

SHORT TAKES

English course for teachers launched

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 9

Deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia launched TESOL Core Certificate Programme for Delhi government school teachers. The programme is conducted by the US Embassy's Regional English Language Office. The program will enhance English language teaching competency of the participant teachers which will improve English teaching in government school classrooms. The current batch is of 50 teachers. "It is important for the teachers to keep enhancing their skills. We want our teachers to do the things they already know differently. This course will bring more creativity in classrooms," said Mr Sisodia. Regional English Language Officer Ruth Goode from the US Embassy in India was also present during the launch. She acknowledged the long association of the US Embassy with the Delhi government and appreciated the efforts taken by the deputy chief minister in ensuring that Delhi government teachers learn from the best. "We really value our relationship with the Delhi government. We have trained around 800 teachers in the past and will continue to support more in the future," She said. The Regional English Language Office of the US Embassy has trained around 800 teachers from Delhi government schools since 2017. They have worked on creating a pool of master trainers who have subsequently trained primary and secondary school teachers on innovative English teaching in classrooms. "We will provide all kinds of support to the teachers for learning new ways of teaching," Mr Sisodia added.

Javadekar launches digital calendar

New Delhi: Union minister for information and broadcasting Prakash Javadekar on Saturday launched the digital calendar and diary of Government of India. In a ceremony held at National Media Center, Mr Javadekar, with the click of a button unveiled the Android and iOS mobile applications of the calendar and diary. On the occasion, the minister said that the government calendar that adorned the walls in the past will now adorn mobile phones. Highlighting the features of the app, Mr Javadekar said: "The app was free and will be available in 11 languages from 15th January, 2021. The app will do away with the need for a new calendar every year". He further added: "Each month will carry a theme and an accompanying message and will feature one famous Indian personality. The app will also inform people about the timeline of launch of various government programmes so far". Speaking on the diary feature of the app, the minister said "because of the diary feature the calendar is more advanced, more feature laden and easier compared to other digital calendar apps". The Digital Calendar of Government of India is in line with Prime Minister's Vision of "Digital India" and can be accessed at click of a button on any smart phone. The app is available for download on both Google Play store and iOS app store. The app has been designed and developed by Bureau of Outreach and Communication, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting in collaboration with National Informatics Centre (NIC). The application is currently available in Hindi and English language, and will be soon made available in 11 other Indian regional languages.

Decomposed body of woman found

New Delhi: The Delhi Police has recovered a highly decomposed body of a woman from near a drain in east Delhi's New Ashok Nagar area, officials said on Saturday. The age of the woman is around 25 to 30 years, they said. On Friday at 2.45 pm, information was received regarding a body of a woman near Chilla Regulator drain. In the garbage lying near the drain, a highly decomposed body of a woman, height about 5'2" has been found. There was no physical injury seen on the body, a senior police officer said, adding that investigation is underway to identify the body.

■ Import of live chicken into city banned in view of bird flu scare

Ghazipur poultry market in Delhi closed for 10 days

New Delhi, Jan. 9: Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, on Saturday, announced a ban on import of live birds in the national capital and closure of Ghazipur poultry market for the next 10 days in view of the bird flu scare.

Noting that there is no confirmed case of avian influenza in Delhi so far, the chief minister said samples have been sent to Jalandhar laboratory.

He also said that a 24-hour helpline has been set up for the assistance of people.

"In the last few days, there have been several cases of bird flu across various parts of the country, which is a cause of worry. Cases of bird flu have been registered in Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, and Rajasthan.

"No confirmed case of bird flu has been registered in Delhi until now. We have collected around 104 samples until now,

which have been sent to Jalandhar for testing and examination in a laboratory," Mr Kejriwal said at a press conference.

He said Delhi is taking several steps to control the spread of bird flu as a precautionary measure.

"Upon receiving the results on Monday, the Delhi government will take all decisions and measures based on the results. The import of live birds is being completely banned from Saturday onwards. Secondly, the Ghazipur poultry market in Delhi will remain shut for the next 10 days," Mr Kejriwal added.

He said the Delhi government is following all guidelines and directions issued by the Central government with regard to bird flu.

"Rapid response teams have been formed in every district to contain the spread and conduct proper surveillance.

"They will function under the district magistrates. Our veterinary offi-

No confirmed case of bird flu has been registered in Delhi until now. We have collected around 104 samples, which have been sent to Jalandhar for testing and examination in a laboratory.

— Arvind Kejriwal, Delhi CM



cers are conducting proper surveys in all bird markets, wildlife establishments, and water bodies across Delhi.

"The special focus of the teams is Ghazipur poultry market, Shakti Sthal Lake, Bhalswa Lake, Sanjay Lake, Delhi Zoo, and DDA Parks situated at Hauz Khas village, Pashchim Vihar, and Dwarka," Mr Kejriwal said.

The chief minister said that the news of birds dying is also coming from across Delhi and the rapid response teams of those districts are conducting adequate inspection of the situation.

— PTI

10 ducks die at Sanjay Lake, 24 crows found dead in Jasola park

New Delhi, Jan. 9: Three recreational parks and famous Sanjay Lake in Delhi were closed by authorities on Saturday amid an avian flu scare in the city as several birds were found dead on their premises in the last couple of days, officials said.

Besides, the popular Hauz Khas Park in south Delhi, which is a huge water body and attracts a large number of crowd every day, has also been shut, they said.

At least 24 crows have been found dead at a district park in south Delhi's Jasola in the past three days and 10 ducks have died at the famous Sanjay Lake, officials said on Sunday.

The DDA, which owns a large number of parks in the city, said authorities are monitoring the situation closely.

"The samples of ducks found dead have been taken by the veterinary department authorities to ascertain if the cause of death was bird flu or not," a senior DDA official said.

On the death of crows, the DDA has informed the Delhi government's forest department, he said.

"We are monitoring the situation very closely as DDA owns a large number of public parks many of which have water bodies," the official said.

— PTI



Ducks at Sanjay Lake in New Delhi on Saturday. Amid a bird flu scare, ten ducks were found dead in the lake.

— PTI

519 Covid-19 cases, 12 deaths in city in 24 hours

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 9

Delhi recorded as many as 519 fresh coronavirus cases on Saturday.

With this, the tally of Covid-19 cases in the national capital has reached over 6.29 lakh while the death toll mounted to 10,666. Twelve fatalities have been recorded in the last 24 hours.

According to a health bulletin issued by the Delhi government, 80,275 Covid-19 tests were conducted in the last 24 hours.

The case tally stands at 6,29,801 in the national capital, including 6,15,452 patients who have either been discharged or have migrated or recovered.

The number of active cases is 3,683, of which 1,652 are in home isolation.

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, on Saturday, appealed to the Centre to provide free Covid-19 vaccine to everyone.

Delhi govt school teachers in frontline workers list for Covid vaccine rollout

New Delhi, January 9: Teachers of government schools in the national capital engaged in Covid-19 duty will be placed in the category of frontline workers and will be vaccinated on priority, Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia said on Saturday.

Sharing an article from a newspaper Sisodia tweeted, "Teachers of Delhi have played a role in the fight against Corona, step by step with the government. Quarantine centers, Containment zones, Surveys, Mask checking duties and online studies - they have been ahead."

"This is why the government has also placed

NDMC starts drive to remove hoardings from public places

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 9

New Delhi Municipal Council's (NDMC) enforcement department has initiated an intensive drive to remove posters, banners, and illegal hoardings or advertisements installed at public places and busy markets in areas falling under the civic body.

"The team has conducted an intensive inspection of the area around Gole Market, Connaught Place, Janpath, Shivaji Stadium, Regal, Rivoli, Shankar Market, K.G. Marg, Barakhmbha Road, and Bengali Market and removed all types of defacement of property items," a senior NDMC official said.

"The civic agency officials are also creating awareness by meeting several market associations and asking them to immediately remove unauthorised advertisements, self-signage, flexes, and hoardings that have been erected in violation of the Delhi Outdoor Advertising Policy, 2017,

40% drop in vector-borne diseases, claims SDMC

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 9

The South Delhi Municipal Corporation has claimed a 40 per cent drop in vector borne diseases.

Leader of house, SDMC, Narendra Chawla said that due to timely action taken by the Corporation there was a sharp drop reported in the number of cases of Dengue, Malaria and Chikungunya in the 2020.

According to Mr Chawla, the field staff, despite Covid-19 pandem-

ic and lockdown, visited every household and public place for prevention of control of vector-borne diseases in the SDMC area.

"During a year, a total of 41,73,769 house visits were done by the field staff out of which 24,528 houses were found positive for breeding of mosquitoes. Even our staff used PPE kits besides taking other precautionary measures when found mosquito breeding in houses/areas where Covid-19 cases were reported," said Mr Chawla.

and the Delhi Prevention of Defacement of Property Act, 2007," the official added.

As per the Outdoor Advertisement Policy, prior permission of the chairman of the NDMC is required to display any advertisement to public view in any manner.

"Self-signage will not be allowed beyond the length of the shop or exceeding 2.5 square meters as per the policy. In case self-signage is beyond the total area of 2.5 square metres, the same requires prior permission from the chairman of NDMC," the official said.

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 9

The body of a 10-year-old boy was recovered from a mosque in northeast Delhi's Khajuri Khas area, police said on Saturday.

Police have arrested two juveniles — 17-year-old and 12-year-old — for killing the victim. The accused wanted to extort money from the deceased's father by kidnapping him, they said.

According to police, one Shamim, a resident of Shri Ram Colony, lodged a missing report of his 10-year-old son at Khajuri Khas police station on Friday.

The minor boy was missing since the intervening

night of Thursday and Friday. Shamim said that on Thursday around 6:50 pm, his son went to Madina Masjid of Shri Ram Colony, but did not return, police said.

During investigation, joint search was conducted by police and the parents of child in the nearby areas of their house.

Police found the body of a boy buried under the debris in a corner on the second floor of the Madina Masjid. Shamim identified him as his son Farhan, they said.

Police analysed the CCTV footages of the area. All the persons present in the Madina Masjid at the time of 'Isha nama' around 7.15 pm were



Farmers during their month-long protest against the new farm bill at Tikri border in New Delhi on Saturday.

— G.N. JHA

Plea in SC seeking removal of farmers from protest sites

'Protesters blocking roads, causing inconvenience to people'

AGE CORRESPONDENT
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, JAN. 9

As stalemate continues over the farm bill, with both government and farmer refusing to blink, a petition was filed in the Supreme Court of India on Saturday seeking removal of farmers from protest sites on Delhi border on the grounds that the protesters were blocking roads causing inconvenience to people.

The petitioner has also mentioned that violent

protests have taken place in some places and they have destroyed telecom towers causing inconvenience and financial loss to the public. The Supreme Court is expected to hear a bunch of petitions relating to the new Farm Bills on January 11. The next round of talks between the farmers and government is to be held on January 15.

Meanwhile, a 72-year-old farmer allegedly died due to suicide at a protest site in Ghaziabad. "The deceased was found hang-

ing at one of the mobile toilets at the protest site. He has also left behind a note which is written in Punjabi," said a police officer. Shamsher Rana of the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) said that the farmer had blamed the union government for not accepting the demands of the protesters.

Congress party has decided to stage protests outside all Governor Houses across the country on January 15, in support of farmers' agitation against farm laws.

Man killed in knife attack by drunken duo in Noida

Noida, Jan. 9: A man was killed in a knife attack allegedly while trying to protect his sister from a drunken duo after a scuffle on a Noida road, police said on Saturday. One of the accused has been arrested while searches are underway to nab the other, the police said.

The deceased, in his twenties, and his sister were returning home from a factory in Sector 8 where they work around 8.30 pm on Friday when the incident took place, according to officials.

"The brother-sister duo were walking on the road when the accused, both of whom were drunk, stumbled on the woman, leading to a scuffle in which the woman slapped one of the accused, additional deputy commissioner of police, Noida, Ranvijay Singh said.

In the melee, the accused, who were probably carrying knives, took them out and tried to attack the woman. Her brother tried to stop the attackers and got stabbed on his thigh in the action, Singh said.

He said the local police immediately reached the spot on being alerted and rushed the man to a hospital where he subsequently died due to excessive bleeding.

One of the accused has been arrested and the other is absconding. Searches are underway to nab the other also and an FIR has been lodged at the local Sector 20 police station, Singh added.

— PTI

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NOIDA, JANUARY 9

A policeman deployed in Noida has been suspended for "indecentcy" after being accused of assaulting and looting two people, who had given him a lift in their car, officials said on Saturday.

A senior police official said the accused head constable, who is attached with the Dadri police station, has been suspended for "indecentcy" as the allegations of loot and assault have not been proved.

According to the complainant, he and his brother were headed to Bulandshahr from Noida around 3 pm on Friday when Head Constable Ombir Bhati hitchhiked a ride in their car.

The complainant has alleged that during the ride, the policeman threatened them with his firearm and took away some documents and cash from them.

"Head constable Ombir Bhati has been found guilty of indecentcy and has been suspended from service. A departmental inquiry has been initiated into the matter. Other allegations, including firing and loot, have not been confirmed," deputy commissioner of police, Greater Noida, Rajesh Kumar Singh said.

Around a dozen policemen have been shunted or suspended for assaulting, manhandling or harassing people across Noida and Greater Noida in Gautam Buddha Nagar district since May 2020.

11 men detained for defacing signboards in Lutyens Delhi

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 9

Delhi Police on Saturday detained 11 people for allegedly defacing two Aurangzeb Lane signboards in Lutyens Delhi on Saturday.

According to a senior police official, a police control room (PCR) call received information at 5.40 AM that a few people have gathered at Aurangzeb Lane, Tughlaq Road following which a police team was dispatched for the spot.

"After reaching the spot, police personnel found that 11 people led by Anuradha Bhargava (30), a resident of Karnal and an advocate by profession, had defaced an Aurangzeb Lane signboard and pasted a poster saying Guru Teg Bahadur Lane on another signage," said the senior police official.

"They were detained and taken to Tughlaq Road police station," the official said, adding that a probe into the matter is underway.

10-yr-old boy killed for ransom, 2 juveniles nabbed

► Police found the body of a boy buried under the debris in a corner on the second floor of the Madina Masjid. Police analysed the CCTV footages of the area. All the persons present in the Madina Masjid at the time of 'Isha nama' around 7.15 pm were examined and it was found that the victim Farhan was last seen with his two minor friends.

examined and it was found that the victim was last seen with his two minor friends, they said.

"Both the juveniles were examined separately and contradictions were found in their versions. Later, they confessed to killing Farhan. On their confession, both the juveniles were apprehended," Deputy Commissioner of Police (northeast) Ved Prakash Surya said.

Interrogation revealed

that the juveniles wanted to extort money from deceased's father by kidnapping him. They planned it some days ago that they will kidnap the child and will demand ransom from his father for his safe release, the DCP said.

To execute their plan, they gave the victim water laced with sleeping pills around 10 days ago, but nothing happened to Farhan and their plan got failed, police said.

On Friday, the 17-year-old boy gave money to another accused and asked him to bring momos from a nearby vendor at about 7 pm. On the pretext of eating momos, they took Farhan to the first floor of the Madina Masjid where they ate the snack and thereafter, took the deceased to the roof of the mosque, police said.

On reaching the roof, the 17-year-old juvenile pulled down Farhan and strangled him while the other accused held his legs.

When Farhan died, they hid his body in the debris at the corner of the second floor of the mosque and put a plastic bag containing sand over it, Surya said.

SHORT TAKES

UP to bring in a new tenancy ordinance

Lucknow: The Uttar Pradesh government has decided to promulgate a tenancy-related ordinance aimed at safeguarding the rights and interests of both the landlords and tenants and check disputes between them. The Ordinance was approved in a Cabinet meeting chaired by chief minister Yogi Adityanath on Friday night and is likely to receive governor Anandiben Patel's assent soon. Amid the Covid pandemic, the ordinance was cleared by the state Cabinet not in the physical meeting but through the circulation of the draft ordinance among concerned ministries and its eventual approval by the chief minister. Under the provisions of the new extra-ordinary enactment titled the Uttar Pradesh Regulation of Urban Premises Tenancy Ordinance, 2021, a rent agreement would be mandatory for any property to be given on rent now, sources said. — PTI

Indian boy among Nasa event winners

New Delhi: A high school student from Gurugram, Aryan Jain, is among the winners of an app development challenge organised by Nasa. Aryan Jain is amongst the winners of Nasa's Artemis Next-Gen STEM Moon to Mars App Development Challenge this year, according to a release. A student of SunCity School, Gurugram (Haryana), he had teamed up with six high school students from the US. The competition is a coding challenge in which NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) presents technical problems to high school students and seeks their contributions to deep space exploration missions. The six-member team developed an app using the cross-platform game engine Unity and programmed it in C#. — PTI

150 passengers of Nilgiris Rail stranded

Udhagamandalam: Landslide disrupted the service of the Nilgiris Mountain Rail (NMR) midway for about three hours on Saturday, forcing about 150 passengers to trek 5 kms to board buses for their onward journey. The heritage NMR, which left here at around 2 pm, passed the Hillgrove station at 4.45 pm when huge boulders fell on the tracks, railway sources said. Since there was no possibility of clearing the tracks of the rocks immediately, the passengers were asked to alight, the sources said. On receiving information, the railway sent three buses to pick up the stranded passengers who had to walk 5 kms to board the buses to Mettupalayam, they said. — PTI

23 SAILORS STUCK IN CHINA TO RETURN JAN. 14

New Delhi: Twenty-three Indian sailors stuck in China will return on January 14, Union Minister Mansukh Mandaviya said on Saturday. The cargo ship MV Jag Anand is set to sail towards Chiba in Japan, Mandaviya said. "Our seafarers stuck in China are coming to India. Ship MV Jag Anand, having 23 Indian crew, stuck in China is set to SAIL toward Chiba, Japan, to carry out crew change, will reach India on 14th January," the ports, shipping and waterways minister said in a tweet. He said this could be made possible only due to the strong leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Mandaviya also acknowledged "the humanitarian approach of the Great Eastern Shipping Company towards the seafarers and standing by them in this crucial time!" On December 30, 2020, he had said that Indian sailors stuck in China will be brought back soon as diplomatic talks are on with the neighbouring country. Two cargo vessels with Indian sailors on board have been on anchorage in Chinese waters as they were not allowed to unload their cargo, though some other ships have managed to do so. "Diplomatic talks are going on for this successfully. Our seafarers will come to India soon," Mandaviya had said in reply to a query about sailors being stuck in China for the last seven months during a Cabinet briefing. — PTI

Gov says security situation in Bengal worrying

Ahead of Assembly polls, Dhankhar meets Shah, targets Mamata govt

New Delhi, Jan. 9: West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar expressed concerns about the security scenario in the state in light of the upcoming Assembly elections and raised questions over the state administration's role in maintaining law and order after meeting Union home minister Amit Shah here on Saturday.

The governor's interaction with Shah comes days after his meeting with West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee at the Raj Bhavan in Kolkata.

Mr Dhankhar, who had been at loggerheads with the Trinamul Congress (TMC) government ever since taking charge as the Bengal governor and criticised the Mamata Banerjee dispensation on several occasions, alleged on Saturday that the state has been "plagued with rampant violence".

"The law-and-order situation and the security environment in West Bengal is under threat. Al Qaeda is spreading, illegal bomb-making is rampant.



Union home Minister Amit Shah during a meeting with West Bengal governor Jagdeep Dhankhar in New Delhi on Saturday.

I'd like to know what are they (state administration) doing?"

"The position of the director general of police in Bengal is an open secret. That's why I say we have 'political police'. Everyday I am hearing news of bomb blasts or bombs being found," he claimed in a press briefing after meeting Shah in Delhi.

The ongoing tiff between

the West Bengal Governor and the ruling TMC reached a new high recently when a group of party leaders wrote to President Ram Nath Kovind demanding Mr Dhankhar's dismissal from the post.

On Saturday, the West Bengal governor said, "It's time for us to set an example by engaging in best practices so that every voter is in a position to express their franchise

freely and fairly in a peaceful atmosphere."

The TMC has repeatedly targeted the BJP, saying it is controlled by "outsiders". Chief Minister Banerjee has also labelled the BJP as a "party of outsiders".

"My heart pains when ignoring constitutional provisions, a child of 'Maa Bharti' is called an outsider in West Bengal because he doesn't belong to the state. We're all the children of 'Maa Bharti' and we believe in our unity. No person living in this land can be an outsider."

"The year 2021 is a challenging year for West Bengal. It's an opportunity for the state to engage in makeover of the image as elections in Bengal have been plagued with rampant violence, compromising basic rights of voters and role of bureaucracy," he said.

Mr Dhankhar, who had a meeting with Mr Shah barely a month ago, spoke to the Union home minister for over an hour on Saturday. — PTI

Top executives also named CBI books Hyd firm in ₹4,736 crore fraud

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 9

The CBI on Saturday booked Hyderabad-based Coastal Projects Limited and its directors in connection with ₹4,736 crore bank fraud in a consortium of banks led by the State Bank of India (SBI).

The SBI in its complaint (which is now a part of the FIR) alleged that the accused construction company, during the five year period between 2013 and 2018, falsified account books and financial statements to show unrealisable bank guarantee amounts as realisable investments.

CBI spokesperson R.C. Joshi said, "The company also allegedly gave wrong information on promoters' contribution, converted receivables from related parties to investments to siphon off bank funds". The loan account of the company became a Non-Performance Asset with retrospective effect from October 28, 2013 and subsequently declared fraud on February 20 last year. "Searches were conducted at the residential and official premises of the accused at Hyderabad and Vijayawada, which led to the recovery of sev-

eral incriminating documents and other material evidence," Joshi said.

Besides the company and its chairman and managing director Sabbineni Surendra, the agency also named managing director Garapati Harihara Rao, directors Sridhar Chandra Sekharan Nivarthi, Sharad Kumar, Guarantor K. Ramuli, K. Anjamma, another company Ravi Kailas Builders Pvt Ltd, its directors Ramesh Pasupuletu and Govind Kumar Irani.

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) is also preparing to start its separate probe against the firm and its promoters under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). "The ED will soon register a case against the firm and its directors. ED officials are in touch with CBI sleuths".

Loan app firm claims another life

KARIMNAGAR (Telangana), Jan. 9:

Another man allegedly died by suicide in Telangana, upset over being harassed by an online money lender from whom he had taken a loan and was unable to repay it, police said on Saturday.

With this death, the total number of suicides due to harassment by instant app-based lenders have gone up to six in the state.

Pavan Kalyan Reddy (24) of Galpalli village in Rajanna Sircilla district, had allegedly taken loan from an online money lending portal and failed to repay the amount within the stipulated time, district police superintendent B.K. Rahul Hegde said.

When Reddy declined to answer repeated calls from the telecallers of the company, they called his cousin and asked him to remind the victim to pay the monthly instalment, Mr Hegde said.

Depressed over the harassment meted out to him by the company as he was unable to repay the loan, Reddy allegedly ended his life on Friday, he said. — PTI

GoAir sacks pilot over tweets on PM

New Delhi, Jan. 9: India's low-cost airline GoAir on Saturday terminated its senior pilot from services over his derogatory remarks on Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Twitter.

"GoAir has a zero-tolerance policy and it is mandatory for all GoAir employees to comply with the company's employment rules, regulations and policies, including social media behaviour. The airline does not associate itself with personal views expressed by any

individual or an employee. GoAir has terminated the services of the Captain with immediate effect," a GoAir spokesperson said. Taking cognisance of the matter, the airline parted itself from the pilot's tweet and took action against him.

Meanwhile, the terminated GoAir pilot tendered his apology on Twitter. "I apologise for my tweets about the Prime Minister and other offensive tweets, which may have hurt sentiments of anyone associ-

ated. I convey that GoAir is not associated with any of my tweets directly or indirectly as they were personal views. I take full responsibility for my actions and would like to apologise for my mistakes and willingly accept the consequences," the pilot said.

The GoAir pilot had made derogatory remarks against Prime Minister on January 7 that the management found offensive and against the company policy. — ANI

Over 1,200 birds found dead across India

UP becomes 7th state to report avian influenza, 900 dead in Maha poultry

New Delhi, Jan. 9: Over 1,200 birds were found dead across the country on Saturday, including 900 in a poultry farm in Maharashtra, with the Centre saying that the outbreak of avian influenza has been reported in Uttar Pradesh, taking the total number of affected states to seven.

The Centre said confirmation of bird flu in Delhi, Chhattisgarh and Maharashtra, is awaited as the samples have been sent for testing, it said.

Besides Uttar Pradesh, the other six states where bird flu is confirmed are Kerala, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana and Gujarat.

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal announced a ban on import of live birds in the national capital and closure of Ghazipur poultry market, the biggest in the city, for the next 10 days in view of bird flu scare.

At least 24 crows have been found dead at a district park in south Delhi's Jasola in the past three days and 10 ducks have died at the famous Sanjay Lake, officials said.

"The samples of ducks found dead have been taken by the veterinary department authorities to ascertain if the cause of death was bird flu or not," a senior DDA official said.

As many as 900 hens have died at a poultry

farm in Murumba village in Parbhani district of Maharashtra, a senior official said.

Their samples have been sent for investigation to identify the exact cause of the death, Parbhani district collector Deepak Mulgikar said.

He said the poultry farm where the death of birds was reported is run by a Self Help Group (SHG).

Prima facie, the death of hens could be related to nutrition, the collector said, adding that the test results are awaited.

Over 350 birds were reported dead in Rajasthan, taking the death count to 2,512, an official said.

Of the 356 birds reported dead on Saturday, 257 were crows, 29 pigeons, 16 peacocks and 54 others.

Even as Gujarat recorded its first confirmed cases of bird flu, four crows were found dead at a village in Mangrol taluka in the state's Junagadh district.

The state on Friday recorded its first cases of bird flu after samples taken from two dead lapwings recovered in the district tested positive for the infection.

"We found carcasses of four crows at Loje village on Friday evening. The remains will be sent to a laboratory in Bhopal to ascertain the cause of death," said Ashok Kumbhani, veterinary

TMC represents anarchy, not Bengali culture: Nadda

Bardhaman (West Bengal), Jan. 9: Taking a swipe at the TMC for accusing it of trying to "destroy the Bengali culture", BJP national President J P Nadda on Saturday said Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee headed Trinamul Congress never represented the Bengali culture rather symbolised "anarchy and corruption".

On speculations about cricketer Sourav Ganguly joining the BJP before Bengal elections, Nadda, without naming anyone, said the "matter will be discussed once it comes before the party".

Addressing a press conference winding up the day-long visit to the state, the BJP chief said the Bengal's ruling political party is working with "a criminal instinct and corruption has been institutionalised".

"The TMC never repre-

sented true Bengali culture. It represents anarchy, corruption and extortion."

"The BJP and Syama Prasad Mookherjee represented the true Bengali culture. We live the rich Bengali culture, which talks of what Bengal thinks today India thinks tomorrow," Nadda told reporters.

He recalled attack on his convoy on way to Diamond Harbour from Kolkata in December to target the ruling dispensation in the state over law and order. "Last time when I came, how I was welcomed en route to Diamond Harbour, we were attacked as part of a plan by the administration and a political party - nation witnessed it."

"The (Home) ministry took a strong note of this. Today when I'm here again, I say so far so

good," he added. He said attack on a protected leader shows the prevailing law and order situation in the state.

"The ruling political party is working with a criminal instinct. Corruption has been institutionalised."

"The point-blank attack on a protected leader like me is a testament to the state of law and order to which a regular citizen is subjected to," he said at the media interaction in Bengal's Purba Bardhaman district.

Eversince Sourav Ganguly was unanimously elected as the BCCI president in October 2019 and he had met Union home minister Amit Shah after that, speculations have been rife about the cricketer joining the saffron party before the state polls which are now only months away. — PTI

BJP, BJD workers come to blows

Tension erupts in presence of Odisha CM Patnaik, Union minister Pradhan

AKSHAYA KUMAR
SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, JAN. 9

Tension gripped the Old Town area in Odisha capital Bhubaneswar on Saturday during the launch of the Bindusagar cleaning initiative by Odisha chief minister Naveen Patnaik and Union minister Dharmendra Pradhan in.

According to reports, a minor scuffle broke out between BJD and BJP workers near the stage as they raised slogans targeting each other. They even went to the extent of pushing each other. Tension ensued following the address by Bhubaneswar MP Aparajita Sarangi (BJP) and a counter attacking speech by local

BJD MLA and social security and empowerment of persons with disabilities minister Ashok Panda.

"There should be coordination between the Centre and the state to complete the project within the stipulated period of four months. We always emphasise on coordination. Wherever there is coordination there is success," said Ms Sarangi.

Countering Ms Sarangi, minister Panda claimed that the project would be completed within only four weeks.

"I don't want to play politics over the remarks of Sarangi but want to assure that the project will be completed within four weeks of time against the target of four months," said Mr Panda

► **TENSION ENSUED** following the address by Bhubaneswar MP Aparajita Sarangi (BJP) and a counter attacking speech by local BJD MLA and social security and empowerment of persons with disabilities minister Ashok Panda

"Earlier the Central government had assured to provide ₹5 crore for the development of Dhauli. But they failed to keep their promise and provided only ₹1 crore. However the State completed the project with ₹5 crore from its own kitty," he added in his speech. However, what irked the BJP workers was the boisterousness in Panda's retort.

The saffron party work-

ers shouted slogans against BJD which agitated the ruling party supporters.

Union minister Pradhan was seen pacifying both the party workers during his speech.

Bindusagar, one of the state heritages and holy lakes in the temple city Bhubaneswar, is situated in the north of Lingaraj temple. The estimated cost for the revival and cleaning of the iconic lake is pegged at Rs 70 lakh which is being funded by the Indian Oil's CSR fund.

The project is being undertaken by the Institute of Chemical Technology (ICT), Indian Oil (IOC) campus Bhubaneswar in collaboration with Odisha Bridge Construction Company.

Bhim Army chief stitches alliance for UP Assembly polls

Lucknow, Jan. 9: Bhim Army chief Chandrashekhar Azad on Saturday met Suheldev Bhartiya Samaj Party president Om Prakash Rajbhar and agreed to contest the upcoming assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh as part of the Bhagidari Sankalp Morcha.

Suheldev Bhartiya Samaj Party general secretary Arun Rajbhar in a statement said their coalition will contest on all 403 seats in the state and the Bhim Army chief agreed to be part of it. We are trying to form the government in the state on issues of education, health, electricity and employment, he said.

In the 2022 Assembly elections, we will form government in the state and give free education and power," Arun Rajbhar said, adding that "whosoever wants to stop the BJP, they are welcome in the Morcha". — PTI



Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan being greeted by Bollywood actress Kangana Ranaut during a meeting at his residence in Bhopal on Saturday.

finally taken," Ranaut, here for a film shoot, said to a query.

Asked about rising cases of rape in the country, the actor said trials of such cases go on for long and victims get harassed in the process.

"They have the burden to prove the charges against the accused...More than

half the accused get acquitted," Ranaut said.

"Many countries like Saudi hang (the accused) in public squares," she said, adding "until we set five-six such examples, until tough action is not taken (such crimes will not stop)...because people get away with such crimes," she said. — PTI

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IN BRIEF

MP ENFORCES
'LOVE JIHAD'
ORDINANCERABINDRA NATH
CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, JAN. 9

Madhya Pradesh government on Saturday brought into force the contentious Freedom of Religion ordinance, known in political parlance as 'Love Jihad' law, providing a maximum jail term of 10 years for forcible marriage of a girl for the purpose of changing her religion.

The ordinance was enforced 2 days after the governor Anandiben Patel gave her assent to it on Thursday.

Earlier on December 29, the state cabinet gave a nod to the ordinance in the wake of suspension of the winter session of the state assembly, scheduled to commence on December 28.

The state cabinet had last month given approval to the Freedom of Religion Bill, 2020, which was scheduled to see passage in the state assembly in the now-suspended winter session.

The ordinance has provided a maximum of 10 years' imprisonment for forcible marriage of a girl for the purpose of changing her religion.

It has been made mandatory for the bride and the groom to notify the local district magistrate 2 months ahead of their conversions, failing which the marriage would be nullified.

The ordinance has provided 5 years' jail term for the religious leaders and priests involved in the forcible marriages. Onus would be on the accused to prove his or her innocence.

Anti-BJP front
in Assam....

■ Continued from Page 1

from power in the upcoming assembly polls," said Mr Ajmal.

In December 2020, the AIUDF and the Congress had together contested the Bodoland Territorial Council elections, fielding 20 candidates each. Congress won just one seat.

The idea of forming a grand alliance of anti-CAA forces was floated and stitched together by late chief minister Tarun Gogoi.

AJP, led by Mr Gogoi, a former All Assam Students' Union (AASU) leader, and Rajiour Dal, led by jailed farmers' leader Akhil Gogoi, came into being following the anti-CAA agitation in December 2019, which turned violent. Scrapping the CAA is one of the two regional parties. And yet neither seems keen on partnering with the Congress.

"Since the beginning our stand is clear. We will try to unite all regional forces and maintain distance from the national parties. We are firm on this and so we have decided to form an alliance with Rajiour Dal. An agreement in this regard will be signed very soon," AJP president Lurinjyoti Gogoi told reporters.

Mr Akhil Gogoi is in jail since the agitation and is facing sedition charges.

Vaccination
from Jan. 16

■ Continued from Page 1

especially national programmes and primary healthcare.

The PM was also apprised about the Co-WIN Vaccine Delivery Management System that will provide real-time information of vaccine stocks, their storage temperature and individualised tracking of beneficiaries of the Covid-19 vaccine.

Emergency-use authorisation or accelerated approval has been granted by the Drug Controller General of India for Covishield (by SII) and Covaxin (Bharat Biotech). Central government is in the process of procuring the vaccines that will be delivered to main hubs in each zone and taken to different parts of the country from there.

"This platform will assist the programme managers across all levels through automated session allocation for pre-registered beneficiaries, their verification and for generating a digital certificate upon successful completion of the vaccine schedule. More than 79 lakh beneficiaries have been already registered on the platform," said health ministry officials. More than 61,000 programme managers, 2 lakh vaccinators and 3.7 lakh other vaccination team members have been trained for the vaccine drive.

Modi: World waiting
for India's vaccinesAGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN. 9

India is ready to protect humanity with not just one but "two Made in India corona vaccines" and the world is not only waiting for them but also watching as to how the country runs the globe's biggest vaccination programme", Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in a virtual format Saturday.

In his address at the inauguration of the 16th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) Convention, Mr Modi also asserted that if democracy is most strong, vibrant and lively anywhere in the world, it is in India.

The Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) Convention — the flagship event of the ministry of external affairs (MEA) — provides an important platform to engage and connect with "the 31 million strong Indian diaspora in all corners of the globe".

"Today, India is ready to protect humanity with not one but two Made in India Corona Vaccines. Being the pharmacy of the world, India has done the work of delivering essential medicines to every needy in the world and is still doing it today. Today, the world is not only waiting for India's vaccine, but it is also eyeing how India runs the world's largest vaccination programme," Mr Modi said.

Mr Modi also said that during the pandemic, Indians showed their capabilities and the way the country stood together was unparalleled.

"In this era of pandemic, India again showed what our potential is. ... Be it PPE kits, masks, ventilators, testing kits, all these were (earlier) sought from outside India. India has today not only become self-reliant in them but has started exporting many of these products as well. Today India is one of the countries with the lowest fatality rate and fastest recovery rate in the world."

The PBD Convention — the theme of which was "Contributing to Aatmanirbhar Bharat" (self-reliant India) — was



Prime Minister Narendra Modi delivers the inaugural address at the 16th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas in New Delhi. — PTI

● **THE PM said that during the pandemic, Indians showed their capabilities and the way the country stood together was unparalleled**

inaugurated by Mr Modi and featured a keynote address by Caribbean nation Suriname President Chandrikapersad Santokhi, who was the chief guest at the event.

Mr Modi hailed the contributions of Suriname President Mr Santokhi as "a shining example" of the service of the Indian Diaspora to the world.

On the occasion, 30 individuals and organisations were conferred the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award (PBSA) — the highest honour for overseas Indians/persons of Indian origin — by President Ram Nath Kovind in recognition of their outstanding achievements both in India and abroad in various fields. The awardees included Priyanka Radhakrishnan, New Zealand's Minister for Youth, Community and Voluntary Sector, and Diversity, Inclusion and Ethnic Communities.

Quoting the wisdom of ancient Tamil sage Thiruvalluvar who had said, "the best land in the world is that which does not learn evils from its opponents and which, if ever in trouble, does not decrease the welfare of others", Mr Modi announced that the next PBD will be "associated with the celebration of the 75th year of independence".

Days after
participating
in trial, man
dies in MP

Bhopal, Jan. 9: A 42-year-old man, who had taken part in the trial of indigenous coronavirus vaccine Covaxin here on December 12, died nine days later, with doctors suspecting that poisoning could be the cause.

The vaccine maker Bharat Biotech said in a statement that preliminary reviews indicated that the death was unrelated to Covaxin.

Dr Rajesh Kapur, vice-chancellor, People's Medical College and Hospital, a private institute where the trial was conducted, said Deepak Marawi, the deceased, had taken part in the Covaxin trial on December 12. He died on December 21.

Madhya Pradesh Medico Legal Institute director Dr Ashok Sharma said the doctor who performed autopsy suspected that Marawi died of poisoning. However, the exact cause of death will be known from his viscera test, he added.

Bharat Biotech said that Marawi had fulfilled "all the inclusion and exclusion criteria to be accepted as a participant in the Phase III trial".

He was reported to be healthy in follow-up calls post seven days of his dosing and no adverse reaction was observed or reported, the Hyderabad-based company said.

"The volunteer passed away nine days after the dosing and preliminary reviews indicate that the death is unrelated to the study dosing. We cannot confirm if the volunteer received the study vaccine or a placebo as the study is blinded," it added.

Dr Kapur said that after Marawi's death, the Drug Controller General of India and Bharat Biotech were duly informed.

He said Marawi, a tribal labourer, had volunteered for the trial and was examined. — PTI



Charred remains of furniture and other equipment inside the new born babies care unit of the Bhandara District General Hospital after a fire which broke out in the wee hours, in Bhandara district on Saturday. — PTI

Maha fire: Ex-mantri alleges
laxity, hospital tight-lipped

Bhandara, Jan. 9: The families of some of the 10 infants killed in a hospital fire here had complained about power fluctuations but no action was taken, alleged a former minister, as the blackened walls and charred furniture inside the ward told their own story of the ferocity of the blaze that broke out early Saturday.

Access to the Bhandara district hospital was barricaded to keep the media away and restless crowds milled around outside, anxious for any information on the deaths of the 10 infants, aged between one and three months, inside the Special Newborn Care unit.

The scale and nature of the incident left the people of this east Maharashtra city shaken and condolences poured in from various sections of society.

While politicians, including current and former ministers, were allowed inside the build-

● **A NURSE first noticed smoke coming out from the neonatal section of the hospital and alerted doctors and other staff who reached there in five minutes**

ing, scarcely anybody else was. Hospital authorities were tightlipped, refusing to divulge any information on the tragedy that had made national headlines.

As anxiety mounted, speaking to those allowed inside was the only way for reporters to get information and try and piece together a narrative.

Former Maharashtra energy minister Chandra Shekar Bawankule of the BJP claimed that relatives of the infants had complained about power fluctuations in the ward for the last week.

"I spoke with relatives of the deceased infants. They told me that power fluctu-

ations had been happening in the hospital ward since the last seven days. The relatives had asked the hospital staff to check electric switches etc, but apparently no action was taken," Bawankule said.

Demanding a high-level inquiry, he also alleged that the hospital didn't have proper fire safety and electrical equipment in place. According to him, a proposal to purchase fire safety equipment worth over ₹1 crore at the hospital sent to the principal secretary, health, and the director of health, in the state government is pending for approval.

While most people were not allowed inside, photographs from the ward gave an indication of intensity of the fire and its aftermath of soot and smoke.

The walls were blackened, only the occasional patch of yellow showing through, the floor was thick with ash and dust and much of the furniture

was charred. The metal stretchers and a few other accoutrements of a special hospital care unit such as the drip stand survived the fire, which broke out around 1.30 am.

In the midst of the gloom shone a bright blue and white sign saying LED.

State health minister Rajesh Tope told reporters that at least three of the 10 infants died of burn injuries while seven were suffocated to death because of the smoke.

District civil surgeon Pramod Khandate said there were 17 babies in the unit and seven were rescued.

A nurse first noticed smoke coming out from the neonatal section of the hospital and alerted doctors and other staff who reached there in five minutes, he said. Fire brigade personnel rescued seven babies from the 'inbound ward' of the unit but could not save the 10 other babies, he said. — PTI

PDP leader released on bail

YUSUF JAMEEL
SRINAGAR, JAN. 9

People's Democratic Party (PDP) youth leader Waheed Ur Rehman Parra was on Saturday released from over six week long detention after a special court of National Investigation Agency (NIA) at Jammu granted him bail.

The NIA had arrested Mr. Parra on November 25 for his alleged "close links" with Kashmiri lawyer Irfan Shafi Mir, who was arrested by the police along with Hizb-ul-Mujahideen commander Syed Naveed Mushtaq, another militant Asif Ahmed Rather and tainted J&K police officer Davinder Singh in January last year.

Since the arrest had come merely two days after Mr. Parra's filing his nomination papers for J&K's maiden District Development Council (DDC) elections, the PDP

● **THE NIA HAD arrested Parra on November 25 for his alleged "close links" with Kashmiri lawyer Irfan Shafi Mir, who was arrested by the police along with Hizb-ul-Mujahideen commander Syed Naveed Mushtaq, another militant Asif Ahmed Rather and tainted J&K police officer Davinder Singh.**

had termed the NIA's action as a political blackmail of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party.

Mr. Parra subsequently won this election with a significant margin of votes from a segment of home district Pulwama while still in NIA custody. However, he wasn't allowed to take the oath as a member even via online mode despite a directive from the court.

The NIA had, however, maintained that Mr. Parra was arrested by it "in con-

nection with the Naveed Babu-Davinder Singh case for supporting Hizb-ul-Mujahideen in conspiracy with the other accused persons."

Mr. Parra was on December 20 sent to a 30-day judicial remand by a special judge of the NIA. A team of Counter Intelligence Kashmir (CIK), a wing of J&K police, carried out a raid at his home in Pulwama on December 30.

Late Saturday night, PDP president and former chief minister, Mehbooba Mufti, informed that Mr. Parra has been detained by an Intelligence wing of the J&K police now and while questioning it's legality she sought Lt. Governor, Manoj Sinha's intervention in the matter.

She tweeted, "Despite NIA Court granting bail to @parawahid after thorough court proceedings, he has now been detained by CIK in Jammu. Under what law & for what crime

has he been arrested? This is brazen contempt of court. Request @manoj-sinha_ji to intervene so that justice is served."

Earlier this week, the NIA had sought the details of his properties in Srinagar from the J&K police.

According to the agency, during the investigations into Singh's association with the Hizb militants, it came across phone records of Mir which showed that he was in close contact with Mr. Parra. The NIA sources had added that Mir had claimed during questioning that Mr. Parra sought his support during the 2019 Lok Sabha elections for his party candidate Mehbooba Mufti.

Singh who last served as Deputy Superintendent of Police at the Anti-Hijacking Squad at the Srinagar International Airport is facing charges under various anti terror laws for helping separatist militants back home.

Mann, Jazzy B, Rabbi Shergill
take stage at the Tikri border

New Delhi, Jan. 9: Harbhajan Mann, Jazzy B, Rabbi Shergill and a host of other Punjabi singers performed at an "Artists for Farmers" concert at the Tikri border on Saturday, raising spirits of farmers' camping on the road braving cold and rain as they await a resolution to their demand for repeal of new farm laws.

Some of them sang songs of dissent, some raised slogans and delivered motivational speeches, and virtually everyone paid their gratitude to the farmers protesting against the Centre's three farm laws for over a month now. Their message was loud and clear: "We stand by you."

Kanwar Grewal, Harf Cheema, Noor Chahal too performed in the concert. Bollywood actor Swara Bhasker, who has been vocal about her support for the farmers' movement and joined the protest at



Actress Swara Bhaskar at Tikri border. — PTI

the Singhu border, was also present at the event.

Harbhajan Mann extended support to the farmers' demand for repeal of the farm laws and thanked them for all the love they have given him over all these years.

Kanwar Grewal and Jazzy B, courtesy their protest songs, touched just the right musical note with the protesters.

Noor Chahal said the powers that be have long divided people in terms of religion and caste but it won't be able to do so here.

"I am a daughter of a farmer. Our history tells us that we have won many

fighters before. I am sure we will win this one too," she said to a packed crowd.

Majority of the Punjabi singers have supported the farmers in the ongoing protest.

Some like Kanwar Grewal and Harf Cheema, who have been associated with the movement since the very beginning, are also the voices behind some of the viral songs on the farmers' movement. Their song "Peecha", which has got over 80 lakh views on YouTube, is a massive hit among protesters camping at different border points of Delhi. It speaks of the rift between Punjab and Delhi, farmer suicides and the Centre's "black laws".

"The programme was very good and it lasted for over two hours. They entertained us as well as supported us. They said that they are with us in this cause," said Jagtar Taari. — PTI

BJP govt increased MSP: Nadda

■ Continued from Page 1

increased budget on agriculture by six times. In 2013-14, the budget on agriculture was only ₹22,000 crore. Today, it stands at ₹1,34,000 crore, Mr Nadda said and added that it was the PM who implemented the Swaminathan Committee report on MSP for crops

● **IN 2013-14, the budget on agriculture was only ₹22,000 crore. Today, it stands at ₹1,34,000 crore, Mr Nadda said and added that it was the PM who implemented the Swaminathan Committee report on MSP for crops**

and Ayushman Bharat scheme," Mr Nadda said. Later in the afternoon Mr Nadda launched 'Ek Muthi Chawal' (a fistful of rice), a programme under which he would collect rice from farmers' homes and brief them about the benefits of the new agri legislations, as part of efforts to blunt the

"anti-farmer" allegations against the BJP-led central government following farmers' protests in Delhi.

Purba Bardwan is a major rice producing district and it is called the "rice bowl of West Bengal."

The district, around 100 km from Kolkata also holds special significance in the state politics as it comprises of 15 assembly constituencies. Out of this majority are with the TMC at present and the saffron party wish to win them to form its government in the state.

Sunil Kumar Mondal, Lok Sabha member from Burdwan Purba constituency recently switched over to the BJP

from the TMC.

Mr Nadda's address at 'Krishok Surokkha Gram Sabha' in Jagadanandpur marked the beginning of 40,000 such meetings to be held by the BJP across West Bengal before the Assembly elections just months away from now.

There are 71.23 lakh farmers' families in West Bengal, 96 per cent of them small and marginal. This was Mr Nadda's first visit to the state after the attack on his convoy during his journey to Diamond Harbour from Kolkata on December 10.

Elections to the 294-member Bengal Assembly are due in April-May. — PTI

THE ASIAN AGE

10 JANUARY 2021



Sanjeev Ahluwalia

Off the beaten track

C-virus funk? Relax, and respect the kids

Parenting is a thankless job except when your child flashes you an admiring look of appreciation and love or envelopes you in a warm, spontaneous hug. But most of the time, you — the parent — are under scrutiny, by your children, your parents and relatives, society and indeed the law — with everyone expecting you to trip up.

The job comes with perks. You get to make the rules — mostly. But more commonly parents are running up the down escalator — coping with their own personal disasters and ghosts, pretending to be in control of the situation or just making do with paying the daily bills.

The most challenging scenario is when “special children” are born. So steeped are most of us in the quicksand of the “norm” that anything out of that spectrum imposes extreme stress. The wonder is that most parents do eventually cope with the daunting task of loving and serving unconditionally.

But parenting is never easy. Nor does one fall automatically into it — at least not well enough. It is fairly straightforward to make babies. Sadly, it is never straightforward to nudge them to grow up to be humane, empathetic, caring siblings, mothers or fathers, responsible citizens and productive members of society.

Even in ordinary times, parenting is a formidable task. It becomes much harder in extraordinary times. Think long wars or extended violence — there are fifty-five such events happening across the globe. Add to that periodic drought, famine, economic distress or the pandemic we are struggling through.

What should parents do if carefully formulated plans collapse into mere physical survival? Look back to the “hunter-gatherer” age for role models? Is it even sensible to bring up a child believing in the “nice” social lessons of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, learnt over the last century, when society itself seems to be hurtling back to where we began?

More than 90,000 people died in 2020 in continuing conflicts across the globe — some of these started as early as 1947 and continue glowing like the embers of a major fire. Covid-19 has devastated human life and social norms more decisively than any other calamity and more confusingly so since there is no one to blame but ourselves.

Perhaps there is a lesson there for us and our children. An old one. Just one rotten apple destroys an entire pile. We should change our rotten ways if our children are to identify and shun rot. The maxim of survival of the fittest is the “learned knowledge” born out of uncaring times. If society thrives so do, we. The impending disaster from climate change illustrates this truism.

The difficult part is how to embed these noble notions into a workable social ethic which preserves the spirit of competition without impeding collaboration; recognises the human impetus for acquisition but tempers it with a notion of relative equality; acknowledges that humans are not saints but nor are they Hobbesian creatures of dystopia.

When faced with a conundrum, parents assume that role modeling will do the trick — being the person you want your child to be. This is an honest way to go — you can’t expect your child to be honest, fair and just if you aren’t. But even this doesn’t guarantee success. No child is a clone of their parents. And force fitting them into narrow roles has an even chance of success or disaster.

Parenting is a high-risk venture. There are so many moving parts, any of which could pitch the game against the parent or the child. Covid-19 is one such. It has also taken away the relief that external actors — teachers, friends, extended family — gave hard pressed parents via “me time”. “Family time” is all we have for those working from home. This is what most parents wished for. Many might now be having second thoughts. Possibly children too feel similarly. Too much of a good thing is never as good as when it is rationed out in dribbles.

Here are three survival strategies to get you through Covid-19 with your sanity intact.

First, quit role modeling. It’s stressful to keep up an act 24x7. Being yourself can bring surprisingly good results. Children are very resilient. They know that adults are fallible and can be surprisingly responsible when asked for help. It is we, adults, who force them into infantile irresponsibility well beyond the initial years when this assumption is valid.

Second, imagine what you always wanted your boss to do — to quit micro-managing you. Become your ideal boss. Lay out fair rules on how your lives will run. Encourage your children to become equal partners in fleshing out what this means in practice — who does what, when and why. Things will probably not work like clockwork. The house will become messy. The kids may need time to discipline themselves about homework or time spent on social media. Your spouse might resent the change just as much as the kids. But in the end, there is a good chance everyone will sort themselves out per their natural inclinations and capacities.

Third, avoid dreaming of the future. “*Que sera sera*” remains the motto. The only thing real is the present — remain in it. This doesn’t mean that planning should be junked. But a future directed by you is as dead as the Planning Commission. Shape your children into commandos — street smart but equipped with the attributes for happiness and success — good health, a head for languages and code, music and art, digital capability and high social and human capacity. The rest will unfold as challenges and opportunities present themselves.

Children are born pure and unsullied. It is we who contaminate them with backward looking limitations. Now is a good time to shed the patrimonial legacy of parenthood and discover the joy of surviving together — the good news being — no one is watching, excepting you.

The writer is adviser, Observer Research Foundation

Subhani



Why J. Khanna dissented from Central Vista ruling



Pavan K. Varma

Chanakya's View

The Supreme Court (SC) has in a two-against-one judgment given a conditional green signal to the government’s plans to massively rebuild the central core of the capital of the Republic. We have no option but to accept the view of the highest court of the land, but the dissenting judgment of Justice Sanjiv Khanna raises issues which, if brushed under the carpet, would sanctify the government’s predilection to rule by law rather than that by rule of law.

The old saying, the way to hell is paved with good intentions, has a new resonance to the manner in which our current government acts. The end goal is often good, but the manner in which it is sought to be achieved is sorely wanting. The recent farm laws provide an illustrative example. No one can question the proposition that the agricultural sector needs reforms. But there is something inherently undemocratic if the reforms are pushed through without adequate consultations.

The farm bills were passed by blatantly violating every procedure and protocol of Parliament; they were hurriedly cleared on a Sunday, without sufficient discussion, by a voice vote, and without referring them to a Select Committee where the views of stakeholders could be taken on board in an organized and transparent manner. The farmers massed on the borders of Delhi are basically saying that there was no conversation with them.

This is precisely what a great many concerned citizens, members of civil society, architects,

Why was an open design competition not held? On what criteria did the government’s in-house committee decide that a Gujarat based firm, which may have done the redevelopment of the Sabarmati river front, had the best design even when its bid was the most expensive?

Justice Sanjiv Khanna, in his dissenting judgment, used a very telling expression to describe the undemocratic opacity of the government. He said that there was a lack of ‘adequate and intelligible disclosure’.

Lutyens was an incorrigible racist, with a deep sense of contempt for Indians and all things Indian. But the city he designed with Herbert Baker has been part of our history for the last seven decades and more. If we wish to change our architectural past, should not that process be fully transparent, and informed by adequate and intelligible information put out in the public realm?

The answer, of course, is yes. But was this done? Many questions hang unanswered in the air. Why was the original brief for the project marked by such uncommunicative brevity? Why were all the drawings, layout plans and explanatory memoranda, inviting suggestions and objections, not put on a public website? Why was an open design competition not held? Why was a public jury of well-known non-governmental experts along with government nominees not constituted to decide the best bid? On what criteria did the government’s in-house committee decide that a Gujarat based firm, which may have done the redevelopment of the Sabarmati river front, had the best design even when its bid was the most expensive? Why have the criteria for this subjective and secretive selection not been made public even now? Why was the permission of the Heritage Conservation Committee not obtained? Why was the environment clearance granted by the Expert Appraisal

Committee not a speaking order, clearly giving reasons, and as Justice Sanjiv Khanna observed, showing application of mind? Why was a detailed report showing why our current Parliament needs to be junked, and is beyond all retrofitting to suit future needs, not made public? Since the changes involved building a new Parliament, could not there have been a discussion in Parliament, rather than merely briefing representatives of political parties?

The BJP may have an absolute majority in Parliament, but that does not mean that the process of democratic consultation, and the imperative of transparency, can be dispensed with. When governments behave as if they know best what is good for the people, and treat the views of the people themselves as unimportant, the consequences lack credibility and legitimacy. On a TV debate the other day, Mohandas Pai said that democracy cannot mean checking out every decision with all the people. My only response to him is not to trivialise the democratic process. Obviously, not everyone can be consulted, but there are standard and institutionalised ways in which the government can attempt to gauge what is best for the people. When this is not done through intelligent and adequate disclosure, and a transparent process of consultations, the result is contentious and counter-productive. This is what the angry farmers are saying, and this is what those who are distressed at manner of the remaking of New Delhi, are reiterating. Their views are best summed up in this couplet: *Yun dikhata hai aankhen mujhe baagbhaan, jaise gulshan pe kuch haq har-mara nahin*: The caretaker of the garden looks at me such, as though I have no say in the well-being of the garden.

The writer, an author and a diplomat, is in politics

LETTERS

ARMS & THE TRIBAL

The Supreme Court has asked the central and state authorities to come up with a policy to give arms licences to forest staff. This has raised fears that it will give them an excuse to shoot down forest rights activists and tribal citizens who are being forced off their land by corporates in many parts of the country. In fact, the Court is currently hearing a case on the land claims of over five lakh ST people under the Forest Rights Act that have allegedly been wrongfully rejected by the government in early 2019. Will these people be evicted on the pain of death and decimation?

Ashok Chowdhury
Saharanpur, UP

THINK OF THE BIRDS

FLYING KITES is an important part of celebrating Makar Sankranti, the festival that marks the end of winter. The tradition of flying kites is believed to have royal origins. With time, however, the activity has gained immense popularity. But the manja used in kite flying can be fatal for birds. Manja is made by coating the string with powdered glass. Birds in flight fail to notice the thin string and get entangled in it. Manja takes longer to decompose than ordinary string and stays in the environment for a long time, putting the lives of small creatures in peril.

Jubel D’Cruz
Mumbai

SHAME ON BHAGWAT

THE RECENT statement of Mohan Bhagwat has not been challenged in the way it should have been. It insinuates that the minorities, Muslims and Christians cannot be trusted. Karan Thapar has set the record straight by giving examples of the times Hindus betrayed the nation. Mr Bhagwat’s utterances expose the inherent prejudice of the RSS ideology and its agenda to relegate them to the status of second class citizens. Being faithful to the nation has nothing to do with religion, but everything to do with the individual.

Anthony Henriques
Mumbai

CRIMINAL NEGLECT

THE DEATH OF 10 newborn babies after a fire broke out in a hospital in Bhandara district in Maharashtra in the early morning of Saturday is most shocking. This incident once again brought to the fore the government’s criminal negligence in maintaining fire safety norms. Exemplary punishment should be handed out to those found guilty, after an impartial probe is quickly conducted.

Sankar Paul
Chakdaha, West Bengal

VACCINE NIGH

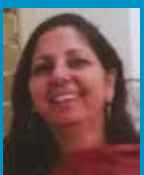
IT IS HEARTENING that Karnataka will get 13.9 lakh vials of Covid-19 vaccine in two consignments from Pune soon. In the first phase, the authorities will administer the vaccination to health care workers and those with co-morbidities, senior citizens, police and revenue staff on pandemic duty are next in line. Karnataka will receive Covishield vaccine manufactured by Serum Institute of India. The news must come as music to the ears of citizens in the state.

N.J. Ravi Chander
Bengaluru

Every Monday the best letter of the week wins ₹500. Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

Anita Katyal

Political Gup-Shup



Divide and win Sikh farmers; artist’s mighty snub to govt

The Akali Dal-controlled Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee has announced that it will not be inviting Prime Minister Narendra Modi for Sikh centenary events in protest against the Centre’s “anti-farmer” stand but it has not stopped informal contacts between the government and Akali Dal leaders as both sides attempt to resolve the ongoing farmers’ stir. Akali Dal’s Rajya Sabha MP Naresh Gujral is said to have called up urban development minister Hardeep Puri recently to draw his attention to the number of Sikh farmers who have died in the last month and urged him to find an early solution to the protests. Mr Puri apparently showed no remorse and instead asked the Akali MP to ensure that the Leftists are kept out of the picture. The BJP is convinced that the protests are being led and managed by Left-leaning activists and cannot countenance dealing with or yielding to their demands. In any case, Mr Puri is also said to have told Mr Gujral that the Modi government has no intention of

repealing the farm laws but is willing to tweak certain clauses to provide a face-saver to the farmers.

As the only Sikh minister in the Modi government, Hardeep Puri has been fielded in the media regularly after farmers from Punjab and Haryana began their protest at the Delhi border. On his part, Mr Puri is doing his bit to appease and mollify the angry Sikh community. It was, therefore, not surprising that the minister made time last week, despite his hectic schedule, to release a coffee table book on the life and teachings of Guru Nanak Dev, authored by Harminder Kaur. Mr Puri later posted photographs of the release function held in his office with a short message mentioning the author’s name and that the paintings in the book were by artist Arpana Caur. However, Arpana Caur was missing from Mr Puri’s photographs. According to the grapevine, Ms Caur refused to attend in protest against the Modi government’s Central Vista redevelopment plans. Arpana Caur is among the large number of

artists, architects and conservationists who have petitioned the Centre against the demolition of the buildings housing the National Museum and the Indira Gandhi Centre National Centre for the Arts.

Stand-up comedian Munawar Faruqui, who was arrested recently in Indore for allegedly making indecent remarks against Hindu deities, seems to have fallen victim to longstanding rivalry between BJP leaders. Mr Faruqui was taken into custody following a complaint by Eklavya Singh Gaur, son of local BJP legislator Malini Laxman Singh Gaur, who is a camp follower of Sumitra Mahajan, former Lok Sabha Speaker and former Indore MP. Ms Mahajan is known to be a long-time rival of BJP general secretary Kailash Vijayvargiya, also from Indore. According to reports from Madhya Pradesh Eklavya Gaur had been chafing ever since Kailash Vijayvargiya’s son and BJP legislator Akash grabbed headlines last year when he beat up a civic body officer with a cricket bat,

Not only did he get away with it but the incident enhanced Akash’s political profile. Eklavya Gaur is hoping Mr Faruqui’s arrest will win him brownie points with the BJP bosses.

It would seem that the BJP is playing a cat-and-mouse game with former Congress leader Jyotiraditya Scindia, who joined the saffron party last March. After making him wait for nearly two months, Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan finally expanded his Cabinet last week and re-inducted two Scindia loyalists — Tulsiram Silawat and Govind Raju — in the ministry. While appeasing Mr Scindia, the chief minister was also quick to send out a message that the former Congress leader cannot dictate terms to him. Two days after the Cabinet expansion, the Chouhan government ordered the transfer of Commissioner, Gwalior Municipal Corporation, Sandeep Makin, known to be close to Mr Scindia. In fact, Mr Scindia has been so protective about Mr Makin that even Kamal Nath could not touch the officer despite several

attempts to move him out.

Though the election for the Congress president’s post is yet to be announced and there is no formal word from Rahul Gandhi about his future plans, it is being assumed that the Nehru-Gandhi scion will return as party chief again. Word to this effect is doing the rounds in the Congress. Consequently, everyone, including senior Congress leaders, has started courting Rahul Gandhi’s team members. There is no “Ahmed Patel” in his office but Kaushal Vidyarthi is among those who is said to be a member of the Congress leader’s core team. It is, therefore, not surprising that he is much in demand with the Congress leaders who vie to get a word with him. One leader went as far as to suggest that Mr Vidyarthi’s role in Rahul Gandhi’s office can be compared to that of R.K. Dawhan and V. George in the offices of Indira Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi, respectively.

Anita Katyal is a Delhi-based journalist

SHORT TAKES

EASTER ATTACKS:
U.S. CHARGES 3
SRI LANKANS

Washington, Jan. 9: The US has charged three Sri Lankan nationals for allegedly being part of a group of ISIS supporters responsible for the 2019 Easter attacks. Mohamed Nufar, Mohamed Anwar Mohamed Riskan and Ahamed Milhan Hayathu Moahmed are currently in custody in Sri Lanka.

The criminal case was filed on December 11, in the US District Court in Los Angeles. Nufar, the "second emir" for the group of ISIS supporters that called itself "ISIS in Sri Lanka" who allegedly led the group's propaganda efforts, recruited others to join ISIS and led a series of multi-day military-type trainings.

Riskan allegedly helped manufacture the IEDs used in the Easter Attacks, and Moahmed allegedly executed a police officer in order to obtain the officer's firearm, shot a suspected informant, and scouted a location for a separate terrorist attack.

INTEL OFFICIAL
'HURT' AFTER
OUSTER BY DON

Washington, Jan. 9: The ousted inspector general of the intelligence community says he is "disappointed and saddened" that President Donald Trump fired him, but he also encouraged other inspectors general to continue to speak out when they are aware of wrongdoing.

Trump notified Congress late Friday evening that he intended to fire Michael Atkinson because he had lost confidence in him. On Saturday, Trump made it clear that the move had been retaliatory, telling reporters that Atkinson was a "disgrace" and had done "a terrible job" because he had provided an anonymous whistleblower complaint to Congress — a move that was required by law.

Atkinson was required by law to notify Congress of the complaint, which was written by an anonymous intelligence official and detailed Trump's pressure on Ukraine to investigate Democrats.

GOOGLE BANS
PARLER FROM
PLAY STORE

Washington, Jan. 9: Internet giant Google has suspended US-based microblogging platform Parler — where most of the supporters of outgoing President Donald Trump are shifting their base — from its app store, citing posts inciting violence and demanding "robust" moderation for "egregious" content from the social networking service.

Simultaneously, Apple also warned Parler on Friday that it will ban the service from its app store if it doesn't start to moderate its content better.

The move by the two Silicon Valley companies came the day when Twitter permanently suspended Trump's account due to "risk of further incitement of violence".

"In order to protect user safety on Google Play, our longstanding policies require that apps displaying user-generated content have moderation policies and enforcement that removes egregious content like spots that incite violence," Google said in a statement.

FBI SEARCHES
LAWMAKERS'
OFFICES, HOMES

Nashville, Jan. 9: Federal prosecutors in Tennessee have said that FBI agents have searched the homes and offices of several state lawmakers.

US Attorney's Office of Middle Tennessee spokesman David Boling on Friday confirmed the searches included the homes of former GOP House Speaker Glen Casada, state Rep. Robin Smith and Casada's former chief of staff, Cade Cothren. The office of Republican Rep. Todd Warner also was searched, according to House Speaker Cameron Sexton.

Boling declined to provide any further information regarding the nature of the searches and how many lawmakers were involved.

A spokesman for the FBI referred all questions to the US Attorney's Office. Republican Gov. Bill Lee told reporters Friday that he had spoken to Sexton, a Republican from Crossville, about the searches, describing them as "FBI raids."

"It's certainly very concerning. I know very little about that. There's been no FBI outreach to us," Lee said.

15 charged over
Capitol violence

Legal action against Trump demanded

Washington, Jan. 9: The US Justice Department announced Friday that it has charged 15 people involved in the assault on Congress, including one man accused of possessing bombs made to act like "homemade napalm." But Ken Kohl, a federal prosecutor with the Washington US attorney's office, said they did not expect to charge anyone with "incitement" or "insurrection" in Wednesday's violence, amid calls for legal action against President Donald Trump, his lawyer Rudy Giuliani and others for encouraging it.

The department unveiled the cases against 13 people, including Richard Barnett, a Trump supporter who invaded the office of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, and Lonnie Coffman of Alabama, who was found carrying two handguns and had 11 Styrofoam-enhanced Molotov cocktails in his truck.

Others whose charges were unsealed include Christopher Albert of Maryland, who allegedly entered the US Capitol with a loaded handgun; and Mark Leffingwell, charged with punching an officer. Most of the 13 were charged with illegal entry into restricted buildings of Congress, and violent or disorderly conduct.

They were also charged with impeding government functions after forcing the shutdown of a joint meeting of Congress to officially certify that Trump rival Joe Biden had won the November 3 election, which Trump had until Thursday refused to accept. Barnett, famously photographed with his feet on a desk in Pelosi's office, was charged with theft of stationery.

"The lawless destruction of the US Capitol building was an attack against one of our nation's greatest institutions," said Acting US Attorney Michael Sherwin in a statement.

Kohl said that not all the charges filed over Wednesday's violence had been unsealed, and that more were in the pipeline as the FBI investigates.

"This investigation has the highest priority," he said, with "hundreds" of Justice Department investigators working the case.

Around 40 people were arrested and charged by

Don impeachment
is for Congress to
decide: Biden

Wilmington, Jan. 9: President-elect Joe Biden on Friday strongly indicated he does not back moves to impeach President Donald Trump, saying the quickest way to get him out of office is through the transition in two weeks. "The quickest way that will happen is us being sworn in on the 20th," said Biden, who will take the oath of office on January 20.

"What actually happens before or after, that is a judgment for the Congress to make. But that's what I am looking forward to: him leaving office."

The President-elect was addressing reporters in his hometown of Wilmington two days after Trump encouraged a mob of supporters to march on Congress.

Democratic leaders in Congress have growing momentum for attempting to impeach Trump for the second time in his

presidency. There is little support so far among Republicans, although they too have loudly condemned Trump's behaviour.

This was Biden's first extended reaction to the talk of impeaching Trump or trying to persuade Vice President Mike Pence to invoke the 25th amendment removing the president from office.

Biden's hesitancy to support his party on impeachment reflects the fact that he already faces a mammoth task in working to heal divisions in US society.

"We're going to do our job and Congress can decide how to proceed," Biden said.

"The idea that I think he shouldn't be out of office yesterday is not an issue. The question is what happens with 14 days to go, 13 days left to go?"

— AFP

POLICE UNION
HEAD SORRY FOR
DEFENDING MOB

Chicago, Jan. 9: The president of the Chicago Police officers' union apologised for defending the pro-Trump mob that stormed the US Capitol and downplaying this week's violence that left four people dead. In a statement posted on Facebook on Friday, John Catanzara, called his "poorly worded" comments made during an interview with WBEZ, Chicago's public radio station, a lapse in judgment. "I certainly would never justify any attacks on citizens, democracy or law enforcement," he wrote.

In the initial comments, he characterised participants as supporters of the president who believed that the election had been stolen.

— AP

Indo-American Sabrina
is Harris' Dy Press Secy

Washington, Jan. 9: Indian-American Sabrina Singh would serve as Deputy Press Secretary to the Vice President in the White House, according to an announcement made by the Biden-Harris Transition. Singh was Press Secretary to Vice President-elect Kamala Harris on the Biden-Harris campaign. Prior to her role on the campaign, she served as senior spokesperson for Mike Bloomberg's presidential campaign and National Press Secretary for Cory Booker's presidential campaign.

She previously served as deputy communications director for the Democratic National Committee, spokesperson for American Bridge's Trump War Room and Regional

Communications Director on Hillary Clinton's 2016 presidential campaign.

Singh was also worked at SKDKnickerbocker, served as Communications Director for Representative Jan Schakowsky and worked at various Democratic committees, said the Biden-Harris Transition as it announced additional members of the Vice President's Office at the White House.

Prominent among them being Yael Belkind, Assistant to the Chief of Staff to the Vice President; Vincent Evans as Deputy Director of the Office of Public Engagement and Intergovernmental Affairs; Michael Fuchs as Deputy Chief of Staff; Kate Childs Graham as Director of Speech Writing and Dr Ike

Irby as Policy Advisor to the Vice President.

Deanne Millison has been named Deputy Policy Director to the Vice President; Rachel Palermo as Assistant Press Secretary; Mike Pyle as Chief Economic Advisor; Peter Velz as Director of Press Operations; and Herbie Ziskend as Deputy Communications Director.

These diverse, experienced, and talented individuals will join the Office of the Vice President. The appointments demonstrate that the president and vice president-elect are building an administration that looks like America and is ready to deliver results for the American people on day one, the transition said.

— PTI

Twitter permanently bans Don

San Francisco, Jan. 9: Twitter said Friday it has permanently suspended President Donald Trump's account, citing the risk of further violence following the assault on the US Capitol by his supporters.

"After close review of recent Tweets from the @realDonaldTrump account," Twitter said in a blog post explaining its decision, "we have permanently suspended the account due to the risk of further incitement of violence." Twitter — Trump's favourite megaphone — blocked him for 12 hours after the deadly attack on the US Capitol on Wednesday and threatened permanent suspension if he continued breaking its rules.

Trump returned to Twitter late Thursday, posting a video message that seemed aimed at calming tensions after the mayhem

MY SUPPORT BASE, MYSELF WON'T
BE SILENCED: TRUMP AFTER BAN

Washington, Jan. 9: Outgoing US President Donald Trump has slammed Twitter for permanently suspending him, vowing that he and his support base would not be silenced. The unprecedented move by the California-based microblogging site on Friday comes after Trump tweeted that he would not attend the inauguration of his successor Joe Biden on January 20.

At the time of suspension, Trump had 88.7 million followers and followed 51 people. In a statement

after he was banned, Trump said: "I predicted this would happen. We have been negotiating with various other sites, and will have a big announcement soon, while we also look at the possibilities of building out our own platform in the near future. We will not be SILENCED!"

"Twitter is not about FREE SPEECH. They are all about promoting a Radical Left platform where some of the most vicious people in the world are allowed to speak freely."

— PTI

caused by his supporters. He acknowledged his presidency was ending and promised a smooth transition to Joe Biden, although he did not go so far as to congratulate or even say the name of his successor.

Twitter said at the time it was continuing to watch Trump's social media activity to determine whether further action was needed.

The decision to suspend Trump's account came after a pair of tweets on Friday, according to the one-to-many messaging platform. In one of the tweets, Trump vowed that none of his supporters would be "disrespected," and in another, he said he would not be attending Biden's inauguration on January 20, as is customary. "These two Tweets must be read in the context of broader events in the country and the ways in which the President's statements can be mobilised by different audiences, including to incite violence, as well as in the context of the pattern of behaviour from this account in recent weeks," Twitter said.

— AFP



People queue for being tested for Covid-19 outside a municipal building on Saturday in Bagneux, a southern suburb of Paris, where a risk cluster of the mutant Coronavirus variant have been detected.

— AFP

China WHO trip: No timeline

'Act like you have
got it' drive in UK

Beijing, Jan. 9: China is ready to receive a WHO expert team to probe the origin of Covid-19 and has reached a consensus with the UN's top health agency, a senior Chinese official said on Saturday, but gave no specific timeline for the visit.

The exact time when the WHO expert team will arrive in Wuhan, where the virus emerged in December last, and investigate into the coronavirus origin is still under negotiation, Zeng Yixin, deputy head of the National Health Commission, said. China and the World Health Organisation have reached a consensus on specific arrangements of the investigation with four video conferences, Zeng was quoted as saying by state-run Global Times.

Chinese experts are waiting for their WHO counterparts, he said. Once the WHO experts complete their procedures and finalise the schedule, Chinese experts will go to Wuhan with them to conduct the probe, Zeng was quoted as saying by the state-run Xinhua news agency.

Zeng stressed that China's position on the WHO investigation is positive, open and supportive, and the country hopes such joint efforts would help deepen the understanding of the virus and better prevent infectious diseases in the future. In a rare instance of criticism from the global body, WHO chief

London, Jan. 9: The UK government on Saturday began rolling out a series of stark advertisements as part of a new awareness drive that warns people to "Act like you've got it" because anyone can spread Coronavirus, especially the new highly transmissible variant that has seen hospitals being overwhelmed with Covid-19 patients.

The campaign — made up of television, radio and newspaper adverts as well as a social media blitz — comes as the latest daily death toll from the deadly virus hit a new peak of 1,325 deaths and infections rose to 68,053 cases. Around one in three people infected with the virus do not have any symptoms and could therefore be passing it on without realising, according to the government's messaging.

UK PM Boris Johnson took to social media to urge people to strictly follow the stay-at-home lockdown as the disease continues to spread at an "alarming rate". "Our hospitals are under more pressure than at any other time since the start of the pandemic, and infection rates continue to soar at an alarming rate," he said in a Twitter statement.

"The vaccine rollout has given us renewed hope, but it's critical for now we stay at home, protect the NHS and save lives," he said. The warnings came a day after London Mayor Sadiq Khan declared a "major incident" in the UK capital because the coronavirus cases are "out of control" as latest figures revealed the infection rate in London has exceeded 1,000 per 100,000 people.

— PTI

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, often accused of being pro-China, in a media conference in Geneva on Tuesday had expressed disappointment over China not finalising the necessary permissions for the experts team's arrival. "I'm very disappointed with this news, given that

two members had already begun their journeys and others were not able to travel at the last minute, but had been in contact with senior Chinese officials," he said. Tedros said he "made it clear" that the mission was a priority for the UN health agency.

— PTI

Washington, Jan. 9: The United States hit a new record for Coronavirus cases Friday, notching nearly 290,000 in a span of 24 hours, according to a real-time tally by Johns Hopkins University.

The country, the hardest hit in the world by the Covid-19 pandemic, also recorded 3,676 virus deaths in the same day, the Baltimore-based university said.

The day before, the US had recorded a record of nearly 4,000 deaths in 24 hours. Some 131,000 people are currently hospitalized in the US for Covid-19, according to the Covid Tracking Project.

The world's largest economy has recorded 21.8 million Coronavirus cases and more than 368,000 deaths since the start of the pandemic.

The country, where health restrictions vary drastically between localities, is ultimately counting on a massive vaccination campaign begun in mid-December to bring the health crisis to an end.

But the effort is running behind, with just under six million people having received the first of two injections in the country of 330 million.

— AFP

Court: Nab Masood
Azhar by Jan. 18

Lahore, Jan. 9: UN designated global terrorist Masood Azhar, chief of the banned Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), should be arrested by January 18 in connection with a terror financing case, an anti-terrorism court in Pakistan has asked the Punjab Police, a court official said on Saturday.

The Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) Gujranwala issued an arrest warrant against Azhar in the terror financing case instituted by the CTD in the previous hearing on Thursday. ATC Gujranwala

judge Natasha Naseem Supra directed the case hearing on Friday directed the CTD to arrest JeM chief Masood Azhar by January 18 and present him in the court. In case of failure (to arrest him), the court may begin proceedings to declare him a proclaimed offender.

Following the Palwama terror attack in February 2019, Pakistan's Punjab police had launched a crackdown on terrorism financing and arrested six militants of the JeM in Gujranwala, some 130 kms from Lahore.

— PTI

WINTRY | WEATHER

Storm Filomena leaves many areas under a white blanket

Spain sees heaviest snowfall in 50 yrs

Madrid, Jan. 9: Heavy snow continued to fall across much of Spain on Friday, causing chaos on the roads, particularly in the centre of the country, with the capital Madrid seeing its heaviest snowfall in 50 years.

By nightfall, the extreme weather brought by Storm Filomena had left many areas under a deep blanket of white in a rare bout of wintry weather not seen in decades to the Iberian peninsula.

As the snow showed no signs of letting up, Madrid's

Barajas airport halted all incoming and outgoing flights. "For safety reasons, operations have been stopped at #Airport AS #Madrid-#Barajas, until visibility is improved. The work to clear the runways continues in order to resume operations as soon as possible #BorrascaFilomena," it tweeted.

The blizzard also caused havoc on the roads, with nearly 400 affected across Spain and hundreds of vehicles stranded in the snow and ice.

The worst-hit regions

were Castilla La Mancha, Valencia and Madrid, with the capital seeing its heaviest snowfall since 1971, Spain's public television said. Hours of intense snow which was still falling by 2100 GMT cut off the city's two main ringroads, the M30 and the M40, and a red alert was declared in the city centre where police struggled to help people stranded in vehicles.

The transport authority said the snow had disrupted traffic on almost 400 main roads, where in

many cases lorries and heavy goods vehicles were unable to pass, while many roads were only passable with snow chains.

On the secondary road network, more than 50 roads were impassable and around 170 roads required chains. And hundreds of lorry drivers were held up across the country.

The AEMET weather agency described the situation as "exceptional and most likely historic".

Earlier in the day, children in Madrid could be seen hurling snowballs or

playing under snow-covered palm trees, while others snapped photos of the rare whiteout which began in earnest the day after Spain celebrated King's Day — or Epiphany.

AEMET had earlier warned another 20 centimetres (eight inches) of snow was expected in Madrid, the high central plains and the nearby mountain ranges, which could rise to 50 centimetres in higher areas. High-speed trains between Madrid and Valencia were cancelled.

— AFP

OUR CRITIC'S RATING

Outstanding ★★★★★ | Great ★★★★ | Good ★★★ | Okay ★★ | Poor ★ | Truly Terrible TT

Soul joins mid-life crisis, jazz fantasia

Soul

CAST: Jamie Foxx, Tina Fey, Questlove, Phylicia Rashad, Daveed Diggs, Angela Bassett, Graham Norton, Rachel House, Alice Braga, Richard Ayoade

DIRECTOR: Peter Doster

RATING: ★★★★★

Streaming on: Disney + Hotstar

Peter Doster's "Soul" features stairway-to-heaven visions of the afterlife, a pre-birth "before" realm where souls are glowing turquoise orbs and an in-between spiritual realm trafficked by some kind of psychedelic pirate. And yet, kind of magically, it's about "just regular old living."

Pixar may have started simple with talking toys, but their concepts have grown increasingly elaborate over the years, giving abstract shape to interior consciousness ("Inside Out"), brightening a peopled world of the dead ("Coco") and conjuring a mythical suburban land with a father's half-resurrected body ("Onward"). "Soul" is a step further, again: a grand metaphysical whatsit — a mid-life crisis movie, a New York jazz fantasia and a body-swap comedy, all in one.

Part of the fun, of late, with Pixar's more ambitious movies is following a plate-spinning act that juggles animation whimsy, kids-movie imperatives and the meaning of life in some seemingly impossible combination that nevertheless in the end makes us cry. You can imagine a Pixar Mad Libs coming up with a movie about hamsters in space that's really about graduating high school, or one with unicorn cousins who learn to cope with trauma.

But part of what's refreshing about "Soul," which debuts Friday on Disney+, is its uniqueness. It's a deliberate and over-



due new direction for Pixar. The animation giant's 23rd film, "Soul" is its first to feature a Black protagonist. Kemp Powers, the screenwriter of the upcoming "One Night in Miami," is also Pixar's first African American co-director. The film is lushly set in a sun-dappled Manhattan. You will even hear, for a moment, A Tribe Called Quest playing in the background of a barbershop. For an animation world that has almost always been colored white, this borders on radical. It's also joyous.

Joe (Jamie Foxx) is a middle-school music teacher who has

long pined for his own career as a jazz pianist. On the day his big shot finally comes — a chance to sit in with the revered saxophonist Dorothea Williams (Angela Bassett) and her quartet — a stray step into an open manhole robs him of his dream. With his body laying comatose in a hospital, Joe's soul lands in a netherworld — and Pixar's animating ingenuity goes into overdrive. Faced with an escalator to The Great Beyond reminiscent of Powell and Pressburger's magnificent "A Matter of Life and Death," Joe runs the other way and drops into The Great Before — a soft, pastel-colored purgato-

ry where nascent souls find their "spark" before plunging to Earth. It's a rolling, blue-hued land of mentorship, overseen by benevolent figures elegantly outlined in Picasso-like two-dimension.

Not everything is perfect in The Great Before. Some souls struggle to find their spark. Joe, posing as a Swedish psychologist to elude capture, is assigned to mentor number 22 (Tina Fey), a problem child who's already cycled through everyone from Mother Teresa to Muhammad Ali looking for her spark, her purpose.

It's the elusiveness of purpose that "Soul" swirls around, ten-

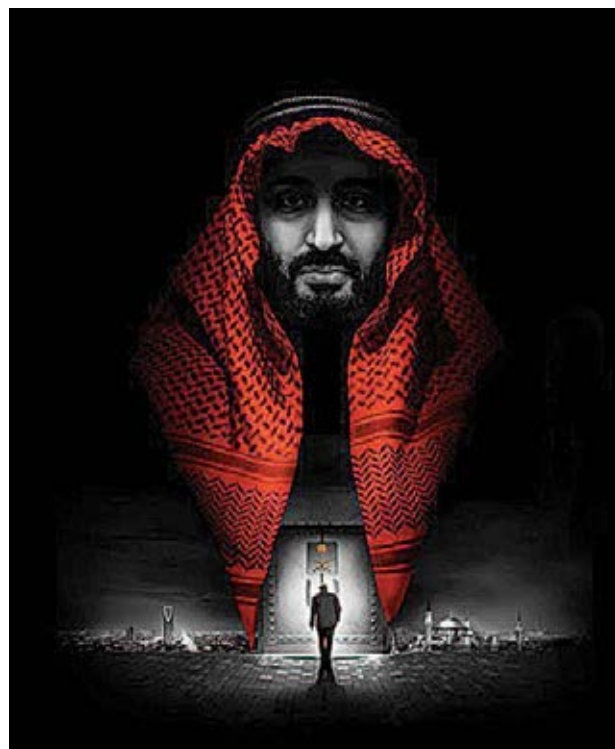
derly examining what gives life meaning. For some, it might come as easily as the notes that pour out of Dorothea's sax. (The jazz scenes, courtesy of Jon Batiste, are brilliantly transpositive, part of the film's rich musical life, as scored by Trent Reznor and Atticus Ross.) But even as "Soul" rhapsodizes the beauty of artistic creation, it ponders the value of life for souls of less premeditated determination. "Soul," a celebration of those less certain of their path in life, is a kind of corollary to Pixar's "Ratatouille," a portrait of a very purposeful young artist.

This comes through not just in 22's journey but Joe's too, as he tries desperately to return to his life and realize his long-held ambition. In the end, Joe may remind some of Burt Lancaster's Archibald "Moonlight" Graham in "Field of Dreams," another who returns from beyond to get another swing at an unrealized dream — and in doing so only realizes how good he had it, in the first place.

But the meaning of "Soul" also comes through in the pointillist realism of Pixar. As delightful as its imagery of the afterlife is, the best stuff might be back on Earth. It would spoil things to say too much, but Joe and 22 land back in New York in a body-swap twist that includes a therapy cat. Not all of this works, in the end: "Soul" is seeking such a high plane of sublimity that it's sometimes forcing Pixar-styled transcendence a little too much.

But the landscapes of "Soul" are full of life. City streets team with it. This is, undoubtedly, the best the Manhattan subway has ever looked. Little joys — pepperoni pizza, lollipops, helicopter seeds spiraling to the ground — steadily accumulate. And "Soul" turns out to be not an exploration of the afterlife but a wondrous whirligig of daily life.

— AP



The Dissident is essential viewing

It's hard to decide what's most shocking in "The Dissident," Bryan Fogel's urgent, gripping new documentary about the horrific murder of Saudi columnist Jamal Khashoggi.

Of course, there are the terrifying details of the killing itself, chillingly recounted here through transcripts of recordings from the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, Turkey, where Khashoggi was suffocated and dismembered with a bone saw. A few examples: The transcripts note laughter as the murderers strategized in advance how they'd dismember the body, pondering whether the hips would fit into a bag. And later, a Turkish official tells us, the killers ordered 70 pounds of meat from a well-known Istanbul restaurant, presumably "to mask the smell of a burning corpse."

Then there are the detailed revelations from Omar Abdulaziz, a young associate of Khashoggi's, about the extent of the regime's efforts to silence its critics, including the torture of his own younger brother and the arrest of more than 20 of his friends back in Saudi Arabia. And the descriptions of extensive Saudi hacking efforts, including the infiltration of the cellphone of Amazon founder Jeff Bezos.

Then there's this stark statement at the end of the film: "To date there have been no global sanctions or punishment against Saudi Arabia for the murder of Jamal Khashoggi."

If "The Dissident" were a fictional thriller rather than a documentary, one can imagine a studio head asking the screenwriters to perhaps tone down the grisly details, for the sake of plausibility.

But it's all too real, and Fogel, who won an Oscar for his previous film, "Icarus," about sports doping in Russia, doesn't hesitate to go bold. This is not a dry film: Fogel employs pounding music at tense moments, and uses lively graphics and dramatic flourishes like a CGI battle between flies and bees to illustrate a Twitter propaganda war. But it does not feel superfluous.

Rather, it feels passionate: Fogel is dedicated to making sure the world remains focused on Khashoggi's story. Unfortunately, his task is harder than it should be. Despite deserved rave reviews at the Sundance Film Festival, the major streaming services did not step forward to acquire the film — including Netflix, for which Fogel won the Oscar. It was eventually acquired last spring by independent distributor Briarcliff Entertainment, and is available on demand this week.

The film operates on several simultaneous tracks as it unfurls the tragic tale. One track follows Abdulaziz, the young Saudi dissident who serves almost as a narrator — and moral conscience — to the story.

We learn not only about Abdulaziz's risky public campaign against the Saudi regime and the repercussions he's already suffered, but about his secret collaboration with Khashoggi and how their work together may have sealed the elder man's fate. We learn that in the days preceding the murder, the two men were collaborating on an elaborate social media campaign to fight Saudi propaganda.

Another track traces the event itself, starting with poignant security footage of Khashoggi leaving his apartment building hand in hand with his fiancée, Hatice Cengiz, and hailing a cab to the consulate. We then see him stride into the building, never to depart again. We soon hear from those shocking transcripts.

Fogel brings in a wide array of voices, from Khashoggi's fellow journalists and friends to prosecutors, intelligence officials and technology experts. Agnes Callamard, the U.N. Special Rapporteur on the case, doesn't hide her shock when she describes listening to recordings of the killings, and demands an investigation into the role of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the powerful Saudi heir widely accused of directing the assassination, which he denies.

Then there's the most emotional voice: Cengiz, who waited for a dozen hours outside the consulate on the fateful day. She shares affectionate voice mails and smiling selfies documenting her courtship with the Washington Post columnist who, when she met him at a conference in May 2018, struck her with "how lonely he looked." (Khashoggi, a former regime insider, had been forced to leave his homeland and his family behind as he became a target of the regime.)

Cengiz shows us the La-Z-Boy chair Khashoggi bought to furnish their home, a chair that made him inordinately happy. Later, when she returns to the apartment after his death, she sits quietly in that chair, stroking its arm. She asks police where his belongings are. They apologize that they needed them for the investigation. It all feels very immediate and raw.

"I still wonder when all of this will end, when I will be a normal person again," she says. "I don't know."

Cengiz said this week that she hopes this film "will keep alive Jamal's name and Jamal's life and his values." Filmgoers can help by simply finding and watching the movie. It should be required viewing for anyone who cares about free speech and democracy.

— AP



The Dissident

DIRECTOR: Bryan Fogel

RATING: ★★★★★

Available online, on demand

A spirited drama of abuse and resilience

Herself

CAST: Molly McCann, Clare Dunne, Ruby Rose O'Hara, Ian Lloyd Anderson, Shadaan Falfeli

DIRECTOR: Phyllida Lloyd

RATING: ★★

Streaming on: Amazon Prime

Phyllida Lloyd's "Herself," an Irish drama of spousal abuse set against Dublin's housing crisis, has some narrative weak spots but its foundation of resilience and heart is strong.

Previous forays into film by Lloyd, a veteran theater director, have been more elaborate, starker affairs ("Mamma Mia!") "The Iron Lady"). But "Herself" is a smaller, neo-realistic and often stirring story about Sandra (Clare Dunne, who co-wrote the script with Malcolm Campbell), a mother of two daughters (Molly McCann, Ruby Rose O'Hara) and the wife of a monstrous brute, Gary (Ian Lloyd Anderson).

Some of the major beats in "Herself" verge on cliché but everything in between rings true thanks to Dunne's steadfast performance and the film's delicate sense of humanity. The film begins almost immediately with the ruthless beating of Sandra by Gary. It's an anguishing scene, of course, though one, given its blunt timing in the film, divorced from any connection to the characters. Still, Lloyd from the start keeps the camera's focus on the connection between Sandra and her young girls, whom she sends running as soon as Gary comes home.

The bond between Sandra and daughters — both of whom are far more natural than most children seen in movies — is the abiding through line of "Herself," as is Sandra's determi-

nation to find a safe home for her children. Housing a n d home-



lessness has been a problem in Ireland in recent years, and it's not uncommon for those needing public housing to be put up in hotels for months or even years.

When Sandra approaches the housing authority, which places her in a hotel, "Herself" verges on the kind of social realism Ken Loach specializes in. Sandra

comes up with a novel pitch: If she builds her own house from a kit costing about \$50,000, she'll actually cost the government less money.

Sandra, a waitress at a pub, finds an unlikely benefactor in a physician she helps care for (a very good Harriet Walter) who offers a backyard as a plot. Through pluck and community, Sandra assembles a small, improvising crew of helpers, led by a reluctant but kindly contractor named Aldo (Conleth Hill, also very fine). A warm spirit of neighborly goodwill grows as everyone pitches in, which Aldo attributes to the Irish the old Irish term of "meitheal."

That may sound like a feel-good, made-for-the-movies tale, and "Herself" does indeed conjure an air of fable. But the film, earthy and sober, refuses to be carried aloft by sentiment, instead navigating a difficult and painful path toward self-preservation and renewal.

— AP

Vanessa Kirby is raw, dynamic

Pieces of a Woman

CAST: Vanessa Kirby, Shia LaBeouf, Molly Parker, Sara Snook, Ellen Burstyn

DIRECTOR: Kornél Mundruczó

RATING: ★★★★★

Streaming on: Netflix

"Pieces of a Woman" begins with a tragedy. Martha (Vanessa Kirby) is expecting her first child with her partner Sean (Shia LaBeouf). For a few minutes, we see them in the final stages of preparation for life with a baby: She's saying farewell to her co-workers and packing up her things; Her mother is signing the papers on a practical minivan; And they're hanging the final photos up in the well-stocked and tastefully neutral nursery.

Then, suddenly, Martha is in labor and for almost 30 minutes the audience is given a front row seat to the most realistic and graphic depiction of a home birth ever put on film. It's a difficult labor — Martha is almost drunk with pain — and it's made even more stressful by the fact that their midwife is unavailable and a replacement is sent. Then it ends in death.

It is a brutal and harrowing start to a film that is committed to telling the ugly truth about a loss so devastating that it's almost taboo. And it's just one of many deeply unpleasant occurrences to come. Like Martha and Sean, you are left somewhat paralyzed and drained after the events of the beginning and have no



choice but to continue this emotionally wrenching and hauntingly visceral journey with them.

Martha attempts to go about her life but is constantly being reminded of what happened, whether it's seeing children out in the wild, running into her mother's friend at the grocery store or all the physical postpartum changes that one's body endures regardless of whether or not the child has survived. She's also navigating her own family's grief, arguments over burials and epitaphs and a legal battle against the substitute midwife (Molly

Parker), which is thankfully relegated to the backdrop.

Kirby, the English actor who portrayed Princess Margaret in the first seasons of "The Crown," plays Martha not as a wilting flower but as a kind of steely, determined robot alternating between utterly detached and aggressively angry. It is fiercely unguarded.

If the gutting discomfort feels more authentic than you're used to, it's because the story is personal for the writer and director couple. Kata Weber wrote the script based on her own experience losing

a child with director Kornél Mundruczó during pregnancy. And "Pieces of a Woman" goes places that many films wouldn't dare. The first half hour will likely get most of the attention but there are a few other jaw-dropping scenes of grief and anger that you must see to believe including a late film argument between Martha and her mother, who is played by Ellen Burstyn.

Aside from the revelatory moments, however, the film unravels a bit as it goes on. The focus turns too often to Sean, a construction worker whose relationship with Martha, an educated professional from a wealthy family, never makes a lot of sense.

His descent is a bundle of clichés and distracts from the uniqueness of Martha's story. He also has a moment of sexual aggression with Martha that is even made even more troublesome to watch in light of the recent allegations against LaBeouf.

But it doesn't detract from Kirby's achievement here. Hers is an unforgettable vulnerable performance that deserves attention and consideration this awards season. The same also goes for Burstyn in a difficult supporting role that she commands.

This movie will not be for everyone, but it is important not least because it continues to advance the discourse around miscarriages which is a trauma that couples, but mainly women, have been expected to shoulder in secret for far too long. The ending won't be satisfying either, but that's probably the point. There is often no satisfying end to tragic loss, just survival.

— AP

SHORT TAKES

Liverpool survive scare in FA Cup

Birmingham: They were given pre-match odds of 90-1 by some British bookmakers. Some of them were dropped off at the stadium ahead of the game by their mothers and fathers. A bunch of new jerseys needed to be printed before kickoff on Friday, adding rarely seen squad numbers up to 76 for the teenagers who, at late notice, were about to play for Aston Villa against the superstars of English champions Liverpool in the FA Cup. Imagine the widespread disbelief, then, when Villa's kids defied grim predictions by reaching halftime of the supposed third-round mismatch at 1-1 against the best team in the country. As expected, Liverpool pulled clear in the second half, but there was little to really celebrate from the 4-1 win at an empty Villa Park. — AP

Karlovic 2nd oldest to win on ATP Tour

Miami: Ivo Karlovic of Croatia became the oldest player to win an ATP Tour match in a quarter-century, hitting 27 aces night to beat No. 7-seeded Pablo Andujar of Spain 6-3, 5-7, 6-4 in the first round of the Delray Beach Open. Karlovic, who turns 42 next month, is the oldest to win on the top men's tour since Jimmy Connors at age 42 in 1995. The victory was the veteran's first since last February. No. 8 seed Frances Tiafoe defeated fellow American Donald Young 6-3, 6-4. Qualifier Roberto Quiroz overcame a shaky stretch in the first set to beat American Noah Rubin 7-6 (1), 6-3. Quiroz led 5-3, lost serve twice and then rallied, dominating the tiebreaker. — AP

East Bengal add to BFC's misery

Margao: Matti Steinmann's first-half strike proved to be the difference as SC East Bengal beat Bengaluru FC 1-0 to record their second win of the Indian Super League here on Saturday. The Kolkata team are now unbeaten in their last five games, while BFC's misery continued with their fourth consecutive defeat this season. Erik Paartalu returned to the Bengaluru starting XI after serving his one-match suspension as Naushad Moosa made four changes in his first game as interim coach. While Udanta Singh was also in the first XI, Moosa handed first start to the defenders Parag Srivas and Ajith Kumar. SCEB made just one change with Jacques Maghoma replacing Aaron Amadi-Holloway. — PTI

Mohammedan off to winning start

Kolkata: Ali Faisal's second-half strike helped newly-promoted Mohammedan Sporting beat debutants Sudeva Delhi FC 1-0 as the I-League season got underway here on Saturday. Faisal's 58th-minute goal proved to be the difference between the two sides in a match that could have gone either way. In a cagey first half, both teams appeared to be gauging each other's strengths without exposing themselves to counter-attacks. — PTI

Live on TV

CRICKET

Australia vs India: Third Test — Day Five from 5 am (Monday) on Sony Six, Ten 1, HD

Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy T20 Tournament: Jharkhand vs Tamil Nadu from 11:55 am; Assam vs Hyderabad from 6:55 pm on Star Sports 1, HD

FOOTBALL

Indian Super League: Chennaiyin vs Odisha from 4:50 pm; Jamshedpur vs Kerala Blasters from 7:20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

FA Cup: Chelsea vs Morecambe from 7 pm on Sony Ten 1; Manchester City vs Birmingham City from 7 pm; Marine vs Tottenham Hotspur from 10:30 pm on Sony Ten 2.

Italian League: Roma vs Inter Milan from 5 pm on Sony Ten 2; Juventus vs Sassuolo from 1:15 am (Monday) on Sony Ten 1, HD

GOLF

PGA Tour: Sentry Tournament of Champions from 2:30 am (Monday) on Eurosport, HD

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SLOW & UNSTEADY

Pujara's slowest Test 50 derails visitors momentum

Sydney, Jan. 9: Cheteshwar Pujara's singular lack of intent pushed an injury-ravaged India into a deep hole as Australia tightened the noose with a substantial 197-run lead on a forgettable Saturday for the visitors in the third Test here. Pujara's slowest Test half-century, a painstaking 50 off 176 balls, was soon followed by India being bowled out for 244 on the third day with the other batsmen feeling tremendous pressure of a dormant scoreboard. A first-innings lead of 94 runs provided by the bowlers and some good fielding did help Australia's cause. By stumps, Steve Smith (29 batting) and Marnus Labuschagne (47 batting) gave an exhibition of how to bat on slow tracks with Australia reaching 103/2. Labuschagne, in particu-

SCORECARD	
Australia 1st Innings 338	
India 1st Innings (overnight 96/2): Rohit Sharma c and b Hazlewood 26, Shubman Gill c Green b Cummins 50, Cheteshwar Pujara c Paine b Cummins 50, Ajinkya Rahane b Cummins 22, Hanuma Vihari run out 4, Rishabh Pant c Warner b Hazlewood 36, Ravindra Jadeja run out 28, R. Ashwin run out 1, Navdeep Saini c Wade b Starc 3, Bumrah run out 0, Mohammed Siraj c Paine b Cummins 6. Extras (lb-2, w-5, nb-2) 9. Total (In 100.4 overs) 244. FoW: 70-1, 85-2, 117-3, 142-4, 195-5, 195-6, 206-7, 210-8, 216-9. Bowling: Starc 19-76-1-1, Hazlewood 21-10-43-2, Cummins 21-4-10-29-4, Lyon 31-68-7-0, Labuschagne 3-0-11-0, Green 5-1-11-0. Australia 2nd Innings: David Warner lbw Ashwin 15, Will Pucovski c (sub)W Saha b Siraj 10, Marnus Labuschagne batting 47, Steven Smith batting 29. Extras (lb-1, nb-3) 4. Total (For 2 wkts, in 29 Overs) 103. FoW: 1-16, 2-35. Bowling: Jasprit Bumrah 8-1-26-0, Mohammed Siraj 8-2-20-1, Navdeep Saini 7-1-28-0, Ravichandran Ashwin 6-0-28-1.	

lar, showed how to bat positively on a dead track hitting six boundaries in 67 balls. As Shane Warne pointed out during commentary, it would be very difficult to chase any score in excess of 250 with variable bounce and the odd balls keeping low. Pat Cummins (4/29 in

Rishabh Pant and Ravindra Jadeja — were hit on the left elbow and left thumb respectively. Earlier, Pujara's ultra-defensive approach put tremendous pressure on his colleagues and India never quite got the momentum going as Cummins, Hazlewood and Starc continuously attacked the batsmen — first with a leg-side field and short-ball strategy and then on the corridor of uncertainty. Pujara doesn't play the pull or hook shot well and he wasn't allowed room to either cut or drive. "I don't think it was the right approach (by Pujara), I think he needed to be a bit more proactive with his scoring rate because I felt it was putting too much pressure on his batting partners," former Australian captain Ricky Ponting wrote on twitter. — PTI

FOR THE RECORD

● Hanuma Vihari , R. Ashwin and Jasprit Bumrah were run out in the first innings on the third day of the third Test at Sydney on Saturday. It provides the seventh such occasion of three Indian batsmen dismissed run out in an innings and the first such occasion against Australia in Tests. ● Overall, it was the 37th occasion of three or more batsmen dismissed run out in an innings in the annals of the Test cricket. ● Shubhman Gill and Cheteshwar Pujara scored 50 runs in India's first innings to provide the first occasion of two Indian batsmen scoring exact 50 runs in the same innings. It also provides the 12th such occasion of two batsmen scoring exact 50 runs in the same innings in Tests.

— S. PERVEZ QAISER



India's Jasprit Bumrah (right) is run out as Australia's Will Pucovski watches on Day Three of the third Test in Sydney on Saturday.

— AP

SINDHU STRESSES ON NEED OF GOOD COACHES

Mumbai, Jan. 9: Olympic silver medalist and world champion shuttler P.V. Sindhu on Saturday said it is important to have good coaches, who can understand the mindset of the players and address their specific needs to create more champions. "I would say we need to have really good coaches, who analyse each player because every player's mindset is different, so he (the coach) needs to understand the player's mindset..." Sindhu said in a virtual session when asked what needs to be done to create more players like her. "Because I might have a different type of game, I might have a different mental state, where (as) other players, for example Saina (Nehwal) or anyone, they might have different mental mindset, so you need to understand

the player (properly) and accordingly change what he or she needs to be done." The 25-year-old also exuded confidence that "in a couple of years, there will be a lot more players who will represent the country and also get medals for the country." "As far as I know, we (as a badminton team) have been getting really good infrastructure and all equipment that we need, so I am sure in couple of years (or) when I look five years down the line there will be lot more people playing for the country and doing really well," she said. India's only individual Olympic gold medalist shooter Abhinav Bindra batted for "imbibing sports culture" in India, saying it will help the country reach its aspiration of winning multiple medals at the Olympics. — PTI

Jadeja dislocates his thumb, out of 4th Test

Sydney, Jan. 9: Depleted India's injury woes worsened on Saturday with senior all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja sustaining a left thumb dislocation and fracture which is likely to rule him out of the final Test in Brisbane, starting January 15. However, there is some good news for India as wicketkeeper-batsman Rishabh Pant's elbow injury is not serious and he will probably be available when India bat to save the Test match. Both players underwent scans after being hit by short balls from Australian pacers on third day of the Test match. "Ravindra Jadeja has suffered a dislocation and fracture on his left thumb. It will be very difficult for him to wear those gloves and bat," a senior BCCI source said on Saturday. "In any case, he will be out of action for at least two to three weeks which rules him out of the final Test.

CUMMINS REVEALS OZ'S PLANS AGAINST PUJARA

Sydney, Jan. 9: Australia entered the four-match Test series against India determined to make it "as hard as possible" for Cheteshwar Pujara to score, the home team's pace spearhead Pat Cummins said after his terrific display in the third Test on Saturday. Pujara has been criticised for his ultra-defensive approach in the series so far. "Today I got a bit of assistance from the pitch. But he (Pujara) is someone you know you are going to have to bowl a lot at," Cummins said. The world's No. 1 bowler dismissed Pujara, who had been a thorn in Australia's flesh during the 2018-19 series, for the fourth time in the ongoing rubber. "We got our head around that this series, for him to score runs, we are going to make it as hard as possible, and whether he bats for 200-300 balls, we would just try and bowl good ball after good ball, challenge both sides of his bat, and fortunately, so far it has worked." — PTI

Pant will be able to bat as his injury isn't that serious." The visitors' first jolt came when Pant sustained an elbow injury after being hit by a Pat Cummins delivery. Reserve wicketkeeper Wriddhiman Saha replaced Pant as per a recent amendment in the ICC playing conditions. — PTI

Superb fielding makes Jadeja an all-round package



Ayaz Memon
Over The Top

Ravindra Jadeja running out Steve Smith in the first innings has been a major highlight of the ongoing Sydney Test. Josh Hazlewood getting rid of Hanuma Vihari with a splendid diving stop followed by a direct hit at the bowlers end while still sprawled on the ground was another stellar fielding effort so far in the match, but all things considered, Jadeja's was a nudge better. He had to cover 25-30 yards, all the while keep-

ing one eye on the ball, the other on the batsmen trying to complete the second. Haring in from the deep, Jadeja picked up the ball on the run, then found the bulls-eye with only one stump to aim at, leaving Smith inches short of the crease. It made for one of the most dazzling pieces of fielding action seen in recent times anywhere. This was not an isolated instance of Jadeja's brilliant fielding. In the 8-9 years since he has been part of the Indian team, he's made a huge impact

with the speed with which he covers ground, his sure catching, and direct hits from very difficult angles. All of these put pressure on rival batsmen who are loath to take any risk against him. How would Jadeja rate as a fielder in Indian cricket? From those I've seen he is certainly among the best 5, the others being Mansur Ali Khan Pataudi, Eknath Solkar, Kapil Dev and Mohamed Azharuddin. For sustained excellence over many matches and many years, this cluster moves ahead of the likes of Abid Ali, Brijesh Patel, Yuvraj Singh, Mohamed Kaif, Robin Singh, Virat Kohli. Electric-heeled Pataudi earned the sobriquet of "Tiger" for his prowling presence and speed in the covers. In fact, he was the

first to put emphasis on fielding after becoming captain in 1962. With a predominantly spin attack at his disposal, Pataudi clouted the legendary creature in trap for Bedi, Prasanna, Chandrashekhhar and Venkatraghavan which proved so rewarding from the 1960s through the 1990s. Solkar was one of those brought in by Pataudi into the Indian team and earned immortality for his exploits standing at forward short-leg. Apart from his quicksilver reflexes and clean catching, Solkar was courage personified. Remember, in his time, there were no helmets. Fielding at short-leg carried huge risk which Solkar bore heroically. Kapil Dev was a natural athlete and with great ball

sense. Strong legs made him cover big distances on the field speedily, and his catching was brilliant because of fine anticipation which got him into position early. His throws to the wicket-keeper from the deep came in like missiles. Late in his career, he fielded in the slips with success too. Azharuddin is arguably the best all-round fielder India's had, equally good in the deep and close-in, either at silly point or in the slips/gully/leg trap. He was also big-hearted like Solkar, taking many knocks at silly point. Unlike in Solkar's time, however, there were helmets around when Azhar was playing. The common factor between these five is their love for fielding. Where so

many players see it as chore and a necessary evil, Pataudi, Solkar, Kapil, Azhar and Jadeja were passionate about it. Pataudi once told me that the runs saved/given away should be factored into averages to get a player's true worth. Historically, Indian cricketers haven't been renowned for their fielding. Speed and athleticism in players were not given too much significance. The essential demand used to be for 'safe' rather than spectacular fielding. That situation has changed dramatically in the last two decades. Fielding standards in the country have improved because of better grounds, more scientific training methods, proper diet and sports medicine, increased

competition (both outside and within) and, of course, livelihood. Money attached to cricket is extremely high today. Nobody wants a 'passenger' in the field. Jadeja is the modern exemplar for brilliant fielding and an inspiration for budding cricketers. In fact, his fielding prowess has been a big factor in why he is now a regular member of the Indian team in all three formats. Breaking into the side essentially as a left-arm spinner, Jadeja's batting has also improved by leaps and bounds — especially in the five-day format — in the past couple of years. But it is his superb fielding that makes him a complete 'all-round' package which selectors and team management can't ignore.

Domestic season finally underway

Mumbai, Jan. 9: India will witness its first major cricket tournament in the country since the Covid-19 disruption when the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy begins the much-delayed domestic season from Sunday, presenting a platform for the hopefuls to impress before IPL auctions.

The presence of seasoned campaigners such as Shikhar Dhawan, Suresh Raina and Ishant Sharma will add sheen to the tournament but one of the biggest talking points in the lead-up has been S. Sreesanth's comeback to top-flight cricket after serving a ban for his alleged involvement in the 2013 IPL corruption scandal.

Sreesanth, 37, will turn out for Kerala in the national T20 championship from January 10-31. But the focus, mostly, will be on domestic uncapped players with the IPL auctions scheduled in February. The tournament also assumes significance as it is an opportunity for the new senior selection committee to draw up a wider pool of players for the T20 World Cup, which will be played in India later this

● The presence of seasoned campaigners such as Shikhar Dhawan, Suresh Raina and Ishant Sharma will add sheen to the T20 tournament.

year. No cricketing activity had happened since mid-March last year and after meticulous planning, the BCCI decided to conduct the tournament at six different venues with as many bio bubbles. The teams have been divided into six groups — five Elite and one Plate and the league stage matches will be played at Mumbai, Vadodara, Indore, Kolkata, Chennai and Bengaluru with the knockouts scheduled in Ahmedabad. The lead-up had its share of controversies with many players lodging a complaint after being served poor quality food in a posh South Mumbai hotel. Then, staff members of a hotel in Chennai, where players of three Plate Group teams were staying, were found Covid-19 positive. — PTI

Oldest living Oly champ turns 100

Budapest, Jan. 9: For Agnes Keleti, the oldest living Olympic champion, the fondest memory of her remarkable 100 years is simply that she has lived through it all. The Holocaust survivor and winner of 10 Olympic medals in gymnastics including five golds celebrates her 100th birthday on Saturday in her native Budapest, punctuating a life of achievement, adventure, tragedy and perseverance which, she says, passed by in a flash. "These 100 years felt to me like 60," she said at a celebration in Budapest on the eve of her birthday. Leafing through a copy of a new book about her life *The Queen of Gymnastics: 100 Years of Agnes Keleti* her trademark modesty was on full display. "The queen of gymnastics," she said, switching to English. And in Hungarian: "That's an exaggeration." Keleti, who was born Agnes Klein in 1921, had her illustrious career interrupted by World War

II and the subsequent cancellation of the 1940 and 1944 Olympics. Forced off her gymnastics team in 1941 because of her Jewish ancestry, Keleti went into hiding in the Hungarian countryside where she survived the Holocaust by assuming a false identity and working as a maid. Her mother and sister survived the war with the help of famed Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg, but her father and other relatives perished at Auschwitz, among the more than half a million Hungarian Jews killed in Nazi death camps and by Hungarian Nazi collaborators. Resuming her career after the war, Keleti was set to compete at the 1948 London Olympics but a last-minute ankle injury dashed her hopes. Four years later, she made her Olympic debut at the 1952 Helsinki Games at the age of 31, winning a gold medal in the floor exercise as well as a silver and two bronzes. — AP



Agnes Keleti, former Olympic gold medal winning gymnast, is jubilant in front of her birthday cake in Budapest, Hungary, on January 4.

— AP