observed? How the judiciary deals with the issue will be keenly watched if Ms Banerjee goes to court. It will be a precedent-setting order and will have a bearing on the broader question of Centre-state relations.

Before the 2019 Lok Sabha election, there was an instance of violence at a poll rally of then BJP party chief Amit Shah in Kolkata. The police commissioner was relieved of his charge by the Election Commission and subsequently asked by the state to report to the Centre. The officer who replaced him was also changed, along with three other IPS officers. These were not decisions of the Union home ministry as in the present instance, but of the EC. And yet it is the bulk nature of transfers, which makes these cases look like punishment.

Political antagonism between the Centre and a particular state government has probably not gone in this direction before and it is not a good sign for federalism, “cooperative” or otherwise, although Prime Minister has made renewed avowals of cooperative federalism.

Subhani



As schools reopen, try to bridge digital divide



Rukmini Banerji

By January 2021, schools will have been closed for almost 300 days. Even when school systems reopen, it will take time for parents to feel comfortable in sending children daily to school. The longer schools stay shut and the more uncertain we are about the next steps, concern grows about the impact and implications of what looks like a year-long closure.

Starting 2005, every year in mid-January India sees the release of the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER). From 2005 to 2014, the ASER report tracked the status of schooling and provided estimates of basic reading and arithmetic skills. After 2014, the nationwide ASER report is done every other year and in the gap year we look in depth at a specific age group. For example, ASER 2017 focused on the 14-18 age group, while ASER 2019 dealt with the 4-8 age group. The year 2020 would have seen the regular country-wide report. But given the Covid crisis, it was appropriate to change the focus and timing of ASER to explore what children were doing while the schools were closed.

There are several key features of the ASER architecture that are worth highlighting. ASER has always been a rural survey with information collected from households. The children's sample is representative at the district and state levels. During Covid-19, where the only way to reach families was through phone calls, and it was essential to maintain the representativeness of the sample. Luckily, as part of the usual ASER process, phone numbers are collected from each surveyed household. In a normal year, this information is

used for monitoring and cross-checking. For ASER 2020, the 2018 sample was used as the frame. To rely on numbers, the sampling process must be scientific and rigorous. Despite the Covid-19 challenges, ASER even in this difficult year remains based on a meticulous sampling process.

Timing-wise, September seemed the right time to do the ASER 2020 survey. Many schools have summer holidays in April-May-June-July. This year, July and August was used by state governments to plan and implement their Covid response. By September, school systems across India had settled into providing whatever support they could to their students.

ASER 2020 Wave 1 was anchored around a set of interconnected questions. These included: what resources did families have, who in the family was able to help children, what inputs and learning opportunities did children receive and what were children able to do with respect to learning. Many of these questions were designed not only to explore how families dealt with the Covid crisis on the education front, but also to provide inputs into thinking about opportunities that could be leveraged beyond the crisis. Close to 120,000 households were sampled. Approximately 58 per cent households were reached, of which 75.8 per cent completed the survey. Thus, the ASER 2020 Wave 1 survey obtained information for about 60,000 children.

Here are some of the highlights. First, the availability of ASER 2018 data allowed comparisons to be made. For example, the proportion of households who own televisions or motorised vehicles remained similar from 2018 to 2020, but a sharp

The digital divide is layered on to existing divisions in our society

increase in smartphone ownership is visible across states. Nationally, in 2018, 29.6 per cent families whose children went to government schools owned smartphones. This number rose to 56.4 per cent by 2018. For families who send their children to private schools, the figure in 2018 was 49.9 per cent, which increased to 74.2 per cent in 2020. A significant rise in access to smartphones in rural families is a striking feature of the last two years.

Overall, households reported that about 75 per cent children get some help at home in terms of learning support, and despite the crisis, close to 30 per cent children continued to attend paid tuition classes. Obviously, in families where parents have more education, they are able to help children more. However, even in families where both parents have less than five years of schooling, close to 25 per cent parents help children. Significant help in low education families also comes from siblings (in households where both parents have not even studied up to Class 5, 23.2 per cent children get help from older brothers and sisters.)

In the reference week before the survey in September, about a third of all children reported receiving learning materials and activities from their school. 67 per cent families whose children go to government schools and 87 per cent of those whose children go to private schools reported receiving materials via WhatsApp. Interestingly, 31.8 per cent of government school children's families also added that materials came via visits (either to the school by parents or by teachers to the child's home).

Interestingly, 80 per cent of all children in the sample had textbooks of their current grade. This number was slightly higher for

government school children. State governments across India made extensive efforts to deliver textbooks to children, and this statistic is testament to these endeavours. Asked about where children were learning at home during the reference week, 70 per cent families said their children did some learning activities in that week. While a majority of these activities were with traditional materials like textbooks and worksheets, fewer children (usually below 20 per cent) accessed learning programmes on television, radio or online.

Five major takeaways from this year's ASER exercise: First, the situation is likely to remain fluid for some months. With the clear inequities in our society, it is essential to track who is getting what opportunities and to assess what kind of learning loss is experienced. Second, ASER 2020 gives clear evidence of parental engagement and willingness to support children's learning. This family support must be leveraged by the school system in a systematic way. Third, traditional teaching-learning methods should be combined effectively with newer ways of teaching/learning. Fourth, in-depth assessments of “what works and how” is needed to improve digital content and delivery for the future. Just because families have devices and connectivity doesn't automatically mean learning is happening effectively. Finally, the digital divide is layered on to existing divisions in our society. Mechanisms to reach and teach children who are on the dark side of the divide must be worked out so their educational disadvantage can be ameliorated over time.

ASER 2020 completed the first wave in September. It's likely that a follow-up wave may be planned later in the current school year to track how children's learning journeys are progressing.

Rukmini Banerji is the CEO of Pratham Education Foundation

LETTERS

CRYING FOUL

The angry verbal exchange between Tamil Nadu Chief Minister and the MNM supreme Mr Kamal is reaching a crescendo even as the election to the state assembly is just four months away (CM: Kamal no good in politics; MNM a flop, Dec.18). Rather than spewing scathing and withering comments, it would be better for new party leaders — in this case — both Mr Kamal and Mr. Rajini — to announce their poll manifesto and its effective implementation if voted to power. Come what may, voters can't be hoodwinked with anything that would undermine their intellect and fair judgment.

E.S.Chandrasekaran, Chennai

A PRACTICAL DECISION

THE SUPREME Court has played its part as a mediator in an astute and clever manner by ordering the contentious farm laws for review and reappraisal of a committee of experts. The stalemate in the farmers' strike issue has been brought to a temporary halt by the wisdom of the Supreme Court. It is now the duty of the farmers to lift the embargo and blocking of the movement of vehicles of all kinds besides the rail roko without further delay. They are also duty bound to return to their native places and resume normal activities. Both the central government and the farmers' unions should give undertakings to the Supreme Court that they will abide by the views and decisions of the experts committee. The government should also not delay constituting of the experts committee.

B.S. Jayaraman Iyer, Coimbatore

INTERESTING TEST

OUR WALL, Cheteshwar Pujara is dead right that the situation on the opening day of pink ball Test at Adelaide warranted lot of patience and hence he played according to the situation. Even Captain Kohli slowly and steadily took control of the situation and commanded respect from his opponents. Unfortunately, it was, Rahane, who put a brake to our captain's progress to another ton at Adelaide. Though the Aussies had the upper hand during the first session, they started losing their grip during the second and third session till the unfortunate run out, which triggered a collapse against the new ball. Still, Bumrah & Co. can prise out the Aussies and who knows they could even grab a slender lead.

N.V. Krishnan, Chennai

DECCAN CHRONICLE

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Farrukh Dhondy
Cabbages & Kings



*“If our hands bent both ways
There'd be lines marked on
the back.
We'd call them life, fate and fortune
Predicting ruin and rack.*

*With our palms already foretelling
It'd be a sort of heads and tails
And palmists would be confounded
Not knowing which fortune
prevails.”*

— *From Come, Say ‘Come’
by Bachchoo*

Researching Wikipedia on the origins of toxic words

Idle days, my friend, idle days in terms of worldly commerce, but busy as a woodpecker tapping the imagined computer keys of a tree-trunk. And as random questions occur, sometimes pertaining to work. Sometimes thoughtful wanderings from questions about how one dodges British tax by registering companies in Nassau, to the origins of phrases one has used and never stopped to etymologise.

Praise be to Ahura Mazda for inspiring the founders and conspirators of Wikipedia. And yes, I do contribute small sums to their coffers now and then. We must all will their incredibly comprehensive and by-

and-large-accurate encyclopaedia(e) as the world has never known, to continue — till time and ingenuity replace the ethereal store of knowledge with some other scientifically invented miracle.

The triviality of what I resort to Wiki for will or may, gentle reader, prompt you to judge me harshly. Today it occurred to me that I had never investigated the origins of the phrase “oopsy daisy”! I am now fairly knowledgeable about the meanings of certain nursery rhymes such as Humpty Dumpty which wasn't an egg as mistakenly portrayed by cartoonists, but a cannon in the service of His Majesty's artillery. I also proudly know that ring-a-ring-a-roses is about the plague that swept Britain and nothing to do with necklaces of blossoms as I had imagined when we played holding hands and forming a ring, at the age of three in the joyous hours of infant birthday parties.

And now Wikipedia corrects my lifelong notions and says the phrase is “Whoopsy Daisy”. There are several notes on the origin of the phrase, and they contradict each other and still leave the attribution of alarm, at an accidental slip, or as an encour-

agement to a child as you fling it into the air, mysterious. The appearance of this Daisy, presumably a girl and not a flower, doesn't figure in the explanations.

And in my idle researches I find that there are places where Wikipedia doesn't fear to tread. It very bravely, if casually, tells the literal meaning of the “F” word while incorporating the various expressions which use the single syllable without in any sense invoking its literal meaning. It is, as Bagwash Shri Ragwort noted in one of his rambles, used to express dismissal, disdain, disappointment and other “d”s, not to mention the moods and utterances whose descriptions begin with other letters of the alphabet.

And so, with other words which we, in our graciously inoffensive era, shorten to their first letters. And in that context, after a few minutes of research in these idle hours, I have discovered, gentle reader, that Wikipedia gives us definitions and connotations of very many common Hindi or Urdu swear words, including those which the victims of the abuse may object to as “going on mothers/sisters”.

One stereotype for us Parsis is that

we punctuate our sentences with the MC and BC words. I sincerely protest that my family and their acquaintances never fell into the particular linguistic habit, but a friend in college was universally known as Adi “MC” Manekshaw. He would freely use the expletives and was famous for his expression of surprise or disbelief, which was “Good Lord MC!” — (the mouth-filling words not just initials).

The intriguing word, which I grew up hearing in the Parsi and wider Indian community, was “saala”. The word literally means brother-in-law, and of course can mean that the speaker had carnal relations with the sister of the one to whom the word is directed. That could be provoking and insulting, but in my hearing, it was often used as an endearment. How in such discourse has its negativity turned into its opposite? (All answers to this newspaper's letters page! — *fd*. Sub-editors: Delete this line, we have enough unprintable nonsense stimulated by his columns anyway — *Ed*)

And wandering outside the possible remit of Wikipedia, I have taken to wondering whether the Parsi surname Siganporia, based on an associ-

ation with place, as with Adenwalla and Billimoria, should really be “Singaporita”. It is easy to see how the eastern tongue twists the sound of “x” or “ks” into “sk”, as in the transformation of Alexander to Sikander, or as boys in school would say “I'll aks my bro”!

And so with the word signal, again in English two consonants “g” and “n” thrown together and rendered very often by the general Indian public as “singal”. Which is why I suspect, as there is no place in Gujarat called Siganpor, that the surname derives from some ancestor who pursued the opium trade, banking or some such in the far eastern colony.

Again, in idle intellectual mode, I wonder why my grandmother demonised the vegetable which we call “brinjal” and Europeans refer to as aubergine or eggplant, by characterising anyone who fell ill with the phrase “*venгна khaddha*”, meaning “ate brinjals”. In my short and happy life, I have never known the vegetable to be toxic or poisonous.

Where are the Parsi etymologists and phraseological historians when you need them? Come back, all is forgiven.



quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	46,960.69	0.15
Nifty 50	13,760.55	0.14
S&P 500*	3,699.28	-0.62
Dollar (₹)	73.56	0.04
Pound Sterling (₹)	99.31	0.66
Euro (₹)	90.10	-0.13
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	49,644.21	0.042
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	52.17	0.67
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.959	0.007
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.926	-0.004

* As of 8:30 PM IST

India Inc's FY21 FDI outflow at \$12.25 billion

Indian firms have committed overseas investments worth \$12.25 billion between April and November this year. Of this actual outflow would be \$6.35-2.97 bn through equity and \$3.38 bn in loan commitments. The rest, \$5.90 bn, would be in guarantees. Main investors are OVL (\$1852 million), JSW Steel (\$865 mn), Haldia Petro-chem (\$599 mn), HCL Tech (\$587 mn), M&M (\$551 mn) and Adani Properties (\$391 mn), Care Ratings said.

No cane price cut; Goyal asks mills to be efficient



Food minister Piyush Goyal said the government cannot reduce the fair and remunerative price (FRP), the minimum price at which sugar mills buy cane from farmers, and asked the industry to be efficient, profitable and diversify product portfolio with less dependency on the central subsidy. Addressing Isma, Goyal said the central subsidy of Rs 3,500 crore for exports will help in liquidating surplus sugar stocks.

Bank credit rises 5.73%, deposits move up 11.34%

Bank credit grew by 5.73 per cent to Rs 105.04 lakh crore while deposits increased by 11.34 per cent to Rs 145.92 lakh crore in the fortnight ended Dec. 4, RBI data showed. In the fortnight ended Dec. 6, 2019, bank credit had stood at Rs 99.35 lakh crore and deposits at Rs 131.06 lakh crore. In the previous fortnight ended Nov. 20, credit grew by 5.82 per cent to Rs 104.34 lakh crore and deposits by 10.89 per cent.

Forex reserves down by \$778 mn to \$578.56 bn

The country's foreign exchange reserves declined by \$778 million to \$578.56 billion in the week to Dec. 11, RBI data showed. In the previous week, the reserves had touched a lifetime high of \$579.346 bn after increasing by \$4.525 bn. Foreign currency assets dropped by \$1.042 bn to \$536.344 bn. The gold reserves rose by \$284 mn to \$36.012 bn. The SDRs with IMF dipped by \$3 mn to \$1.503 bn.



Instructed to clear goods fast, credit drawback in 3 days Customs asked to behave

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, DEC. 18

In a major relief to exporters and importers, customs officials have been asked to credit duty drawback to the exporter in three days. They have also been asked to reduce unnecessary delays and arbitrary practices during the custom clearance of imported goods.

The Action Plan of CBIC 2020- 21 directs officials that at least 90 per cent of the duty drawback should be credited within three days. Further, the refund may be deposited into the customer account in T+2 days, will definitely help

“The government's instruction to further reduce the timeline for crediting at least 90 per cent of the duty drawback claims to the exporters from seven days to three days, will definitely help



improve the cash flow of various industry players involved in exporting goods out of India, especially in these Covid times when a large number of businesses are still facing liquidity crunch," said Abhishek Jain, tax partner, EY.

Moreover all the remaining duty drawback claims should be positively disposed of by March 31, 2021 and while doing so the target of disposing of draw-

back in seven days should be achieved, said Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC).

A major cause of worry for importers has been the delay in clearances.

Exports, after a positive growth in September, once again started de-growing in October and November. Delays in the clearance of goods at the customs department have been one among the various reasons for this. "Most of the

imports from Free Trade economies have been receiving queries and were getting delayed for days as well as months," said the Federation of Indian Exporters Association.

The customs officials have now been advised to ensure judicious application of Carotar 2020, which are rules pertaining to country of origin, without causing disruption to the supply chain. They were also advised to review the function of customs ports to ensure that unnecessary delays and arbitrary practices are not being resorted to during custom clearance of goods.

The CBIC observed that importers are often asked to directly seek clarifications of the exporting country on country of origin verifications. "Officers under your charge may also be sensitised to ensure that enquiry on origin of

imported goods is initiated only where there are sufficient grounds to suspect origin of a good, or where the same has been identified as a risk by the Risk Management System. They should be suitably supervised to ensure that unnecessary queries are not raised on account of goods origin," said CBIC.

"In order to resolve industry concerns around the Carotar 2020, CBIC has issued instructions to ensure that queries under the said rules are issued only when sufficient grounds to question the origin of goods are present. This is a smart move on the part of the government and will be much appreciated by the industry, as this, while preventing revenue leakage, will ensure that the shipments are not unnecessarily delayed at customs ports," said Jain.

Logistics' competitiveness gap may cost \$500 bn by 2030

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, DEC. 18

With the supply chain inefficiencies remaining high, the competitiveness gap of the Indian logistics sector is expected to go up from \$180 billion to \$500 billion in 2030.

The logistics cost in India stands at 14 per cent of GDP, compared to the global average of about 8 per cent, creating a competitiveness gap of \$180 billion and this could increase to \$500 billion by 2030, finds a report by global management consultancy Arthur D. Little.

India's supply chain and logistics sector is valued at \$215 billion and is growing at a CAGR of 10.5 per cent. It is marred by an unbalanced logistics modal mix, high indirect costs, poor infrastructure,

fragmented networks and lack of technology adoption. The pandemic further accentuated supply chain weaknesses.

Indirect logistics costs in India are four times the average of those in developed countries. The main reasons are excessive layers in distribution channels and inventory mismanagement. Inadequate demand forecasting due to lack of technology adoption leads to inventory mismanagement. It also leads to high inventory carrying costs, which include costs for holding and storing unsold goods. These costs alone amount to 15-25 per cent of inventory costs or \$120 to \$180 billion.

Transportation by road is at the root of the unwarranted logistics costs. Transportation represents

about 40 per cent of logistics costs, and heavy dependence on the road networks, combined with poor transportation infrastructure, makes transportation costs balloon. India's rail and sea network are highly under-utilised due to lack of supporting infrastructure.

Failing to address India's competitiveness gap of \$180 billion could expand it to \$500 billion by 2030. Greenfield manufacturing will not be viable because high logistics costs are a barrier to entry. High logistics costs will continue to impede local manufacturing and reduce demand for Indian products in the global markets.

"To bridge the current competitiveness gap of \$180 billion, India needs to halve logistics cost from 14 per cent of GDP to 7 per cent,"

said Barnik Chitran Maitra, managing partner of Arthur D. Little India and South Asia.

The study finds that India will have to optimise the logistics modal mix to global benchmarks, with roads constituting 25-30 per cent, railways comprising 50-55 per cent and waterways accounting for 20-25 per cent of transportation modes. It will have to reduce indirect or "hidden" costs to 20-25 per cent through efficient inventory management and monitoring. In addition, turnaround time should be optimised to 700-800 km per day, with the target of increasing truck trips by 50 per cent. The throughput of the road network has to be raised with better quality roads and a higher proportion national highways in the road network.

World's richest banker Kotak made \$16 bn after a brush with death

SUVASHREE GHOSH &
ANTO ANTONY
DEC. 18

If it weren't for a cricket accident that almost killed him, Uday Kotak probably wouldn't be the world's richest banker.

A ball that hit him in the head and led to an emergency surgery pushed a 20-year-old Kotak to abandon his dream of becoming a professional player. After a brief stint at the family's cotton-trading business, he went on to pursue his MBA at the prestigious Jamnalal Bajaj Institute of Management Studies in Mumbai before starting out in finance in 1985 at the age of 26.

Kotak, now 61, has a fortune estimated at around \$16 billion, according to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index.

While India has been grappling with a shadow-lending crisis, his Kotak Mahindra Bank Ltd has been able to rise through the crowd, gaining investors' trust by starting to slow lending to riskier sectors more than two years ago and keeping good corporate governance. When the coronavirus pandemic added to the industry's woes by eroding borrowers' ability to repay, the firm was one of the first to raise capital to fortify its balance sheet, helping boost investors' confidence.

The strategy paid off: Kotak Mahindra Bank shares are up 17 per cent



this year, the most among Indian peers, and Kotak just gained an extension to his chief executive officer term for another three years. A representative at the firm didn't respond to requests for comment.

"As far as I'm concerned, becoming the world's richest banker is only a proxy for Uday being one of the world's smartest bankers," said Anand Mahindra, the chairman of Mahindra Group in Mumbai, whose tie-up with Kotak back in 1986 led to the firm's name. "More importantly, he's understood that what makes a bank sustainable and durable is not just smart strategies but unsailable governance."

Kotak's company stands out in a country where lenders have some of the worst bad-loan ratios in the world. While its bad-loan ratio has risen in 2020, it ranked as the second lowest among peers, with its capital-adequacy score being the highest.

The nation's second-largest lender by market value reported an unex-

pected 27 per cent profit surge in the September quarter.

The firm got another boost last month, when the central bank proposed increasing the ownership limit for founders, effectively reducing the risk that Kotak will be forced to dilute his 26 per cent stake in the lender as previously demanded by the Reserve Bank of India.

Kotak, a native of Gujarat, set up an investment company in 1985 with a Rs 30 lakh (\$41,000) loan from family and friends and partnered with Mahindra the following year. The firm, which started off discounting bills, later expanded its loan portfolio, got into stock brokering, investment banking, insurance and mutual funds. It converted into a lender in 2003 after getting the RBI's nod.

He has been Kotak Mahindra Bank's CEO since its beginning and gained more control of it in 2006 by ending a partnership of more than a

decade with Goldman Sachs Group Inc. Kotak rose through the ranks by keeping strong underwriting practices and avoiding lending to riskier sectors, focusing instead on expanding collateral-backed loans for farm equipment, mortgages and vehicles, according to Deepak Jasani, head of retail research at HDFC Securities Ltd.

While the RBI just approved the extension of Kotak's CEO term investors are starting to wonder what will happen after he hands over the reins.

Unlike many family-owned enterprises in India, Kotak has avoided enrolling family members into the lender's board or at top executive positions. That helped maintain investors' and depositors' confidence in a country where the lack of corporate governance and transparency has already brought down three banks and pushed two shadow lenders to bankruptcy in less than two years.

"It's been all Uday," said Ananth Narayan, a former banker and now an associate professor of finance at the S.P. Jain Institute of Management & Research in Mumbai. "There are a lot of good people under him, but frankly, they are all overshadowed by Uday. Anybody who has to step into Uday's shoes has a tough job because he is an institution by himself."

—Bloomberg

Copper tops \$8,000 as Goldman points to commodities super-cycle

Dec. 18: Copper topped \$8,000 a tonne for the first time in more than seven years, with Goldman Sachs Group Inc and BlackRock Inc pointing to the start of a new long-term bull market as supply lags an expected demand boom.

The market is witnessing the sharpest rally in more than a decade, with China's appetite for commodities and supply snags early on in the Covid-19 pandemic

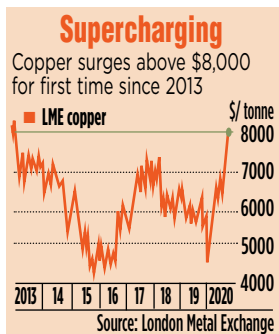
lifting copper about 80 per cent from its March lows.

Expectations for a deficit, the weaker dollar, and its role in green technology have also fuelled gains. Some banks and investors are now drawing comparisons to the spike in the early 2000s, when a jump in Chinese orders ushered in the last super-cycle for commodities.

"You have all the tell-tale signs of a super-cycle," Jeff

Currie, head of commodities research at Goldman Sachs, told Bloomberg TV. He cited metals hitting multiyear highs, the weaker dollar, crude oil reaching \$50, and rising global liquidity.

Copper spiked to \$8,028 a tonne, the highest price since 2013, on Thursday, on the London Metal Exchange. Most other metals also gained, with aluminum rising 0.5 per cent.



Singapore iron ore futures pushed above \$160 a tonne, hitting the highest level since trading began in 2013.

Goldman pointed to the start of a positive feedback loop between commodities, the dollar and emerging-market growth that has driven past structural bull markets. At the centre is strong, synchronized, policy-driven demand focused on wealth redistribution

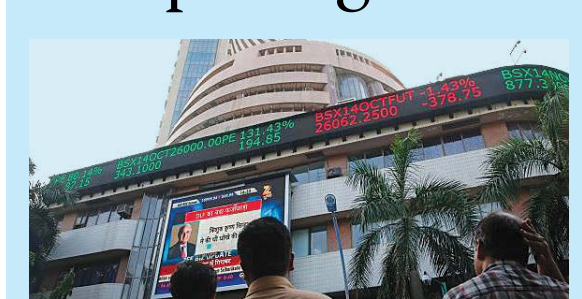
and renewables and, with commodity supply-side spending outside of renewables still at very low levels, this demand growth should keep markets tight for the foreseeable future, it said in a December 17 note.

BlackRock expects copper to hit new all-time highs in the upswing of the cycle, Evy Hambro, the firm's global head of thematic investing, said.

China's success at containing the pandemic and optimism about global economic growth next year is fuelling gains across industrial commodities from iron ore to oil. It's been a remarkable turnaround for copper, which fell more than 50 per cent from a record high in 2011, trading below \$5,000 a tonne during a slump in 2015-16 and again earlier this year.

—Bloomberg

Sensex hits 47000 in opening trade



RAVI NANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, DEC. 18

The Sensex breached the 47000-mark for the first time ever on Friday in opening trade, led by gains in the IT sector stocks post-Accenture's strong first quarter performance and US Federal Reserve's decision to keep rates unchanged.

The unrelenting bull run is now seen taking the benchmark index closer to 50000 points, the target set by some brokerages.

The index opened at 47026 as against the previous close at 46,890.34. But it closed below 47000 at 46,960.69, up 70 points or 0.15 per cent, as the market turned volatile post the big opening move and touched a low of 46,630.31.

The Nifty-50 also closed at a new all-time high of 13,760.55, gaining 0.14 per cent, or 19.85 points.

Recently BNP Paribas set a target of 50500 for 2021, earlier Morgan Stanley had said that the Sensex would cross 50000 by December 2021.

Who knows it may come even earlier by March 2021, going by the pace of index movement.

At the same time risks are increasing as the foreign money pouring into the equity market is large-

ly short-term funds, which could fly out on monetary policy tightening by global central banks like the US Fed.

Large-scale foreign buying continued, with Rs 2,720.95 crore net purchase reported by the exchanges on Friday.

"The Fed's decision to keep rates unchanged will help FIIs to maintain a positive view on emerging markets like India," said Vinod Nair, head of research, Geojit Financial Services.

Strong first quarter FY21 performance by IT major Accenture led to a rally in Indian IT stocks.

The BSE IT index gained 1.70 per cent, led by gains for Infosys (2.64 per cent), Wipro (1.89 per cent), HCL Technologies (1.32 per cent) and TCS (0.87 per cent).

"Accenture's Q1 performance and guidance came in well ahead of expectations largely due to continued strong demand in outsourcing and recovery in the consulting business," said Emkay Global Financial Services. "A broad-based demand recovery and sustained healthy growth momentum in revenue/order booking of the outsourcing business augur well for Indian IT peers."

MG TO ROLL OUT 7-SEATER HECTOR PLUS IN JANUARY

MICHAEL GONSALVES
PUNE, DEC. 18

MG Motor, the British car brand now owned by the Chinese giant SAIC Motor, plans to introduce the much-awaited MG Hector Plus 7-seater version in January to boost sales in the fiercely competitive Indian car market.

The Hector Plus range rivals the upcoming next-generation Mahindra XUV500, the Tata Gravitas, as well as the three-row version of the Hyundai Creta.

The biggest difference between this new model and the three-row, six-seat Hector Plus, launched in July this year, is that the seven-seater version will get a bench instead of captain seats in the second row.

With the price likely to be close to the six-seat Hector Plus (Rs 13.74 lakh-Rs 19.69 lakh), expect a few cosmetic changes inside and out to differentiate between the six-seater and seven-seater versions of the Hector Plus.



SHORT TAKE

Rooney's son Kai signs for Man U

London: Wayne Rooney's son Kai has followed in his father's footsteps by signing for Manchester United. United's record goalscorer posted a picture on social media of the 11-year-old, the oldest of Rooney's four sons, signing a contract at his father's former club. Rooney accompanied the image with the caption: "Proud day. Kai signing for @manchesterunited. Keep up the hard work son." Rooney, 38, joined United from Everton in 2004 as a teenager. — AFP

Live on TV

CRICKET

Australia vs India: First Test — Day Three from 9.30 am on Sony Ten 1, 3, Sony Six, HD

FOOTBALL

English Premier League: Crystal Palace vs Liverpool from 6 pm; Southampton vs Manchester City from 8.30 pm; Everton vs Arsenal from 11 pm; Newcastle vs Fulham from 1.30 am (Sunday) on Star Sports Select 1, HD

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

Italian League: Fiorentina vs Verona from 7.30 pm; Sampdoria vs Crotone from 10.30 pm; Parma vs Juventus from 1.15 am (Sunday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

UFC

Fight Night: Leon Edwards vs Khamzat Chimaev and other bouts from 5.30 am (Sunday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

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Editor: **KAUSHIK MITTER**

ASHWIN ON FIRE

Spinner takes four to tie Aussies in knots on Day 2

Adelaide, Dec. 18: Ravi Ashwin bagged four wickets as a dominant India held a 62-run lead at stumps on day two of the Adelaide day-night Test after Australian captain Tim Paine ran out of batting partners.

Paine was left stranded on 73 not out when the Australian innings ended at 191 to trail India's 244 by 53 runs.

Ashwin had figures of 4-55 while Umesh Yadav took 3-40.

At stumps, India in their second innings were one down for nine with Mayank Agarwal on five and nightwatchman Jasprit Bumrah yet to score. The under-pressure Prithvi Shaw, who was out for a duck in the first innings, was bowled by Pat Cummins for four.

Fifteen wickets fell on the day which started when Cummins and Mitchell Starc took just 25 deliveries to knock off the final four India batsmen.

Australia in turn struggled to make headway as Bumrah, Ashwin and Yadav worked their way through the batting order.

Even with India spilling five chances, they never allowed Australia to settle apart from a determined Paine who plugged on to his eighth half century, aided in part by being dropped by Agarwal on 26.

It was Paine's only mis-step and he brought up his 50 off 68 deliveries with an assured cut to the boundary. As his confidence grew he produced a reverse sweep to move into the 60s with a four off Ashwin.

Ashwin's spin captured the wickets of Steve Smith, Travis Head and Cameron Green between dinner and tea. — AFP



Ravichandran Ashwin (left) celebrates with teammates after dismissing Australia's Steve Smith during the second day of the first Test in Adelaide on Friday. — AFP

SCORECARD

India 1st Innings: (overnight 233 for 6): Saha c Paine b Starc 9, Ashwin c Paine b Cummins 15, Yadav c Wade b Starc 6, Bumrah not out 4, Shami c Head b Cummins 0. Extras (B-2, LB-8, NB-7, WD-1) 18. **Total (all out in 93.1 overs) 244.** **FoW:** 1-0, 2-3, 3-100, 4-188, 5-196, 6-206, 7-233, 8-235, 9-240, 10-244. **Bowling:** Starc 21-5-53-4, Hazlewood 20-6-47-1, Cummins 21-7-48-3, Green 9-2-15-0, Nathan Lyon 21-2-68-1, Marnus Labuschagne 1-0-3-0. **Australia 1st Innings:** Wade lbw b Bumrah 8, Burns lbw b Bumrah 8, Labuschagne lbw b Yadav 47, Smith c Rahane b Ashwin 1, Head c&b Ashwin 7, Green c Kohli b Ashwin 11, Paine not out 73, Cummins c Rahane b Yadav 0, Starc run out 15, Lyon c Kohli b Ashwin 10, Hazlewood c Pujara b Yadav 8. Extras (LB-3) 3. **Total (all out in 72.1 overs) 191.** **FoW:** 1-16, 2-29, 3-45, 4-65, 5-79, 6-111, 7-111, 8-139, 9-167, 10-191. **Bowling:** Yadav 16-1-5-40-3, Bumrah 21-7-52-2, Shami 17-4-41-0, Ashwin 18-3-55-4. **India 2nd Innings:** Prithvi b Cummins 4, Mayank not out 5, Bumrah not out 0. **Total (for 1 wicket in 6 overs) 9.** **FoW:** 1-7. **Bowling:** Starc 3-1-3-0, Cummins 3-2-6-1.

NUMBERS GAME

R. ASHWIN'S BEST BOWLING IN AUSTRALIA:

- Ravichandran Ashwin recorded the best bowling performance in Australia by taking four for 55 off 18 overs. It was only second time when this off-spinner took four wickets in an innings in Australia. His previous best in Australia was four for 105 off 19 overs at Sydney in January 2015. The 34-year old's best bowling against Australia is seven for 103 at Chennai in February 2013.
- Ravichandran Ashwin also became the third highest wicket taker for India against Australia in Tests after Anil Kumble (111 wickets in 38 innings of 20 Tests) and Harbhajan Singh (95 wickets in 35 innings of 18 Tests). He took 81 wickets at an average of 31.00 in 29 innings of 16 Tests by end of the Australian first innings.
- Steven Smith made just one run off 29 balls in 45 minutes. It was his fourth single in 132 innings of 74 Tests. His previous slowest single was against England at Lord's in July 18, 2013, off 14 balls in 19 minutes.
- Tim Paine's unbeaten 73 was fifth half century in 31 innings of 20 Tests as skipper. Overall, it was his eighth fifty in 51 innings of 32 Tests.

— S. PERVEZ KAISER

We need to score goals, says Laszlo

NEHA SURANA | DC
CHENNAI, DEC. 18

Having scored just three goals in five games this season, Chennaiyin FC are well aware of the issue at hand. As the two-time champions are keen to move up the table, head coach Csaba Laszlo made it clear that he wants to see more goals from CFC players.

"If you don't score goals, you don't win games. I don't want to push all the responsibility just on the players. This is also a little bit to do with your own confidence and maybe because our preparation was not long. If you are out of football for six months and then come back, it is not easy for players. So, I don't want to blame anybody," said Laszlo ahead of their game against FC Goa.

"I want players to start scoring more goals even in training. I want to see the ball touch the net from the sides, not just from the centre. And, eventually, if we play more games and keep scoring in our practice sessions then automatically the confidence will be gained," said Laszlo.

Speaking about the



Edwin Sydney (left) and S. Pandiyan.

injury concerns, the coach said, "Enes Sipovic is ready but I don't know if he will play from the beginning. Isma's injury is not so bad, I hope he joins the team next week. Thapa is okay now and he is fully fit. We have some small injuries, that is normal. We need players on the pitch and not in the doctor's room."

Meanwhile, Chennaiyin FC's defensive midfielder Deepak Tangri has set sights on winning three points from FC Goa game. "The coach has told us to stay more compact and focus on ourselves rather than focusing on Goa. So, we will give our best to get the three points, because these points are very important for us to climb up the points table," said Tangri.

Ahamed leads TVS Racing 1-2

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, DEC. 18

KY Ahamed started his campaign in the second and final round of the MRF MMSC fmcsi Indian National Motorcycle Racing Championship 2020 with two brilliant performances as he led his team, TVS Racing, to 1-2 finishes in both the Pro-Stock categories (301-400cc and 165cc)

at the MMRT, here on Friday.

Also notching up victories in the National championship were 23-year old Engineering graduate from Bengaluru Seshadri Suresh (Sparks Racing), in the Novice (Stock 165cc) and Ann Jennifer (Sparks Racing) who completed a hat-trick of wins in the Girls (Stock 165cc) category.

COFFEE-BREAK

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

Aries: Take timely action. Be prudent and precise about your decisions and many a path will open up for you. A dull routine could take away interest in work.

Taurus: Investment offers may tempt you. You find it difficult to achieve professional targets. Family life could suffer. Unexpected travel could be tiring.

Gemini: You will sort out differences with associates. Neglecting parents could vitiate domestic harmony. Avoid talking without purpose. Persistent efforts will bring results.

Cancer: Business partnerships bring expected results. You learn important lessons to enjoy the domestic life. Voluntary work will be recognised.

Leo: Banking, engineering and tourism professionals will touch new heights. Domestic life will be happy. Personal expectations will be fulfilled.

Virgo: You will complete research-related work. Family will be supportive. A death could haunt you. You'll earn from indirect sources. A hectic schedule could make you short-tempered. Thoughtless action could mar domestic harmony.

You share your b'day with

Manav Kaul, theatre director, actor and playwright. He is best known for his roles in Tumhari Sulu, Badla, Thappad, Wazir, Jolly LLB 2, Jai Gangajal and Haider amongst others.

Libra: Lack of communication skills will hamper work. The family front could be disturbing. Join a vocational course to equip yourself with technical skills.

Scorpio: Domestic atmosphere will be harmonious. Profits are likely to come much sooner than expected. You enjoy perfect health.

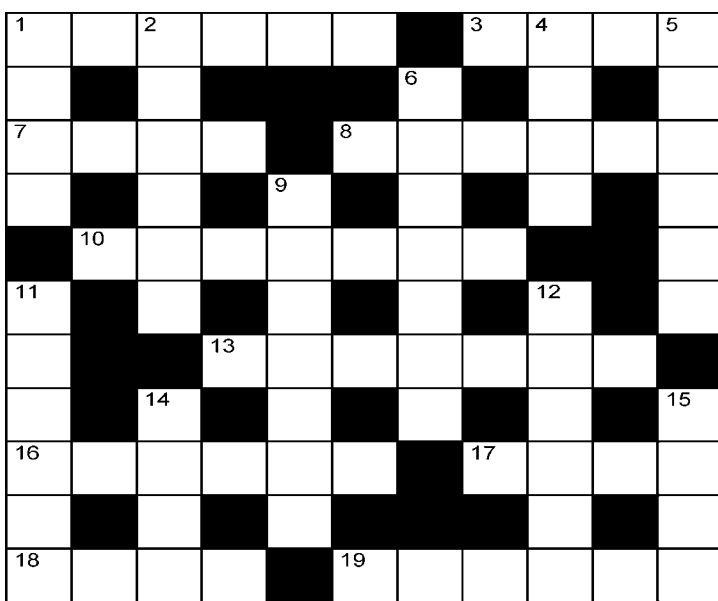
Sagittarius: A supportive family will help you deal with a personal issue. Some of you may waste time chasing fantasies. An unexpected financial burden is likely.

Capricorn: Domestic tensions may increase. Impulsive behaviour might cause health problems. Secret enemies would conspire to harm. No improvement in financial position. Work stress may harm your reputation.

Aquarius: You might face family problems. Circumstances could force curtailment of expenses. Professional results may exceed expectations. Health will be sound. Work commitments won't be honoured today.

Pisces: A promising day to streamline work. No indication of monetary losses. Health will bloom. Obstacles won't deter you on the professional path. Healthy interaction with family will keep you happy. Spend time learning a new skill.

QUICK CROSSWORD



Across

- Beer maker (6)
- Joint (4)
- State emphatically (4)
- Artful (6)
- Bibliotheca (7)
- Deep regret (7)
- Three-legged stand (6)
- Confront (4)
- Appear like (4)
- Wretchedness (6)

Down

- Bill (4)
- TiUllating (6)
- Balanced (4)
- Rile (6)
- Ruler of ancient Egypt (7)
- Spreading plant (7)
- Free of charge (6)
- Property (6)
- Swoop (4)
- Charge (4)

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

- Across:** 1. Precipice, 6. Caper, 7. Trunk, 9. Odds, 10. Shekel, 12. Berate, 14. Scot, 17. Rinse, 18. Raven, 19. Cockroach.
- Down:** 2. Rapid, 3. Care, 4. Patchy, 5. Caulk, 6. Crowbar, 8. Kiloton, 11. Streak, 13. Rondo, 15. Civic, 16. Trio.

Word Mine

V
D S R
E R I E

TODAY'S RATINGS: 19 AVERAGE: 20
GOOD: 21 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.

North: 1. D S R E, 2. D S R, 3. D S, 4. D, 5. R, 6. S, 7. E, 8. D S R E, 9. D S R, 10. D S, 11. D, 12. R, 13. S, 14. E, 15. D S R E, 16. D S, 17. D, 18. R, 19. S, 20. E, 21. D S R E, 22. D S, 23. D, 24. R, 25. S, 26. E, 27. D S R E, 28. D S, 29. D, 30. R, 31. S, 32. E, 33. D S R E, 34. D S, 35. D, 36. R, 37. S, 38. E, 39. D S R E, 40. D S, 41. D, 42. R, 43. S, 44. E, 45. D S R E, 46. D S, 47. D, 48. R, 49. S, 50. E, 51. D S R E, 52. D S, 53. D, 54. R, 55. S, 56. E, 57. D S R E, 58. D S, 59. D, 60. R, 61. S, 62. E, 63. D S R E, 64. D S, 65. D, 66. R, 67. S, 68. E, 69. D S R E, 70. D S, 71. D, 72. R, 73. S, 74. E, 75. D S R E, 76. D S, 77. D, 78. R, 79. S, 80. E, 81. D S R E, 82. D S, 83. D, 84. R, 85. S, 86. E, 87. D S R E, 88. D S, 89. D, 90. R, 91. S, 92. E, 93. D S R E, 94. D S, 95. D, 96. R, 97. S, 98. E, 99. D S R E, 100. D S, 101. D, 102. R, 103. S, 104. E, 105. D S R E, 106. D S, 107. D, 108. R, 109. S, 110. E, 111. D S R E, 112. D S, 113. D, 114. R, 115. S, 116. E, 117. 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