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Allotment of govt. housing being rationalised: Puri
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NEARBY



Fewest daily infections in Delhi in four months

NEW DELHI

The Capital reported 758 new COVID-19 cases in the last 24 hours – the lowest in more than four months – taking the total to 6,21,439, according to a health bulletin released by the Delhi government on Friday.

CITY ▶ PAGE 3

Six clubs sealed for flouting COVID-19 rules

NEW DELHI

The Delhi government's Excise Department fully or partly sealed eight nightclubs and bars in the past one month and imposed fines totalling around ₹1.15 crore for violating COVID-related guidelines or other rules, said authorities. In most cases there was overcrowding, no social distancing, and people were not wearing masks, according to officials.

CITY ▶ PAGE 3

Seven MLAs switch over to BJP in Arunachal

GUWAHATI

The BJP has gained seven MLAs in Arunachal Pradesh as six legislators of the Janata Dal (United) and the lone MLA of the People's Party of Arunachal switched over in the past two days, taking the party's count in the 60-member Assembly to 48. JD(U) now has Techi Kaso as the lone MLA.

NEWS ▶ PAGE 10

Farmer unions refute PM's charge of changing demands

Modi accuses Opposition of using farmers; AIKSCC says focus is still on MSP

ASHOK KUMAR
NEW DELHI

Refuting Prime Minister Narendra Modi's allegation that farmer unions were moving the goalposts every day, the All-India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee (AIKSCC) on Friday said the only demand of the farmers was an "assured, guaranteed and legalised" income by announcing a minimum support price (MSP) for all crops.

₹18,000 cr. for farmers
Earlier in the day, speaking at a programme to release an instalment of ₹18,000 crore to nine crore beneficiaries of the PM Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojana, Mr. Modi said people with a certain political ideology, instigating the farmers agitation, were moving the



Parties which are missing APMC mandis nowadays, forget that there are no APMC mandis in Kerala. And these people never agitate in Kerala

Those leading the agitation today sat on the recommendations of the Swaminathan Commission report when they were in power

NARENDRA MODI, PRIME MINISTER

Prime Minister deliberately twisted facts on the issue of APMC in Kerala because the Kerala government was the highest procurer of farm produce despite the absence of mandis

The farmers have only one demand. Give them assured, guaranteed and legalised income. It can be done through announcing MSP for all crops and ensuring that all farmers across the country get it. It must be a legal guarantee

AVIK SAHA,
AIKSCC GENERAL SECRETARY

goalposts every day to raise new issues not even concerned with the movement and were not allowing discussions for political reasons.

Appealing again to the farmers to not get misled, Mr.

Modi said the farmers' movement began with concerns over the MSP but they were now seeking release of those accused of violence, and even opposing toll plazas.

"Those firing from the

shoulders of the farmers are raising different issues in their name because they don't have any logic," Mr. Modi said.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

MORE REPORTS ▶ PAGES 2, 4 & 9

Boy arrested in U.P. didn't change name'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GHAZIABAD

Days after the Bijnor police arrested a Muslim boy under the recent Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Ordinance for allegedly enticing a Dalit minor girl by changing his name to Sonu, new facts have emerged in the case.

Ismael Ahmed, the pradan of Kirakhedi gram panchayat, the village of the ac-

cused, said the boy did not change his name to lure the girl and that Hindu and Muslim families share names such as Sonu, Guddu, etc. He claimed the duo was returning from a birthday party on December 14 night when they were stopped by some villagers in Naseerpur on suspicion of being battery thieves.

"The boy was beaten up. They then called up the pol-

ice... the police gave it a new direction," he alleged.

In a video that surfaced on Friday, a mob could be seen beating Sonu.

Bijnor SP Dharm Veer Singh said the police have registered a case and arrested two persons but denied such allegations. "The girl's father gave a written complaint and the girl's statement was recorded under Section 164 of CrPC," he said.

"The boy was beaten up. They then called up the pol-

Tamil superstar Rajinikanth was admitted to a hospital here on Friday after his blood pressure showed severe fluctuation. "He is stable and is resting," Apollo Hospitals said in a bulletin in the evening. He will remain in the hospital and undergo further investigations on Saturday.

The 70-year-old actor has been in Hyderabad for the shooting of the film *Annaatthe* for the last 10 days. He isolated himself after four members of his unit tested positive for COVID-19. He was brought to the hospital at Jubilee Hills around 11 a.m.

The release said though he did not have any COVID-19 symptom, his blood pressure showed severe fluctuation and needed further evaluation, for which he was admitted to the hospital.

Rajinikanth admitted to hospital, stable

RAVI REDDY
HYDERABAD

Tamil superstar Rajinikanth was admitted to a hospital here on Friday after his blood pressure showed severe fluctuation. "He is stable and is resting," Apollo Hospitals said in a bulletin in the evening. He will remain in the hospital and undergo further investigations on Saturday.

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21-year-old student set to become Mayor

If endorsed, CPI(M)'s nominee for Thiruvananthapuram will be the youngest

S.R. PRAVEEN
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

If the party's seniors approve the nomination, a 21-year-old woman college student who is a member of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) will become the youngest Mayor of Thiruvananthapuram.

The district committee of the CPI(M) on Friday proposed Arya Rajendran for the Mayor's post in the city Corporation. The party's State Committee must endorse the choice, which would make her the youngest in the job. Party leaders remained tight-lipped, but CPI(M) sources confirmed that the nomination had been made, with an announcement.



Arya Rajendran

expected on Monday.

Ms. Rajendran, who won the election from the Mudavanmugal ward in the State capital, is a B.Sc. student at the All Saints College in the city. She is the State president of Balasangham, a children's organisation, and a member of the State Committee of the

Students Federation of India (SFI) and the CPI(M)'s Kesavadev Road branch committee. Her father is an electrician and her mother an LIC agent.

"I have not got any official communication from the party. The decision will be taken by the party," Ms. Rajendran told *The Hindu*.

The two top contenders from the LDF for the Mayor's post were defeated in the election, leaving 65-year-old Jameela Sreedharan, daughter of veteran Communist leader N. Sreedharan and a former member of the Public Service Commission, in the race.

Party circles were abuzz with reports that the CPI(M)

which leads the coalition, would want a young face, following the success of its experiment in 2015, when it chose 34-year-old V.K. Prasanth. He quickly became popular with administrative initiatives and in 2019, wrested the Vattiyoorkavu Assembly seat for the LDF.

The Thiruvananthapuram Corporation, viewed by many as the Bharatiya Janata Party's target in its quest for political gains in Kerala, has remained elusive for the LDF.

The LDF won big in the local body elections, bagging 52 seats in the 100-member council. The BJP won 34 seats and the UDF 10. Four independents, too, won this time.

Party circles were abuzz with reports that the CPI(M)

Dry run for vaccine rollout in 4 States next week: govt.

Pilots in two districts of A.P., Assam, Gujarat and Punjab

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Centre is gearing up for the roll out of the COVID-19 vaccine across the country, with four States to initiate a dry-run next week, the Union Health Ministry said on Friday.

"Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Gujarat and Punjab have been selected considering the geographical locations. Each State will plan it in two districts and preferably in different (five) session type settings, e.g. district hospital, CHC/PHC, urban site, private health facility, rural outreach, etc.," a Ministry release said.

Testing linkages

The Ministry said this exercise would enable end-to-end mobilisation and testing of the COVID-19 vaccination process (except the vaccine) and check the usage of Co-WIN in the field environment, the linkages between planning, implementation and reporting mechanisms and identify challenges and guide the actual implementation, including improve-

ments in the process.

It noted that this would also provide a hands-on experience to programme managers at various levels. This two-day activity is planned on December 28 and 29.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

No large-scale Bangladeshi ingress, say BSF, BGB

'Country's GDP growth rate behind people not entering India illegally'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

The Border Security Force (BSF) and Border Guards Bangladesh (BGB) also decided to facilitate the erection of a single-row fence in "priority patches" of the 4,096 km border. "There is no reason really for Bangladeshis to cross the border unless they travel for treatment or other

purposes with valid documents," BGB Director-General Shafeenul Islam said on Friday after the conclusion of the 51st DG-level conference between the two forces.

A factor behind Bangladeshi people not entering India illegally was the GDP growth rate of Bangladesh, he said. Mr. Islam also played down the issue of NRC in Assam.

His BSF counterpart Rakesh Asthana said there was

national health authority

Government of Jammu and Kashmir

Government of Jammu and Kashmir



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Farm laws will do a lot of harm: Kejriwal

Amit Shah and other senior BJP leaders hold events across city in support of the new Acts and PM Modi

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI
Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Friday said the Centre's three agricultural reform laws will not benefit farmers in any way and instead will do a lot of harm.

Earlier in the day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi squarely blamed those with a political agenda for the deadlock in the Centre's talks with protesting farmers.

Reacting to the PM's speech, Mr. Kejriwal questioned how the farm laws would benefit the farmers and alleged that their negative impact outweighed the intended benefits.

The BJP says that these laws will not harm farmers. But what will be the benefit? They say that now the farmer will be able to sell the crop anywhere outside the market. But outside the market, the crop is sold for half the price. How does this 'benefit' happen? The truth is that there is a lot of potential for harm from these laws and not a single benefit," the Chief Minister tweeted.

Amit Shah event

Meanwhile, the BJP's senior leadership, including a gamut of Union Ministers, addressed programmes across the city in support of the PM and the three controversial



Union Home Minister Amit Shah addresses farmers in Delhi on Friday. ■ PTI

farm laws.

Addressing an event in south Delhi's Mehrauli, Union Home Minister Amit Shah credited the Prime Minister for having bettered the

state of farmers in the country since coming to power.

"I have come to say to the farmers that these three farm laws are in favour of the farmers, it will not harm the farmers. The Minimum Support Prices system will not be closed nor will anyone take away the land of the farmers. As long as Modiji is the Prime Minister, no corporate can take away the land of the farmers, this is the promise of the BJP," Mr. Shah told attendees.

"The Opposition wants to use the farmers' protest for its own political selfishness. In 2014 and 2019, farmers gave an absolute majority to PM Modi. The highest priori-

ty of the Centre is the welfare of the farmer," he added.

Farmers from various parts of the country have been camping at different border points of Delhi for four weeks now to demand repeal of the three farm laws, which were voted through in Parliament in September amid strong protests by opposition parties.

Mr. Kejriwal and his Aam Aadmi Party have come out strongly in support of the protesting farmers.

Earlier this month, the Delhi CM had visited Singhu border, one of the protest sites, and reviewed arrangements made for the farmers by the city government.

Today's special



Men and women prepare food for the protesting farmers near Ghazipur in Delhi on Friday. ■ R. V. MOORTHY

IN BRIEF

Man arrested for routing ₹9 crore black money

NEW DELHI
A 35-year-old man has been arrested for allegedly opening seven bank accounts with forged documents and routing black money to the tune of ₹9 crore through them during the demonetisation drive, police said on Friday. The accused has been identified as Gaurav Singh, a resident of Shahdara, they said.

EAST CENTRAL RAILWAY e-Tender Notice

e-Tender is invited on Behalf of the President of India for the under mentioned work:-
Details : S.No. 01. Name of the work with its location : Removal of overhead infringements 11KV between Supaul (Excl) to Triveniyanj 11KV incoming feeder with transformer at stations, electrification of signal building, PF lightings, circulating area lighting street lighting at Tumra Halt, Pipra Station and Triveniyanj station between Supaul to Araria Court in connection with construction of New BG line Supaul - Araria. e-Tender No. : EL/C/N/MHX/ETEN/77/20-21 02 Approx. Cost of the work : Rs. 23,52,128.53/- Sl.No. 3. Earnest Money : ₹ 47,100.00 SlNo. 4. Date & time for closing of tender: 12.01.2021 (12:00 बजे) I Sl.No. 5. Any E-Tenders which is sent by Post/Courier/FAX or self, Manual proposals although the letter is on firms letter paper or received in time will not be accepted. The above E-Tenders, E-Tendering document alongwith full information is available on website i.e. <http://www.ireps.gov.in>. Note :- Tenderers are requested to visit the website <http://www.ireps.gov.in> atleast 10 days before last date of closing for latest corrigendum/corrections etc. in response to this E-tender.

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For Principal Chief Material Manager
PR/1187/HQ/Store/T/20-21/32

Man held for killing minor

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI
A 22-year-old man was arrested for allegedly killing a boy in Maidan Garhi here, the police said on Friday.

Inspired by a crime TV show, Bittu from Sanjay Colony Bhati Mines, first kidnapped the minor and then murdered him, they said. The case came to the fore when on November 28, a woman from Sanjay Colony Bhati Mines lodged a missing report of her son.

Initially, it was found that there was some family dispute over the custody of the child between his parents, who live separately. The police then interrogated his parents but did not find any clue. Next, they analysed CCTV footage of the area but made no headway in the case.

On Thursday, a decomposed body was found in a pond near Maidan Garhi village. The parents then identified it as their son, an officer said.

During the probe, Bittu, whom the victim's mother knew, became a suspect.

He was apprehended. He said he wanted to marry the boy's mother since childhood but her parents arranged her marriage with another person. He had been upset about this," said DCP (South) Atul Kumar Thakur. Two years ago, when the complainant and her husband started living separately, Bittu thought he would try to get close to the woman. He used to send her food items through her son. He was friendly with the boy.

Next, Bittu proposed to the woman but she refused to marry him, saying "she has a son". On the day of the crime, he lured the boy to a jungle promising him berries and new clothes. He then strangled him with a cloth and dumped his body in the pond.

He then came to the woman's house and pretended to help her look for the minor. Next day, he went to the jungle and realised that the body was visible. He tried to burn it but failed. He then hid the body under big stones. Later, he packed the body in a plastic bag and threw it in the pond, the police added.

Mending the gap

With services first disrupted by JNU protests and then the February riots, and forced into a long hiatus by the pandemic, Delhi Metro in 2020 has been a case of arrested development

SHINJINI GHOSH

NEW DELHI
With people taking to the streets on multiple occasions over the past one year, be it the anti-Citizenship (Amendment) Act protests or a demand for rollback of fee hike at Jawaharlal Nehru University, services on the Delhi Metro network have remained disrupted.

The Delhi riots in February this year, followed by the COVID-19 pandemic hampered metro services.

Apart from the COVID-19-induced lockdown, imposed nationwide, when metro services were suspended for over five months, every time stations were shut for security measures due to some protest, the closure lasted for up to six hours. During the riots, some stations were even shut for the entire day.

On December 19, 2019, the maximum number of stations were closed at a go to demonstrations that were being held across the national capital against the CAA, with the number touching 19.

Stations that were shut

The first few stations to shut were Jamia Millia Islamia, Jasola Vihar Shaheen Bagh, Munirka on the Magenta Line, Lal Quila, Jama Masjid on the Violet Line and Chandni Chowk and Vishwavidyalaya stations on the Yellow Line.

Subsequently, the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) had to close entry and exit gates of stations such as Patel Chowk, Lok Kalyan Marg, Udyog Bhawan on the Yellow Line, Pragati Maidan and Barakhamba stations on the Blue Line and ITO, Khan Market and Mandi House stations on the Violet Line.

According to statements issued by the DMRC, the stations were closed following directions from the Delhi

Police raid on my office lasted 15 hours, tweets Mehmood Pracha

DCP alleges advocate and his associates obstructed probe

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI
Advocate Mehmood Pracha on Friday said a team of Delhi Police raided his office in Nizamuddin here for 15 hours.

"Delhi Police team just left despite 15 hours of marathon scrutiny of all my office computers filed and even bathrooms when could find nothing frustrated they assaulted me and my associates. If @DelhiPolice doesn't destroy the Court ordered video recording of [sic]," Mr. Pracha tweeted.

"The raid the real masterminds of North East Delhi violence will get exposed. I was repeatedly threatened with the name of @AmitShah Sahab... [sic]"

MEHMUD PRACHA
Advocate

supported me. I promise that we will not back down in our Mission Save Constitution. Jai Bhim Jai Bharat [sic]," the lawyer said in series of tweets.

Proud of his juniors

Calling the incident "an attack on the lawyer community", Mr. Pracha said he is proud of his juniors who "stood like rocks" against

the move. On Thursday, a team of Delhi Police Special Cell conducted a search at Mr. Pracha's office after getting permission from court.

During the course of a bail matter pertaining to an accused in the north-east Delhi riots, use of a forged notary stamp and creation of allegedly false or manipulated evidence at the hands of certain members of the bar was noticed.

DCP (Special Cell) Manishi Chandra said the raid lasted over four-five hours, and Mr. Pracha along with his associates obstructed the investigation.

The officer and his team recorded the happenings.

A complaint regarding the conduct of Mr. Pracha and his associates has been reported to the police.

Riots victims stand with advocate

They say Pracha has provided them legal assistance for free

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI
North-east Delhi riot victims, who have been allegedly facing pressure to withdraw their complaints, came forward in support of senior advocate Mehmood Pracha on Friday.

A group of such victims held a media meet at the Press Club of India where they said that Mr. Pracha stood by them after the government and law enforcement agencies denied assistance to them. They claimed, Mr. Pracha provided them legal assistance and other help for free.

One such victim, Wasim, whose stock finished within half-an-hour.

Their stock finished within half-an-hour.

Surender Kamboj and his friends stared the novel langar after seeing a child loitering near a stall selling "gol gappas".

Mr. Kamboj asked the child what he wanted. "Gol gappas, said the boy who did not have any money," recalls the 33-year-old fire service personnel.

What happened next amazed the child and the farmers in nearby trolleys. Mr. Kamboj and his friends from the Rania fire station bought the entire stock from the stall and started a "gol gappa" langar.

ary riots", said when he had gone to Jyoti Nagar police station to register an FIR, they had turned him away.

Police against Pracha'

"Policemen refused to register an FIR on my complaint. They threatened to implicate me in false cases and make my life hell.

When I lost all hope, another riot victim told me about Mr. Pracha. He helped me register an FIR. During the investigation, the policemen asked me to disengage myself from Mr. Pracha or else I would get in trouble," said Wasim.

Another victim, Mohammad Nasir, who turned blind in one eye during the

riots, said the police had refused to register his complaint and also misbehaved with him. "I forwarded my complaint to all senior police officers and the Home Minister but it was never lodged. I got my FIR registered only after the intervention of Mr. Pracha. He is a God for us. A staff at Bajajpura police station asked me to leave the premises and gave me death threats for being associated with Mr. Pracha," Mr. Nasir said, adding: "I have also been offered another advocate by the police."

The victims said that the police are showing fake witnesses and filing fake cases to trouble the advocate.



Kausambi metro station at the Delhi-Uttar Pradesh border closed in the wake of farmers' protest in Delhi. ■ FILE PHOTO: SANDEEP SAXENA

police.

As the protests gained momentum, in a bid to restrict movement of those intending to participate in the demonstrations, the DMRC had to close around 17 stations across the network on December 20 last year, following police advisories.

While Jasola Vihar, Shaheen Bagh and Jamia Millia Islamia stations had to be shut for a few hours in the morning, later in the day, with demonstrations beginning in the Walled City, stations like Chawri Bazar, Lal Quila, Jama Masjid and Delhi Gate, among others, were also closed. Metro stations on the Pink Line in north-east Delhi, including Jaffrabad, Maujpur-Babarpur and Johri Enclave were also closed for commuters that day.

Security measures

The DMRC had earlier said that "owing to sudden safety and security reasons" stations had to be "closed for a few hours this week". Officials also added that the move to shut stations temporarily was a "precautionary measure amid protests".

On November 18, 2019, entry and exit points of five Delhi Metro stations had to be closed for around two hours due to a protest march carried out by JNU students who were demanding a rollback of fee hike.

While initially entry and exit points of three metro stations near Parliament House were shut, later Jor Bagh station was shut as students assembled near the area.

During the Delhi riots, the first sta-

tions to be get closed on February 23 this year were Jaffrabad and Maujpur-Babarpur and they remained shut for several hours as violence had erupted in the area.

A day later, the DMRC had to shut nine stations, including Jaffrabad, Maujpur-Babarpur, Gokulpuri, Johri Enclave and Shiv Vihar, apart from Udyog Bhawan, Patel Chowk, Central Secretariat and Janpath. The stations on the Yellow Line were closed in view of a protest called near the Delhi Police Headquarters by the Jamia Coordination Committee.

Also, seven stations in north-east Delhi had to be closed owing to security reasons on February 25 this year, during the riots.

Since the outbreak of the pandemic, the Delhi Metro has remained operational for around four months now after it resumed services in September. The public transporter was forced into a long hiatus from March 22 to September 7 owing to the pandemic and the subsequent lockdown. Operations resumed in a graded manner with staggered timings.

Maintenance work

During the five-month period when metro services were suspended, the DMRC operated two trains daily to keep the nearly 400-km-long network well-oiled. The DMRC officials also said that maintenance work of over 2,200 coaches, 264 stations, 1,100 escalators and 1,000 lifts across the metro network was being undertaken during this period.

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Please refer to Institute Tender notice No. GBPNIHE/In House Project-04/water Purification system

Timings
DELHI

SATURDAY, DEC. 26	RISE 07:12 SET 17:32
SUNDAY, DEC. 27	RISE 14:49 SET 03:36
MONDAY, DEC. 28	RISE 07:13 SET 17:33
TUESDAY, DEC. 29	RISE 15:26 SET 04:30
WEDNESDAY, DEC. 30	RISE 07:13 SET 17:34
THURSDAY, DEC. 31	RISE 16:07 SET 05:27

Delhi Weather max min

Delhi City 22 05

Safdarjung 22 05

Palam 20 07

Delhi Palam Today
22°C Moderate to patchy
dence fog during the cold
morning. A pleasant day with
partly cloudy sky.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow
21°C Rise in temperatures
likely. Moderate to shallow fog
during morning. A pleasant day with
few clouds.

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Six clubs sealed in Capital for flouting COVID-19 guidelines

Overcrowding, no social distancing or masks in most cases, say officials

NIKHIL M BABU
NEW DELHI

The Delhi government's Excise Department fully or partly sealed a total of eight night clubs and bars in the past one month and imposed fines totalling around ₹1.15 crore on them for violating COVID-related guidelines or other rules, said authorities.

In most cases there was overcrowding, no social distancing, and people were not wearing masks, according to officials.

Strong message'
"Penalty was imposed on all of them to send a strong message to the industry to follow COVID guidelines and Excise Department rules. Health is of paramount importance and we cannot afford to have a fourth wave [COVID-19 infection]. Every time, a peak happens around festive season and people should take precautions," Rahul Singh, Commissioner of Department of



Bars and clubs are allowed to operate at 50% capacity.

The team entered *Privee* in Shangrila Eros Hotel around 3 a.m. and observed that around 325-350 persons were inside the club and it was jam-packed. No social distancing was being followed and nobody was wearing a mask.

DELHI EXCISE DEPT. REPORT

Excise, Entertainment and Luxury Tax, told *The Hindu*.

The clubs that were sealed include *Key Night Club* in *Hotel Samrat*, Kautilya Marg; and *Soho* in *The Ashok Hotel*, Chanakyapuri. In *Privee*, *Shangrila Eros Hotel*, and *Club BW* in *Hotel Surya*, New Friends Colony, the department found liquor being served to underage people.

Other clubs that were fully or partly sealed were *Majestic Café* in Pusa Road, *Bokan* situated in Community Center in East of Kailash, *Air Bar and Lounge* in West Punjab and *Bagh*, and *Moti Mahal DX* in Panchkuian Road. Some of these clubs have reopened after paying the fine.

About the violations at nightclub *Privee*, the inspection report said: "The inspecting team entered the club around 3 a.m. and observed that around 325-350 persons were inside the club and it was jam-packed. No social distancing was being followed and nobody was wearing a mask. All blatant violation of the Standard operating procedure issued by the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA)."

Overcapacity

According to the COVID-19 guidelines of the DDMA, clubs and bars are allowed to operate at 50% of total seating capacity.

The ones with L-16 licence (night clubs mostly in five-star hotels) can operate 24 hours and establishments with L-17 licence (clubs/bars) can operate till 1 a.m.

Majestic Café and *Bokan* were sealed for violation of COVID-related rules.

Also, there were extra seats than approved capacity and liquor was served outside the licensed premises, according to documents.

The third floor of the *Air Bar and Lounge* was sealed as their excise licence was only for the second floor.

Bagh was sealed for violating COVID-related rules.

Part of the *Moti Mahal DX* was sealed for serving non-duty paid liquor and *Key Night Club* for not following COVID-related rules.

Fewest daily infections since Aug.

Eight more who returned from U.K. test positive, says govt.

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Capital reported 758 new COVID-19 cases in the last 24 hours – the lowest in more than four months – taking the total to 6,21,439, according to a health bulletin released by the Delhi government on Friday.

This is the lowest number of new cases since August 16, when 652 infections were reported in a day.

As per the bulletin, a total of 85,749 tests were conducted in the past 24 hours.

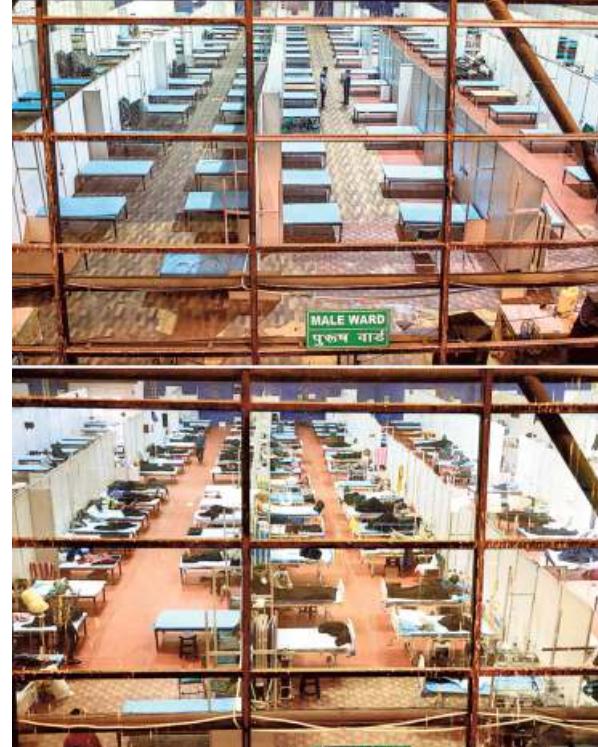
The death toll has reached 10,414 after 30 more fatalities were reported in a single day.

Of the total cases, 6,03,758 people have recovered and there are now 7,267 active cases in the city.

The test positivity was 0.88% on Friday, far less than the average daily test positivity in November, which was 11.65%. This is also the lowest positive rate in over eight months.

On Wednesday, the test positivity was 0.99%. The overall positivity till now is 7.57%, as per the bulletin.

Over 85% beds vacant
Out of the total 18,774 beds available for COVID-19 treatment in the city, 85.8% were vacant. About 2,656 people were admitted in hospitals and 3,762 patients were un-



(Below) Patients being treated at CWG Village COVID-19 Care Centre last month; (above) empty beds at the centre as only 11 patients were at the facility on Friday. ■PTI

der home isolation.

There are now 5,001 containment zones in the city.

Meanwhile, in the ongoing door-to-door contact drive being conducted by the Delhi government to test U.K.-returned persons for COVID-19, eight have so far been found infected, officials said on Friday.

Eleven were tested positive at the airport while eight others were found positive during the door to door contact and testing drive.

More field trips once schools open

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

In a step aimed at resurrecting both the tourism sector and revenue generation – affected by lockdown and COVID-19 guidelines – the Directorate of Education (DoE) will begin encouraging students to virtually learn about the heritage of Delhi.

This will be followed by trips and excursions for students to tourist spots in the Capital as soon as schools open.

"All heads of DoE schools are requested... to equip the students through virtual mode," read a circular by the department.

"Excursions and tours can be organised subject to opening of schools after COVID-19 pandemic to overcome impending crisis being faced by the tourism Industry," it also stated.

As per the Delhi Economic Survey 2019-2020, approximately 2.74 million (28.35%) foreign tourist arrived in Delhi during 2017.

Prior to the pandemic, Delhi government records show its flagship Bed and Breakfast scheme hosted over 1.05 lakh tourists till December 2019. While the number of tourists lodged at these sites in 2018-19 was 1.14 lakh.

A total of 19 passengers out of over 13,000 who landed from the U.K. at the IGI Airport between November 25 and December 21 have been found positive.

Eleven were tested positive at the airport while eight others were found positive during the door to door contact and testing drive.

On the day of the crime, the accused forcibly entered her house at 1 p.m. and tied her up with dupatta and tried to strangle her.

They then fled the spot with her laptop, mobile phone, gold chain and ₹1.25 lakh in cash.

The speed of surface-level winds, which was "low" for the past three days, picked up speed and was "moderate" on Friday.

Faster surface winds help in dispersion of pollutants.

Mixing layer height, which is the height from the ground level up to which pollutants can be dispersed, remained "low".

This leads to accumulation of pollutants near the surface, which increases air pollution.

The values for Gurugram and Noida were 302 and 386, respectively. The effect of stubble burning on the city's air quality remained low on Friday, said monitoring agency SAFAR.

Marginal better ventilation conditions are forecast for the next two days.

Delhi gets some respite from 'severe' air quality

AQI to improve over next three days

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

After three days of 'severe' air pollution, the air quality of Delhi and Noida improved to the 'very poor' category on Friday and Gurugram's continued in the 'very poor' category, as per the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB).

The air quality of Delhi is expected to further improve on Saturday and Sunday.

Air pollution of the 'very poor' category can cause "respiratory illness on prolonged exposure", according to the government.

The 24-hour average Air Quality Index (AQI) of Delhi was 357 on Friday.

The values for Gurugram and Noida were 302 and 386, respectively. The effect of stubble burning on the city's air quality remained low on Friday, said monitoring agency SAFAR.

Marginally better ventilation conditions are forecast for the next two days.

Teen robs woman for refusing friendship

Accused held, accomplice on the run

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A 19-year-old youth has been arrested for allegedly robbing a woman of over ₹1 lakh and other expensive items in Pul Prahladpur on December 22, the police said on Friday.

Faisal, who came in contact with the woman through a mobile app, had planned the crime with his friend Ansar, they said.

On the day of the crime, the accused forcibly entered her house at 1 p.m. and tied her up with dupatta and tried to strangle her.

After that, he visited her house a few times but she did not entertain him.

In July, she called him to her house where her husband and sons asked him not to "disturb" her anymore. At the time, he assured them that he would not keep any contact with her but had decided to take revenge, the DCP said.

The phone and ₹11,000 in cash have been recovered.

FIR lodged in DJB office vandalism case

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A day after BJP workers allegedly vandalised the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) headquarters in central Delhi, the Delhi police have registered an FIR into the matter under Indian Penal Code (IPC) Section 188 (Disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant) and sections of the Epidemic Diseases Act, said a senior police officer.



A screen grab of a mob
vandalising the DJB HQ
on Thursday. ■ FILE PHOTO

and others.

On Thursday, a group of BJP workers led by party Delhi chief Adesh Gupta attacked the DJB headquarters

and assaulted the DJB employees, according to the Aam Aadmi Party.

In multiple videos released by the AAP, a mob chanting "Adeshji sangharsh karo", "Jai Shri Ram", and "Bharat Mata Ki Jai" can be seen forcing its way through the main gate of the DJB headquarters and vandalising government property.

Mr. Gupta can also be seen in the videos as the main figure in the group both inside and outside the main DJB building.

Mr. Gupta, however, had claimed that the attack was carried out by AAP workers.

WELCOME TO THE 16th ANNUAL CONVOCATION

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Chief Guest
Dr. K. SIVAN
Secretary, Department of Space, GoI
& Chairman, ISRO, Bengaluru



Presided by
Dr. T.R. PAARIVENDHAR
Founder Chancellor, SRM Institute of Science and Technology
& Member of Parliament, Lok Sabha

DATE: 26th December 2020, TIME: 10.30 a.m.

VENUE: Dr. T.P. Ganesan Auditorium, Kattankulathur, Chennai.

2020 PLACEMENTS

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Don't disrupt State's telecom services, Punjab CM tells farmers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
CHANDIGARH

Amid reports that power supply to mobile towers was being disconnected by protesting farmers in different parts of the state, Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh on Friday appealed to them to not inconvenience the general public with such actions.

He asked them to exercise the same restraint that they had been showing over the past several months and said that telecom connectivity had become even more critical for people amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

He said the farmers protesting against the Centre's new farm laws should show the same discipline and sense of responsibility which they had been exercising during their protest at the Delhi border and also earlier during their agitation in the State.

Congress expels Assam MLA ahead of Amit Shah's visit to State

BJP will welcome Ajanta Neog if she decides to join: Himanta

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

The Congress expelled one of its most influential MLAs in Assam for alleged anti-party activities, hours before Union Home Minister Amit Shah's visit to Guwahati on Friday night.

Assam's Finance and Health Minister, Himanta Biswa Sarma said the Congress could have taken action against Ajanta Neog, a former Minister, on the basis of rumours. He, however, said that the Bharatiya Janata Party would welcome her if she decides to join the party.

'Expulsion approved'
Ranjan Bora, the general secretary (organisation) of the Assam State Congress Committee, said the party's central leadership has ap-

Governor not sending Bills for Presidential assent, says Gehlot

Amendment Bills to counter the Centre's farm laws held up in Raj Bhavan

MOHAMMED IQBAL
JAIPUR



Ashok Gehlot •

any democracy."

Mr. Gehlot said the Chief Ministers of four Congress-ruled States had sought an appointment with President Ram Nath Kovind to raise the issue of farmers' agitation, but he did not entertain the request for meeting. "The President is under so much pressure that he was not even willing to meet us. I have seen this for the first time," he remarked.

While accusing the Bharatiya Janata Party leaders of conspiring to topple the State government, Mr. Gehlot said the people would give a "befitting reply" to them in the next elections. Asked about the role of Congress leader Sachin Pilot in the recent political crisis, Mr. Gehlot said his earlier statement that he was ready to "forget and forgive" had sent across a strong message.

The Chief Minister said the NDA government at the Centre was showing its insensitivity to the issues raised by farmers in their agitation, which would soon complete a month, and was trying to create confusion by inviting them for talks and making baseless allegations against the Opposition parties.

Mr. Gehlot said 50% of the promises made in the Congress manifesto for the 2018 Assembly election had been fulfilled in the first two years of his government. The challenge posed by COVID-19 epidemic was also successfully met and the State government had made all efforts to save lives and livelihoods of people, he added.

Mr. Gehlot said the political appointments in the State were getting delayed because of the model code of conduct enforced for panchayat and local body elections.

Referring to the issue of loan waiver for farmers, he said the State government had already taken action for the loans disbursed by cooperative banks, but the Centre was not helping in respect of the public sector banks.

All India Congress Committee general secretary in charge of Rajasthan Ajay Makar, who arrived here on Friday on a three-day visit, also addressed the press conference.

Feeding time



An animal keeper feeds an elephant calf, rescued from Satgaon army camp, at the Assam State Zoo in Guwahati on Friday. • PTI

OBITUARY & REMEMBRANCE

DEATH ANNIVERSARIES

FOURTH ANNIVERSARY



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Appeal for Identification



General public is hereby informed that one person Name: Unknown, S/o: Unknown, R/o: Unknown, Age: About 60-65 Yrs., Height: 5'9", Sex: Male, Complexion: Wheatish, Face: Round, Built: Thin, Wearing: Brown Colour Kurta and Grey Colour Payjama, Place of Recovery: Found dead on 22.12.2020 at Rain Basera, Jama Masjid, Delhi.

In this regard FIR/DD No. 44A, Dated 22.12.2020 has been lodged at Police Station, Jama Masjid, Delhi. Any clue come to notice please inform undersigned.

SHO
P.S. Jama Masjid, Delhi
Ph.: 011-23269777 & 23261625

DP/570/CD/2020

READ

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EVERY

FORTNIGHT

BJP event venue in Bathinda ransacked, five workers hurt

Some farmers claim antisocial elements behind incident

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
BATHINDA



The incident took place in Bathinda on Friday. • PTI

to control the situation.

Bathinda BJP chief Vinod Gupta and State BJP legal cell co-convenor Ravinder Gupta, among others, sustained minor injuries in the incident.

While some farmers present claimed the ransacking was the handiwork of anti-social elements, the BJP leaders sought police action against them.

Women, children and the elderly fled to nearby shops for safety. The police said they rushed to the spot and resorted to mild baton charge

and order is in the hands of goons and the police have become a silent and helpless onlooker," remarked BJP national general secretary Tarun Chugh. He said the Amarinder Singh government has been playing vicious games against the BJP and its complete breakdown of law and order in Punjab.

Saying the BJP workers are "facing threats to their life", Mr. Chugh urged Punjab Governor V.P. Singh Badnore to take action against the Amarinder government.

Dalit man beaten up for using common handpump

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
BANDA

A 45-year-old Dalit man was beaten up in a village in Banda district of Uttar Pradesh on Friday allegedly by people who objected to his using a handpump installed by the government, the police said.

In an FIR lodged at Bisanda police station, Ramchandra Raides has alleged that family members of Ram Dayal Yadav attacked him with sticks when he had gone to fetch water from the handpump in Tendura village here, Station House Officer Narendra Pratap Singh said.

Mr. Raides was admitted to a primary health centre, Mr. Singh said.

An investigation in the case is under way, the police officer said.

Tripura launches scheme for violence victims' kin

Panel set up after Cabinet meeting has started scrutinising applications

SYED SAJJAD ALI
AGARTALA

Tripura government has launched a scheme to provide jobs to next of kin of those who died in political violence over a period of 46 years with 2018 as a cut-off year. This was one of the assurances the ruling BJP declared in its vision document released ahead of State's Assembly elections

held in February 2018.

Education Minister Ratan Lal Nath, who is assigned to inform important decisions of the State government, said a committee which was set up immediately after the last Cabinet meeting already started scrutinising applications.

"The committee has reviewed applications of ten families so far and recom-

mended jobs for six applicants. Next of kin of those killed before March 2018 are eligible to be considered under the scheme," Mr. Nath, who is the chairman of the six-member committee, said.

Officials on Friday said the applications of families who lost one or more members in political violence over a time of 46 years since

Tripura became a full-fledged State will be accepted for consideration. They said the candidates should have the eligibility to be enrolled in government jobs and the victim families must not have viable alternative sources of income.

The government might consider relaxation of age and educational qualification of candidates.

Potato farmers in Haryana stare at loss as prices start to crash

Average price has seen dip from ₹3,200 to ₹700 per quintal

VIKAS VASUDEV

CHANDIGARH

With arrival of season's fresh potato crop picking up in the markets of Haryana, the potato growers have started feeling the pinch on account of poor return as the average price has seen a sharp dip from around ₹3,200 per quintal a month and half ago to nearly ₹700 per quintal currently.

Farmers and traders told *The Hindu* that as potato crop arrival will increase in the coming days the price is likely to fall further.

"In Shahbad, Pipili and Babain vegetable markets, which are considered to be the centre of potato trading, potato crop was fetching ₹800-850 per quintal for the past three days, depending on the quality," said Ashok Gupta, a Kurukshetra based commission agent, adding that demand was weak and supply has increased in the last few days, resulting in

drop in price of potato crop.

He said initially when the fresh crop started to arrive in the markets during mid-November, farmers were fetching price somewhere in the range of ₹3,000-3,200 per quintal. "Gradually the price started to fall down as the arrival increased. This trend is usual and it is seen every year," he said.

Concerned over the falling price, farmers say if the trend continues, they won't be able to recover even the expenses of input costs in the crop. "I have started harvesting the crop. Four days ago, I sold first lot of my crop in Babain market at ₹640 per quintal. On an average the cost of production for potato settles around ₹7 to 8 per Kg, but what I fetched is even below that.

Sustaining in farming is becoming difficult day by day," said Amit Saini, who has sown potato in nearly 6 acres at Berkheri village in

Naraingarh.

"Given the way the price is crashing, if am not able to sell my produce in the next few days I'll then have to throw my crop on the road," he added.

Another potato farmer from Hasanpur village, Rajeev Sharma, said he was staring at huge loss as his crop would be ready for harvesting in another the next 12-15 days.

"The arrival of potato in markets is continuously increasing, which eventually will result in further drop on price. The prevailing price in local mandis is ₹700-Rs 800. In next few days it (price) will fall further which would mean a total loss," he said.

Dr. Bhandari said any structural changes found in spike protein or the mutation detected in the virus would indicate an alteration in its infection properties.

Mutant strain of virus to be studied in Jaipur

Hospital developing facility at its lab

MOHAMMED IQBAL
JAIPUR

The mutant strain of the virus causing COVID-19, detected in Britain, will be studied at Sawai Man Singh Government Hospital here with genetic sequencing and testing of the spike protein. The biggest hospital in Rajasthan is developing the study facility at its state-of-the-art microbiology laboratory.

SMS Medical College's principal and controller Sudhir Bhandari told *The Hindu* on Thursday that the samples for study would be obtained from the patients returning from Britain and other European countries, who test positive in the regular RT-PCR investigation.

The hospital's Microbiology Department was already conducting 6,000 RT-PCR tests a day, he said.

The sequencing lab, expected to start shortly, will detect the mutation in SARS-CoV-2 by testing spike protein and the specific genes which were targeted as part of screening of the infection cases.

Dr. Bhandari said any structural changes found in spike protein or the mutation detected in the virus would indicate an alteration in its infection properties.

Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot also pointed out on Thursday that the new variant of the virus could spread 70% faster. He called upon the people to take all precautions to avoid infection and adhere to the protocol of wearing masks and maintaining social distancing.

• All these drugs [hydroxychloroquine and anti-HIV drugs] are today a part of solidarity trial by the World Health Organisation. The recovery rate has been phenomenal because of [our] intense management

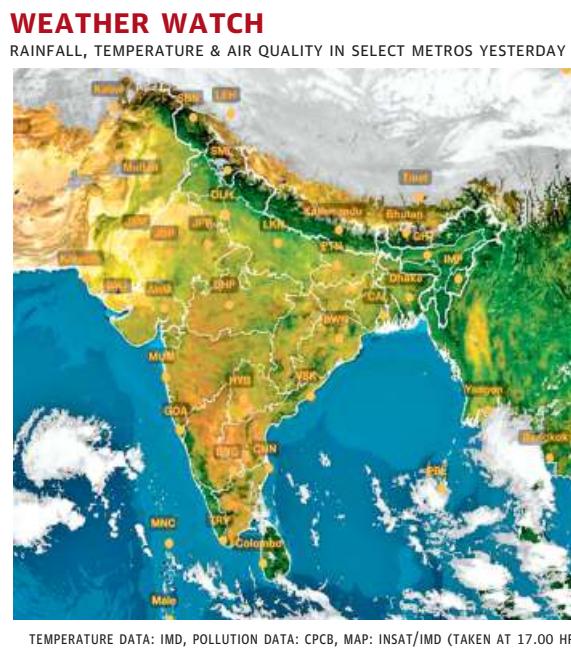
SUDHIR BHANDARI

SMS Medical College's principal and controller

Mr. Gehlot said the infection by the new virus strain has been detected in countries, such as Austria, France and Belgium, in addition to Britain. The State government is alert for screening of the people travelling from these countries.

The SMS Hospital was the first medical institution to use hydroxychloroquine and anti-HIV drugs, Lopinavir and Ritonavir, in the first few COVID-19 patients earlier this year with encouraging results. "All these drugs are today a part of solidarity trial by the World Health Organisation. The recovery rate has been phenomenal because of [our] intense management," Dr. Bhandari said.

Dr. Bhandari, who heads the COVID-19 management group, said the State had achieved the recovery rate of 95% with the help of medical experts, administrative action and healthcare facilities. The condition of each patient with or without comorbid symptoms was assessed and their management planned along with a close monitoring, he said.



Forecast for Saturday: Cold wave conditions likely at isolated pockets over Punjab; dense fog likely in isolated pockets over Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	...-26.2...	12.4	...	Kozhikode	...-34.0...	25.0	...
Ahmedabad	...-30.0...	16.4	...	Kurnool	...-29.7...	17.1	...
Aizawl	...-24.0...	6.1	...	Lucknow	...-23.3...	7.5	...
Allahabad	...-25.1...	9.0	...	Madurai	...-31.8...	21.0	...
Bengaluru	...-28.0...	17.4	...	Mangaluru	...-22.0...	34.0	...
Bhopal	...-25.6...	10.4	...	Mumbai	...-31.8...	21.2	...
Bhubaneswar	...-28.0...	14.0	...	Mysuru	...-28.0...	17.0	...
Chandigarh	...-20.0...	5.6	...	New Delhi	...-22.4...	4.6	...
Chennai	...-29.5...	20.1	...	Patna	...-24.0...	9.4	...
Coimbatore	...-28.7...	21.2	...	Port Blair	...-30.8...	25.9	...
Dehradoon	...-22.0...	5.0	...	Puducherry	...-30.0...	19.5	...
Gangtok	...-13.2...	5.6	...	Pune	...-29.9...	14.0	...
Goa	...-33.3...	22.8	...	Raipur	...-28.7...	12.0	...
Guwahati	...-26.0...	10.6	...	Ranchi	...-24.6...	8.6	...
Hubballi	...-29.0...	18.0	...	Shillong	...-16.3...	5.5	...
Hyderabad	...-27.3...	14.3	...	Shimla	...-18.2...	4.6	...
Imphal	...-21.5...	4.6	...	Srinagar	...-9.0...	4.0	...
Jaipur	...-24.0...	9.3	...	Thiruvananthapuram	...-32.4...	23.5	...
Kochi	...-31.4...	24.6	...	Tiruchi	...-31.0...	19.9	...
Kohima	...-16.8...	5.4	...	Vijayawada	...-28.6...	18.6	...
Kolkata	...-25.7...	13.7	...	Visakhapatnam	...-28.2...	20.2	...

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing Yesterday

CITIES	SO ₂	NO _x	CO	PM _{2.5}	PM ₁₀	CODE
Ahmedabad	23	89	50	.109	110	■■■■■
Bengaluru	.5	33	15	.71	-	■■■■■
Chennai	.5	35	-	.138	.116	■■■■■
Delhi	11	96	60	.405	.363	■■■■■
Hyderabad	.9	79	33	.251	-	■■■■■
Kolkata	19	26	64	.326	.208	■■■■■
Lucknow	..	.70	43	.387	.285	■■■■■
Mumbai	21	55	12	.347	-	■■■■■
Pune	6	110	87	.177	.141	■■■■■
Visakhapatnam	20	18	72	.295	.236	■■■■■

Air Quality Code: ■ Poor ■■ Moderate ■■■ Good (Readings indicate average AQI)
SO₂: Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.

NO_x: Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.

CO: Carbon monoxide. High concentration in air reduces oxygen supply to critical organs like the heart and brain. At very high levels, it can cause dizziness, confusion, unconsciousness and even death.

PM_{2.5} & PM₁₀: Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease

NMMC prepares priority list for giving COVID-19 vaccine

16,921 medical corona warriors to be vaccinated in first phase; civic chief takes stock

RAINA ASSAINAR
NAVI MUMBAI

A total of 16,921 medical corona warriors – 4,490 employees from 42 centres of the Navi Mumbai Municipal Corporation (NMMC) and 12,431 employees from 904 private health institutions – will be vaccinated in the first phase of the COVID-19 vaccination programme by the civic body.

NMMC chief Abhijit Bangar on Thursday chaired a meeting with all officers concerned, members of the corona vaccination task force committee, and medical officers of the civic health centres to review the preparations for the drive.

Around 10 NMMC health officers on December 22 received training for the programme from State government officials while the corporation personnel who would be present at the vaccination booths are yet to be given the training.

“Even though the vaccination drive is yet to be started,



Navi Mumbai civic chief Abhijit Bangar said the vaccination booths would be designed as per the government guidelines.

■ PIC FOR REPRESENTATION PURPOSE

we have made sure that our corporation is ready to undertake it,” Mr. Bangar said.

After the programme has begun, the registered person will be informed about the day, place and time of getting the vaccine through a message on their registered mobile number and a certificate after receiving it will be sent on the same mobile number.

Mr. Bangar said that the

vaccination booths/centres would be designed as per the government guidelines. “Each booth would have a waiting room, vaccination room, and observation room. The team that would be posted at every booth will consist of four vaccination officers and one vaccinator. At one centre, around 100 people would be vaccinated every day.”

Those expected to get vac-

Merry Christmas



Festive fervour: (Top) Christian devotees attend the mass at Mount Mary Church at Bandra in Mumbai on Thursday. In view of the COVID-19 situation and the night curfew in Mumbai, churches advanced the midnight mass timings to finish it before 10 p.m., while allowing only 50 people inside; and a dog takes the centre stage as people wearing Santa hats take part in a laughter yoga session during the Christmas celebrations on a beach in Mumbai on Friday.

■ EMANUEL YOGINI ■ REUTERS

TRP scam: ex-CEO of BARC remanded in police custody

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI

A magistrate's court on Friday remanded Partho Dasgupta, a former CEO of the rating agency Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC), in police custody till December 28 in the alleged fake Television Rating Points (TRP) scam.

The court on Thursday had granted bail to another accused in the case, Ramil Ramgarhia, a former chief operating officer of the BARC. The probe was over and therefore his detention was not needed, the court said. Most of the accused in the case are now out on bail.

The Mumbai Police began the probe after the BARC, a rating agency, filed a complaint about rigging of TRP by some channels.

TRP, measured by recording viewership data at sample households, is crucial as it helps TV channels attract advertisers. It was alleged that some of these households were being bribed to tune in certain channels to ramp up their ratings.

The probe was harassment and a use of pressure tactics by the police, the lawyer alleged.

After hearing both the

IISER scientists identify the gene that greens plants

The study was recently published in the prestigious U.K. journal *New Phytologist*

SHOUMOJIT BANERJEE
PUNE

Researchers at the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER) have identified a gene that facilitates in the greening of plants by playing a crucial role in regulating the levels of protochlorophyllide – an intermediate in the biosynthesis of the green pigment chlorophyll.

Dr. Sourav Datta, Associate Professor, Department of Biological Sciences, IISER Bhopal, and a PhD research student Nikhil Job have identified the gene ‘BBX11’ and their study was recently published in the prestigious British journal *New Phytologist*.

The synthesis of chlorophyll in plants is a lengthy, multi-step process. When a seedling emerges from un-



Dr. Sourav Datta (left) with Nikhil Job at Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, Bhopal. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

der the soil it must quickly synthesise chlorophyll to start supporting its own growth. In order to facilitate quick synthesis of chlorophyll, plants make a precursor of chlorophyll called ‘protochlorophyllide’ in the dark, which glows red when blue light is shone on the plant. As soon as the plant

comes out into the light from under the soil, light-dependent enzymes convert protochlorophyllide to chlorophyll,” explained Dr. Datta.

Using genetic, molecular and biochemical techniques, the duo found a mechanism where two proteins oppositely regulate the ‘BBX11’ gene to maintain optimum

levels of ‘BBX11’. Dr. Datta said that the amount of protochlorophyllide synthesised needed to be proportional to the number of enzymes available to convert them to chlorophyll.

If there is excess of free protochlorophyllide, then exposure to light converts it into molecules that cause ‘photobleaching’. Thus, it is very important to regulate the amount of protochlorophyllide synthesized by the plant and here comes the vital plant played by the ‘BBX11’ gene. If it is less, plants are unable to efficiently ‘green’ in order to harvest sunlight. If the amount of protochlorophyllide is more, then plants bleach under the light,” he explained.

According to Dr. Datta, the study could have tremendous implications in the agricul-

ture sector in tropical countries like India and can help provide leads to optimise plant growth under stressful and rapidly changing climatic conditions. Due to the rapidly changing climatic conditions, farmers in several states in India, especially in Maharashtra, are suffering huge losses in crop yields.

“This often leads to severe distress among the farming community as indicated by the high number of farmer suicides in Maharashtra for several years. Severe drought, high temperature and high light are some of the major reasons for crop failure. Young seedlings emerging out of the soil are extremely sensitive to high irradiance of light. This study can provide leads to optimise plant growth under these stressful conditions,” Dr. Datta said.

New agri laws will provide freedom to farmers: Fadnavis

He accuses MVA govt. of fooling farmers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
PUNE

Defending the three new agriculture laws brought by the Centre, senior BJP leader Devendra Fadnavis on Friday said these “revolutionary” legislations were aimed at providing freedom to farmers to sell their produce wherever they want.

The former Maharashtra Chief Minister said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had always stood behind the country’s farmers and would continue to do so in future.

Mr. Fadnavis also accused the Uddhav Thackeray-led Maha Vikas Aghadi government of fooling the farmers through false promises.

“Farmers, who sell their produce at the market yards, have to pay transport, labour, weighing and other charges. For example, a farmer recently sold his produce worth ₹15,000 in Pune’s market yard. Of the ₹15,000, he paid ₹4,000 to

wards transport, labour, and weighing charges. This is injustice,” he said while showing the payment receipt.

Mr. Fadnavis was addressing a farmers’ congregation in Pune before the Prime Minister’s event in Delhi, in which he released ₹8,000 crore to more than nine crore farmers and interacted with a section of them. The Leader of Opposition in Maharashtra Assembly said that after the Centre de-regulated fruit trading, mango producers from the Konkan region were benefited during the lockdown as they could sell the produce by going directly to the housing societies.

He alleged that some people had double standards on the new agriculture laws. “In 2006, Maharashtra brought a law regarding contract farming. So the law related to contract farming brought by Modiji was introduced in Maharashtra in 2006,” he said.

tra and India a force to reckon with in the future,” Mr. Kedar said.

The

first-of-its-kind ISU is to be set up at the Shiv Chhatrapati Sports Complex at Mhalunge in Balewadi.

Mr. Kedar further said that the idea for the ISU was unanimously passed by all legislators regardless of party and ideology. “There is no political hindrance to this project. The idea was approved, appreciated and passed unanimously by all the members of the State legislature,” he said.

“Today, competition at the world level is the new basic. The prime aim of any sportsperson is to compete at the international level. We have similar expectations from the ISU and accordingly, we are aiming to create a place with facilities matching international standards where students will acquire a high-level of expertise that in turn will make Maharashtra

When questioned as to why the ruling Maha Vikas Aghadi government had chosen Pune as the site of the ISU, the minister pointed to Balewadi’s ready infrastructure and the city’s robust sports culture.

“To establish a university, you need to create infrastructure. If we set up the ISU

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Recharging DTH

Scaled down licence fee will help, but there is no escaping competition

The Union Cabinet's approval of a revised scheme for the Direct-to-Home (DTH) television distribution sector beginning with 100% FDI brings a measure of calm to an industry buffeted by technological change and revenue pressures this year. Under the new norms, the licence period will go up to 20 years from the present 10, and, importantly, the fee has been reduced to 8% of Adjusted Gross Revenue, after setting off service tax, as opposed to 10% on Gross Revenue now. The proposal for a reduction in the licence fee has been on the backburner for six years since the regulator, TRAI, recommended it. The DTH operators have also been facing a challenge from high bandwidth Internet and new generation entertainment providers using Over The Top (OTT) channels that are chipping away at their urban viewer base so valuable to advertisers. Many broadcasters now have a live Internet presence, and newer screen casting technologies pair mobiles to large screen TVs. In such an environment of flux, some existing players have combined technologies, incorporating DTH, Internet service and OTT. There is relief among the DTH players on the licence fee decision, although the Indian Broadcasting Foundation would like to see further liberalisation – the removal of cross media ownership restrictions. Significantly, a legal challenge against the existing annual licence fee in the Supreme Court was recently posted for hearing in February 2021.

The DTH operators have been arguing that, since TRAI issued the New Tariff Order (NTO) for television last year, they have become mere carriers of channels and bouquets, with no pricing powers for these. Any high fee would, therefore, be anomalous, in their view. The broadcasters, on the other hand, have approached the courts against the amended NTO issued in January, which increased the available channels for a mandated network capacity fee paid to platforms like DTH, reduced the maximum price of pay channels in bouquets, and curbed price rigging using bouquet arrangements. These are measures that strike a blow for the common man. While major platforms accepted the network fee provision, the channels have balked at regulation. India is one of the biggest single markets for audiences, with an estimated 200 million cable and satellite households, and regulation favouring the consumer is warranted. In fact, the recent controversy surrounding fake audience numbers for channels points to the need for scrutiny of the methods adopted. What broadcasters, including state-run Doordarshan, must realise is that audiences are won by the power of authentic programming and entertainment. In a diverse cultural milieu, with a vibrant public sphere and a sporting tradition, there is space for everyone, and the best combination of technology and pricing will win the viewer's favour.

Limits of sovereignty

Britain averted a 'no deal' Brexit, which would have been catastrophic for all

The tariff-free trade accord in goods that the U.K. and the EU signed on Thursday, days before the post-Brexit transition expires, should mitigate somewhat the consequences of Britain's narrow decision, in 2016, to leave one of the largest trading blocs. The eleventh hour agreement averts a catastrophic 'no deal' scenario. This is borne out by the findings from the UK Office for Budget Responsibility. The country now faces a potential 4% loss of GDP over 15 years, compared to remaining in the EU. Leaving without any agreement would have led to a potential loss of 6% of GDP, estimates the fiscal watchdog. Moreover, given the U.K.'s reliance on the EU for about 75% of food product imports, the significance of zero duty trade for consumers and the retail economy cannot be exaggerated. Brexit's biggest trade-off for the ordinary citizen is perhaps the restrictions on the right to free movement and work. The tariff-free access to Europe's single market has been realised in exchange for guarantees that Britain would not undercut EU competition rules and environmental regulations. Among the more contentious issues in the talks, the arrangement allays apprehensions about the potential economic threat from the "Singapore-on-Thames" growth model the U.K. might pursue outside the EU. The biggest stumbling block was the access for EU fisheries to British seas, which London was keen to reclaim as demonstration of wresting sovereignty after Brexit. There is now a five-and-a-half-year transition period that guarantees continued access for the affected EU states. The reduced terms for the latter are expected to help British fisheries. A major challenge now would be to keep border checks and red tape to the minimum, besides ensuring that supply chains are not unduly disrupted. U.K. businesses have given a cautious welcome to the agreement, which has left the EU market in services out of its purview, requiring Britain's pre-eminent financial services sector to negotiate *ad hoc* measures with European counterparts.

Politically, the post-Brexit partnership could end the rancour that has polarised British society. Prime Minister Boris Johnson has predictably claimed victory for restoring the nation's sovereignty that had supposedly eroded under its 47-year EU membership. His Conservative party's massive parliamentary majority would enable its automatic approval early next week. The Opposition Labour party has announced its backing for the agreement. Thursday's terms will provisionally enter into force on January 1, while the European Parliament is expected to give its nod in a few weeks. Conservative hardliners surely have their moment of triumph. But they can hardly escape the reality of their country juxtaposed to the EU 27 in areas of mutual cooperation. That will set the limits of national sovereignty.

Article 356 and an activist judiciary

The A.P. High Court's recent order is worrisome — it opens up the possibility of judicial use or misuse of the Article



FAIZAN MUSTAFA

In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this; you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself," said James Madison. Judicial activism may be good as a rare exception but an activist judiciary is neither good for the country nor for the judiciary itself as it would encourage the government to appoint committed judges. Sometimes even the collegium's recommendations on transfer of judges and chief justices today looks more like an executive order transferring IAS officers.

The recent order of the Andhra Pradesh High Court directing the Andhra Pradesh government to come prepared to argue on the 'breakdown of constitutional machinery in the state' is shocking as it opens up the possibility of use or even misuse of Article 356 by the judiciary. Though the Supreme Court of India has stayed the order, we need to go deeper into this observation and look at the controversial provision of Article 356 because of which the High Court could make such an observation. The devil is in the provision itself.

Behind the inclusion

No liberal democratic Constitution in the world has a provision such as Article 356 that gives the central government the power to dismiss a democratically-elected State government except the Constitution of Pakistan. Both India and Pakistan borrowed this provision from the Government of India Act, 1935. Interestingly, the leaders of our freedom struggle were so very op-

posed to this provision that they forced the British government to suspend it; thus, Section 93 of the Government of India Act, 1935 was never brought into effect. The provision which we had opposed during our freedom struggle was incorporated in the Constitution strangely in the name of democracy, federalism and stability.

On June 11, 1947, it was agreed in the Constituent Assembly that the Governor could use this emergency power. By this time the Governor was supposed to be elected by the people of the State rather than nominated by the Centre. Govind Ballabh Pant did say that by mere elections, Governors will not become all wise. G.B. Pant and Hidayatullah Khan opposed it and termed it as virtual reproduction of the 1935 Act. H.N. Kunzru defied the whip and voted against it. Laxmi Kant Maitra and Tangutri Prakasam said that Indian Governors would not behave like British Governors who acted as agents of the Centre. Alladi Krishnaswami justified the provision in the name of representative government at the Centre. Subsequent decades proved all of them wrong both in respect of Governors as well as the central government.

The power of a word

After several revisions, provision became Article 278 (now Article 356). H.V. Kamath termed it as a surgical operation for a mere cold. He criticised the word 'otherwise' and said only god knows what 'otherwise' means. As the Governor had been made a nominee of the Centre by this time, he asked why the President could not have confidence in his own nominees. He went on to say: "if he cannot have confidence in his own nominees, let us wind up this Assembly and go home." 'Otherwise' can include anything including a presidential dream of breakdown of constitutional machinery in a state. Though Shubban Lal Saksena was happy about Parliament's

power to ratify President's Rule in States, he did concede that this was a 'retrograde step' and that 'we are reducing the autonomy of the states to a farce.' P.S. Deshmukh too favoured deletion of the term 'otherwise'. Naziruddin Ahmad said that "I think we are drifting, perhaps unconsciously, towards dictatorship. Democracy will flourish only in a democratic atmosphere and under democratic condition." In a strongly worded observation, he said the drafting committee had become a 'Drifting Committee' as it had gone against the original draft. 'Otherwise' can include anything including a presidential dream of breakdown of constitutional machinery in a state.

The Andhra Pradesh High Court could pass such an order due to this very term 'otherwise'. But for this word which negates the ideals of constitutionalism by giving unlimited powers to the Centre, the High Court could not have overstepped the line as it did. But this is not the first instance of judicial overreach on this issue. On August 13, 1997, a Patna High Court Bench of Chief Justice B.M. Lal and Justice S.K. Singh while disapproving the functioning of the Rabri Devi government had observed that the Governor's report was not conclusive regarding the invocation of Article 356, and the High Court could also report to the President about the breakdown of constitutional machinery in the State.

The record

Article 356 has been used/misused more than 125 times though B.R. Ambedkar had assured that it

would remain a dead letter. Both on Article 356 and the Governor, experience has proven Ambedkar wrong. In almost all cases it was used for political considerations rather than any genuine breakdown of constitutional machinery in the States. All Presidents signed presidential proclamations without demur except K.R. Narayanan who twice returned the cabinet's recommendation on October 22, 1997 in respect of the Kalyan Singh government in Uttar Pradesh which had just won the controversial confidence vote and stating that imposition of President's Rule would be constitutional improbity. He also returned the cabinet's recommendation on September 25, 1998 in respect of the Rabri Devi government in Bihar, and in an unprecedented detailed note, rebutted all the charges made by the Governor Sunder Singh Bhandari.

Inflicting more wounds

In the very first invocation of Article 356 in 1951, Jawaharlal Nehru removed the Gopi Chand Bhagava ministry in Punjab though he enjoyed the majority. In 1959, it was used against the majority opposition government of the E.M.S. Namboodripad government in Kerala and Governor B. Ramakrishna Rao in his report argued that the government had lost 'support of [the] overwhelming majority of people' and belittled the fact of it enjoying the confidence of [the] House which he said was an important consideration at the time of formation of government not its continuance. Strange logic indeed.

Indira Gandhi has the dubious distinction of using Article 356 as many as 27 times, and in most cases to remove majority governments on the ground of political stability, absence of clear mandate or withdrawal of support, etc. She did not spare even Chief Ministers of her own party. But the Janata government did worse than Mrs

Gandhi by removing nine majority Congress governments in one stroke on April 30, 1977. The Supreme Court of India upheld it in *State of Rajasthan v. Union of India* (1977). Mrs Gandhi replied in the same currency on her return to power in 1980 by removing nine Opposition majority governments at one go. Subsequent governments too acted in similar fashion including the Narendra Modi government which invoked Article 356 in Arunachal Pradesh on Republic Day itself, in 2016.

The most notable case of non-use of Article 356 was the refusal of the P.V. Narasimha Rao government prior to the demolition of the Babri Masjid on December 6, 1992 as in the draft Constitution, emergency power could be used to safeguard the 'legitimate interests of minorities' and the government was fully aware of a breakdown of constitutional machinery in Uttar Pradesh. However, the subsequent dismissal of three Bharatiya Janata Party governments in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh, though upheld by the Supreme Court in *S.R. Bommai v. Union of India* (1994) was wrong as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh ban was better implemented in these States and much greater violence had taken place in the Congress-ruled States of Gujarat and Maharashtra.

Today, when many constitutional experts are of the view that the judiciary is increasingly becoming more executive-minded than the executive itself, the observations of the Andhra Pradesh High Court are a worrisome sign. Ideally, the word 'otherwise' should be deleted from Article 356 and the provision be used only sparingly and to never remove a majority government.

Faizan Mustafa is Vice-Chancellor, the National Academy of Legal Studies and Research (NALSA) University of Law, Hyderabad. The views expressed are personal



The fallout of keying in the wrong labour codes

As the Wistron case shows, hoodwinking industrial workers is economically suicidal and damaging to India



R. NAGARAJ

On December 12, contract workers ransacked Wistron's iPhone assembly factory in Karnataka, at Narsapura in Kolar district, about 80 kilometres from Bengaluru. There are reports that property worth ₹50 crore was damaged, and many workers sent to jail. The factory which began production in July, employed about 2,000 permanent workers and 7,000 contract workers. The factory does not have a labour union.

What caused the violence? The reason is said to be the reported non-payment, or only partial payment, of wages, or its delay, and flouting of labour laws, such as non-issuance of the wage contract, and employing women workers in night shift without providing adequate safety.

Incident and deeper impact

The central and State governments have sharply condemned the violence. They are now busy controlling the damage the incident has caused to the country's high-profile global campaign to attract foreign direct investment, especially under its production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme to boost domestic investment in mobile phone manufacturing. The Wistron project showcased the government's success in attracting foreign direct investment, and promoting Atmanirbhar Bharat, the vision of making India self-reliant.

However, according to a preliminary inquiry report by the State

labour department into the incident (the report is unavailable in the public domain), Wistron and its labour contractors violated many provisions of the laws that led to the violence. The Taiwanese assembler has admitted its faults, and sacked its vice-president for its India operations for the lapses. Apple Corporation has condemned the violations of statutory laws and has reportedly put further business on hold until Wistron addresses the labour dispute.

In July, the State government promulgated an ordinance to dilute the major labour laws including the Factories Act 1948. The Act regulates the ordinary working day's length, overtime wages, hours of work, the timing of shifts, safety, and health issues. Couched in legalese, the yet-to-be-operationalised law, effectively repealed the standard eight-hour working day with a 12-hour (with overtime payments applicable for work 75 hours to 125 hours, per quarter). This is evident from workers' testimonies in the police inquiry into the incident.

The pandemic as a foil

Amid the health pandemic and the lockdown, a few State governments sensed an opportunity to quickly ram through pieces of legislation or ordinances to whittle down the labour laws. It was purportedly to attract foreign capital seeking alternative locations to China, considering rising geopolitical tensions. The reform effectively knocks down the foundations of national labour laws by paring down many protective laws. The Karnataka government is apparently at the forefront of such a reform drive, with the media widely reporting the legal changes and the deep discontent among workers in the State.

India's labour laws are indeed a



cumbersome web — some 47 central

cess. But the government seems keen to emulate China's long working days and flexible use of labour. However, China also mandates employers to provide dormitory accommodation for workers close to factories and other social security benefits. Factory-provided dormitory accommodation is the principal reason for slum-free Chinese industrial cities, unlike in India.

Moreover, as is widely known, China's local governments compete with each other to offer excellent physical infrastructure and ensure adequate credit to industrial enterprises through the national development banks, thus implicitly subsidising production costs. The local governments and party officials, whose objective is employment generation, act as midwives in industrial promotion.

Why do they do so? Because the professional rewards for Chinese bureaucracy and provincial ruling party officials are dependent on the local economic performance. India's efforts at cherry-picking legal changes for labour reforms, without reasonable compensation, are bound to face resistance.

Data on earnings

The average daily earnings of casual workers in urban India in 2018-19, as per the official Periodic Labour Force Survey (<https://bit.ly/3hpS2h6>), are ₹256 (or ₹6,400 a month for 25 days of work). It is well below the official living wage as defined by the Seventh Pay Commission for central government employees. Industrial workers are ever eager to work longer hours for overtime, considering the low absolute earning levels. Trade unions mostly welcome negotiations for labour flexibility linked to productivity but resist its unilateral imposition if the productivity gains accrue

mainly to the management (the 'winner takes all' situation).

The Wistron episode has highlighted how the government has short-changed workers, as the length of the working day was unilaterally raised from eight hours to 12 hours in October, undoing the principal provision of the Factory Act 1948. The State Labour Department has reportedly admitted the flaw in the ordinance, in its letter to the Secretary, Ministry of Labour and Employment at the Centre. If the "principal employers" (Wistron in this case) and their labour contractors view the reforms as unbridled "hunting licence", such legal changes are bound to unleash a backlash, sooner than later. The Wistron episode seems proof of this.

No surprises

What are the lessons of the sorry episode? Hoodwinking workers is politically illegitimate and economically suicidal in a shrinking economy. During the lockdown following the novel coronavirus pandemic, when lakhs of workers lost jobs and livelihoods, trudging back to their villages, an insensitive government instead of addressing the humanitarian crisis, cleverly sought to capitalise on working-class misery to undercut wages — a morally reprehensible act in any civilised society. So, it should not come as a surprise if such hasty and crafty measures have now backfired, denting India's image among global investors. The Wistron dispute has apparently turned the clock back on the government's efforts to boost domestic production ('Make in India'), and enhance national self-reliance (Atmanirbhar Bharat).

R. Nagaraj is with the Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

Coding for children

In the midst of emerging online learning systems, ensuring a blissful childhood remains a key challenge for parents (OpEd page, "Are children being introduced to coding too early in life?", December 25). There is an imperative need to provide children soft skills to nurture their emotional intelligence which would enable them

to boldly face challenges in life. While learning coding helps problem-solving skills in children, it does take away their precious playtime. It could make them become glued to their device screens all the time. As such we need to disseminate the requisite inputs to children to enable them to withstand the pressures in academics and outside as well.

Experiential learning, interpersonal skills and peer learning would be available to children only from their outside mingling during their playtime. G. RAMASUBRAMANYAM, Kanuru, Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh

■ Introducing children, of ages four or five, to coding is, without a question, far too early. One has to agree that 21st century careers will be

based on technology but that does not mean such young children should be made to sit in front of mobile and laptop screens. It is pointless.

AKSHATA ANIL RUPNAVARI,

Hadapsar, Pune, Maharashtra

Protocol forgotten

It is definitely the festive season and one must

certainly does not begrudge a man his favourite tipple but the chaotic scenes witnessed outside the beverages outlet at Vizhinjam shocked our family as we travelled to and from a seaside resort nearby. People jostled in serpentine queues paying scant regard to the COVID-19 protocol. Masks were worn incorrectly or not at all and social distancing norms were aggressively compromised. Coming on the heels of recently concluded elections,

a similar festive season rush at other such liquor outlets will further aggravate the COVID-19 new caseload situation. I hope the authorities concerned will put in place corrective measures to ensure that gains against the disease are not frittered away.

DEEPAK NAIR,
Thiruvananthapuram

To read more letters online, scan the QR code

The making of a tinderbox

Long shifts and failure to resolve payment and overtime issues allegedly led to the violence by the workers in an iPhone factory in Narasapura earlier this month. Sharath S. Srivatsa reports on the night of the unrest and the many violations of labour rules by Wistron



The scene of destruction at the iPhone manufacturing plant in Narasapura. (Below): The police try to disperse the protesters outside the plant. • KPN

+ Anxiety writ large on their faces, Abhishek and Sunil walk into a small playground littered with garbage. Their attentive eyes scan the area to see if anyone other than *The Hindu* team is in the vicinity. It takes a lot of convincing for the duo, engineering graduates in their early 20s, to open up.

Abhishek and Sunil, who are from Kolar city in Karnataka, went to work until recently. Now they not only worry about whether they still have their jobs, but are also scarred by the violence that broke out on December 12 at their workplace, the Wistron Infocomm facility at Narasapura, about 20 km from Kolar, where workers assemble Apple's SE2 iPhones.

The trigger

"We did not expect violence though tensions had been simmering among the employees over lack of payment for overtime and problems with the punching machine that resulted in loss of pay," says Abhishek. The sudden increase in work hours was taking a toll on their health, he says. The anger reached a peak on December 12.

At around 5.45 a.m. on that day, when the night shift employees were getting ready to leave and the day shift employees had just walked in, an argument broke out between the contract employees and the executives of a staffing company that had hired them, recalls Sunil, who is employed in the Final Assembly Test and Pack (FATP) department.

The night shift employees claimed that they had not received any information about their salaries being credited to their accounts (they had deposited their phones in lockers before getting into the assembly line). Those in the day shift had noted that discrepancies in overtime wages between what they were entitled to and what they had received for the months of October and November had continued into December as well.

On the night of December 11-12 (Friday-Saturday), the atmosphere was tense, Sunil recalls. Employees stopped production in the assembly line a few times in protest and gathered in small groups to discuss these issues. They approached the manager in one of the lines, who promised to sort out the matter by Monday. However, as the shift ended and workers came down to the locker room adjacent to the exit area, where punching machines are installed, miscommunication between the executive of a staffing company and those employed by the company sparked off violence, says Sunil. There were about 200 angry employees at the spot, clearly outnumbering the 30 odd security staff present at the time. In all, about 5,000 employees were present at the 43-acre facility when the violence broke out.

Then pandemonium broke out as en-



cidentally, as part of its efforts to bring in more industry, the State government on May 22 had introduced 10-hour shifts but later withdrew the order on June 12 after protests from unions.

As early as in the second week of November, production was affected briefly when employees stopped work at the assembly line for about an hour. Work resumed after line supervisors convinced employees to resume work, with the promise that their issues would be resolved. "Until October, we did not have any issue with our salary. If there was any problem with the punching machine, the problem would be rectified. However, the employee strength started increasing, and hundreds of new workers were added. The glitch in the punching machine was not fixed, and the information centre set up by the company to address these complaints could not handle the growing number," says Abhishek. He also says that there was a huge difference between the salary offered and what the workers actually received. Overtime payment did not bring much relief, he says.

Employees claim that they were given notice about the increase in their shift time to 12 hours only about 10 days before the change was brought in. Already affected by COVID-19-related stress, this only added to their woes, they say. While each shift had two 30 minute-long breaks for meal times and two 15 minute-long tea breaks, employees took time to travel to and from the facility, which meant that they were out for about 15 hours everyday. "Some people had to travel from places as far as Chintamani, Mulbagal and Kolar Gold Fields, so it took them even longer. Employees had no life outside of work and would end up sleeping on their weekly off. When we joined, we were not told about the 12-hour shift," Abhishek says.

The major provocation for the violence on that day was the fact that the day shift employees knew how much salary they had received as they had got notifications on their phones but the

night shift employees did not, and there were discrepancies in the salaries, claim workers. "I know my friends received only ₹300 and ₹600 as salaries for the full month of November. Overtime in October and November did not reflect in the salaries of many people. These people's families depend on their salaries," says Nithin, a B.Com graduate employed in the FATP department. As an incentive, the company had introduced a monthly attendance bonus of ₹1,000 for those who did not take any leave.

Excitement and disappointment
Months before the incident, the ₹3,000 crore investment by Wistron in Narasapura had caused great excitement among the youth in this district for two reasons. One, given that iPhones were to be assembled there, they knew that the facility would generate employment closer home. This meant that they didn't have to go all the way to Bengaluru, 70 km away. As hiring started, young people below 25, from Kolar Gold Fields, Malur, Mulbagal, Hoskote, Kolar, Chikkaballapur and also Tamil Nadu and the northern States, landed contract jobs through staffing firms Randstad, Quess Corp, Innovsource, Creative Engineers, Needs Manpower Support Services, Adecco Group, and United House Keeping. As local trains to Bengaluru from Kolar Gold Fields and Bangalore were cancelled during the pandemic, a vital link to the capital for those commuting daily had been cut off. These people joined Wistron as they were offered transport facilities. With colleges closed, many students also joined the growing workforce. While no educational qualifications were specified for those joining the FATP department, only engineers were hired for the engineering department.

Abhishek says the job was not stressful. "The management was not pushing us to meet bigger targets. Many quit Honda Motorcycles and joined here because the job did not require physical exertion. Also, assembly lines were yet

to stabilise so the assembly of iPhones had not reached the peak capacity. It all changed once the 12-hour shifts kicked in and overtime wages were not paid."

Many violations

The violence triggered a series of investigations by government agencies. The preliminary inspection report by the Department of Labour shows that the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act of 1970; the Minimum Wages Act of 1948 and Rules of 1958; the Equal Remuneration Act of 1976 and Rules, 1976; and the Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act of 1946, all of them crucial labour laws, were violated.

A separate report by the Department of Factories, Boilers, Industrial Safety and Health says that the increase in manpower in the factory from the license capacity of 5,000 to 10,500 was done within a short span of time. More serious was the move to increase working hours from eight hours to 12 hours on a continuous basis without informing the department and without seeking the necessary exemptions under the Factories Act for overtime work. It also found that there was no assessment of the repercussions of moving from eight-hour shifts to 12-hour shifts. The company was found not to have followed statutory compliance pertaining to the requisite number of safety officers, welfare officers, and medical officers as stipulated by the Factories Act.

At an internal meeting, the Labour Department found that no yardstick in terms of educational qualifications was provided: Pre-University Course graduates, Industrial Training Institutes graduates, diploma graduates, and B.E. graduates were all doing the same work for a monthly salary of ₹15,000. It was also found that without consent letters, women had been posted in night shifts.

The department noted that 1,343 permanent workers and 8,490 contract workers had been hired through six contractors. A glaring violation can be seen in this pattern, note trade unions, as there is a disproportionate number of contract workers compared to permanent workers. The Contract Labour Act of 1970 prohibits appointment of workers in jobs that are perennial in nature.

Acknowledgement and apology

On December 19, about a week after the incident, Wistron publicly acknowledged that some workers had not been paid correctly or on time and apologized to them.

"This is a new facility and we recognise we made mistakes as we expanded. Some of the processes we put in place to manage labour agencies and payments need to be strengthened," it said in a statement. The company also said it was enhancing the processes and restructuring teams to ensure that such issues

are not repeated. Hours later, Apple issued a statement further acknowledging the lapses. The smartphone major's preliminary inquiry found violations of Supplier Code of Conduct. Proper working hour management processes had not been implemented, leading to payment delays for some workers in October and November. "We are disappointed and taking corrective steps to address these issues. Wistron is restructuring their recruitment and payroll teams at Narasapura," Apple said. It also said that Wistron had been kept on probation and will receive no further orders until it completes corrective action.

Official response

Over the last two weeks, as the incident in Karnataka, a State that is otherwise regarded peaceful and investment-friendly, attracted international attention, the government has been on an overdrive to send a positive message to investors. Before the violence at Narasapura, on the other side of Bengaluru, workers were protesting against Toyota in Bidadi where a lockout has been declared in one of the plants. Government intervention has not brought relief.

In the aftermath of the violence, the government first said it would provide security to the company as thousands of jobs were at stake. Over the last few days, Ministers and top government officials have been tight-lipped about the issue. Their focus has been on restarting the facility at the earliest. In fact, despite Wistron and Apple acknowledging the workers' problem publicly, the State government is yet to speak on the issues raised by the workers. The Union government is also keen on bringing the facility back on its feet, Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa announced. In the process, the information flow has been tightened and no official action has been announced yet on Wistron even as the company is focusing on re-starting operations. Labour officials say the company has submitted documents.

Permanent employees have started going to the factory, while contract workers are yet to hear about their fate.

Meanwhile, the Joint Committee of Trade Unions comprising eight unions told the State government that it is "a matter of great shame" that the supplier company, Wistron, and parent company, Apple, have shown the courage to admit mistakes, but the State government agencies, which are tasked with the welfare of workers, have no official response in this matter. The unions have also sought to be a part of the investigation team, and have told the government to treat the issue as a complex industrial relations issue and not a law and order one.

The names of the workers have been changed to protect their identity



FROM PAGE ONE

Farmers' unions refute PM Modi's charge

The Prime Minister, however, reiterated the government's offer for talks, saying that his government was ready to talk even with their staunch political opponents, but the talks could be held only within the realm of facts, logic and issues.

Responding to Mr. Modi's address, AIKSCC general secretary Avik Saha, in a Farmers' Bulletin, said the Prime Minister should stop confusing the people and not obfuscate the movement.

"The farmers have only one demand. Give them assured, guaranteed and legalised income. It can be done through announcing MSP for all crops and ensuring that all farmers across the country get it. It must be a legal guarantee," said Mr. Saha.

He said the Prime Minister's attempt to confuse people would not work and he should stop working for the big corporates.

Opposition inaction

In a scathing attack on his political opponents, Mr. Modi, in his 50-minute address, said opposition parties shedding tears for the farmers today had done little for them when they were in power.

"Those leading the agitation today, sat on the recommendations of the Swaminathan Commission report when they were in power," said Mr. Modi. He added that despite the agitation, farmers rejected those behind the movement in Panchayat elections in Rajasthan, Assam and Jammu

and Kashmir. "Through ballot they have supported the new laws," he remarked.

Accusing the West Bengal government of blocking the benefits of the Samman Nidhi Yojana to the farmers of the State for political reasons, Mr. Modi, turned his guns on the Left without naming any specific party. He said those who ruled in West Bengal for three decades and ruined it, never launched an agitation over the denial of Samman Nidhi to the farmers in the State, but they reached Punjab and are raising questions over the farm laws.

Mr. Modi said a lot of lies were being spread about the new laws. Some people were spreading rumours that *mandis* would close and Minimum Support Price would stop. "But not a single *mandi* has been shut," claimed Mr. Modi. .

He added that these people were talking about APMC, but they were in power in Kerala where there were no *mandis*. "They have time to mislead the Punjab farmers. But if it is a good system. Why it is not in Kerala?" asked Mr. Modi.

Responding to the allegations, Mr. Saha said the Prime Minister had deliberately twisted facts on the issue of APMC in Kerala, because the Kerala government was the highest procurer of farm produce despite the absence of *mandis*. "The farmers in Kerala are getting more price than the rest of India because of the intervention of the government," he claimed.

Dry run next week for vaccine rollout in 4 States

It will include activities from the necessary data entries in Co-WIN to vaccine receipt and allocation to deployment of team members, mock drill of session sites with test beneficiaries to reporting and evening meetings.

This would also include testing for cold storage and transportation arrangements for the vaccine and management of crowds with proper physical distancing, said the Ministry.

"An important focus of the dry run will be on management of any possible adverse events following immunisation (AEFI)," said the release. This will be in addition to checking adherence and management of infection control practices at the session site to prevent disease transmission.

The mock drill will include concurrent monitoring and review at the block and district levels and preparation of feedback to be shared with the State and Union Health Ministry," the Ministry said. A detailed checklist has been prepared by the Health Ministry and shared with the four States

to guide them in the dry run.

Meanwhile the National Expert Group on Vaccine Administration of COVID-19 (NEGVC) has recommended three prioritised population groups, including healthcare workers (about one crore), frontline workers (about two crore) and prioritised age group (about 27 crore).

The Ministry added that as vaccines are temperature sensitive and need to be stored in specific temperature, the present cold chain system consisting of 85,634 equipments for storage of vaccine at about 28,947 cold chain points across the country will be used for the cold chain administration.

To strengthen the capacity of human resource for COVID-19 vaccine introduction and roll-out, detailed training modules have been developed for different categories of vaccine handlers and administrators including medical officers, vaccinators, alternate vaccinators, cold chain handlers, supervisors, data managers, ASHA coordinators and all others involved.

Train no. 03351 Dhanbad-Alappuzha special express train will leave Dhanbad at 11.40 a.m. and arrive in Visakhapatnam the next day at 8.15 a.m.

It will depart from there at 8.35 a.m. and reach Alappuzha at 3.25 p.m. on the third day.

Train no. 03352 Alappuzha-Dhanbad special express train will leave Alappuzha daily at 6 a.m. to arrive in Visakhapatnam the next day at 1.10 p.m.

It will depart from there at 1.30 p.m. and reach Dhanbad at 10.20 a.m. on the third day of its journey.

On Thursday, the first set of data were released for all users, the ISRO said.

Has to be peer reviewed

The public release data archived at the Indian Space Science Data Centre in Byla, near Bengaluru, are prepared in the standard, globally followed Planetary Data System 4 (PDS4) format for public release, it added.

The Indian Space Science Data Centre (ISSDC) is the period since the launch, payload teams tuned onboard systems for optimal instrument configurations, derived essential in-flight calibration data, revised / updated data processing steps / software and have started to publish early results, it said.

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The Indian Space Science Data Centre (ISSDC) is the

All experiments are performing well and data received suggest excellent capability to deliver on pre-launch promises'

The orbiter which was injected into a lunar orbit on September 2, 2019, carries eight experiments to address many open questions on lunar science. "All experiments have been performing well and the data received suggest excellent capability to deliver on the pre-launch promises," the ISRO said. In the pe-

Kerala govt. not for tussle with Governor

Ministers Balan and Sunil Kumar visit Raj Bhavan, spend over an hour with Arif Muhammad Khan

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM



Kerala CM Pinarayi Vijayan and Governor Arif Muhammad Khan have divergent views on the issue ■ S. MAHINSHA

On Friday, the Kerala government appeared keen on steering clear of a legal confrontation with Governor Arif Muhammad Khan over his assent to convoking a special session of the Assembly on December 31 to discuss the national-level farmers' agitation and its implications for the State's food security.

Law Minister A.K. Balan and Agriculture Minister V.S. Sunil Kumar called in at the Raj Bhavan with a Christmas cake. They spent over an hour closeted with Mr. Khan.

The government's proposal to club the issue of food security with a discussion on the contentious agriculture reforms laws that have

pushed the farmers on the warpath against the Central government had emerged as a subject of disagreement between the Raj Bhavan and

the administration. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and Mr. Khan had expressed starkly different views on the subject.

Stepping out of the meeting, the Ministers expressed confidence that Mr. Khan would give his assent. They avoided any mention of the suggestion to introduce a resolution in the Assembly against the farm laws. They said they would convey Mr. Khan's views to Mr. Vijayan.

'No objections'

A Raj Bhavan official pointed out that Mr. Khan had not objected to the summoning of the Assembly. He had merely sought further clarification of the purported exigency that compelled an impromptu session of the Assembly on December 31 without the minimum 15-day notice period.

Mr. Khan had turned

down a similar request on December 21 because he felt the Assembly lacked the "jurisdiction to offer a solution" to the farmers' strike.

He had also expressed scepticism on whether the Assembly could discuss the constitutional validity of laws enacted by Parliament. Mr. Khan had aired a similar sentiment when the Assembly passed a resolution against the Citizenship Amendment Act in December 2019.

Mr. Vijayan, in turn, felt the Governor had no power to arbitrate on subjects considered by the Assembly. Mr. Khan was constitutionally bound to summon the Assembly on the advice of the Cabinet. The Governor had no choice in the matter.

IN BRIEF



Malayalam actor drowns in Malankara dam

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM Actor Anil Nedumangad, 48, known for character roles in recent Malayalam films, drowned in the Malankara dam in Idukki district on Friday. The actor was in Thodupuzha for a shoot and had gone for a swim. Starting his career as a television anchor, he came into cinematic limelight with the 2014 film *Njan Steve Lopez*. One of his most noted roles was in *Ayyappan Koshyam*, in which he played a circle inspector.

Thanga Anki procession reaches Sabarimala

SABARIMALA The ceremonial procession carrying *Thanga Anki*, the golden attire that will adorn Lord Ayyappa during the Mandala puja, reached Sabarimala temple on Friday. In view of the COVID-19 protocols, only a few people could accompany the annual procession. It set off four days ago from Aranmula Sree Partha Sarathy temple, where the sacred attire is kept.

Openly expressing the aspiration to be the Chief Minister is rare in today's BJP, when the central leadership prefers low-profile leaders, a senior BJP leader observed.

While Mr. Yatnal's previous utterances on leadership change had gone without any censure, on Friday, a host of senior BJP leaders reacted sharply.

Union Minister D.V. Sadananda Gowda, said in Bengaluru, "Mr. Yatnal is only an MLA, not the party president to talk on leadership issues. He better stop making such statements for his own good."

Meanwhile, Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee president D.K. Shivakumar, speaking to mediapersons in the city, also hinted at change during Sankranti. "A new time will come after Sankranti. Let us see what all happens," he said.

HASSAN BJP Lok Sabha member Shobha Karandlaje has branded people protesting against the Centre as "urban naxals". "The people who raised anti-India slogans are protesting in the name of farmers," she said at a programme organised by the Hassan district unit of the BJP to mark the birth anniversary of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on Friday. "The farm Bills introduced by the Union government would benefit farmers," she said.

MLA speaks of leadership change

Karnataka BJP leaders censure him for speaking out of turn, creating confusion

KARNATAKA BUREAU
BENGALURU/BELAGAVI

Senior BJP MLA Basanagouda Patil Yatnal, a known dissenter to Karnataka Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa, yet again not only hinted at leadership change in the State by Sankranti, but also expressed his aspirations to become Chief Minister.

His statement at Vijayapura on Friday gained significance in light of Union Home Minister Amit Shah's proposed visit to the State, including to Vijayapura around Sankranti, when Mr. Yediyurappa hopes to get the green signal for the much-delayed Cabinet expansion.

Shah's visit
Stating that there will be a "big change" probably before Mr. Shah's visit to the State, Mr. Yatnal also hinted at his aspirations. "Every



year, the sun changes his path and shines on the northern hemisphere on Sankranti. In Karnataka, the sun will shine on north Karnataka and the era of wholesome development of this region will begin," he said.

Answering a question as to whether he hoped he would be appointed the Chief Minister, he said, "Who said I cannot be the

Chief Minister? I could be if it is my destiny."

N. Ravikumar, general secretary, Karnataka BJP, said Mr. Yatnal seemed to be upset that he had not been made a Minister and was speaking out of that frustration. "General secretary in charge of party affairs Arun Singh and party president Nalin Kumar Katreel have clearly said there will be no change in leadership in the State. Despite that Mr. Yatnal has been creating confusion time and again. His indiscipline is being observed by the party leadership," he said. However, there is as yet no response from Mr. Katreel.

While Mr. Yatnal's previous utterances on leadership change had gone without any censure, on Friday, a host of senior BJP leaders reacted sharply.

Union Minister D.V. Sadananda Gowda, said in Bengaluru, "Mr. Yatnal is only an MLA, not the party president to talk on leadership issues. He better stop making such statements for his own good."

However, Mr. Yatnal hit back at Mr. Gowda, pointing out that he was a Union Minister in Atal Bihari Vajpayee's Cabinet, much before Mr. Gowda became one. "This shows who is senior to

TDP blocking land allotment to poor'

Will approach SC against stay: Jagan

STAFF REPORTER
KOMARAGIRI

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy on Friday said he was saddened to know that the court had stayed the government's proposal to sanction house sites to 54,000 poor families in Amaravati, following a petition filed by the supporters of the Telugu Desham Party (TDP). The petition had stated that the initiative would result in an imbalance in "caste-based demography" in the region.

Mr. Reddy was addressing the gathering at the housing site here in East Godavari district. Accusing TDP president N. Chandrababu Naidu and his aides of launching a legal battle against the housing scheme, Mr. Reddy said the several cases filed at various



courts was leading to a delay in the issue of patta to the 3.74 lakh families. "The State government is unable to distribute patta to 10% of the beneficiaries due to the stays issued by various courts," Mr. Reddy said.

"The government has approached the Supreme Court and the sites will be sanctioned to all the 3.74 lakh families as soon as the legal hurdles are cleared."

According to a complaint, he had taken small loans amounting to ₹51,196 from at least 5 micro-financing apps – Udhara Loan App, Rufilo App, Reepay, A A A Loan App and Loan Gram app.

On December 18, the victim recorded a video, stating that he was being harassed by these companies as he could not repay the loans. He then consumed poison.

Meanwhile, the Cyberabad police on Friday announced the arrest of four persons, including a Chinese national, for their involvement in the app-based money lending cases.

According to the police, the accused are Yi Bai alias Denis, the Chinese citizen; Satyapal Kyalia, a resident of

Delhi who hails from Rajasthan; Anirudh Malhotra and Murathoti Richie Hemanth Seth, both residents of Hyderabad. Two others, Umapatil alias Ajay and Zixa Zhang, another Chinese national, are said to be absconding.

3 arrests from Bengaluru In another development, the Hyderabad Cyber Crime police arrested three persons from Bengaluru allegedly involved in the app-based lending of money.

The accused are K. Eswar, who works in the administrative section of Annuvi Pvt Ltd, Madhusudhan, a senior manager at Truthtech Pvt., and Satish Kumar, a manager with Truthtech Pvt Ltd.

Those in distress can dial Roshni at 040-6620 2000

First set of data from Chandrayaan-2 released: ISRO

All experiments are performing well and data received suggest excellent capability to deliver on pre-launch promises'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
BENGALURU

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) on Thursday said it had released the first set of data from the country's second mission to the Moon, Chandrayaan-2, for the general public.

Chandrayaan-2 was launched on July 22, 2019 from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre at Sriharikota in Andhra Pradesh.

The orbiter which was injected into a lunar orbit on September 2, 2019, carries eight experiments to address many open questions on lunar science. "All experiments have been performing well and the data received suggest excellent capability to deliver on the pre-launch promises," the ISRO said. In the pe-



Rapid strides: Chandrayaan-2 was launched from Sriharikota in Andhra Pradesh in July 2019. ■ PTI

The Indian Space Science Data Centre in Byla, near Bengaluru, are prepared in the standard, globally followed Planetary Data System 4 (PDS4) format for public release, it added.

The Indian Space Science Data Centre (ISSDC) is the

period since the launch, payload teams tuned onboard systems for optimal instrument configurations, derived essential in-flight calibration data, revised / updated data processing steps / software and have started to publish early results, it said.

On Thursday, the first set of data were released for all users, the ISRO said.

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The public release data archived at the Indian Space Science Data Centre in Byla, near Bengaluru, are prepared in the standard, globally followed Planetary Data System 4 (PDS4) format for public release, it added.

The Indian Space Science Data Centre (ISSDC) is the

prepared using Planetary Data System (PDS) version 4 standards.

The Chandrayaan-2 mission was India's first attempt to land on the lunar surface.

A month on, unflagging resolve on show

Farmers say the strength of the protesters has increased, with those from more States joining in

HEMANI BHANDARI

NEW DELHI

It was exactly a month ago when scores of farmers reached the borders of Delhi and made it their home. In just 30 days, their resolve seems to have only grown, and going back appears to be a distant dream.

When the farmers parked their trucks and trolleys in the last week of November, they had come with sacks of wheat, rice, flour and vegetables. Now, the trucks also have toothpaste, kneecaps, blankets, and *desi* geysers, among many essentials.

Amarjeet Singh, a 65-year-old farmer from Fatehgarh Sahib, said the trolley he had travelled in was one of the three that first reached Delhi on the night of November 26.

"We were stopped at the Kundli border and late in the night, when all the police officials were sleeping, we pushed an empty bus which was in front of our trolley and sneaked towards the



Staying put: Farmers protesting near Ghazipur in New Delhi on Friday. ■ R.V. MOORTHY

Singhu border," he said. On November 27, Mr. Amarjeet recalled facing tear gas shells and his eyes burning for hours.

"There was a retired Army man with us. He told us to soak sacks in water and cover the tear gas shells as soon as they drop," he said.

A trend that has set in over the past four weeks is that the elderly of the village have stayed back, while the youngsters make trips to their homes and back.

Mr. Amarjeet had come with 10 people in his trolley, including his sons and brother, but only three of them are

now in Delhi – new people from the village, however, have joined the protest. "They have gone back because someone has to take care of the crops too. This is the time to water the fields and fertilize the land," he said. Avtar Singh from Mohali also said that 22 people had

come with him, and 12 of them have stayed permanently.

After his friend and protester Harphool Singh's death on Thursday, Mr. Amarjeet's family is worried for his health, but he has decided to stay till the end. Harphool fell sick here at the border and was taken home on December 21, but he died of the illness three days later, Mr. Amarjeet said.

More hands

"The strength of the protest has increased in the past few weeks because now it is not just about Punjab and Haryana, so many other States have joined in – Maharashtra, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh," said Harminder Singh from Bhatinda.

"Earlier, we had come prepared for six months of food, but now, ration is flowing in. We haven't even used the sacks of flour and rice we had got," Avtar Singh said.

Another batch of Punjab farmers sets off for Delhi

Over 600 tractor-trolleys have started their journey: KMSC



Spirited march: Farmers leaving for Delhi on Friday. ■ AFP

nay. Thousands of farmers associated with us are coming and will reach the Delhi border by December 27," he said.

The KMSC is the one outfit that is still continuing with the 'rail roko' agitation it started on September 24. Most other unions lifted the blockade on November 24.

Farmers associated with Bharatiya Kisan Union (Ekta-Ugram), one of the largest farm outfits in Punjab, are

slated to start marching for Delhi on December 26. "We are mobilising people from nearly 1,100 villages from the Malwa, Doaba and Majha regions of the State. At least one batch of at least 15,000 protesters will march from the Khanauri border on December 26, and another 15,000 farmers will start their march from Dabwali on December 27," said Sukhdev Singh, general secretary of the BKU(U).

Mamata counters PM on Kisan Nidhi scheme

'No support even after two letters'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

Countering the charge made by Prime Minister Narendra Modi that farmers in West Bengal are being denied benefits of the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi for "political reasons", Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Friday said that Mr. Modi was trying to "mislead the people with half-truths and distorted facts".

Ms. Banerjee said the "Modi government has done nothing to help the State of West Bengal".

"They are yet to release even a portion of the ₹85,000 crore of outstanding dues that includes unpaid GST dues of ₹8,000 crore. If he genuinely wants to help the State, he must release at least a part of these funds..." the Chief Minister said.

are implementing so many schemes with Central government, the question of not cooperating on a scheme that is benefiting farmers seems absurd," Ms. Banerjee said in a statement.

Ms. Banerjee said the "Modi government has done nothing to help the State of West Bengal".

"They are yet to release even a portion of the ₹85,000 crore of outstanding dues that includes unpaid GST dues of ₹8,000 crore. If he genuinely wants to help the State, he must release at least a part of these funds..." the Chief Minister said.

"I personally have written two letters and have even spoken to the Minister concerned two days ago but they are refusing to cooperate and are instead indulging in malicious propaganda for political gains. When we

AAP MPs protest in Parliament

Pressing for repeal of farm laws, they shout slogans to draw Modi's attention

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

With the winter session of Parliament cancelled, two Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) MPs raised slogans against the three farm laws, in a failed attempt to draw attention of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who had come to pay tributes to former PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee on the occasion of his 96th birth anniversary, in the central hall of Parliament on Friday.

AAP's Rajya Sabha member Sanjay Singh tweeted a video of himself and his Lok Sabha colleague Bhagwant Mann holding placards and raising slogans while PM Modi walked out, without acknowledging the two. In the

video, Leader of the Opposition in Rajya Sabha Ghulam Nabi Azad and the Congress's Lok Sabha floor leader are also seen. Mr. Singh and Mr. Mann held posters demanding legal provision for Minimum Support Price (MSP) and shouted slogans demanding repeal of the farm laws. "The Parliament session is not being called.

Speaking out: Sanjay Singh, left, and Bhagwant Mann showing placards in the central hall of Parliament on Friday. ■ PTI

demanding legal provision for Minimum Support Price (MSP) and shouted slogans demanding repeal of the farm laws. "The Parliament session is not being called.

The winter session is cancelled. How do we raise our voice? How do we flag the farmers' concerns? Thirty-two farmers so far have lost their lives in this agitation but the government is completely immune to their travails," Mr. Singh told *The Hindu*. When pointed out that the protest failed to draw PM Modi's attention, Mr. Singh added, "He doesn't bother sparing a moment to look at the concerns of the nation, why would he bother about us," he said.

Mr. Mann, the MP from Sangrur, tweeted in Hindi, "Pro-farmer slogans echoed in the Central Hall to open the closed eyes and ears of the Modi government."

'Centre's strategy is to tire out farmers'

Congress flays Samman Nidhi 'drama'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH

Congress general secretary Randeep Singh Surjewala on Friday accused the Central government of working on a strategy to exhaust the farmers who are agitating against new farm laws, and thus eventually driving them away.



Reacting to the 'PM Kisan' event to release funds for farmers, Mr. Surjewala said, "Prime Minister Narendra Modi who attacked farmers with water cannons and lathi is today indulging in the drama of Samman Nidhi."

At a press conference, Mr. Surjewala said that as per the 2015-16 agriculture census, a total number of 14.64 crore farmers in the country undertake cultivation on 15.78 crore hectares of land.

"The Modi government launched 'Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojana' in December 2018 in which it was stated that ₹6,000 would be deposited in the accounts of all farmers of the country in three instalments. Under this scheme, in the year 2018-19, instead of ₹88,000

crore, only ₹6,005 crore was deposited. In the election year 2019-20 only ₹49,196 crore was deposited and in the year 2020-21, only ₹38,872 crore has been deposited till date, whereas this amount should have been ₹88,000 crore. If we multiply 14.64 crore (farmers) with ₹6,000, the amount comes to ₹88,713 crore [per year]," he said.

"Now today, the Prime Minister, by transferring ₹18,000 crore, is unsuccessfully trying to clean the stains of these three black laws," he added.

Mr. Surjewala said that instead of indulging in "event management", the BJP-led government should apologise to the farmers and withdraw the three laws.

Congress plans 'Save cow' march, Tiranga yatras

Party aims to take on BJP on its own turf on care of cow shelters, plans campaign for 'selfies' with the national tricolour

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

With a *gai bachao, kisan bachao* (save cow, save farmers) *padyatra* (march) in the Bundelkhand region of Uttar Pradesh on Saturday, Tiranga yatras and an online campaign of a selfie with the national tricolour, the Congress seems eager to engage with issues perceived to be core to the politics of the BJP.

Instructing State units to organise different functions on the occasion of its 136th foundation on December 28, party general secretary (organisation) K.C. Venugopal wrote to State units saying that "Tiranga Yatras and other such innovative campaigns may also be organised following the necessary social distancing protocols. The PCCs [Pradesh Congress

Committees] are also requested to pay solidarity to our fighting farmers who are sitting in an indefinite protest against the anti-farmers law."

On Friday, Mr. Gandhi

again targeted the Modi government over its proposed "Tour of Duty" programme that seeks to attract civilians for a three-year service plan. Tagging a critical opinion piece by former Indian Air Force chief B.S. Dhanoa, he tweeted, "Remember 'some-one' who explained radar to the Indian Air Force. This idea bears the imprint of the same mind. The Indian Army

is a fighting force, not a tourist destination."

Party general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, too, has been raising issues like the pitiable condition of cows in U.P. under Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's government. She also wrote to him asking him to take inspiration from Congress-ruled Chhattisgarh on how to look after cattle.

U.S. leaders urge Pompeo to raise farmers' protest with Jaishankar

Seven lawmakers express 'serious concern' in letter

SRIRAM LAKSHMAN

A group of seven American lawmakers – six Democrats and a Republican – has written to U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on the farmers' protest, expressing "serious concern" over the "ongoing civil unrest" in India. The letter asks Mr. Pompeo to reach out to his counterpart, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, on the issue.

"As a nation that is familiar with political protests we believe that the United States can offer counsel to India during their current period of social disturbance," the lawmakers wrote on December 23 about the thousands of farmers from States like Punjab and Haryana who have been engaging in a 'Dilli Chalo' (march to Delhi) protest for a month.

"As national legislators we respect the right of the government of India to determine national policy, in compliance with existing law. We also acknowledge the rights of those in India and abroad who are current-

ly protesting peacefully against agricultural laws that many Indian farmers see as an attack on their economic security," they wrote.

New Delhi has previously bristled at criticism from foreign governments and said it is an interference in India's internal affairs.

Earlier this month, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's comments in support of the farmers were called "ill-informed" and "unwarranted" by Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Anurag Srivastava. "This is an issue of particular concern to Sikh Americans linked to Punjab,

though it also heavily impacts the Indian Americans belonging to other Indian States. Many Indian Americans are directly affected as they have family members and ancestral land in Punjab and are concerned for the well-being of their families in India."

Another set of three lawmakers of the American Sikh Caucus had written to India's U.S. Ambassador Taranjit Singh Sandhu in early December, expressing concern over the government's response to the protests.

National Dairy Development Board

PB No. 40, Anand, Gujarat-388001

Tel: 02692-260 148/149/160 Fax: 02692-260 159

Website: <http://www.nddb.coop>, Email: purchase@nddb.coop

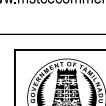
INVITATION FOR BIDS (IFB)/LOCAL COMPETITIVE BIDDING (LCB) ON LINE BIDDING

Bids are invited on behalf of Service Recipients from eligible bidders for the works listed below:

Sr. No.	Description of works/Bid Reference	Estd. Cost (₹)/Duration	Event Start/ Close Date	Bid submission/ opening date & time
I Civil, structural & Internal Electrification works for the following:-				
1	Ice Cream Plant of cap. 10000L per shift expandable to 30000L per day at Madurai, Tamil Nadu. NDB:HO:PUR:LCB:65/2020 (ET/65)	1510 Lakh/ 06 Months	26.12.2020/ 15.01.2021	15.01.2021 15:00 hrs.
2	ETP of cap. 20 LLPD at Saber Dairy, Himmatnagar, Gujarat. NDB:HO:PUR:LCB:66/2020 (ET/66)	774 Lakh/ 12 Months	30.12.2020/ 20.01.2021	20.01.2021 15:00 hrs.

For further details pertaining to IFB and for downloading the bid document, please visit these websites: www.nddb.coop and www.msticcommerce.com/eprocurement/nddb For any clarification please contact Dr. G.M. (Purchase) U.N.D.B., Anand-388001

NB: Any corrigendum/modification etc. will be posted only on these websites



GOVERNMENT OF TAMILNADU

WATER RESOURCES DEPARTMENT

LOWER CAUVERY BASIN CIRCLE, THANJAVUR.

INVITATION FOR BIDS

NATIONAL COMPETITIVE BIDDING (NCB)

NIT.No.8/ADB-CAVSCDP/TN/DSS/LCB.Circle,Thanjavur/Dated.24.12.2020.

Loan no. Title Letter no.3394-IND, Climate Adaptation Sub-Basin in Cauvery Delta Project (CAVSCDP)

Contract no. 3394-IND-2020-001, Installation, Operation and Maintenance of Decision Support System

WITH RELATED ELECTRO-MECHANICAL WORKS, INCLUDING CIVIL WORKS AND OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

FOR 5 YEARS IN SPECIFIC IDENTIFIED LOCATIONS IN VENNAR SUB-BASIN. Package No. CAVSCDP/TN/DSS/01

Deadline for Submission of Bids: 28/01/2021 at 15.00 hours Indian time.

1. India has been financing the Cauvery Delta Project (CAVSCDP) and it intends to apply part of the proceeds of this financing to payments

to the farmers whose names above. Bidding is open to bidders from eligible source as described in the Bidding Document

approved by ADB.

2. The Office of the Super

Army seeks to expedite helicopter deal

It will seek a waiver from Defence Ministry as Cheetahs and Chetaks are in dire need of replacement

DINAKAR PERI
NEW DELHI

With the deal for Ka-226T utility helicopters with Russia not concluded five years after it was announced and its fleet of Cheetah and Chetak helicopters at the end of their service life, the Army is set to approach the Defence Ministry for a waiver to take the deal forward.

"About 75% of the Army's fleet of Cheetah and Chetak helicopters is over 30 years old. Some of them are about 50 years old. We need urgent replacements. The Ka-226T deal with Russia has been stuck over indigenisation. So the Army is approaching the Ministry of Defence [MoD] for a waiver to conclude the deal," a defence official said on condition of anonymity.

Operational capability
Stating that the operational capability has already been impacted due to deficiencies and non-availability of re-



Utility chopper: The Ka-226T deal with Russia has been stuck over indigenisation. • FILE PHOTO

placement, the official stated. "The total technical life of these helicopters will start finishing from 2023 onwards. So the existing deficiencies will keep increasing."

In 2015, India and Russia had concluded an Inter-Governmental Agreement (IGA)

for at least 200 Ka-226T twin-engine utility helicopters estimated to cost over \$1 billion with 60 helicopters to be directly imported and remaining 140 manufactured locally. They are to replace the ageing and obsolete Cheetah and Chetak fleet of the Army and the Air Force.

A joint venture India Russia Helicopters Ltd. (IRHL) has been set up between Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd. (HAL) and Russian Helicopters (RH) which will assemble the helicopters in India. The Request For Proposal (RFP) issued by the MoD to IRHL for 200 helicopters stated 70% localisation over which the final deal has been held up as the JV quoted localisation of 62.4% in its response.

Efforts to resolve this impasse in the last few months by adopting a revised methodology has not made any progress, it has been learnt. As the RFP states 70% indigenous content, it cannot be modified.

Withdrawing it and issuing a new one would mean another 2-3 years lost. "The Army is now in a desperate situation for replacements and is preparing to take the case to the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) for a waiver.

to proceed with 62.4%," the official stated.

Import content

"Even indigenous platforms like Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH) and Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) have significant import content. How can an imported and assembled platform meet 70% requirement," the official questioned. According to a March 2020 report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence, the ALH has 46% import content by value, LCA - 40% and SU-30MKI assembled by HAL with technology transfer also has 40%. The issue has been taken up by Army Chief General Manoj Naravane with Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, another official said.

The Army has around 185 Cheetah and Chetak helicopters with around 20 helicopters with HAL for overhaul for around a year at any point of time.

Mamata says she supports Amartya Sen

West Bengal CM writes to him

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

C Let us not be daunted by their untrue accusation, and unfair attacks. We shall overcome

MAMATA BANERJEE
West Bengal CM

tacks. We shall overcome," Ms. Banerjee's letter said.

Referring to Mr. Sen's maternal grandfather Kshitimohan Sen, who was one of the early leading settlers in Santiniketan and Ashutosh Sen, a noted educationalist who had his famed house Pratichi built up in Santiniketan about eight decades ago, she said Professor Sen's family had been woven in the culture of Santiniketan, inalienably. Ms. Banerjee said everyone is well aware of "your family's deep and organic linkages with Santiniketan". So far there has been no response from Visva Bharati administration on these developments.

Varsity for disability studies soon

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Social Justice and Empowerment Ministry on Thursday invited comments from the public on a draft Bill for setting up a university for disability studies and rehabilitation sciences.

The Ministry sought comments on the draft University of Disabilities Studies and Rehabilitation Sciences Bill, 2021 till January 3. In the public notice inviting comments, the Ministry said the proposed university to be located in Kamrup district, Assam, would be "the first of its kind." The university would be a multi-disciplinary institution for research and courses from Bachelor's level onward.

The Ministry's proposal stated that there was a shortage of rehabilitation professionals in the country.

CBI books case against Haryana firm

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The CBI has registered a case against R.P. Basmati Rice and others for allegedly cheating a consortium of the State Bank of India and the Oriental Bank of Commerce, causing a loss of ₹220.98 crore. The agency has also named Anuj Singhal, Raj Pal Singh, Sumitra, Bharat, Naveen Kumar, Ishwar Chand Singla and Gangaram Mukhiya in the FIR, based on a complaint from the SBI.

The accused company, based in Haryana's Karnal, exported goods to the West Asian countries and Europe under various brands and also had about 50 domestic dealers. It took credit facilities under a consortium arrangement. From May 2016 onwards, the company did not submit any stock statement.

The loan account was declared non-performing asset in September 2016. The fraud came to light during a forensic audit of the check period, based on which a report was submitted to the bank in October 2018. It was reported to the Reserve Bank of India in April this year by the SBI. The audit revealed alleged diversion of funds to the tune of ₹106.16 crore to related parties. The company had shown a related party, Paras Foods, as debtor of ₹65.23 crore. It also claimed ₹40.93 crore outstanding against Sheeba International, Rajpal Bharat Kumar and others.

Seven MLAs switch over to BJP in Arunachal

Party now has 48 MLAs in Assembly

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

The BJP has gained seven MLAs in Arunachal Pradesh as six legislators of the Janta Dal(U) and the lone MLA of the People's Party of Arunachal (PPA) switched over to the party. The JD(U), which emerged as the second largest party after the BJP in the 2019 Assembly election, now has Techi Kaso as the lone MLA.

"We have accepted their applications to join the party. This is yet another example of the faith of the people in Prime Minister Narendra Modi and in the governance of Chief Minister Pema Khandu, who has taken the State on the path of development," BJP State president Biyuram Wahge told *The Hindu* from Itanagar.

The JD(U) MLAs who switched over are Talem Taboh from Rumong constituency, Hayeng Mangfi from Chayang Tajo, Jikke Tako from Tali, Dorjee Wangdi Kharma from Kalaktang, Dongru Siongju from Bomdila and Kangong Taku from Mariyang Geku constituency.

The PPA legislator who shifted allegiance is Kardo Nyigyor from Likabali constituency.

The PPA legislator who shifted allegiance is Kardo Nyigyor from Likabali constituency.

Smart Santa



It's the season: Santa Claus sanitising his hands before joining in the Christmas celebrations at the Holy Family Catholic Church in Srinagar on Friday. • NISSAR AHMAD

'Govt. allotments being rationalised'

Minister says there is a move from an approach of extending patronage

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Housing and Urban Affairs Minister Hardeep Puri on Friday said the allotment of government accommodation was being rationalised and that the government had moved away from an approach of patronage.

Mr. Puri was speaking at the launch of a portal for booking and applying for government homes and offices, e-Sampada. In response to a question, Mr. Puri said, "We have moved slowly from an overall approach in government of extending pa-

tronage, giving to people. There was never a scheme."

In October, eminent artists who had been allotted government houses in Delhi over the years were asked by the Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry to vacate by December 31, as reported by

The Hindu in November. This week, some artists moved the Delhi High Court and were granted a stay against the notice until the next hearing in January 2021.

Mr. Puri said some categories of people had been occupying the houses for very

long. "One such category is hitting the news recently, where you look at it, the original allotment was made 30 years ago, 40 years ago. Also there was a stipulation that their earnings would be below a certain threshold."

The Minister tweeted, "In a significant step to boost transparency & accountability in providing various estate services & adopt digital technologies, I am delighted to launch e-Sampada

The Minister tweeted, "In a significant step to boost transparency & accountability in providing various estate services & adopt digital technologies, I am delighted to launch e-Sampada, a single online platform for management of all GoI Estate services on occasion of Good Governance Day."

2 NC leaders, including MP's son, are arrested

Hilal Lone in Srinagar MLA hostel

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR

Two National Conference (NC) leaders, including the son of Member Parliament (MP) Akbar Lone, were arrested in Kashmir on Friday for their "likely bid to commit a breach of the peace or disturb the public tranquillity", just days after three close aides of Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) president Mehbooba Mufti were held on similar charges.

"Two NC leaders and three PDP leaders have been detained under Section 107

and Section 151 of the CrPC. Two were arrested on Friday," Inspector General of Police (IGP) Vijay Kumar said. The Sections under which the leaders were arrested is based on the information that "a person is likely to commit a breach of the peace or disturb the public tranquillity" and is a preventive detention "to prevent the commission of cognisable offence".

The arrested leaders are NC leader Hilal Lone, the Baramulla MP's son, and Shabir Ahmed Kullay.

J&K Internet ban extended

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR

The Jammu and Kashmir administration on Friday extended the ban on 4G mobile Internet up to January 8, saying "the restrictions on the high-speed connectivity acted as an impediment to attempts" of the militants to disturb the District Development Council (DDC) polls.

An order issued by the Jammu and Kashmir Home Department noted that there were credible inputs about the presence of a large number of militants trying to infiltrate from across the border.

64-year-old Odisha man set to join MBBS

The retired banker will be fulfilling the ambition he has been nurturing for decades

SATYASUNDAR BARIK
BHUBANESWAR

After 40 years of a gruelling job and raising children, a sexagenarian is probably more inclined to take it easy. However, a 64-year-old retired banker from Odisha has a different idea.

Jay Kishore Pradhan, born in 1956, has set out to become a doctor. He will formally start pursuing the four-year MBBS programme at the Veer Surendra Sai Institute of Medical Sciences and Research (VIMSAR), Burla, one of Odisha's premier government-run health institutes, after taking admission on Monday.

All set

Hailing from Atabira in Bargh district, Mr. Pradhan has completed all formalities required for a new entrant to the MBBS programme. The senior citizen has been cleared of cardiology, pulmonary function and nephrology



Jay Kishore Pradhan

tests and allowed to study medicine.

He retired as a Deputy Manager in the State Bank of India in 2016. The strange decision surprised many, but Mr. Pradhan is only fulfilling an ambition he has been nurturing for decades.

"I had once appeared for the MBBS entrance examination just after my intermediate class in the 1970s. I could not succeed then. I did not want to lose another year in preparation, so I joined B.Sc. physics honours. Since then, a sense of non-fulfilment keeps

haunting me," he said. "Besides, I am indebted to medical science. My father was admitted to the college where I will be studying, in 1982 for urinal ulcer. In 1987, he had undergone a second surgery and was taken to Vellore for further treatment. As a result of the successful treatment, my father survived till January 2010," he said.

Strong desire
"The desire to study medicine was so strong that I was toying with the idea of taking voluntary retirement after 15 years of banking service. However, it was too risky to quit the job keeping the family obligation in mind," Mr. Pradhan said.

After staying away from active studies for more than four decades, how did the man find rhythm in preparation for the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET)? "I have twin daughters,

who were preparing for the medical entrance examinations. I had been assisting them in their preparations," he said.

"In 2019, the Supreme Court lifted the upper age limit for studying till further judgment. It helped me firm up my resolve to pursue my dream," Mr. Pradhan said.

He had secured rank 5,94,380 by scoring 175 marks. Mr. Pradhan became eligible to take admission in VIMSAR in the physically challenged quota.

As one of his daughters died last month, the family could not rejoice the achievement the way it should have been celebrated.

"I am determined to continue study medicine in memory of my daughter," he said. At VIMSAR, Brajmoan Mishra, Dean and Principal, who is a year senior to Mr. Pradhan in age, is at a loss of words after coming across the unheard-of feat.

Urdu author S.R. Faruqi passes away

He is famous for his magnum opus *Kai Chaand The Sare Asmaan*

ASHUTOSH BHARDWAJ

In the 1950s, Shamsur Rahman Faruqi appeared for the Civil Services interview, a few days before Republic Day. It was the young man's first visit to Delhi. One of the distinguished persons on the interview panel asked him whether he would stay back to watch the parade. "No... I don't like such tamasha," he replied.

He got zero in the interview.

Faruqi, who died on Friday, was among the finest literary brains in Urdu, who redefined Urdu criticism. His greatest feat, perhaps, was his mammoth novel *Kai Chaand The Sare Asmaan* (The Mirror of Beauty), a work that he began writing at the age of 70. There aren't many instances in world literature of a novelist publishing a thick masterpiece in his or her twilight years.

He was born in 1935, in what was perhaps the golden age of Urdu translations. Between 1910 and 1940, sev-

eral classics were translated into Urdu, including *Madame Bovary*, *The Red and the Black*, and even many versions of the *Gita*. Faruqi's favourite was rendered by Khwaja Dil Mohammad as *Dil Ki Gita*. In such an atmosphere, the young boy took early to literature and brought out his first journal, *Gulistan*, on sheets pulled out of notebooks when just in Class VIII, that had some of his fiction, translations and his sister's writings.

He had three major influences in his formative years – the 1942 movement, Thomas Hardy and Shakespeare.

Among the speakers who spoke on the various forms



Shamsur Rahman Faruqi

of love, he was the eldest, and yet most playful and profound. I told him that some of us friends believe that *Kai Chaand The Sare Asmaan* was the greatest Indian novel of the last decade. He smiled, and a friendship soon bloomed.

What is his contribution to contemporary life? I had been writing a novel on Basar, and even got some extracts published. His novel, which I read while writing my own, was among the prime factors that convinced me that I must not attempt the genre without adding something remarkable to the existing works. A filmmaker friend, inspired by *Kai Chaand*, began working on an ambitious novel that he believed would take at least 10 years to complete. In this world marked by fleeting fame and books written for the instant, only a master could have persuaded you for posterity.

(Ashutosh Bhardwaj's latest book, *The Death Script*, traces the Naxal insurgency)

TRIBUTE

It was this commitment to the word that prompted him to chart his own path.

I first met Faruqi as a co-participant at a seminar at the India International Centre, Delhi, in February 2017. The seminar drew its title, *Ishq Bhari Pathar*, from a couplet of his favourite poet Mir.

Among the speakers who spoke on the various forms



How the pandemic has changed New Year plans

2020 made me realise what my true priorities are – and that is family and loved ones. We are planning to spend New Year's Eve with the extended family at a gorgeous fort hotel in Rajasthan. Gratitude is my greatest take away this year: for my family, my friends, for being privileged enough to survive over half the year without earning. As for 2021, it will be work, work, work. The lockdown has made me miss shooting and being on set tremendously. I want to be busy, relentlessly busy.

Swara Bhasker,
actor

This New Year's Eve, I am going to my native home in Kannur, Kerala, for a private weekend with the family. 'Krishna Leela' is my grandfather's [CP Krishnan Nair who founded The Leela Group] home and I have so many memories of growing up there. I plan to eat a lot of *kallumakkaya* (mussels) made the local way with chillies, turmeric and coconut, and I look forward to opening a 68 Salon Champagne, saved for a special occasion. Having gratitude for what you have gives you a bountiful life... that is one lesson from 2020 I will take forward.

Aishwarya Nair Mathew,
hotelier and entrepreneur

This year, I'm going to wing it to a hill station by myself [I'm not revealing which one because I'll be pretending that I don't exist when my friends start inviting me to parties]. The plan is to go off the radar and play video games all day. This year taught me that

I don't always need to have a huge setup or a lot of help around me to make good content. I want to apply that learning to all parts of my life, hence the solitary start to 2021.

Madan Gowri,
South India's biggest YouTuber

I will be locked down in a family bubble in muddy Somerset, warding off mutant Covid-19 and dreaming of the Kerala coast near Trivandrum, where we saw out 2019 and saw in the Anus Horribilis.

William Dalrymple,
historian and writer

This year, because of night restrictions, people are forced to celebrate my way – at home. Despite my stage persona, I'm not a New Year party person. Everyone is usually out on the roads and, with Delhi traffic, who wants to be part of that? I will step into the new year relaxed, with the people I really care about. Plus, I got married a couple of weeks ago, so it is going to be a really fresh beginning to 2021.

Rahul Dua,
stand-up comic

No amount of Tarot card reading or crystal ball gazing will prepare you for the coming year

KRISHNA SHASTRI DEVULAPALLI

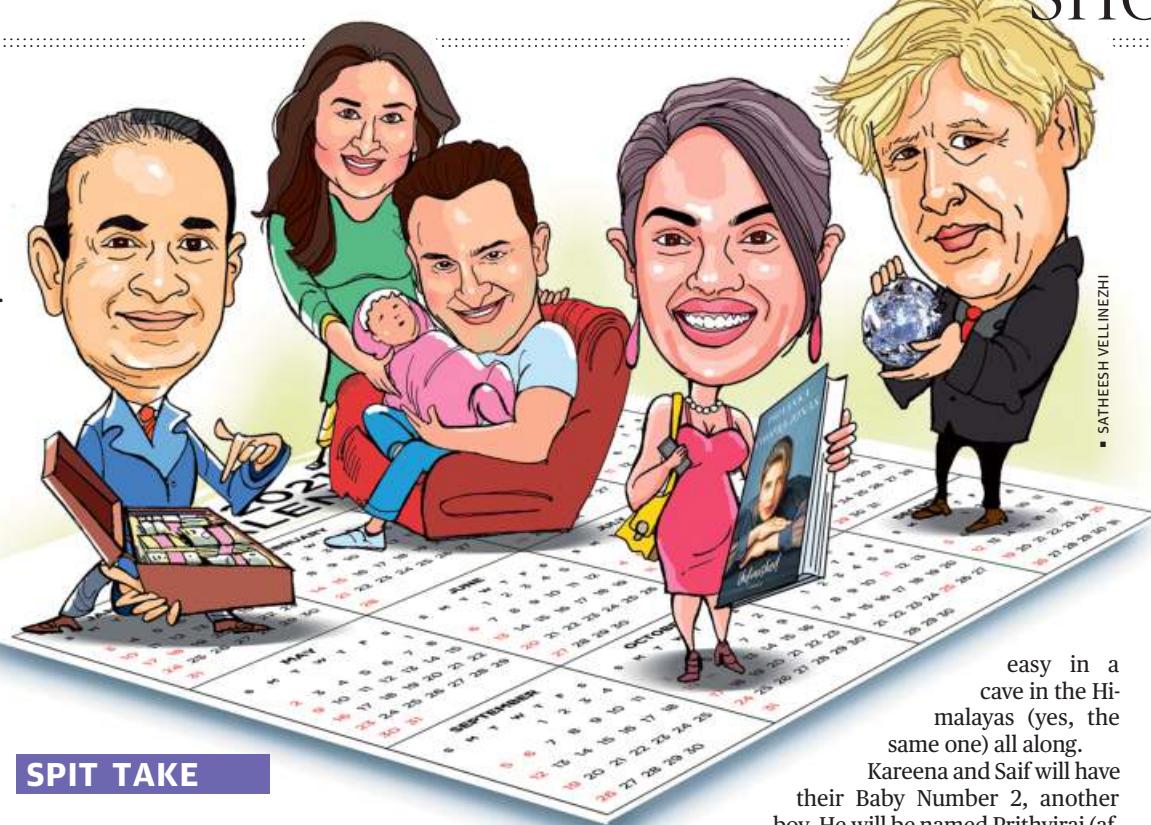
Priya Mitron, with Sant Nikhil Das Diwas out of the way, the last of the homemade *somapanam* quaffed, the CDs of 'Shanti Raat, Punya Raat', and 'Jhanak Chante, Jhanak Chante' put away, you must be wondering what 2021 has in store for you.

Fear not, Dear Readers. Using my profound yogic powers, and a double dose of secret *lehyams*, I have time travelled to our ancient future and returned with some genuinely *majama* tidings.

January starts with a bang. I am delighted to inform you that, after the Republic Day Parade, Borisbhai Johnson (who will be repeatedly referred to as Boris Becker by our leader in his speech) will ceremonially return the Kohinoor to its rightful owner: our queen, HRH Kangananika Ranautvanshi I. Following which he will issue an eviction notice to QE 2 so that Buckingham Palace will be made available within 60 days to its new tenant, HRH KR I.

After that, in no particular order, here are some of the delights in store for us.

Thalaivar Rajinikanth will finally become CM of Tamil Nadu. And



SPLIT TAKE

2021: what's in store

usher in an era of spiritual politics. Meaning, he will walk in slow motion followed by Senthil, Ramesh Khanna & Co, and solve all our material problems with some nifty finger swishing and *aamriga* pun-

chines. We will realise only at the end of the year that it was never him at all but his best friend, master of disguise, *Ulaganayagan* Kamal Saar, playing Rajini to perfection, as the real Superstar was taking it

declare war on China and defeat it comprehensively using goats and cows that speak fluent Sanskrit. And *sooperconshusnessss*. The history of China's geography will forever be altered by the depth of the physics in the Me in the me.

There will be a sudden Hindi renaissance in Tamil Nadu coinciding with the rise in spirituality. Raghuthaatha Gindi Nagin Maloom Institutes will mushroom all over the state with Hema Malini as dean.

There will be stiff competition between *Kareena Kapoor's Pregnancy Bible* (renamed *Kareena Beti Ki Maa Banne Wali Gita* for the Indian market) and Priyanka Chopra's memoir *Unfinished* (not to be confused with Nick Jonas' memoir *Finished*) for the Booker. Judge Shahid Kapoor will declare it a tie.

Eventually, KJo's *Big Thoughts Of Little Luv* will be declared the winner.

In the megabudget *Mahabharata* that is being made for our mythology-hungry patriots, Mukesh Khanna will have creative differences with his co-showrunner, Barack Obama, and try to strangle him with his old Shaktimaan suit. Peace will prevail when Akshay Kumar (playing all five Pandavas and Draupadi) intervenes.

In December, Kamala Harris will have her much delayed *arangoram* at the Schmidt Memorial. And Nehru will finally be arrested.

Jai Hind.

Krishna Shastri Devulapalli is a satirist. He has written four books and edited an anthology.

Where to spend NYE

As states and cities continue to clamp down on New Year celebrations, here are some options to ring in 2021



Art by acid attack survivors



ITC's biryani n pulao pack



K-Pop on YouTube



Eat Italian at home



Bending reality

Check out this exhibition of art works and paintings made by acid attack survivors. The Mitti Handprints is an initiative by the Laxmi Foundation to provide a creative platform and empower the survivors. At the Foundation office in Laxmi Nagar till December 31, entry is by invitation or registration. Call 725287774 / 8595282507

For a safe dining experience, the ITC Hotels' has curated a collection of 'biryani and pulao' in 10 flavours from the heritage kitchens of north, south, east and west. Priced between ₹625 to 825 each, the pack can be ordered on Swiggy, Zomato, EazyDiner, and is available across special take-out counters at ITC Maurya and Welcom Hotel Sheraton.

This virtual event brings together top K-Pop acts like BTS, TXT, Lee Hyun, and GFriend, for a New Year's Eve concert. Singers Halsey, Lauv and Steve Aoki are also set to make an appearance. All three artistes have earlier collaborated with BTS, so tune in for this year's hits in one place. From 6 pm IST on YouTube. Free to stream.

Ritu Dalmia has curated a retail line DIVA Casa pantry with special recipes. Freshly rolled pastas, sauces, seasonings, meats, seafood and salad dressing are measured, separately packed and prepared for each dish. The hamper is home delivered with a QR code for a video link of the chef explaining how to cook it. Call 7290043704 / 7291996198

Eschaton, New York's virtual nightclub launched during the pandemic, can be surreal. Thanks to the time difference, you can join their special Zoom event, *NYE: The Dissolution*, at 9.30 am on January 1, 2021. Slip on festive attire for the 60-minute experience, which also gives access to an hour-long after party. From ₹2,000 (approx) on tickettailor.com

How beauty and wellness rituals kept this writer centered through the endless days of lockdown

Glowing up this year

VASUDHA RAI

When the country locked down on March 25, few could imagine that we would be fighting the pandemic till the year's end. Call it research, vanity or a coping mechanism, but for me 2020 has been all about self-care. As the world shut down, I took solace in pots, tubes, oils, creams, powders and tools. I see beauty routines as a direct connection within, grounding and calming with every stroke.

Having saved money on clothes and eating out, I spent lavishly on skincare. Day and night creams and cleansers for my retired General father, who now refuses to wear an AM moisturiser in the PM. Mother stopped dyeing her hair, so I worked to elevate her skin with face massage, organic sunscreen (Coconut), rosehip oil (Purearth) and eye cream (IS Clinical).

As for me, I swung from plant-based skincare to potent actives. I mixed *kasturi manjal* with red sandalwood, orange peel, honey and rose water to create a daily cleanser and mask. I also discovered the power of Tretinoin and how it can transform your skin. I followed the 10-10 massage technique created by Paayal Mahajan, the founder of Essential Body Couture Skincare, to which I added the last five moves of the Tanaka face massage to smooth and tighten my skin. I added a sprinkling of



Top picks



Palmer's Raw Shea Hand Cream ₹295 on nykaa.com



Laneige Watery Sun Cream ₹1,650 on nykaa.com



Vedagiri Kasturi Manjal ₹490 on vedagiriherbals.com

Vedagiri Neelibhringadi Hair Oil ₹650 on vedagiriherbals.com

vedagiriherbals.com

vedagiriherbals.com



Kama Moringa Oil ₹1,450 on kamaayurveda.com



Wabi Sabi Dalmatian Quartz Gu Sha ₹3,000 (approx) on shop.beauty-heroes.com



gua sha, acquiring not one but two tools along the way. I found that ordering from Beauty Heroes and The Boxwalla is best to feed beauty obsessions. They deliver to India for a small charge, without excessive duty – but there are exceptions to this rule.

Though it may seem that I created an awful lot of waste, the opposite is true. 2020 is the year I stopped accepting PR gifts. Not only have I reduced both waste and the pressure from brands to post about them but, more importantly, I've become reacquainted with the value of money.

Collaborating with others has been a source of meaningful, human contact in what could have otherwise been a year of solitude. I hosted and participated in several Insta Lives and webinars, and have generally been more productive and visible – even more than 2018, the year I launched my debut book. I'm now working on part two of the Micro Beauty Awards with Aishwarya Subramanyam, former editor of Elle��度 current hell-raiser on the 'gram. The first edition, featuring skincare recommendations from reliable beau-

ty influencers, was so successful that we're doing a make-up edit on Christmas. We only did it because we were bored, but this is more proof that beauty isn't just gratifying, but also has the potential to unite people.

And what about 2021? I like to believe the online chatter, which claims that just like we had the roaring '20s right after the First World War and Spanish Flu, we will again recover. If history indeed repeats itself, I expect some decadence and the opportunity to finally flaunt the results of my 2020 rituals.

Read the full story on weekend.thehindu.com

A ND-NDE



This year, because of night restrictions, people are forced to celebrate my way – at home. Despite my stage persona, I'm not a New Year party person. Everyone is usually out on the roads and, with Delhi traffic, who wants to be part of that? I will step into the new year relaxed, with the people I really care about. Plus, I got married a couple of weeks ago, so it is going to be a really fresh beginning to 2021.

Rahul Dua,
stand-up comic

Niharika NM
• SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

SUSANNA MYRTLE LAZARUS

When Niharika NM hit a million followers on Instagram, she celebrated by dancing to the song 'Vaathi Coming' from Vijay's upcoming Tamil movie, *Master*. It can't get more apt than that for someone whose fans came for the relatable Reels and stayed for the South Indian humour. She reached the milestone on December 17, exactly two months after touching the one lakh mark.

This puts her in an elite bracket of 0.32% of users who have this kind of reach (according to the Mention x Hubspot Instagram Engagement Report 2020). Other Indian influencers who have similar numbers include YouTuber-turned-actor Prajakta Koli (@mostlysane, 3 million), content creator Kusha Kapila (@kushakapila, 1.5 million) and chef Ranveer Brar (@ranveer.brar, 1.2 million). The pandemic also helped accelerate her growth, as did guest appearances on Netflix India's social media show, *Behensplaining*. "It can be a little intimidating to think of the people behind these numbers... It is very easy to lose track of what you truly want to do and what you are passionate about once you start playing the number game – that is not where I intend to go or to be," says the 23-year-old Los Angeles-based content creator who is simultaneously working on an MBA degree.

Digital native

Niharika is not new to the social media scene. Back in 2016 – in her second year of engineering college – she started a successful YouTube channel with long-form sketches such as 'Types of Students Before an Exam' and 'Annoying Things That People Do'. "It just started as a hobby, but when the videos began getting a lot of attention, it required me to be consistent. Not being able to balance academics and content creation, I slowly



Niharika NM on reaching an Instagram milestone, making the switch from YouTube to Reels, and her backup career options

Three to follow

Liza Koshy
She has such a magnetic and charming personality. It keeps me engaged.

Jordindian
I have a soft spot for them. I think they are the funniest people I know.

David Dobrik
His vlogs are absolutely entertaining. They make me feel like I am a part of his friends group

dropped off the scene," she explains. After moving to the US for her MBA, she chose the easier option when Instagram launched the Reels feature. "There was no other excuse to avoid creating content. Also, it is easier to hold audience attention for 15 to 20 seconds than it is for 15 minutes," she laughs.

Born in Chennai and brought up in Bengaluru, Niharika's taste in comedy is "extremely diverse". She counts everyone from Jim Carrey to Rowan Atkinson and Brahmanandam to Vadivelu, as well as Vivek, Santhanam and Vennela Kishore among her inspirations. "If all else fails, I turn to my friends and family because they're all absolute clowns," she says. True to this, her content often references them, especially her parents, whom she describes as "very traditional but also cool at the same time". Through her childhood, they captured her innate humour on video and are therefore very used to it. "Whatever I do they're like 'Oh my god, so great, we love it!' So, I don't really trust their judgment but they love me and I love them," she adds.

Repping the South

The casual way in which she throws around 'da' and 'machan' in her 30-second clips has probably done more for Tamil and Kannada than *Chennai Express* did to mainstream South Indian languages and culture. In a recent Reel, she starts off by singing along to 'Body' by Megan Thee Stallion and pivots to arguing with a bad driver in Kannada. It

hits a sweet spot of both western and Indian pop culture. In a space where regional accents and actions can easily fall into offensive parody territory, how does she tread the line? "I try to stay in my lane and not generalise. Which is why most of my videos start with 'sometimes my friend/mum says this'. I make sure it is about my life, so others can relate to it instead of me preaching what other's experiences possibly are," she explains. Her signature way of saying 'actually' always manages to elicit a laugh.

Instead of considering social media a beast that needs to be fed constantly, Niharika looks at it more as a creative outlet. "I don't really force myself because that won't be organic or funny or relatable. I make sure I give myself a break to recharge in case I don't feel like it on a particular day," she says. Of course, there are inspired days when more than one sketch is created. As for trolls, she largely ignores them and will try to differentiate between fact and opinion. She says, "I am quite aware that I'm not everyone's cup of tea. It would be weird if that was the case, since comedy is so subjective!"

Course correction

Despite the large following, Niharika makes it a point to check who is sliding into her DMs almost every day. "I absolutely love it when people send me reaction videos of their parents watching my content. Then there was a girl who sent me screenshots of a conversation between her and her best friend, where every message was a line from my videos. It made me feel really important, at least for a brief second," she recalls.

She likens being a content creator to being an entrepreneur, where "you need to take risks to get rewards". She also recommends having more than one revenue stream so if one brand limits ad spends (especially in a vulnerable post-Covid economy) you have other sources of income. Apart from her work with Netflix, she has also created sponsored posts for Amazon Prime Video. "I think I am monetising my skills to the best of my ability. If I wasn't a comedian or a content creator, I would definitely use my MBA or my engineering degree to become an entrepreneur in the tech space, just to be aligned with the true Bengaluru spirit," she concludes.

FOOD SPOT

RAHUL VERMA

This time last year, I suppose I was sitting in an open-air café, basking in the sun, and biting into a juicy something or the other. It seems like another age altogether. But I have become philosophical with time. And my favourite mantra now is: This too shall pass.

Thus, in this last column of the year, allow me to look at the brighter side of life. The year 2020 came with its share of grave problems, but people stood up and extended a helping hand to others. And among those who did so – along with countless others who fed the hungry on the streets -- were home cooks, small entrepreneurs, delivery agents and top chefs. This was the year that gave new meaning to the term home delivery.

I have several good food memories of 2020. Among the ones I remember fondly are the shami kabab and yakhni pulao from Arq, an Awadhi food outlet based in Gurugram. The kababs, prepared with beaten meat, were chewy and soft, and the pulao had been cooked in meat stock with saffron and milk. I missed the hallem that I used to order from Hyderabad's Pista House every year, so was very happy with the one prepared by the chefs at potpot.in. It was wonderfully meaty and the cracked wheat gave it the mildly crunchy texture it needed.

Of other regional cuisines, the one I recall in particular is the Kerala food prepared by The Naadan Kitchen, a small outlet in Vaishali. Their pork fry was spicy and delicious, and I hugely enjoyed their rich plum cake over Christmas. The Kolkata mutton stew from an outlet called Park Street Khana was superb: it consisted of soft pieces of lamb and veggies in a mildly sweet sauce.

Among the many European dishes that we ordered, I cannot forget the quiches from Wenger's and the roast chicken with onion sauce, whole browned potatoes



ALL AT HOME An assortment of food items the author tasted during the year.
• SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

ing meals last week. One day, I ordered some pork, chicken and vegetable momos prepared by Prasuma and delivered by Meatigo. We steamed the momos and thought they were the best we'd had in a long time. The casing was thin and light and the fillings were deliciously juicy. From Hoipure, I ordered a dosa batter packet, sambar pack and chutney prepared by a company called Aasai. The dosa came out nicely crisp, and the coconut chutney was sweet and granular. The sambar, however, was pretty much flavourless.

Then one day, I received a sampler of biryanis and pulaos – including gosht Bohri biryani and Metiaburz biryani – from ITC Hotels. The dishes, as you would expect, had all the right flavours: The rice was fragrant, and the meat moist and tender. They came with various kinds of raitas (with mustard, or pomegranate seeds and cucumber, or onions and so on), mirch ka salan and gulab jamuns. The one I liked the most was surprisingly a vegetarian pulao – the nimona mirch pulao – which had such a delectable flavour of green chillies that I had it without any side dishes.

The year 2020 had its moments. But 2021 promises to rock. Happy New Year – and let there always be food!

The writer is a seasoned food critic



Revisiting the meals of 2020

A look back at the home-delivered good foods in Delhi during the year of pandemic and lockdowns

and glazed vegetables from Utpala Mukherjee's Culinary Connections.

The pandemic taught us that even street food can be delivered home. From a regional food service called Bhawan's I had aloo dum dahi vada, an Odia dish of spicy aloo dum served with yoghurt

urt-topped dahi vadas, and golgappas. The puffs came with different kinds of fillings and flavoured water – gondhoraj lime et al. I am still smacking my lips.

Thanks to the pandemic, I also discovered an old favourite – Fa Yian, a restaurant in the middle lane of Connaught Place. Their chop suey – with juicy prawns, tender pieces of chicken and all kinds of crunchy veggies mixed with crisp noodles, a tangy sauce on the side – reminded me of all the great meals we'd had at that restaurant long years ago.

I had three other interest-

Anthony Wonke's new documentary turns the lens on Johnnie Walker, following the whisky's 200-year journey through archives, anecdotes and more

AATISH NATH

A whisky brand, and a blended one at that, might not seem like the top candidate for a documentary. But when it is Johnnie Walker, the world's best selling Scotch brand, all bets are off. BAFTA-winning director Anthony Wonke's new independent film, *The Man Who Walked Around the World*, looks at how the 'striding man' became omnipresent, far removed from its humble start as a grocer in 1820.

Wonke – who has previously made documentaries on Portuguese footballer Cristiano Ronaldo and *Star Wars* – is no stranger to culture and fandom. With his latest offering, the two collide for an often-hagiographic history of the Scottish distillery. "I am intrigued by the brand's iconography and how it somehow resonates in our lives today," he tells me over an email interview. "Whisky itself is imbued with historical and cultural connotations, a Zelig-like character that has been part of major social and political scenes in history."

A dram of history
Encompassing almost 200 years and as many countries in a film is a tough task. Those seeking a deep dive will be disappointed – the film is an exploration of what 'it takes to become an icon in popular culture'.

There is, however, deep respect for the whisky maker, both by those interviewed on camera – ranging from actors and musicians (like Sophia Bush and Cappadonna) to barbers, activists and artists – and those behind it. As a result, the final cut spans the period, that, as Wonke says,

"has covered the two World Wars, the influenza pan-



Wonke and (top right) rapper Cappadonna

demic [which was at the same time as their 100-year anniversary], the civil rights movement, the feminist movement, civil unrest, prohibition etc. The brand has seen all sorts of major historical events".

One of the most interesting anecdotes is from Iraq.



I am intrigued by the brand's iconography and how it somehow resonates in our lives today

ANTHONY WONKE, director

Footprints in Bollywood

Following the trail of how the brand became a social justice beacon in Brazil and a symbol of aspiration for many around the world, Wonke came to India – the world's largest consumer of whisky. "We looked into the world of Bollywood and realised the huge cultural impact Johnnie Walker has had within the industry. It appears in many films

[from *Mehbooba* and *Baazi* to *Hera Pheri*] and has its own set of meanings and connotations," he says.

The director also came across Badruddin Jamaluddin Kazi, a teetotaller who was better known as Johnnie Walker. "We thought it a brilliant story. After speaking to his son, and realising how charming he was, we had to have him," he says.

But for more of the conversation, he points us towards the documentary.

Blue," shares Wonke. "So, I quite like the idea that if that bottle of whisky could talk, what would it say about the world, about global history, and about significant moments in life. I think that was one of the things that really struck me."

Watch *The Man Who Walked Around the World* on SonyLIV.

ANND-E

EU envoys assess post-Brexit trade deal

They seek more time to study the text before sending it to lawmakers at the EU Parliament

ASSOCIATED PRESS
BRUSSELS

Ambassadors from the European Union's 27 nations convened on Christmas Day to start assessing the free trade deal the bloc has struck with former member Britain, a historic accord that takes effect in just a week.

At Friday's exceptional meeting, the EU delegations asked for more time to study the texts before sending them to lawmakers at the European Parliament, according to an EU diplomat. The ambassadors are expected to meet again on Monday.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson hailed Thursday's agreement as a "new beginning" for the U.K. in its relationship with its European neighbours.

In a Christmas message, Mr. Johnson sought to sell the deal to a weary public af-



Busy Christmas: EU chief negotiator Michel Barnier, left, attending a meeting on Brexit in Brussels on Friday. ■AP

ter years of Brexit-related wrangling since the U.K. voted narrowly to leave the EU in 2016. Although the U.K. formally left the bloc on January 31, it remains in a transition period tied to EU rules until the end of this year.

Without a trade deal to set

out the terms of their new relationship, tariffs and other impediments would have been imposed on trade between the two sides starting January 1. Both sides would have suffered economically from a failure to secure a trade deal, with the British

economy taking a bigger hit at least in the near-term, as it is more reliant on trade with the EU than vice versa.

"I have a small present for anyone who may be looking for something to read in that sleepy post-Christmas lunch moment, and here it is, tidings, glad tidings of great joy, because this is a deal," Mr. Johnson said.

"A deal to give certainty to business, travellers and all investors in our country from January 1. A deal with our friends and partners in the EU," he said.

Under the deal, there will be no tariffs or quotas on trade between the two sides, though there will be more red tape for businesses because the U.K. is leaving the EU's frictionless single market and customs union. Firms will have to file forms and customs declarations for

the first time in years. There will also be different rules on product labelling as well as checks on agricultural products.

Under the terms of the deal, the EU will give up a quarter of the quota it catches in U.K. waters, far less than the 80% Britain initially demanded. The system will be phased in over 5 1/2 years, after which the quotas will be reassessed.

The French government announced aid for its fishing industry to help deal with the smaller quota, but insisted that the deal protects French interests.

The president of the French ports of Calais and Boulogne-sur-Mer, Jean-Marc Puisseusseau, said life for his port will become more difficult because "there will no longer be free movement of merchandise."

As court seeks clarification, PM Oli reshuffles Ministry

He was asked to give explanation for dissolving Parliament

KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE
NEW DELHI

Disregarding criticism from the rival faction of the ruling Nepal Communist Party, Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli reshuffled his Cabinet on Friday. The swearing-in ceremony of the eight newly inducted Ministers took place in the evening, hours after the Supreme Court of Nepal asked Mr. Oli to provide explanation for dissolving the elected Parliament.

Among the newly appointed Ministers are Top Bahadur Rayamajhi, who will take charge as the Minister for Energy, Prabhu Sah as the Minister for Urban Development and Prem Ale as Minister for Forest and Soil Conservation.

The reshuffle is being in-



K.P. Sharma Oli

met on Friday and issued a notice to the Oli government seeking clarification about the decision to dissolve the House of Representatives. The move was a response to the 12 writ petitions that were filed after President V.D. Bhandari dissolved the Parliament last Sunday acting on the recommendation of Mr. Oli.

The constitutional bench is expected to meet twice every week and is expected to deliver a verdict on the legality of the dissolution. Mr. Oli's team has repeated that the dissolved Parliament can not be resurrected. However, the Supreme Court has sought original documents related to Sunday's decision, from the offices of the Prime Minister and the President.

Russia opens criminal case against Navalny's ally Sobol

Agencies accuse her of trespassing into home of 'FSB agent'

REUTERS
MOSCOW

Russian law enforcement agencies opened a criminal case against Lyubov Sobol, an ally of Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny, and took her in for questioning early on Friday after raiding her home, Mr. Navalny and his supporters said.

There was no immediate comment from the police.

Supporters of Mr. Navalny said the police action appeared to be a response to Ms. Sobol visiting the home of an alleged FSB security service agent in Moscow. Mr. Navalny had earlier said the man took part in a botched plot to poison him in August.

The FSB has dismissed Mr. Navalny's allegations as a provocation designed to discredit it.

Ms. Sobol was briefly de-



charge that carries a punishment of up to two years in jail.

Mr. Navalny, one of President Vladimir Putin's most outspoken critics, said the authorities' response was disproportionate and confirmation that his allegations were true.

He was airlifted to Germany in August for emergency medical treatment after collapsing on a plane in Russia.

Germany has said he was poisoned with a Soviet-style Novichok nerve agent in an attempt to murder him, an assertion many Western nations accept.

The Kremlin has repeatedly denied any suggestion Russia's authorities were involved in poisoning him. Mr. Putin has said the incident was part of a U.S.-backed plot to try to discredit him.

tained on Monday after visiting the alleged agent's flat and ringing the doorbell. She was not let into the man's flat.

But Ivan Zhdanov, a lawyer for Mr. Navalny's anti-corruption organisation, said police suspected Ms. Sobol of violating the sanctity of someone's home with the use or threat of violence, a

Israeli jets fly over Beirut, blasts reported in Syria

'Syrian forces responded to attack'

ASSOCIATED PRESS
BEIRUT

Israeli jets flew very low over parts of Lebanon early on Friday, terrifying residents on Christmas Eve, some of whom reported seeing missiles in the skies over Beirut.

Minutes later, Syria's official news agency reported explosions in the central Syrian town of Masyaf.

Other Syrian media said Syrian air defences responded to an Israeli attack near the town in the Hama province.

There was no immediate word on what the target was or whether there were any casualties.

Israeli jets regularly violate Lebanese airspace and have often struck inside Syria from Lebanese territory. But the Christmas Eve flights were louder than usual, frightening residents of Beirut who have endured

multiple crises in the past year, including the catastrophic August 4 explosion at the city's port that killed over 200 people and destroyed parts of the capital.

That explosion resulted from the detonation of a stockpile of ammonium nitrates that was improperly stored at the facility.

There was no immediate word from Israel on Friday's flights and alleged attacks on Syria.

In the past few years, Israel has acknowledged carrying out dozens of airstrikes in Syria, most of them aimed at suspected Iranian weapons shipments believed to be bound for Hezbollah.

In recent months, Israeli officials have expressed concern that Hezbollah is trying to establish production facilities to make precision guided missiles.

U.S. to require negative COVID-19 test for U.K. arrivals

Travellers need to provide results to airline before trip

ASSOCIATED PRESS
ATLANTA

The United States will require airline passengers from Britain to get a negative COVID-19 test before their flight, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced late on Thursday.

The U.S. is the latest country to announce new travel restrictions because of a new variant of the coronavirus that is spreading in Britain and elsewhere.

Airline passengers from the United Kingdom will need to get negative COVID-19 tests within three days of their trip and provide the results to the airline, the CDC said in a statement. The agency said the order will be signed on Friday and go into effect on

Monday. "If a passenger chooses not to take a test, the airline must deny boarding to the passenger," the CDC said. The agency said because of travel restrictions in place since March, air travel to the U.S. from the U.K. is already down by 90%.

Last weekend, Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson said the new variant of the coronavirus seemed to spread more easily than earlier ones and was moving rapidly through England. But Mr. Johnson stressed "there's no evidence to suggest it is more lethal or causes more severe illness," or that vaccines will be less effective against it.

Some 40 countries imposed travel bans on Britain, leaving the country increasingly isolated.

Japan also records cases of new variant

ASSOCIATED PRESS
TOKYO

Japan's Health Ministry has confirmed the country's first cases of infection with the new variant of the coronavirus that was identified in Britain.

The five people arrived between December 18 and December 21, before Japan stepped up border control on Friday for entrants from Britain.

A man in his sixties developed fatigue, but the other four were without symptoms.

Trump loses Wisconsin lawsuit

President should have challenged the state's election laws before polls: court

ASSOCIATED PRESS
MADISON

A federal appeals court on Thursday upheld a decision dismissing a lawsuit seeking to declare President Donald Trump won swing state Wisconsin.

Democrat Joe Biden defeated Mr. Trump by 0.6 points in Wisconsin in the November 6 election, a key victory that helped propel Biden to the White House.

Mr. Trump filed the lawsuit in the Eastern District of Wisconsin on December 2 against the state elections commission, arguing the court should order the state's Republican-controlled Legislature to declare he had won the state. U.S. District Judge Brett Justice Ludwig, a Trump appointee,



Another setback: Donald Trump and Melania Trump going to board Air Force One in Maryland on Wednesday. ■AP

refused, ruling on December 12 that Mr. Trump's arguments "fail as a matter of law and fact." He said that ruling in Mr. Trump's favour would amount to the "most remarkable ruling in the history of

this court or the federal judiciary."

Mr. Trump then turned to the 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. A three-judge panel from that court affirmed Justice Ludwig's decision on

Thursday afternoon, finding that Mr. Trump should have challenged the state's election laws before the election. All three judges were appointed by Republican Presidents. One of them, Michael Scudder, was appointed by Mr. Trump.

"Allowing the President to raise his arguments, at this late date, after Wisconsin has tallied the votes and certified the election outcome, would impose unquestionable harm on the defendants, and the State's voters," Justice Scudder wrote.

Mr. Trump and his allies have suffered dozens of defeats in Wisconsin and across the country in lawsuits that rely on unsubstantiated claims of widespread fraud and election abuse.

Killing of unarmed Black man sparks fresh outrage in U.S.

Officer's violation cost an innocent man his life: police chief

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
COLUMBUS

The fatal shooting of an unarmed Black man by police in Columbus, Ohio – the U.S. city's second such killing this month – sparked a fresh wave of protests on Thursday against racial injustice and police brutality in the country.

Andre Maurice Hill, 47, was in the garage of a house on Monday night when he was shot several times by a police officer who had been called to the scene for a minor incident.

Seconds before the gunfire, bodycam footage shows Mr. Hill walking towards the policeman holding a cell

phone in his left hand, while his other hand cannot be seen.

Columbus police chief Thomas Quinlan announced on Thursday that he was moving to fire the officer, Adam Coy, on allegations of "critical misconduct".

"We have an officer who violated his oath to comply with the rules and policies of the Columbus Division of Police," Quinlan said in a statement. "This violation cost an innocent man his life."

According to local media reports, Mr. Coy had previously received complaints of excessive force.

Mr. Coy and his colleague

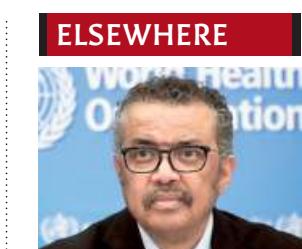
waited several minutes before approaching Mr. Hill, who was still alive, but died later.

Mr. Hill, the second African-American killed by police in Columbus in less than three weeks, was not carrying a weapon.

Casey Goodson Jr., 23, was shot several times on December 4 while returning home. His family has said he was holding a sandwich when law enforcement mistook it for a gun.

Several dozen protesters gathered on Thursday, waving Black Lives Matter signs and calling for justice for people killed in police shootings.

ELSEWHERE



Don't squander sacrifices of 2020: WHO chief

GENEVA

The sacrifices made to protect people during the pandemic must not be squandered over the festive period, the World Health Organization's chief said in a Christmas message. Millions were making "heart-wrenching sacrifices" by staying away from loved ones on Christmas Day, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in a video posted to Twitter late on Thursday, while others will have a missing face at the family table. AFP

Afghan women's rights activist shot dead

KABUL

Gummen on a motorbike shot dead a women's rights activist and her brother north of Afghanistan's capital on Thursday, officials said. Freshta Kohistani, aged 29, was the second activist to be killed in two days after a prominent pro-democracy advocate was gunned down in Kabul on Wednesday. Their murders follow a similar pattern seen in recent weeks, in which prominent Afghans have died in targeted killings in broad daylight, several of them in the capital. AP

Two Afghan officers killed by roadside bomb

KABUL

At least two Afghan Army officers, including a battalion commander, were killed on Friday when their vehicle was hit by a roadside bomb in the northern Balkh province, the military said. Hanif Rezaie, a spokesman for the Army, said Capt. Mohammad Qasim Paikar and another officer were killed and two other soldiers were wounded in the explosion, which took place between Balkh and Char Bolak districts. AP

A Christmas celebrated under the pandemic's shadow

Pope Francis appealed to people to show 'fraternity'; South Korea reported its highest daily number of coronavirus cases on Christmas Day

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
ROME

Hundreds of millions across the world celebrated pared-down Christmas festivities on Friday due to coronavirus restrictions, as Pope Francis appealed for people to show "fraternity" faced with crises aggravated by the pandemic.

"At this moment in history, marked by the ecological crisis and grave economic and social imbalances only worsened by the coronavirus pandemic, it is all the more important for us to acknowledge one another as brothers and sisters," Pope Francis said in his traditional "Urbi et Orbi" message.

The pontiff, who just celebrated his 84th birthday, reported its highest daily number of coronavirus cases on



Finding joy in tough times: A family posing for a photo on Christmas Day at Sydney's Bondi Beach on Friday. ■AP

Friday, as the country's Christmas celebrations were marred by a harsh third wave of COVID-19.

The nation has been held up as a model of how to combat the virus, with the public

which would usually expect up to 10,000 worshippers, but on Friday was only able to welcome 15 staff and choir members.

And in Catholic-majority Philippines, services were rocked when a 6.3-magnitude earthquake struck the country, capping off a troubled yuletide already muted by bans on parties and carol singing.

Despite warm weather, the usual picnicking crowds also avoided the sands of Sydney's Bondi Beach, while the waves were empty of surfing Santas and patrolling police officers enforced social distancing rules.

Tough new coronavirus restrictions were imposed on Thursday over the Christmas

and New Year period across Italy, the hardest-hit European country, with nearly 71,000 deaths and more than two million cases.

Online service

Demand in manufacturing revived in Q2'

Sector saw softer contraction of 4.3% in sales, growth for IT firms remained steady at 3.6%: RBI data

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

MUMBAI

Demand conditions in the manufacturing sector returned to recovery mode with a softer contraction of 4.3% year-on-year in the quarter ended September in terms of nominal sales, according to RBI data. This followed a shrinkage of 41.1% in the previous quarter that was hit by countrywide lockdowns due to COVID-19.

The recovery was led by iron and steel, food products, cement, automobile and pharmaceuticals companies, showed the data on the performance of the private corporate sector during the second quarter (Q2) of 2020-21.

Manufacturing companies reported sales of ₹5,99,479 crore in the second quarter, compared with ₹3,97,233



Stirring awake: Manufacturing firms saw sales of ₹5.99 lakh cr. in Q2 compared with ₹3.97 lakh cr. in April-June. ■ VIJAY SONEJI

crore in April-June of FY21.

The data had been drawn from abridged quarterly financial results of 2,637 listed non-government non-financial (NGNF) companies, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI)

said. Nominal sales of non-IT services sector also registered lower contraction of 14.5% year-on-year, led by expansion in sales of telecommunication and real estate companies.

Sales growth for IT companies remained steady at 3.6% in Q2.

As per the data, sales of non-IT firms and IT firms stood at ₹80,842 crore and ₹1,01,353 crore, respectively, during the second quarter.

'Savings spurred profits'

"Operating profits of manufacturing companies increased on the back of savings in expenditure; operating profits of services (both IT and non-IT) companies also increased in Q2," the RBI said in a statement.

On expenditure, it said input cost pressure from raw materials remained subdued for the manufacturing sector in the quarter. Meanwhile, staff cost growth decelerated for IT firms in the second quarter, whereas it remained in contraction mode for the

manufacturing and non-IT services sectors.

'Interest coverage rises'

As per the data, with rise in profits, the interest coverage ratio (ICR) of manufacturing companies improved to 4.6 in the second quarter from 2.4 in the immediately previous three-month period. The ICR of non-IT services companies remained below one.

Also, profit margins improved across manufacturing and services companies on account of a rise in profit from cost savings.

The coverage of companies in different quarters varies, depending on the date of declaration of results. This, however, was not expected to significantly alter the aggregate position, the RBI said.

National Textile Corporation to reopen mills in phases

'Mills selected for operation based on cash profitability'

M. SOUNDARIYA PREETHA

COIMBATORE
The management of National Textile Corporation (NTC) has decided to reopen mills in a phased manner.

An official told *The Hindu* on Friday the mills had ceased production when the nationwide lockdown was announced in March to control the spread of COVID-19.

However, the 23 NTC mills in India had stocks of both raw materials and finished products. The market was also weak in the initial months when the lockdown restrictions were relaxed.

The demand began picking up in September-October and the mills were able to start clearing yarn stocks. The market outlook was



good now. "The Textiles Minister has been monitoring the situation and it was decided to reopen six mills initially," the official said.

These are three mills in Tamil Nadu and one each in Kerala, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. These account for almost 40% of NTC's total production. The mills would resume produc-

tion using the raw material stocks available, sell the products and generate cash.

The situation would be reviewed in a month and more mills would be reopened. Five or six more mills had the potential to operate and generate cash. The aim was to have 10-12 mills running by next March.

Dues cleared

The NTC had paid salaries till November to all the workers and cleared dues to vendors till January, the official said. The NTC had decided to reopen the mills in phases following cash constraints.

The mills were selected for operation based on cash profitability, according to the official.

Russia backs increase in oil output by OPEC+ from Feb.

Price of \$45-\$55 optimum, allows for production boost: Novak

REUTERS

MOSCOW

Russia expects to support an increase in oil production by the group, known as OPEC+, of another 500,000 barrels per day (bpd) from February at next month's summit of the leading global oil producers, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said.

Oil prices are trading above \$50 per barrel, after coming under pressure this week from concerns that new fast-spreading variants of the coronavirus will lead to reduced fuel demand.

In comments, cleared for publication on Friday, Mr. Novak also said that Moscow



Alexander Novak
views an oil price between \$45 and \$55 per barrel as the optimum level to allow for recovery of its oil production, which has been significantly reduced as part of the OPEC+ supply deal.
Russia, other leading oil

producers and the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, a group known as OPEC+, agreed to reduce output to support the global oil market as the COVID-19 pandemic has weakened fuel demand.

Since the agreement on a record global supply cut in April, OPEC+ has progressively reduced the cuts and is expected in January to release an extra 5,00,000 bpd into the market.

The group holds its next online summit on January 4.

"If the situation stays normal and stable, we will support this position (increase by 5,00,000 bpd)," Mr. Novak told reporters.

'India must strongly push for U.K., EU trade pacts'

Services, a bright spot, say experts

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

With the European Union (EU) and the U.K. clinching a post-Brexit trade pact, India should now aggressively pursue free trade agreements (FTAs) separately with both the regions, according to experts.

Although it was premature to assess the gains for India from the agreement between the European Union (EU) and the U.K., Indian goods would not benefit much from this pact, they said.

However, India can explore opportunities in services sectors such as IT in both the markets as the EU-U.K. pact does not cover services, they added. "There is



not much gain for Indian goods, but we can gain in services in both the markets," Federation of Indian Export Organisations director general Ajay Sahai said.

Rakesh Mohan Joshi, professor at Indian Institute of Foreign Trade, said after the trade deal with the EU and the U.K., India will get a better opportunity to cater to demand in these markets.

Centre tells Dish TV to pay ₹4,164-cr. fee

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Direct-to-home operator Dish TV on Friday said it had received a demand notice from the government for payment of ₹4,164.05 crore, which included the licence fee and interest.

The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) asked the Essel Group firm to pay the said amount towards licence fee from the date of issuance of DTH licence till the financial year 2018-19,

the company said. The MIB has, in its letter, also said the amount was further subject to verification and audit and the outcome of pending court cases in the matter of DTH licence fee.

'Loan rejig, other steps to save PSBs from shock'

Quick signs of recovery seen: Panda

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Loan restructuring and other measures announced by the government to help the industry hit by the pandemic may save public sector banks from 'shock' in the next year, a top Finance Ministry official said.

Despite the pandemic, the lockdown and the consequent damage done to the economy, there are quick signs of recovery, Financial Services Secretary Debasish Panda told PTI.

"There is a steady uptick in the credit growth. Retail, home and agriculture loans are doing well, and MSMEs again, with the intervention of the government through the ECLGS and other similar

schemes, have also picked up," he said.

Mr. Panda added that with the window for restructuring now made available by the RBI through the COVID-19 resolution plan, which offers resolution for all kinds of loans, the impact may not be that severe as had been projected earlier. However, it was difficult to exactly predict the numbers, he said.

"We don't anticipate a big shock going to hit public sector banks (PSBs) next year, on account of high provision coverage ratio, steady decline in non-performing assets (NPAs), and one-time restructuring of loans, among other things," Mr. Panda added.

Ampersand Group to foray into telemedicine

200 clinics in West Bengal in 1st phase

LALATENDU MISHRA

MUMBAI

Ampersand Group, which provides school management services to more than 3,000 government schools in 20 States, has announced plans to foray into healthcare through a chain of assisted-telemedicine clinics called Ashvin Care.

The pan-India network of tech-enabled kiosks would be run by local entrepreneurs in areas that have little access to healthcare and be supported by on-ground paramedic or nursing assistants. Each kiosk would be linked to a virtual doctor for consultation, diagnosis, follow-up and medical care with the technology backend being handled by the company.

The group plans to open 200 nursing-supported digital

'Independent directors not really independent'

Retail shareholders flag worry: survey

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

A significant percentage of individual shareholders believe the constitution of the board of directors of most Indian companies is tilted towards promoters as many independent directors are not really independent, says a survey.

According to the Corporate Governance Survey 2020 by online platform LocalCircles, 79% individual shareholders have expressed concern about the independence of independent directors.

The company has earmarked an investment of ₹50 crore in phase one, meant for building the digital infrastructure. A kiosk will need two people and 7-8 IoT devices such as stethoscopes and ECG equipment. For now, one doctor may be dedicated to 2.5 kiosks. The expense for a patient may be about ₹250-300 per visit.

LocalCircles conducted the survey after observing citizen posts on corporate governance over a 12-month period. The survey received more than 48,000 responses from 21,000 unique shareholders located across 272 districts of India.

As many as 65% of individual shareholders said that independent directors in publicly-traded Indian companies are not acting to protect the interest of minority shareholders, the survey said. Further, the top-three concerns of individual shareholders of such companies are accounting fraud, selling of company assets without shareholder knowledge and insider trading.

Nine in 10 employees in India ready for long-term 'work from remote': Dell study

'Blurring of boundaries between personal, work lives is a concern'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

BENGALURU

A majority of employees in India is ready to work outside of the traditional office space, over the long term, according to a Dell Technologies study.

The study also found that these employees, however, said the new normal had blurred work-life boundaries.

The study found that 91% of employees in India, as against 81% in the Asia Pacific and Japan, felt they were prepared for long-term remote work but faced ongoing productivity challenges.

The employees shared concerns about not having access to the right technologies and the blurring of



Employers' support is needed for a productive and connected workforce, says Dell's Indrajit Belgundi. ■ SAMPATH KUMAR G.

boundaries between work and personal lives.

Nine in 10 employees in India were prepared to work remotely for the long-term provided they had access to the right technology assets

employee readiness for long-term remote work and their views on factors important for its success.

'Onus is on employer'

"For CIOs and their teams who displayed agility and speed in achieving or embarking upon digital transformation for their business earlier this year, it has become clear that the onus is on the organisation to enable employees with support available at every stage," said Indrajit Belgundi, senior director & general manager, Client Solutions Group, Dell Technologies, India.

"This will be essential to establishing a productive and connected digital workforce," Mr. Belgundi added.

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STEP FOR
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PROFESSIONALS

India eyes fightback in Boxing Day Test

Rings in four changes to the line-up; Jadeja and Pant return; Gill and Siraj to make debut

INDIA IN AUS

REUTERS
MELBOURNE

India made four changes in its bid to bounce back from the shellacking in Adelaide but it has an uphill battle as Australia captain Tim Paine wants the hosts to continue their ruthless streak in the second Test in Melbourne from Saturday.

The tourists were shot out for a record low Innings total of 36 in Adelaide where Australia triumphed inside three days to go 1-0 up in the four-Test series.

A combination of poor form, injury and regular skipper Virat Kohli's paternity leave forced the changes, which would see top-order batsman Shubman Gill and quick Mohammed Siraj making their debut in the Boxing Day Test.

Fit-again all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja and wicket-keeper Rishabh Pant returned to the side to be led by Ajinkya Rahane in Kohli's absence.

Shaw, Saha dropped
Out-of-form opener Prithvi Shaw and stumper Wriddhiman Saha were dropped while Siraj owes his inclusion to the hand injury. Mohammed Shami suffered while batting in Adelaide.

"Each and every individual in this team is really capable of doing well, so it's really a challenge for the captain and management to select the 11," Rahane told a video conference on Friday.

"We had just one bad hour (in Adelaide). It's about stay-



Senior pros: Ashwin, Rahane, Jadeja and Pujara need to pull their weight if India has to make a match of it. ■ AFP

All is not lost

1934-35: West Indies bt England 2-1 (L | W | D | W), home

1950: West Indies bt England 3-1 (L | W | W | W), away

1999: New Zealand bt England 2-1 (L | W | D | W), away

2012-13: England bt India 2-1 (L | W | W | D), away

2016-17: India bt Australia 2-1 (L | W | D | W), home

2017-18: South Africa bt Australia 3-1 (L | W | W | W), home

2019-20: England bt South Africa 3-1 (L | W | W | W), away

Rahane's men will head into the Melbourne Test taking heart from the fact that there have been seven instances where a team has bounced back to win from a 1-0 deficit in a four-Test series. Incidentally, India has managed to do it once, against the same opponent, in 2016-17 at home

India made a comeback during the Border-Gavaskar Trophy at home in 2016-17

First Test: India lost by 333 runs, Pune

Second: India won by 75 runs, Bengaluru

Third: Drawn, Ranchi

Fourth: India won by eight wickets, Dharamshala

■ Ajinkya Rahane had led the side in the final Test of the series which was tied 1-1 at that time. Incidentally, it was his first game as captain

India vs. Australia in Tests at MCG
Played 13 | India 3 | Australia 8 | Drawn 2

1977: India won by 222 runs

1981: India won by 59 runs

2018: India won by 137 runs

SOURCE: ESPNCRICINFO
COMPILED BY
R. NARAYANAN
AND G. PRASAD

ing positive, backing your own ability and batting in partnerships."

Rahane's counterpart Tim Paine said that even without Kohli and the others, the wounded tourists were more

than capable of reversing their fortunes.

"The moment we take our foot off the pedal, and think we're going all right (performances can slip)," Paine told reporters. "A huge focus of

ours... has been winning after winning. We've been fantastic in how we've prepared for this game."

The match will also be played in the shadow of the coronavirus pandemic, with

Match starts at 5 a.m. IST.
Live on Sony Ten 1, 3 and Sony Six (SD & HD).

the fate of the third Test in Sydney still up in the air because of a fresh outbreak in the city's northern beaches, causing a lockdown and border closure.

30,000 fans allowed

The Melbourne Test also normally attracts large crowds but COVID-19 restrictions have limited the crowd to 30,000.

"It's going to be different isn't it," Paine said.

"I think we're just lucky to be playing a Boxing Day Test at the MCG."

**AUSTRALIA VS INDIA
LIVE AND EXCLUSIVE ON
SONY SIX SONY TEN 1
TAMIL ENGLISH
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The teams: India: Ajinkya Rahane (Capt.), Mayank Agarwal, Shubman Gill, Cheteshwar Pujara, Hanuma Vihari, Rishabh Pant (wk), Ravindra Jadeja, R. Ashwin, Umesh Yadav, Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Siraj. **Australia:** Tim Paine (Capt. & wk), Matthew Wade, Joe Burns, Marnus Labuschagne, Steve Smith, Travis Head, Cameron Green, Mitchell Starc, Josh Hazlewood, Pat Cummins, and Nathan Lyon.

Umpires: Rod Tucker and Paul Reiffel; **Third umpire:** Bruce Oxenford; **Match referee:** David Boon.

Match starts at 5 a.m. IST.
Live on Sony Ten 1, 3 and Sony Six (SD & HD).

I don't want to put pressure on the openers, says Rahane

S. DIPAK RAGAV

for the first Test."

With Shubman Gill replacing the out-of-form Prithvi Shaw as the opener for the second Test, Rahane has vowed not to put pressure on the openers.

"The role of the openers is crucial everywhere and not just in Australia. I don't want to put pressure on them and want to give freedom to play their game. Having said that, when you get a good (opening) partnership going, it becomes easy for the batsman coming after," Rahane added.

Apology to Kohli

Rahane also revealed that he apologised to Kohli for triggering a mix up that saw the latter being run out in the

first innings in Adelaide and conceded the dismissal swung the momentum towards Australia. "After the end of day's play I went and said sorry to him (Kohli) but he was all okay, he was okay about it," he said.

The 32-year-old Mumbai batsman had led India against the same opponent in Dharamshala in 2017, and said that he would use the learnings from that Test. "It is a great opportunity and responsibility, but I don't want to take any pressure. What I want to do is back my team-mates and, as a team, we want to do well. I learnt a lot during that (2017) Test – to just back your instincts and to remain calm under pressure," he added.



Big boost: Pant, who hammered a century in the warm-up game against Australia-A, has been included for the second Test. ■ TWITTER/BCCI

The tale of two debutants

As Mohammed Siraj and Shubman Gill get ready to don the India Test caps for the Boxing Day show down, a look at their journeys

Siraj: Age: 26

Place of birth: Hyderabad

Major teams: India, Hyderabad, Sunrisers Hyderabad, Royal Challengers Bangalore



ODI debut	vs. Australia, Adelaide, 2019
T20I debut	vs. New Zealand, Rajkot, 2017
First Class debut	vs. Services, Delhi, 2015
List A debut	vs. Tamil Nadu, Hyderabad, 2015
T20 debut	vs. Bengal, Nagpur, 2016
IPL debut	Sunrisers Hyderabad vs. Delhi Daredevils, Hyderabad, 2017

M	I	W	BBI	Avg.	Econ.	SR	5W
ODI	1	1	0	-	-	7.60	0
T20Is	3	3	3	1/45	49.33	12.33	24.0
First Class	38	67	152	8/59	23.44	3.12	44.9
List A	46	46	81	5/37	23.37	5.30	26.4
T20s	67	66	90	4/20	22.41	8.47	15.8
IPL	35	35	39	4/32	27.79	9.08	18.3

In the 2020 edition, he took 11 wickets in 9 matches for RCB

Gill: Age: 21

Place of birth: Fazilka, Punjab

Major teams: India, Punjab, Kolkata Knight Riders



ODI debut	vs. New Zealand, Hamilton, 2019
First Class debut	vs. Bengal, Amritsar, 2017
List A debut	vs. Vidarbha, Delhi, 2017
T20 debut	vs. Sunrisers Hyderabad, Kolkata, 2018
IPL debut	vs. Sunrisers Hyderabad, Kolkata, 2018

In the 2020 edition, he scored 440 runs in 14 matches for KKR

Paine doesn't expect India to 'roll over' at Melbourne

attention to mental scars or whatever anyone is talking about," said Paine. "India is a proud cricket country, they are an extremely talented Test side with lots of dangerous players."

About India making four changes – Shubman Gill, Rishabh Pant, Ravindra Jadeja and Mohammed Siraj

– for the second Test, Paine said Australia had studied everyone and his side was ready for everyone who takes the field.

"We know that some of the players who are coming into the side are dangerous ones who like to take the game on and play positively," he said. "If we

give players like that an inch, they will take a mile. We need to be bang on the mark as we were in Adelaide and be prepared to turn up for another five-day battle.

"We have been on overseas tours before when we have been bowled out for 50 and it can be really

difficult. That's why it's so important for us to turn up with the same attitude as the first Test," said Paine.

"We're going to have to do our best to get them in a position like we did in Adelaide. If we can do it, Tests three and four will become a real battle for them."

Surprise package



A boy gets ready to bowl during Australia's training session at MCG on Friday.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE MOUNT MAUNGANUI

New Zealand begins its final push to make the World Test Championship (WTC) final when it meets an injury-hit Pakistan in the first Test at Bay Oval from Saturday.

The Kiwis are full of confidence coming off a comprehensive 2-0 series win against the West Indies, and need to produce a similar result in the two Pakistan Tests.

India and Australia are ahead of New Zealand on the

WTC ladder, but if India continues to struggle and New Zealand sweeps the series

against Pakistan, it could be enough to see the Black Caps at Lord's for the final in June 2021. New Zealand presents a settled line-up with the only question over whether it will play spinner Mitchell Santner or all-rounder Daryl Mitchell in the XI.

When Ross Taylor walks in at No. 3 in this Test, it will make him the most capped New Zealand player with 438 appearances across all three formats.



Taylor... Kiwis' most capped player across formats. ■ AFP

SUDOKU

6							4	9
						1		3
	8	6	4				1	

Chennaiyin looks to sustain momentum

East Bengal coach Fowler feels the tide is turning for his winless side; league returns after short break

ISL 2020-21

SPORTS BUREAU

Chennaiyin FC, which ended its four-match winless streak with a 2-1 victory over FC Goa in its previous match, will be the favourite when it takes on SC East Bengal at the Tilak Maidan, Vasco, on Saturday.

Things fell in place for the former champion following the return of skipper Rafael Crivellaro who, along with Anirudh Thappa, helped the team become more organised and creative.

Be sharper

However, Chennaiyin would want to be sharper in the final third and not squander as many chances as it did in the game against Juan Fernando's side.

The contest against East Bengal, without a win and lying last in the table, offers Csaba Laszlo's team an opportunity to climb up from its eighth position.

The CFC coach is, however,

not taking things for granted. "Even when you are the favourite, there is a lot of pressure. It will be a tough game for us. They are a new team but have adapted well. We have to remain focused," he said.

East Bengal would rue the fact that it squandered a golden chance to register its maiden win in the ISL. The Kolkata outfit led by a goal before conceding a goal against Kerala Blasters in the 94th minute.

Morale high

Coach Robbie Fowler said that despite the heartbreak, the team's morale was high and things were looking good.

"We have been unlucky at times. It is really unfortunate that you are conceding goals at the last minute. But the boys played well and created a lot of chances," said Fowler.

"We are not a million miles away. The tide is turning. Hopefully, it will happen pretty soon," he added.



The trigger: Crivellaro's brilliant goal sparked CFC to life against Goa. ■ISL/SPORTZPICS

Three managers under the scanner

Arteta, Bruce and Wilder will be eager to write different scripts post-Christmas

PREMIER LEAGUE

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

LONDON

Slaven Bilic's sacking by West Brom last week made him the earliest managerial departure in a Premier League season for six years after it took 18 games for Cardiff City to dismiss Neil Warnock in 2014.

The next sacking may not be long in coming with several bosses having serious question marks over their futures.

Mikel Arteta's FA Cup success last season and then victory over Liverpool in the Community Shield suggested the turbulent period for Arsenal under his predecessor Unai Emery had been laid to rest.

However, heading into a tough home clash with high-flying London rival Chelsea on Saturday, the bright new



Arteta. ■AFP



Bruce. ■GETTY IMAGES



Wilder. ■AFP

dawn has clouded over and the former Gunners captain's future after just over a year in charge is in doubt.

Steve Bruce knows all about the ups and downs of football management especially after Newcastle's disappointing League Cup quarterfinal exit at the hands of second-tier Brentford.

The Magpies look reasonably comfortable in 12th place in the table. However, with a trip to Manchester Ci-

ty on Saturday and then welcoming champion Liverpool a few days later, things could get worse.

Bilic might well scratching his head at being the first manager sacked when he compares notes with Sheffield United's Chris Wilder.

The Blades' board has shown admirable gratitude and restraint in retaining faith with the 53-year-old Englishman despite garnering just two points this season –

the worst start in Premier League history.

The weekend schedule:

Saturday: Leicester vs Manchester Utd, Arsenal vs Chelsea, Manchester City v Newcastle, Aston Villa vs Crystal Palace, Fulham vs Southampton, and Sheffield United vs Everton.

Sunday: Leeds vs Burnley, Liverpool vs West Brom, Wolves vs Tottenham, and West Ham vs Brighton.

From prisoner to mentor: Swaibu warns of the dangers of match-fixing

ASSOCIATED PRESS

LONDON

When Moses Swaibu stands in front of future Premier League players, warning of the dangers of becoming embroiled in match-fixing, he is speaking from experience.

"You do not want to end up in my position, going to prison," Swaibu recalls telling some of the game's most famous players in talks at training grounds, "sitting in the cell with someone you once looked up to that played in the Premier League, eating tinned food and a packet of crisps and someone opening your door, telling you what you should and shouldn't do for 24 hours."

Swaibu's educational talks at academies with future stars are about ensuring the current generation of players does not make the same mistakes as him. They are lessons in how a series of fateful mistakes ended up five years



Salutary lessons: Moses Swaibu was convicted of conspiracy to bribe lower-league players in England and jailed. ■AP

ago with him being convicted of conspiracy to bribe lower-league players in England and jailed, along with Delroy Facey, who played as a striker for Bolton.

While the 31-year-old Swaibu began his career at Crystal Palace, he never got to play in the top division, drifting down the leagues before ending up in the fourth profes-

sional tier at Lincoln where he met Facey.

His big regret

"Delroy had asked us to come down to his hotel room and he introduced us to these match-fixers that wanted us to throw a game," Swaibu said in an interview with The Associated Press. "They pro-

duced around €60,000 but

at that time, everyone turned around and said, 'No, we're not going to do it.' But it was never reported (to the authorities)."

Swaibu regrets that. It set

Swaibu on a path that led to

spending four months in jail

after a judge denounced his

and Facey's behavior as "like

a cancer" that could have un-

dermined the fairness of foot-

ball. Investigators said they

were part of a concerted at-

tempt to build a network of

corrupt players in Britain.

"They deliberately target-

ed lower leagues believing

that because players earn

less, they could be more sus-

ceptible to taking a bribe,"

National Crime Agency officer Adrian Hansford said.

Swaibu insists no games

were ever manipulated but

even just offering money to

come to meetings with poten-

tial fixers is wrong – and he

wants players to be aware of

that he has re-

NEW DELHI ROUND-UP

Nikhil and Daksh help Sporting win title

Nikhil Sangwan (4/7) and Daksh Sethi (3/12) restricted Telefunken Club and paved the way for Sporting Club's eight-wicket triumph in the final of the Sethi Sports (under-13) cricket tournament.

The scores: Telefunken Club 79 in 31 overs (Chinnay Vashishat 26, Nikhil Sangwan 4/7, Daksh Sethi 3/12) lost to Sporting Club 80/2 in 15.1 overs (Lakshay Kaushik 34).

Daksh excels

Salil Malhotra (56 and 2/18) helped Hari Singh Academy beat Fauji Spartans by 100

runs in the Rikhi Ram

memorial cricket tourna-

The scores: Hari Singh

Academy 230/9 in 40 overs

(Salil Malhotra 56, Ravi Tewaria

35, Shivam Bhardwaj 34,

Abhisekh Raturi 29) bt Fauji

Spartans 13 in 31.2 overs

(Sachin Tyagi 59, Salil Malhotra

3/18, Pragam Sharma 3/45).

Piyush, Hardik bat well

Piyush Kumar (52) and

Hardik Sharma (40) set up

Golden Hawks Club's 84-run

win over Indian Sports Star

Academy in the seventh S.N. Dubey memorial (under-16)

cricket tournament.

The scores:

Ravinder Fagna Academy 214 in

39.3 overs (Karan Detha 94,

Sunil Chauhan 29, Eash Paliwal

3/34) bt Brite Innovative

Academy 193/7 in 40 overs

The scores: Golden Hawks

Club 194/8 in 40 overs (Piyush

Kumar 52, Hardik Sharma 40,

Mohd. Shuaib 5/37) bt Indian

Sports Star Academy 110 in

25.4 overs (Yash Tripathi 25).

Karan, Bhavya shine

Karan Detha (94) and

Bhavya Kakkar (3/18)

enabled Ravinder Fagna

Academy beat Brite

Innovative Academy by 21

runs in the Skillz Youth Cup

(under-19) cricket tourna-

The scores:

Telefunkin Club 214 in 39.6

overs (Abhimanyu Singh 82,

Yash Dabas 57, Rohan Rana

3/35, Kamal Singh Bhaiwra

3/26) lost to Ravindra Academy

215/7 in 39.1 overs (Lakshay

Kundra 76, Ayush Sachdeva

42).

(Arpit Kumar 78, Saurabh Bisht

53, Bhavya Kakkar 3/18).

Lakshya, Ayush guide

Ravindra Fagna (76) and

Ayush Sachdeva (42) guided

Ravindra Academy to a

three-wicket win over

Telefunkin Club in the fifth

Shanti Devi memorial

cricket tournament.

The scores:

Telefunkin Club 214 in 39.6

overs (Abhimanyu Singh 82,

Yash Dabas 57, Rohan Rana

3/35, Kamal Singh Bhaiwra

3/26) lost to Ravindra Academy

215/7 in 39.1 overs (Lakshay

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