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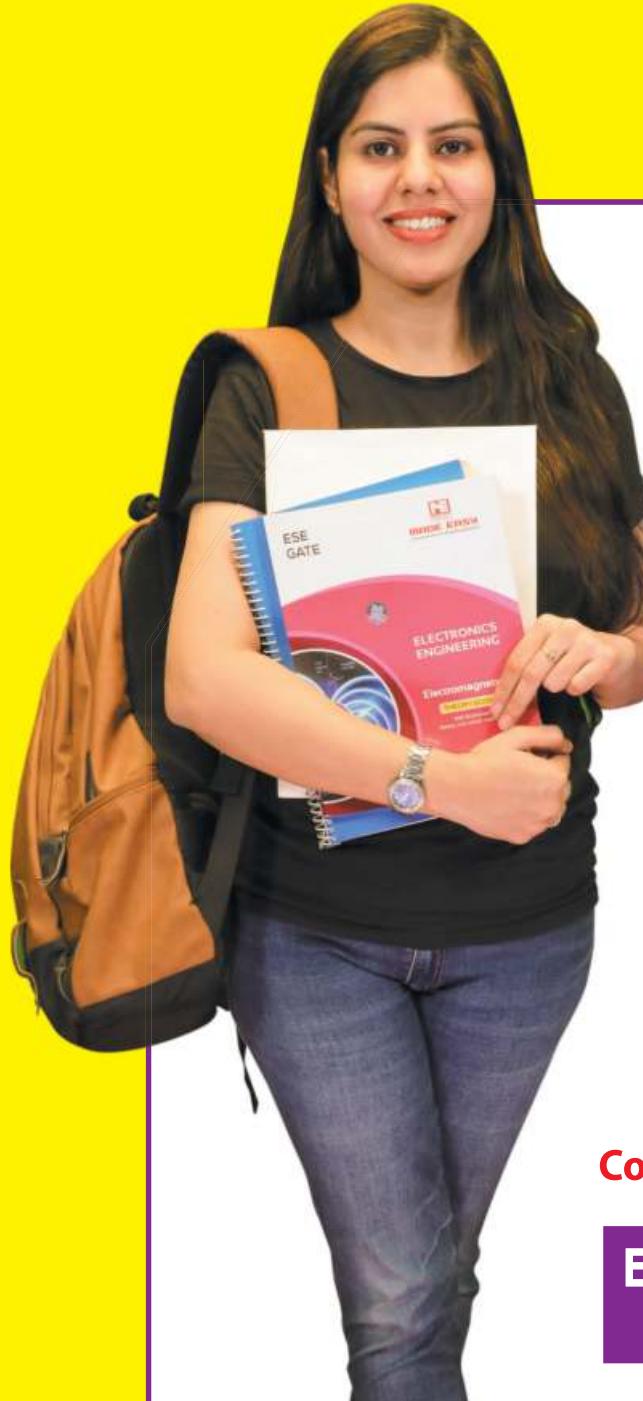
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Kerala again seeks Governor's nod for Assembly session
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Visva-Bharati is the essence of self-reliance, says PM Modi
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Donald Trump pardons more allies, including Jared Kushner's father
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BCCI AGM approves two additional teams in IPL
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NEARBY



Delhi ready with vaccine roll-out plan: Kejriwal

NEW DELHI
Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday said that Delhi is fully prepared and his government had made all arrangements to receive the COVID-19 vaccine from the Centre. In the first phase, 51 lakh people earmarked by the Centre in priority lists will get the vaccine, he said.

CITY ▶ PAGE 3

Cong. ties up with Left Front in West Bengal

NEW DELHI
The Congress party on Thursday formally announced its alliance with the Left Front in West Bengal for the upcoming Assembly election. State Congress president Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury said the party's high command had given its go-ahead for the tie-up.

NEWS ▶ PAGE 9



Govt. renews offer for dialogue

Centre reiterates commitment to finding a solution to issues raised by farmers

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

A day after farmer unions rejected its offer for talks, the Union government on Thursday extended a fresh invitation for dialogue and reiterated its commitment to finding a logical solution to all the issues raised by them.

In a three-page letter to the unions, Vivek Aggarwal, Joint Secretary, Agriculture Ministry, said the government had always been discussing the issues with an open mind and honest intentions to end the agitation, and sought a convenient date and time for further discussions. He sought details of the issues to be discussed.

The letter was written in the context of the Samyukt Kisan Morcha's reply to the government's earlier offer on Wednesday.



For the long haul: A labourer erecting tents for farmers at the Delhi-Uttar Pradesh border at Ghazipur. ■ SANDEEP SAXENA

However, the fresh letter said the three laws on agricultural reforms were not related to the minimum support price (MSP) and would not impact it in any manner; therefore, putting forth any new demand on this front was not justified. The government was still ready to discuss all the issues raised by the unions, the letter said.

The unions, in their reply on Wednesday, had objected to the written proposal earlier, saying it did not mention amendments to the Essential Commodities Act.

The letter clarified that the written proposal was based on the issues identified during the December 3 meeting. It added that the government was ready for

PM's allegations baseless: Oppn.

Opposition leaders termed the allegations made by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who has accused them of lying to the farmers, as "baseless", stating that such accusations are a "travesty of truth". ▶ PAGE 9

talks on any issues, including those not identified during the December 3 meeting.

All-India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee general secretary Avik Shah said the government should start engaging farmers on an agenda that addressed their "real issues".

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

Economic revival beating predictions: RBI bulletin

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI

There is now more evidence to show that the Indian economy "is pulling out of COVID-19's deep abyss and is reflating" at a pace that beats most predictions, RBI officials, including Deputy Governor Michael Patra, said in an article in the central bank's monthly bulletin.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

India files appeal against Vodafone case verdict

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA NEW DELHI

India has challenged in a Singapore court the international arbitration tribunal verdict that overturned its demand for ₹22,100 crore in back taxes from Vodafone Group Plc, sources said on Thursday.

An international arbitration court had on Septem-

ber 25 rejected tax authorities' demand for ₹22,100 crore in back taxes and penalties relating to the British telecom giant's 2007 acquisition of an Indian operator.

India had 90 days to file an appeal, and the same was done in a Singapore court earlier this week.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

Christmas cheer!



Yuletide spirit: Tourists in Santa Claus costume attending a Christmas eve programme organised by the J&K Tourism Department in Srinagar on Thursday. ■ NISSAR AHMAD

ABVP threatens to raze idol in Jain college

OMAR RASHID LUCKNOW

A college run by the Jain community in Baghpat district of western Uttar Pradesh has accused the ABVP, the student wing of the RSS, of threatening to demolish a temple and an idol of a Jain goddess on the premises.

While the ABVP later issued an apology for the misconduct of its activists, blaming it on ignorance, an FIR was lodged against four persons, at least two of them members of the outfit, on charges of rioting, criminal intimidation and intentional insult with intent to provoke breach of peace.

DETAILS ON ▶ PAGE 4

DJB office vandalised by BJP workers: AAP

Party releases videos as proof; BJP claims attack was carried out by AAP men

STAFF REPORTER NEW DELHI

A group of BJP workers, led by party's Delhi unit president Adesh Gupta, on Thursday allegedly attacked the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) headquarters and assaulted the employees on the premises.

In multiple videos released by the Aam Aadmi Party, a mob chanting "Adesh ji sangharsh karo" and "Jai Shri Ram" can be seen forcing its way through the main gate of the DJB headquarters and vandalising property. Mr. Gupta can also be seen in the videos, both inside and outside the main DJB building.

Mr. Gupta, however, claimed that the attack was carried out by AAP workers. "In the interest of Delhites, the BJP was staging a peaceful demonstration outside



A screen grab of a mob vandalising the DJB HQ in Jhandewalan on Thursday.
■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

the Delhi Jal Board headquarters against the tanker scan, but Aam Aadmi Party karyakartas (workers) forcibly barged into the headquarters, vandalised the property and assaulted the staff too." "On the floor, you can see blood drops of DJB officers. Some of

A senior police officer said 30 people were detained in connection with the vandalism and later released. No complaint has been received in the matter, said the officer, adding that they are obtaining CCTV and mobile footage to identify the people involved in the incident.

Employees injured
DJB Vice-Chairman and AAP legislator Raghav Chadha said at a press conference, "Hundreds of BJP leaders and goons entered through the [DJB] gate by force. From the reception to the Vice-Chairman's office, they vandalised doors, windows, and glass. They broke computers, printers and other things. They assaulted the staff too."

"On the floor, you can see blood drops of DJB officers. Some of our staffers are hospitalised and some are getting treated at a dispensary," he added.

Mr. Chadha alleged that the attack was carried out with the "help" of the Delhi police. He said the BJP workers asked them to "stop supporting the protesting farmers and threatened to attack other AAP leaders too".

The BJP Delhi chief also tweeted photos of him and other party workers protesting outside the DJB office.

Mr. Gupta alleged that "AAP goons" attacked BJP workers and severely injured them. "The [Arvind] Kejriwal government has conspired to defame the BJP. One BJP karyakarta got injured in the backbone and was admitted to a trauma centre. Four other karyakartas have suffered serious injuries," he alleged.

Construction major 'prints out' a building

3D printer used to realise a 700-sq-ft structure with indigenous concrete mixture

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI

The 700-sq-ft building looks like a normal concrete shell structure. There is nothing to indicate that it is not one of the usual concrete buildings of the urban landscape, but it is special. What makes it unique is that the ground-plus-first floor building in Kancheepuram, about 75 km from Chennai, has been fully constructed using only a 3D printer and a special concrete mix.

L&T, the engineering and construction conglomerate, built this concrete building using a fully automated 3D printer with an indigenously developed concrete mixture and some manual labour. The special concrete mix used by the printer has been prepared using the same concrete composition used for regular construction materials. The company



Novel solution: A view of the 3D-printed concrete house in Kancheepuram. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

hopes the project would play a disruptive role in the construction industry.

'At a nascent stage'
The 3D printing technology is a computer-controlled execution of printing an object layer-by-layer and is being used for manufacturing various prototype models and producing complex shapes

of engineering products, but 3D printing with concrete has remained at a nascent stage internationally until now, said the company spokesman.

M.V. Satish, senior executive vice-president (Buildings), L&T, said the success of the building project lies in its construction, executed in both vertical and horizontal

methods using reinforced bars and welded mesh. The building project was executed at an open project site and completed within 106 printing hours.

The vertical and horizontal methodology formulated for the 3D building project meets the provisions of the Indian codes for construction. The cost is also optimal, compared to what is spent on traditional manpower and material-intensive construction, he added.

The 700-sq-ft building is an advancement over the company's project last year – a 3D printed 240-sq-ft one-bedroom house aimed at promoting building layouts for the economically weaker sections, and exploring 3D printing for house construction. It could make housing for all viable.

Plea for SIT probe into alleged custodial death during Delhi riots

Faizan seen in video of 5 injured men singing national anthem

SOIBAM ROCKY SINGH NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Thursday issued notice to Delhi Police on a petition by a 61-year-old widow seeking constitution of a court-monitored Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe into the alleged custodial death of her son during the northeast Delhi riots. Faizan, 23, was last seen in a viral video being rounded up by policemen with four other Muslim youth and forced to sing the national anthem on February 24 this year.

In her petition, Kismatun alleged that "the policemen kicked the five Muslim men with their boots, beat them with their lathis and taunted them saying, 'Yeh loh azadi (Here, take freedom)'. They forced them to sing the national anthem while they were lying down, in a grievous

wounded condition".

The plea alleged that Faizan was in the "control and custody of the policemen from the time he was wrongfully confined and assaulted on February 24, till he was released in a precarious health condition on February 25 from Jyoti Nagar police station around 11 p.m.". He succumbed to his injuries the next day at the Lok Nayak Hospital.

'Denied critical care'

Advocate Vrinda Grover, representing Ms. Kismatun, said her son was denied access to critical medical care all through his illegal detention from the evening of February 24 till almost midnight on February 25.

"The MLC (medico-legal certificate) from GJB (Guru Teg Bahadur) Hospital dated February 24 records that Faizan

was in need of specialised care, but the police took him to Jyoti Nagar police station. It was only when Faizan's condition turned precarious and it appeared that he may not survive that he was released from the police station," the plea stated.

"The mere release from the police station prior to his death would not absolve the policemen of having committed murder in custody, and the petitioner is seeking justice for the same," advocate Grover said.

Faizan's murder case was registered at the Bhajanpura police station on February 28. The investigation was later transferred to the Crime Branch of Delhi Police.

Justice Suresh Kumar Kait has directed the police to submit a status report on the case before the next date of hearing on February 1, 2021.

Fuel stickers, HSRP 'news' for HC judges too

STAFF REPORTER NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Thursday told the city government not to create panic among the citizens and give them more time to obtain colour-coded fuel stickers and high-security registration plates (HSRP) before it starts imposing ₹5,500 fine for violations.

A Bench of Justice Siddhartha Mridul and Justice Talwant Singh said even they were clueless about the requirement of the stickers and asked the Delhi government's counsel to come with "detailed instructions" regarding the steps taken by the government to publicise the move.

Referring to his own experience, Justice Singh said he came to know about the stickers from news reports and managed to book two with much difficulty as the website kept crashing.

Centre owes
₹1,600 crore to
North body
employees: AAP

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI
The Aam Aadmi Party on Thursday said different Central government agencies owe around ₹1,600 crore to the BJP-ruled North Delhi Municipal Corporation.

The BJP should collect this money and pay pending salaries of the North body employees, the party added.

"The BJP-ruled North body can get this pending amount within 24 hours because the DDA, Income-Tax Department and other departments are under the BJP. But I do not understand why the BJP is not collecting this money with which they can pay the salaries of their employees, that too, in advance," said AAP leader Durgesh Pathak.

He said teachers, doctors, nurses, sweepers and others working under the municipal corporation were protesting and even going on hunger strike to get their salaries.

Teens to elderly volunteer at protest site

People from all age groups, professions working day and night to attend to the farmers' needs at Singhu border

HEMANI BHANDARI
NEW DELHI

A 14-year-old girl who wants to participate in making history to a 76-year-old man from Fategarh Sahib who has been part of volunteering efforts for decades and a 26-year-old man who is supposed to get married in February next year to a 51-year-old businessman, there is a plethora of people making themselves available at the Singhu border.



Four pillars: Khalsa Aid volunteers (from left) Sher Singh, Gurpreet, Tejinder and Jaap Kaur serving protesters at the Singhu border on Thursday. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

teers if he could also perform *sewa*. "They told me I am old and I should not perform *sewa* now. I told them I can work 24 hours a day and won't feel tired," he said, adding that now also, he does not feel the need to wear socks and sweaters.

Willingness to work

Mr. Singh said he did not have to go through the formal process with the NGO because his "willingness to work" made others let him. He comes in at 8 a.m. and leaves the spot at 8 p.m. after serving everyone's needs.

"Back at home, my wife and children are looking after our farm. I don't have a phone. My family calls the people with whom I have come here. I talk to them once in 10 days," he said, adding: "Morcha fateh karke hi jaenge [Will go only after the march is successful]."

A Class 9 student of a private school in Delhi, Jaap Kaur, has been volunteering at the kiosk since a week now. Her father is also a volunteer.

"I put up a WhatsApp status that I am a volunteer here. After seeing the status,

my friends were left surprised and amazed," she said. She also said her first stint at "sewa" was serving water two years ago. "Sab good wishes deta hain, usme bohot proud wali feeling aati hai [Everyone blesses me. It is a very rewarding]."

Ms. Jaap not only gives out necessary things to protesters but also helps in segregating materials from all the donations.

Gurpreet Singh from Patiala, a documentary filmmaker, has been associated with the organisation since he was 19. He had joined for a

paid project but later, he told them that he would work for free. But for the last five years, he has been working full time with Khalsa Aid.

Mr. Singh's wedding is on the cards and his family is worried for his health as he has recovered from COVID-19 just in August. "They just don't want me to contract the virus again especially before the wedding," he said.

Every night, Mr. Singh takes a stroll to check if all the elderly protesters are fine. "People come here during the weekend, take a look at all sorts of langars and leave the spot. They should stop and ask these old men and women if they are fine. It's not easy. At this retirement age, when they should be more comforted, they are in fact most uncomfortable," he said.

Tejinder Singh (51) from Jalandhar, a businessman, has been here volunteering for the last 18 days. He believes that he is earning more profits by performing *sewa*. "I have experienced this before as well," he said.

BJP installs LED screens across 125 villages in city

Prime Minister to address farmers today

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The BJP has installed LED screens across 125 villages in the Capital to relay Prime Minister Narendra Modi's address to farmers on Friday, the party said on Thursday.

The programme will feature speeches at each venue on the achievements of the Modi government over the last six years followed by the PM's address in which he will directly converse with farmers

RAMVIR SINGH BIDHURI,
Leader of the Opposition

farmers," Mr. Bidhuri added.

Mr. Shah along with Delhi BJP president Adesh Gupta and MP Ramesh Bidhuri will hear the PM's address at Gausaha, Kishangarh village near Vasant Kunj, Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and MP Pravesh Sahib Singh at Kakrola Mor in the Mitala Assembly, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman at Ranjit Nagar, the party said.

IN BRIEF

PM to flag off driverless metro train service

NEW DELHI

The Delhi Metro Rail Corporation on Thursday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi will flag off the driverless train service on the Magenta Line on December 28. DMRC spokesperson Anuj Dayal said Mr. Modi will also launch the fully operational National Common Mobility Card for travel on the Airport Express Line on the same day. "PM Modi will be flagging off the country's first ever fully automated driverless train service on the 37 km-Magenta Line on December 28," the DMRC said.

DDA suggests 12 nodes, other changes to TOD policy

Kashmere Gate, Anand Vihar to be part of the first phase of development

SHINJINI GHOSH

NEW DELHI

The Delhi Development Authority (DDA) has suggested a few modifications, including identification of 12 nodes, to the Transit-Oriented Development policy.

Senior officials said the DDA has identified Kashmere Gate, Nizamuddin/Sarai Kale Khan, Anand Vihar Multi-modal transit hubs as some of the TOD nodes.

They will be taken up in the first phase alongside

the New Delhi Railway station, Trilokpuri metro station, Jangpura RRTS station and Mukundpur metro station.

A senior DDA official said: "TOD nodes are the select mass transit stations and their influence zones identified by the DDA. The provisions of this regulation shall only be applicable in the influence zones of such identified TOD nodes. A TOD approach in Delhi will help in bringing people and jobs closer to

mass transit and lead to walkable, mixed-use developments within influence zones of transit stations."

Influence Zone Plans

The land-owning agency has also proposed the preparation of Influence Zone Plans (IZP), which will cover recommendations for area improvement pertaining to traffic and parking management plan, integration of projects over station development, if applicable and projects for

the improvement of open spaces, public spaces, location of vending zones and so on, officials said.

An IZP will be prepared to assess existing traffic patterns and the potential impact of new development. An audit of streets to review walkability, mapping of ongoing and existing infrastructure projects or other public works by various service providing agencies, in the node will also be carried out," the official said.

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RISE 07:12	SET 17:32
RISE 14:49	SET 03:36
SUNDAY, DEC. 27	
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Palam 20 08**Delhi Palam Today**
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'Delhi ready to receive vaccine from Centre'

51 lakh people to get the shot in the first phase, says Kejriwal

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**NEW DELHI**

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday said that Delhi was fully prepared and the government had made all arrangements to receive the COVID-19 vaccine from the Centre for storage and to administer to patients. He said this after attending a review meeting on vaccination steps.

In the first phase, he said, the vaccine will be given to 51 lakh people as earmarked by the Central government in priority lists, which include 3 lakh healthcare workers, 6 lakh frontline workers and 42 lakh people either aged above 50 or below but with co-morbidities.

Recovery rate

"There has been a significant decrease in daily deaths due to COVID-19 and we have to reduce it further. The recovery rate has also considerably increased. But

such individuals will be contacted via SMS and be given full information regarding the vaccine rollout, the manpower and the number of teams that are required for the administration of the vaccine, such as, officers and workers have been marked and trained for the task and each such team would have five people, he said.

"In case we come to know about some post-vaccine side-effects on a person, we can provide treatment to such patients, such as the arrangement of doctors and adequate treatment methods," he also said.

According to Mr. Kejriwal, one person will get two doses each, which meant that 1.02 crore doses will be required to be administered to



51 lakh people.

The Delhi government, he said, has cold storage capacity for 74 lakh doses, which will increase to 1,15,00,000 doses in the next 5-7 days. The vaccine will be administered to only those people whose registration has been done.

Such individuals will be contacted via SMS and be given full information regarding the vaccine rollout, the manpower and the number of teams that are required for the administration of the vaccine, such as, officers and workers have been marked and trained for the task and each such team would have five people, he said.

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Several churches to stay shut on Xmas

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**NEW DELHI**

Several churches in Delhi, including the Sacred Heart Cathedral, will remain closed for visitors on Christmas Day on Friday, said a notice issued by the church authorities.

"Due to the COVID-19 pandemic this year, there will not be any midnight Christmas service at the Sacred Heart Cathedral," said the notice. The church, however, has allowed parishioners to be part of the Christmas service in a limited number after registration. Xmas service will also be available online. The authorities noted that the main gate of the church will remain closed during this period and entry will be from St. Columbas School gates.

Church-goers, understanding the need to adhere to COVID-19 norms, said that they will abide by the SOP issued by the Health Ministry.

"Health first is the motto this year and we are not rushing into churches for the celebrations. Delhi has just been able to control its growing number of COVID-19 cases and we have passed through a phase where even getting a hospital bed was difficult," said Poonam Mathew, a resident of Gole market.

Delhi riots: police search houses of Bar members

STAFF REPORTER**NEW DELHI**

In a case related to the alleged use of forged documents as genuine on judicial record in the north-east Delhi riots matter, the police on Thursday searched premises of two members of the Bar, including lawyer Mehmood Pracha, officials said.

The search was conducted by Delhi Police Special Cell after getting permission from court.

The police said that during the course of a bail matter pertaining to a Delhi riots accused, use of a forged notary stamp and creation of allegedly false or manipulated evidence at the hands of certain members of the bar was noticed. The special court had observed that the same required thorough investigation. Pursuant to this, a criminal case under appropriate sections of law was registered and probe was taken up, a senior officer said.

No respite for city from 'severe' AQI

'Effect of stubble burning low'

STAFF REPORTER**NEW DELHI**

The air quality of Delhi and Noida continued to be in the "severe" category for the third consecutive day on Thursday and Gurugram's was in the "very poor" category, as per the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). The air quality of the national capital is expected to improve on Friday.

Severe air pollution levels affect "healthy people" and "seriously impacts" those with existing diseases, as per the CPCB.

"Better ventilation condition is forecast for the next two days. Hence, the AQI is forecast to improve to the higher end of the "very poor" category by December 25 and likely to further improve to the middle-end of very poor on December 26 and 27," said a statement by the government-run monitoring agency SAFAR. Also, the effect of stubble burning is low, SAFAR said.

Apart from the pollutants, two other factors are negatively impacting the air quality of the city.

The speed of surface-level winds is "low", which aids in accumulation of pollutants. Faster surface winds help in the dispersion of pollutants.

The AQI of Delhi was 423 on Thursday, as per CPCB's 4 pm bulletin, which is an average of the past 24 hours. The values for Gurugram and Noida were 361 and 441 respectively.

Capital witnesses 1,063 new COVID-19 cases

Positivity rate at 1.18%, much lower than the 11.65% average daily positivity in Nov.

STAFF REPORTER**NEW DELHI**

The Capital witnessed 1,063 new COVID-19 cases in the last 24 hours, taking the total number of cases to 6,20,681, according to a health bulletin released by the Delhi government on Thursday.

Also, 37 more deaths have been reported in the past 24 hours, taking the total number of deaths to 10,384.

Of the total cases,

Virus spread

Total number of COVID-19 cases	Total deaths
6,20,681	10,384
New cases in the past 24 hours 1,063	New deaths 37

SOURCE: DELHI GOVERNMENT HEALTH BULLETIN

tive cases.

Also, a total of 89,920 COVID-19 tests were done in the past 24 hours.

The positivity of COVID-19 cases was 1.18% on Thursday, lesser than the average daily positivity in November, which was 11.65%.

The overall positivity till now was 7.64%, as per the bulletin. The positivity on Wednesday was 0.99%.

Out of the total 18,779

beds available for COVID-19 treatment in the city, 15,966 were vacant, as per the bulletin.

About 2,813 people were admitted in hospitals and 3,938 patients were under home isolation.

As per the bulletin, the death rate in the past 10 days was 2.62%.

There were 5,152 containment zones in the city as on Thursday.

Panel for reducing number of reserved ICU beds'

It will create availability in pvt. hospitals for non-COVID critical care, govt. tells HC

STAFF REPORTER**NEW DELHI**

which was constituted to assess the current position of hospital admissions and discharges and recommend reduction in the number of beds dedicated for COVID-19 patients.

The Delhi government said the panel has recommended that de-escalation may be carried out in a graded manner, preferably in Delhi government and private sector hospitals but not in Central

government hospitals.

"The committee recommends that COVID ICU beds reservation of 80% of total ICU beds in the private sector be reduced to 60%, making 40% ICU capacity of the private hospitals available for the non-COVID critical care," the government said.

"This will make available 600 ICU beds [approx] for non-COVID patients. The committee decided not to

change the COVID ICU beds status of any Delhi government hospitals as for now," it added.

The court was also informed that the panel has recommended that "the COVID beds reservation of 60% of total beds in all private hospitals should be de-escalated to 45%. This will result in making 55% beds in private sector hospitals available for non-COVID patients".



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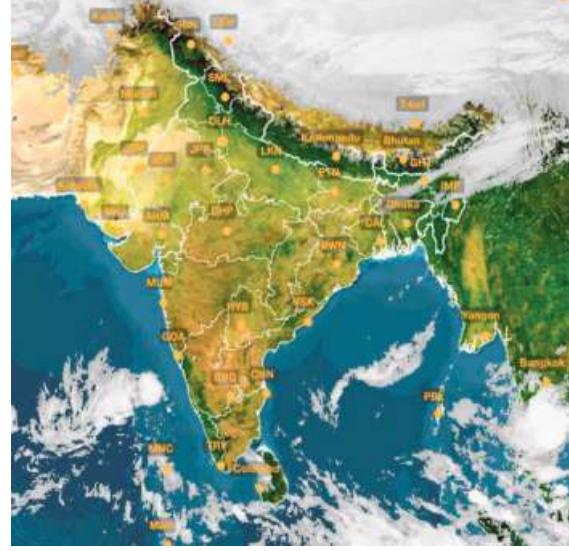
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WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD, POLLUTION DATA: CPCB, MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 19.00 HRS)

Forecast for Friday: Cold wave conditions very likely in isolated pockets over Punjab; dense fog likely in isolated pockets over northern parts of Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Chandigarh and Delhi; squally winds very likely over Southeast Arabian Sea

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	26.2	12.4	Kozhikode	34.0
Ahmedabad	29.1	11.8	Kurnool	30.0	16.0
Aizawl	22.0	8.1	Lucknow	23.5	7.5
Allahabad	25.5	8.0	Madurai	29.8	21.1
Bengaluru	28.2	17.4	Mangaluru	33.9	23.2
Bhopal	26.9	10.2	Mumbai	31.0	20.0
Bhubaneswar	28.4	13.8	Mysoor	29.0	18.2
Chandigarh	22.3	5.9	New Delhi	23.1	4.5
Chennai	29.2	19.4	Patna	25.2	8.2
Coimbatore	29.3	20.4	Poil Blair	30.4	22.6
Dehradun	22.8	5.7	Puducherry	28.6	19.6
Gangtok	14.3	5.3	Pune	29.3	11.7
Goa	33.0	21.0	Raipur	28.4	14.4
Guwahati	24.0	11.6	Ranchi	25.0	11.5
Hubballi	29.0	17.0	Shillong	16.2	7.6
Hyderabad	28.2	14.2	Shimla	15.8	6.4
Imphal	22.1	4.6	Srinagar	10.3	3.8
Jaipur	23.4	9.4	Thiruvananthapuram	32.4	23.2
Kochi	31.8	24.0	Tiruchi	30.9	21.0
Kohima	17.2	5.7	Vijayawada	28.8	17.2
Kolkata	25.6	14.6	Visakhapatnam	28.0	16.4

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing

Yesterday

In observation made at 4 p.m., Greater Noida, Uttar Pradesh recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 446, indicating an unhealthy level of pollution. In contrast, Aizawl, Mizoram recorded a healthy AQI score of 26.

Air Quality Code: ■ Poor □ Moderate ■ Good (Readings indicate average AQI)

SO: Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.

NO: Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.

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

PM2.5 & PM10: Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease

Hathras remand order: 'Court not empowered'

Custody was unlawful: defence counsel

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GHAZIABAD

Almost three months after the U.P. police arrested four men on their way to Hathras on sedition and terror charges, the district court in Mathura has said their police remand order was issued by a court that was not empowered to do so.

Citing a Supreme Court judgment, Yashwant Kumar Mishra, district and sessions judge, Mathura, said in his order on Tuesday, magistrates didn't have the power to grant remand for suspects booked under the UAPA.

Masood Ahmad (28), Ati-

kur Rahman (28), Mohammad Alam (37) and Sidique Kappan (41) were arrested on October 5, when they were going from Delhi to meet the Hathras victim's family.

The police said the four men were plotting to disrupt peace in Hathras.

Defence counsel Madhuvan Dutt Chaturvedi said, "The order proves that the custody of these four persons till December 22 was unlawful."

He said it seems to have been done "to save the skin of the prosecution" as the Habeus Corpus petition is listed before the Allahabad HC on January 5.

Manipur's Zomi people push for BTC-like council

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

Ahead of Union Home Minister Amit Shah's visit to Manipur on December 27, the State's Zomi ethnic group has renewed its demand for a self-administered zone on the lines of the Bodoland Territorial Council in Assam.

The Zomi Council, representing nine Zomi tribes, said it was banking on the decisive leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Mr. Shah and Manipur Chief Minister Nongthombam Biren Singh for the creation of Zoland Territorial Council (ZTC) under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.

According to Zomi Council chairman John K. Ngahite, the ZTC was envisaged to be modelled on the BTC. "With Mr. Shah scheduled to visit Manipur, we are hopeful that an honourable politi-

cal solution will be expedited for the Zo kindred tribes and the political dialogue with the Zomi political groups for the creation of ZTC will be resumed," he said.

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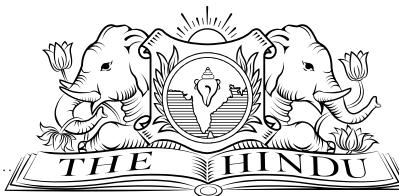
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POSSESSION NOTICE (Immovable Property)

Whereas, the undersigned was the Authorised Officer of City Union Bank Ltd., having its Administrative Office at No.24-B, Gandhi Nagar, Kumbakonam and one of the Branch Offices at 1917-18, 1st Floor, Opp. Gurudwara Sisganj Sahib, Chandini Chowk, Delhi under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under Section 13(2) & (12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued a Demand Notice dated 18-09-2020 followed by paper publication dated 16-10-2020 calling upon the borrowers No.1) Mr. Sunil Aggarwal, S/o. Madan Mohan Goyal, No.48, Block - 1, EROS Garden, Charwood Village, Faridabad -121 009.2) Mr. Sunil Singh Bhati, S/o. Baya Singh, D-198, Sector-47, Goutam Buddha Nagar, Noida, U.P - 201 301. No.3) Ms. M.G. Impex Private Limited, Pkt A-825, Kalkaji Extension, New Delhi - 110 019. Also at M/s. M.G. Impex Private Limited, F-466, Sector-63, Noida, Uttar Pradesh - 201 301. No.4) Mrs. Seema Aggarwal, W/o. Mr. Sunil Aggarwal, No.48, Block-1, EROS Garden, Charwood Village, Faridabad - 121 009. 5) Mrs. Kusum Singh, W/o. Mr. Sunil Singh Bhati, D-198, Sector-47, Goutam Buddha Nagar, Noida, U.P - 201 301 to repay the amount mentioned in the Notice being Rs.13,50,87,628/- (Rupees Thirteen Crore Fifty Lakh Eighty Seven Thousand Six Hundred and Twenty Eight Only) within 60 days from the date of the said Notice with subsequent interest thereon from 17-09-2020 with monthly rests.

The borrowers above named having failed to repay the amount despite the receipt of the above referred statutory notice, NOTICE is hereby given to the borrowers above named and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the Property described herein below in exercise of the powers conferred on him under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the said Rules on this 22nd day of December 2020.

The borrowers above named in Particular and the public in general are hereby cautioned not to deal with the Property and any dealings with the Property will be subject to the charge of City Union Bank Ltd., for an amount of Rs. 14,03,89,587/- (Rupees Fourteen Crore Three Lakh Eighty Nine Thousand Five Hundred and Eighty Seven Only) as on 20-12-2020 and interest thereon from 21-12-2020 till the repayment of entire dues.



Learning to let go

India must ensure policy stability, and not rely on retrospective laws to levy tax

The Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague on Wednesday ruled in favour of energy firm Cairn Plc over a retrospective tax demand worth ₹24,500 crore pursued by India's taxmen since 2014. It has ruled that the tax levy, pertaining to a corporate reorganisation exercise undertaken in 2006-07, falls foul of the India-U.K. bilateral investment pact. The timing could not have been worse for the government – expiry of a three-month deadline to contest a similar retrospective taxation case lost against Vodafone this September. But unlike the telecom case, where the government would only need to fork out around ₹80 crore if it were to concede defeat, this verdict includes a sharp \$1.4 billion payable as damages to Cairn. The damages arise from tax authorities' decision to take by force and subsequently sell the company's shares, and freeze dividend payments as well as tax refunds, to recover the disputed tax dues even as the arbitration process was under way. This outcome has repercussions, not in the least for an arbitration plea filed over the same tax demand by Cairn's parent firm, Vedanta, whose verdict is awaited. Second, perhaps, the fiscal implications of such a large payout to Cairn when the exchequer is cash strapped, may have galvanised the government's mind about challenging the Vodafone verdict after much dithering. Ostensibly, because it cannot take a different stance on two similar cases, the Centre has now filed an appeal in the Vodafone matter in Singapore. A similar appeal too can be expected on Cairn.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has repeatedly asserted that India retains the sovereign right to levy taxes. The arbitrators do not seem to be disputing that. The fact is that this government has asserted from the outset it is not in favour of retrospective legislative changes. PM Narendra Modi had promised to resolve concerns on retrospective taxation, introduced to global consternation in 2012 by then Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee after losing a tax battle with Vodafone in the Supreme Court. The Cairn order even refers to statements by BJP leaders like the late Arun Jaitley terming the retrospective amendments as 'tax terrorism' while in the Opposition. The guilty clauses could have been scuppered in the first NDA Budget itself, but barbs about it being a 'suit, boot Sarkar' then, that compelled the government to retract land acquisition reforms, may have dampened the enthusiasm for 'investor-friendly' changes. Losing the arbitrations in the most-watched cases under a troublesome law that has hurt India's investment credibility, provided a cathartic opportunity to let go, while resting the blame for the mess on the UPA. In doubling down instead, the government has scored a self-goal. Its aspirations to rope in global investments must be matched by ensuring policy stability and creating a robust regulatory framework.

Provocation trap

Iran should rein in its proxies in Iraq and allow the Biden administration to reboot diplomacy

The rocket attacks on the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad on Sunday, which American military leaders called the largest attack on the highly fortified Green Zone in a decade, have sent tensions in the region soaring. President Donald Trump and senior leaders of the administration have pointed to Iran, saying that it supplied the rockets. The offensive appears to have been countered by the U.S.'s radar-guided defensive systems. Mr. Trump has warned that he would hold Iran responsible "if one American is killed". The attack comes at a volatile time for Iran-American relations, which have collapsed after Mr. Trump took the U.S. out of the Iran nuclear deal unilaterally in 2018 and reimposed sanctions. He had reportedly sought options to launch strikes on Iran immediately after his election defeat but was dissuaded by Cabinet colleagues. With his exit soon from the White House, and Joe Biden, the next President, promising to revive the nuclear deal, there is a window of opportunity to restart the diplomatic process. But attacks like this threaten to push both the countries into an open conflict.

When the U.S. killed top Iranian general Qasem Soleimani in January this year, American officials claimed that the drone strike in the Iraqi capital had reestablished America's deterrence. But Iran had launched retaliatory missile attacks on U.S. military camps in Iraq, wounding several soldiers. And since then, pro-Iran Shia militias in Iraq have launched missile attacks at the Green Zone that houses the Embassy and repeatedly targeted American supply lines inside Iraq. The U.S. had earlier downsized its Embassy staff, closed the consulate in Basra and decided to reduce troops in Iraq. If U.S.-Iran relations are now at an explosive stage, the primary responsibility lies with Mr. Trump. His actions derailed a functioning international deal and his 'maximum pressure' campaign turned an Iran fully compliant with the deal's terms more dangerous. Besides targeting the American Embassy, Iran, directly or through proxies, had attacked oil facilities and tankers in the Gulf over the past two years. Earlier this month, a tanker off Jeddah was attacked, allegedly by the Iran-backed Houthi rebels of Yemen. Iran is under pressure to counter the repeated attempts by the U.S. and its allies to scuttle its influence. Late last month, Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, a top scientist, was killed inside Iran, allegedly by Israeli agents. But in a quest for revenge, Iran should not sleep-walk into the trap of provocation. Under any circumstance, attacks on diplomatic missions cannot be accepted. It should rein in the militia groups in Iraq that it supports. It must give the Biden administration a chance to reboot diplomacy, which is in the larger interests of Tehran as well as the wider west Asia.

The farmers' protest, truths and half-truths

With the agitation continuing, finding a meeting ground for farmers and the government could be difficult



DIPANKAR GUPTA

The farmers' protest that currently rings-fences Delhi resists resolution as the air is dense with contrary sets of truths and half-truths. This has made activist farmers suspicious of the activist state, and the general public too is equally divided.

But what are these contrary sets of truths and half-truths?

Protesters' truth

Farmers of Punjab and Haryana alone provide as much as 45% of the marketable surplus of wheat and rice by leveraging Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) regulations and the Minimum Support Price (MSP). These provisions were put in place more than 50 years ago to attract farmers to participate in the Green Revolution. That this programme worked best in Punjab and Haryana is because progressive farmers were at the political helm in these States (<https://bit.ly/2WIdCUN>).

As a result, the MSP became identified with wheat and rice, the two main crops of Punjab and Haryana. Other crops did not get much prominence as APMCs and its attendant MSP did not receive prominent support outside north-west India.

The "arhtiyas" (or, the *mandi* middlemen) are not seen as villains by farmers in Punjab and Haryana but function as lifeline links. Besides helping in the weighing, grading and sorting of grain, most of them are also fertilizer and pesticide agents, money lenders and

general knowledge providers. Many *arhtiyas* today are Jat Sikhs and are substantial farmers too.

APMC *mandis* charge a transaction fee, or cess, which the State pockets. The proceeds of this money are used primarily to make better roads and storage facilities.

Contract farming has not been a success for two reasons. Small farmers complain that big contractors easily renege on their commitments and either refuse to buy the produce or beat down the price once harvesting is done. Second, if they give their lands to them then they may not get them back for no contractor will invest in land if the contract is just for a year and is renewable annually. The anti-zamindari policy of land to the tiller might now work against the interest of farmers if they are not the actual tillers for an extended period.

Government's truth

The Minimum Support Price has never been a law, only a policy. Therefore, to demand it be made a law now is unfair. Farmers try to duck this question, but it is a major sticking point.

Like everything else, agricultural produce should also obey market price fluctuations. There will be good years and bad years and this is how agricultural markets function everywhere, and for every other crop in India as well. As there is no food shortage today, the provisions of the Green Revolution should no longer be binding.

Contract farming will help the mass of small farmers by freeing them from their tiny plots and they will now be free to move outside the village and seek jobs elsewhere.

Farmers get huge subsidies from the State to the tune of 2%-2.5% of GDP. This is much higher



than subsidies farmers receive in the United States, the European Union (EU), Latin America or Japan. Total subsidy in India is in the range of \$45-50 billion, while in the U.S. it is about \$20 billion, in the EU around \$39 billion and Japan nearly \$46 billion (<https://bit.ly/3mN9R9I>).

Half-truths of protesters

Protesters are putting out a half-truth when they argue that the MSP should be made a law. The MSP was never law, it was always a policy. So the farmers' demand is not really to roll back the new agricultural Bill, as they claim, but to bring in a fresh one that makes MSP a law.

The second half-truth protesters refuse to fully acknowledge is that when international prices are higher than domestic prices, they resent not being able to sell outside the country. Onions and sugar are recent examples.

Half-truths of the government

On the other side there are half-truths too. True, contract farming ought to release farmers from their uneconomical holdings, but this does not acknowledge the actual difficulties farmers face with contract farming. As we have elaborated, a little earlier, farmers face problems both in terms of selling their produce and when they want their lands back from the contractors.

It is true that mainly big farmers, not small or marginal ones, go

to *mandis*. This conceals the fact that most small farmers find the transportation cost too expensive as APMC-run *mandis* are few and far between. If there had been more of them nearby, then these *mandis* would have been their preferred choice.

It is true that the farm subsidy in India can be as high as \$50 billion (about ₹3.83-lakh crore), but per farmer the subsidy just about touches \$48, compared to over \$7,000 in the U.S. (<https://bit.ly/37Nztjq>). When this is contextualised, we find that only 2% of U.S. farmers are below poverty line, but 85% of Indian farmers are small and marginal. We should not forget either that in India, the social cover for health, education and unemployment is poor.

The MSP does not apply only to wheat and rice, but to 22 crops in all (<https://bit.ly/37MkvKB>). If it is active only for wheat and rice, it is because there is a strong farmers' lobby in the northwest. Also in the early years of food shortages, it was wheat and rice that received attention.

It is true that farmers in Punjab and Haryana have created an ecological crisis of magnum proportions. Aided and abetted by the APMC and the MSP, farmers in the northwest primarily cultivate paddy and wheat and this has robbed the soil of vital nutrients besides depleting groundwater reserves. As rice is a thirsty crop and it does not rain very heavily in Punjab and Haryana, groundwater is increasingly being used, leading to its rapid depletion. If the APMC and the MSP were to go, farmers would diversify and the ecology would be restored, so also the economy.

What is concealed is that the proposal for diversification has been discussed from the time Professor S.S. Johl recommended it as early as in his 1986 report, but no

government, at any level, paid heed to it. This is obviously an issue that should have been discussed decades back, but aroused no determined interest (<https://bit.ly/3plOur>).

Political truth about subsidies
An uncomfortable truth looms above all this but is conveniently ignored by most.

This truth is that everybody benefits from subsidies. The farmers benefit (cheap electricity and fertilizers, for example), central Government employees benefit (the Central Government Health Scheme, for example), Ministers benefit, corporates benefit (for example, the "revenues foregone" by the government to help business; this increased by 16% in the 2018-19 Budget), the armed forces benefit (rations for the services are priced much lower, for example), poor children benefit (government schools), universities benefit (State and central universities), even prisons benefit (in the U.S., as many as 8% of prisoners are in privately-run prisons).

When a particular subsidy is withdrawn, the population that was being served by it will protest. If the CGHS is shut down, bureaucrats will rise in opposition; withdraw perks to Members of Parliament, and our lawmakers will object; cease cancelling the "revenues foregone" provision in the Budget and businesses will complain. Subsidies are bad, but only for other people, never for oneself.

If there are so many truths, half-truths and an overwhelming politically unacceptable truth, a meeting ground will always be hard to find.

Dipankar Gupta, an eminent sociologist, was a professor at the School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University

MGR's mojo, time tested and enduring

In the run-up to the Tamil Nadu elections, his name and legacy still cast their spell on voters and political claimants



T. RAMAKRISHNAN

M.G. Ramachandran, or MGR (1917-1987), founder of Tamil Nadu's ruling party, the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), and Chief Minister for an almost unbroken period of 10 years (1977-87), is back in the public discourse.

List of claimants

Kamal Haasan, veteran actor and founder of the Makkal Needhi Maaiam (MNM), has joined the list of claimants to his legacy. Rajini-Kanth, another veteran actor, and who has planned to launch his party in a month, declared in early 2018 that he aspired to revive "MGR rule". His admirers are expecting him to replicate a "Dindigul-type" of performance in the 2021 Assembly election, just as MGR's AIADMK, in its maiden attempt within months of formation, scored a spectacular victory in the 1973 by-election to the Dindigul Lok Sabha constituency; it surpassed the Congress (Organisation) led by former Chief Minister K. Kamaraj and pushed the then ruling Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) to the third spot.

About two months ago, the Bharatiya Janata Party sought to appropriate the MGR legacy when his images were used in the promotion material of the "Vetrivel Yatra," a roadshow by the party's State president, L. Murugan. Last week, even DMK president M.K. Stalin rendered a few lines from a 1965 MGR film to lash out at Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami. MGR's 33rd death anniversary was observed yesterday, December 24, and there is a generation of people in the State who have not seen him. Yet, MGR's name continues to cast a spell on voters.

There is a school of thought that the former Chief Minister's following among people in Tamil Nadu has been a myth. In the later part of his rule, there were critics who described his style of functioning – both in the government and in the party – as "highly personalised" and "feudal". As far as his style of working was concerned, there was always an element of unpredictability.

A stress on welfareism
If MGR joined hands with the Indian National Congress in the March 1977 Lok Sabha elections, three months later, in the Assembly elections, he could dump the Congress party and go with the Communist Party of India (Marxist), an adversary of the Congress

at the all-India level. Likewise, he sought to implement the concept of a creamy layer in July 1979 by prescribing an annual income limit of ₹9,000 for the Backward Classes to be eligible for reservation in education and public employment. After his party faced a drubbing in the Lok Sabha election in January 1980, he not only withdrew it but also hiked the quantum of quota for the BCs from 31% to 50%; also, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are entitled to 19% reservation. As proof of his ability to shock his party colleagues and the public alike, MGR axed 10 Ministers at one go in 1986.

Despite his regime getting embroiled in several controversies of corruption such as illegal diversion of rectified spirit to Kerala and allegations of kickbacks in the purchase of foreign ships, the dirt did not stick. The AIADMK founder is best remembered for his government's noon meal scheme for

children and his emphasis on welfare economics, which, according to some of his Ministerial colleagues, was a reflection of his "identification with the poor". The stress on welfareism sustained MGR's image of being the champion of the poor, the oppressed and the vulnerable sections of society, including women. MGR had assiduously cultivated such an image even from the early days in the film world. His successor, Jayalalithaa, had, for sometime, dabbled with market-led and neo-liberal policies focusing on growth. But electoral debacles made her realise that welfareism was a powerful political tool and should not be overlooked.

Nuanced shift
Though MGR broke away from the DMK, whose emphasis on iconoclasm, atheism, and ethnic and regional identity was well known, he was clear from the beginning that he should not be seen as one more representative of that set of political values. Without making any radical departure from the State's known stand on issues such as the two-language formula, he made a nuanced shift from the DMK's approach. Initially, he presented himself as a nationalist and later, as a believer, as borne out by his government's centenary celebrations for C. Rajagopalachari ("Rajaji") and Subramania Bharati, both prominent figures of the free-

dom movement, as well as his visits to the Mookambika temple, Kollur, in Udupi, Karnataka.

The two traits helped him widen the AIADMK's political base, as he targeted the vote bank of the national parties, the Janata Party and the Congress, which together had secured around 34% of votes in the 1977 Assembly election. Jayalalithaa, with her felicity with several languages, was never seen as a parochialist, despite her strong stand on issues such as "Hindi imposition." She had all along portrayed herself as a god-believing Hindu. Former Electricity Minister Pantruti S. Ramachandran, who was a key person in all the three cabinets of MGR, strongly disputes the contention that MGR was an autocrat, while emphasising the point that "in the Cabinet meetings, he would seek the views of every one of us before taking any decision".

More than all these, MGR, while in power, was virtually invincible and his political *bête noire*, M. Karunanidhi, could become Chief Minister only after his death. Charisma was not the only reason behind his success as MGR banked on a combination of factors to keep himself politically relevant. This is why Mr. Haasan and others have realised that MGR's mojo can fetch them a rich electoral dividend.

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

The Cairn case

Retrospective taxation is not only bad in law but also an unfair practice resorted solely with the purpose of filling up the exchequer by dubious means. It is ironic that such an undesirable practice reared its ugly head for the first time during the tenure of Dr. Manmohan Singh, who, through his liberalisation policies, opened the doors to global investors. The Vodafone incident set a bad precedent emboldening authorities to act in similar fashion, but without taking into account the wider repercussions to the Indian economy. Despite the not-so-conducive investing conditions prevailing due to the pandemic, global investors have continued to repose trust in the Indian market, going by the funds being pumped into the stock market, and even their investing in distressed

assets. Their contribution in generating employment and growth of Gross Domestic Product can in no way be under-estimated. We should tread with caution before application of penal provisions. Given their importance to the Indian economy, there should be a separate panel to deal with tax or other critical financial transactions relating to global investors. It would help in resolution (Page 1, "Cairn Energy wins arbitration award", December 24).

V. SUBRAMANIAN,
Chennai

Sugathakumari
In the passing of Sugathakumari, the literary world has lost one of its greatest poets and an iconic public figure who worked tirelessly for the cause of the downtrodden. She anchored herself as a

towering moral presence in Kerala's public sphere. Her pioneering role in the Silent Valley Movement in 1970 cannot be easily forgotten.

M. JAYARAM,
Sholavandan, Tamil Nadu

State's yes to jallikattu
The Tamil Nadu government's decision to permit jallikattu in the State, with the ostensible objective of romanticising the ancient sport, is aimed more at vote bank politics. Though a standard operating procedure would be put in place, it is susceptible to be observed more in the breach. More importantly, the grim prospect of grievous injuries cannot be downplayed.

P.K. VARADARAJAN,
Chennai

Inducing polarisation
In today's India, "love jihad" is one

Are children being introduced to coding too early in life?

PARLEY

Only if children are kept busy in different ways can problem solving and other skills be honed

The number of coding and programming bootcamps that are being offered by educational technology (Ed Tech) companies for children as young as four or five years has increased exponentially in recent times. Ed Tech companies argue that careers in the 21st century will be based on technology, for which children should get a head start. There have also been ringing endorsements from celebrities for this trend. Should we at all be concerned about this? What are the repercussions of increasing screen time for young children? Pritika Mehta and Latha Madhusudhan discuss this issue in a conversation moderated by Mandira Moddie. Edited excerpts:



Pritika Mehta
is a data scientist
and entrepreneur
who leads
initiatives to teach
coding to young
children via
interactive games



Latha
Madhusudhan,
an educator for
over 30 years, is
the founder of
'Prakriti - A
Waldorf
Kindergarten', a
Waldorf-inspired
school in Bengaluru



Scan the QR code to
listen to the full
interview online

With schools being shut due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a spurt in enrolments in coding classes. What could be the reasons for this?

Pritika Mehta: I think there are three reasons. One is FOMO (fear of missing out) – somebody else's child has learned JavaScript. My child is not yet into it, so I shall get him to do that. The second is the sense of security with jobs. I think a lot of careers in India are driven by how well-paying the job is. We pursue careers not out of passion but by figuring out what can earn us a decent living. The third is that parents wanted to channelise the energy of their children during the pandemic and they found coding to be one way of doing that.

Latha Madhusudhan: I would not recommend joining coding classes. I would go back and ask the parents, what is it that a child needs at the age of four? The child needs his security, he needs to develop his physical skills, hone his language and speaking skills, and his metabolic system has to be in place. All of this has to be achieved before he can get into coding and programming.

Some say that since technology has crept into pretty much every aspect of our lives, children should be exposed at an early age to coding as that will help them develop

analytical thinking, logic and problem-solving skills. But why is it happening at such an early age?

PM: Education is not only about learning to code, or learning mathematics, or learning just one subject; it is about the overall development of a child's brain. My nieces and nephews are very attracted to technology, to mobile phones. They know how to open websites and do many things on the phone. So, if a child enjoys technology, how about you expose him to certain coding courses online which are free? Instead of letting your child play games on the mobile phone for two hours, why don't you help him spend an hour learning coding which can help him channelise his energy and maybe one hour he can have the time to play games? I don't think coding is for everybody, but it's like maths... if you know maths, your life becomes easier. And it is not that everybody goes on to pursue a career in maths. If you know coding, it will help you become a part of this technological revolution that is happening around the world. But I would not recommend that every parent push their child aged four or five into coding. I would just say expose it to them. If they like it, good; if they don't, then they have a lot of years to learn it.

There have been numerous studies on how early exposure to technology can harm the child's development; that technology comes at the cost of developing cognitive skills that children build through personal connections and interactions, and free play. Could you elaborate on this?

LM: In my school, we do not encourage technology in any form. I advise parents that screen time is not at all what children should have right now. We need to understand what the child needs at this age. Until the age of 12, the brain is not wired to master anything outside of oneself. The brain is wired to connect, it is wired to learn from experience and stimulation. A young child between the age of zero and



seven years only learns in an environment of imitation, emulation. When children see their parents sitting in front of a screen and working, they pretend to do the same thing. At that point of time, what they need is to first develop their basic skills. Let them develop the biggest computer that is their own body and their brain, let them master their physical skills, and then move on to something outside of their body to master. Then it happens very easily. It's not like I'm against technology. But only at the age of 12, the brain is wired to better receive technology.

PM: I disagree a little that at the age of 12, everybody has developed at the same pace. A parent should judge his or her child's ability to learn. Whether the child is ready or not, expose the child to technology. If he doesn't like it, don't go ahead with it. And if he does like it, then why not? Just like you send your children for swimming classes, maths classes and dance classes, why not send them or just expose them to coding classes online?

LM: Yes, children are very individualistic. Each one has his own talent. But what does [literature on] pedagogy and human development or child development say? Universally, if you see, by the age of 24 months, every child is walking. By 18 months, the child speaks. So, when there are developmental milestones to be reached, then individualism comes within that span of development. When children are exposed too early to technology, to screen time, to too much media, what happens to the physical development of the eye, to sensory integration and to their social interactions? There are developmental

C Play experiences bring everything into the picture, whether it is logical thinking, cognition, critical thinking skills, or problem-solving skills... let the child be a child, not a small adult.

LATHA MADHUSUDHAN

milestones which every child should meet at the appropriate age. When you put children in front of the screen or introduce them to coding and they develop one kind of skill, what happens to their physical skills? The human eye does not develop completely until the age of seven. Any medical person will tell you that it takes that much time for the heartbeat to settle, since children's heart rates are faster. When all these things are happening inside their bodies, we need to wait, give them time. There is enough time to do all these things.

Do you think that there is room for both to co-exist at an age-appropriate time? That at the right time, the ideas of free play and these structured

programmes that can help them develop their cognitive skills can be combined?

LM: Yes, there is scope, but the bone of contention here is, what is the right age? We always talk about age-appropriate activities, even in education. As an educator, I am very clear: play experiences bring everything into the picture, whether it is logical thinking, cognition, critical thinking skills, problem-solving skills... you let the child be a child, not a small adult. If you leave him at that level, and allow play to take over, he will work, interact with the outer environment. Then these things will automatically happen.

PM: I would like to add one thing. Because of the pandemic, children are receiving their education only on mobiles or laptops, so there is already screen time. And they are watching a lot of television. There is technology at every juncture of your day-to-day life, and it is really hard to keep your child away from it. I see no harm in this. I started coding when I was very young, and I used to go outside and play. So, I think both can exist together.

LM: I agree that media and screen time cannot be brushed under the carpet. They are here to stay. But that is my worry. The early years are the single most important period of the human lifespan. That time is the [time for the] creation of healthy, happy, sustainable societies. This is not happening. There is lack of touch. There is lack of sensory integration. There is too much of exposure to media and children have forgotten how to write properly, how to pick up a book and read. They need to stay connected to another human being. They have relationship problems. Their growth hormones and genes are changing. Maturity has come down from 12 years to eight years and now five years. Where is society headed? Some affluent children have access to sports activities and these parents might find that balance. But what happens to these middle class children or lower middle class children? They are addicted to their mobiles. It is very harmful.

PM: Excess of anything is harmful, but if done in moderation, I see no harm. And when it comes to writing or reading, honestly, these days I'm also not reading any book because I find reading blogs more interesting. And I hardly write anything; I type. I use Google Docs to make my documents, notes. Technology has made our life easier. And if we are using technology in our day-to-day life, maybe we are evolving in a different manner.

There is an argument that technology is developing at such a fast pace that programming languages that are being used today will become redundant. And instead, with developments in artificial intelligence, humans

will no longer be needed to code. So, is there a possibility that these skills that are being taught can become redundant?

PM: No, coding will not become redundant. Today, I know more than seven to eight programming languages. But initially, I just learned one. For all the other languages, only the syntax changes, the semantics remain the same. If you know the basics of coding, you can pick up any language any time. And when it comes to the premise that humans will no longer be needed, I would say it is not that we will be replaced, but that we are going to work with better technology. When computers came people said, oh, we are going to be replaced. But just look at the time we are in. During the pandemic, almost all companies were able to operate because they had technology by their side. We had Zoom meetings and people could work from their homes because of technology. If we are replaced at one job, we might just need to learn another skill. I think technology has improved our life rather than ruining it. Excess of anything is bad. We just need to find the right balance.

The National Education Policy 2020 recommends that coding be introduced in school only from Class 6 onwards. With private players coming into this field, do you think there is a need for some sort of regulation in this area?

PM: I don't see the need to regulate anything. Companies pressing parents to enrol their children in coding classes or bootcamps... that's a marketing problem and not really a problem related to coding.

LM: More than regulation, what is needed is a statutory warning. Parents should be educated on what is the need for the child at that age.

PM: School education in India is broken. You might have seen a lot of discussions on why there is such a huge gap between the skills required by corporates versus the skills acquired by children in schools or colleges. We can fill this gap when we help children become creators of the future; this century is driven by technology.

Tackling an existential crisis

An informal alliance with the BJP will suit the JD(S) which is seeing an apparent decline

P. S. JAYARAMU

Responding to rumours in Karnataka about the Janata Dal (Secular) merging with the Bharatiya Janata Party, JD(S) leader and former Chief Minister H.D. Kumaraswamy publicly denied this, adding that his real political innings will commence in 2023. Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa of the BJP separately endorsed the merger denial statement. Public posturing apart, Mr. Kumaraswamy appears to be taking his party closer to the Yediyurappa government. Some of his recent decisions in this regard are worth scrutinising.

Support for the BJP
First, his support to the amendment to Karnataka Land Reforms Act, 1961 allowing non-agriculturists to buy agricultural land in the State is notable. Mr. Kumaraswamy defended his decision on the ground that the new Bill will result in increase the coverage of agriculture, attract youth to farming, and encourage new experiments in scientific farming in place of traditional farming.

An equally important reason for the apparent decline of the JD(S) is its dynastic character. Dynasty has made the party dysfunctional. With no democratically conducted organisational elections, the party lacks a committed cadre.

Additionally, Mr. Kumaraswamy's disdain for ideology and his pursuit of politics as a business, coupled with statements that his father's obsession with secularism has come in the way of his political ambitions being realised, are negative factors hindering his party's performance. JD(S) supremo H.D. Deve Gowda maintains a strategic silence on many issues, signalling perhaps that he is allowing Mr. Kumaraswamy to chart out plans for the future of the party.

Win-win situation

At this juncture, an informal alliance between the JD(S) and the BJP appears to suit both parties. The BJP's main objective is to contain and checkmate the Congress in the 2023 Assembly elections, if necessary, by getting into an electoral understanding with the JD(S). Mr. Kumaraswamy's longer-term plan may be, if necessary, to become Nitish Kumar for the BJP in Karnataka: if no party obtains a majority in the next Assembly elections, he could bargain for the Chief Minister's post by supporting the BJP in forming a coalition government. Depending on the numbers, Mr. Kumaraswamy might even settle for the post of Deputy Chief Minister and bargain for key portfolios. This might be a way for him to pull the JD(S) out of its existential crisis.

Politics driven by self-interest
The root cause for the self-interest-driven politics of the JD(S) is its inability to electorally reach a level where it can form the government on its own, ever since its inception. Its tally in the Assembly of 224 seats has been between 58 and 37.

The social base of the party is narrow and is dominated by the Vokkaliga community. A look at the seats



NOTEBOOK

News from this day, that age

Choosing snippets from the archives is fun, instructive and also tedious

RADHIKA SANTHANAM

Every day, *The Hindu* publishes a small section called 'From the Archives' on the op-ed page. This gives our readers a peek into the issues that were pre-occupying minds 50 years ago and 100 years ago. The task of choosing snippets is fun and informative, the eye strain notwithstanding. Scanning the pages feels like a hurried visit to the past, to historic events that took place when I wasn't even born, yet also strangely gives me a sense of *déjà vu*. That is because news is always broadly the same, yet news is always a product of the times we live in.

A hundred years ago, the newspaper was vastly different. There were very few advertisements; fonts were designed, it seems, only to serve as an eye test a century later; and little effort was made to keep space between lines. News naturally focused on the nationalist movement. But there were always reports on robbery

and murder, sometimes with gruesome details. The writing was archaic and sometimes tedious. Reports were stingy with the use of punctuation and sometimes contained details that would be considered politically incorrect today.

In choosing snippets from 100 years ago, the most important factor to consider is the legibility of the report. Though well preserved, the pages are yellowed and some words have faded, so it is often hard to decipher portions of an article, even if the snippet is interesting. Then, of course, is relevance. For instance, I found an interesting piece on fake news, referred to as "yellow journalism", on how the 'Hare Street Journal' was "concocting" stories about a conference that never took place.

While choosing reports from 100 years ago is to choose news from an altogether different era, snippets from 50 years ago seem like they're out of to-

day's newspaper. Much like how Prime Minister Narendra Modi is often asked where he gets his energy from, in 1969, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was asked in Kabul by an Afghan correspondent about the secret of her "astounding freshness" despite the fact that she had to "carry the heavy burdens of a country like India". Reports on demonetisation five decades ago in Sri Lanka narrated how lines of anxious people waited at banks to get their cash exchanged. A BBC correspondent was asked to leave India for his "anti-national coverage". An editorial on the importance of student participation in political movements was published half a century before 2019, the year when many in India complained that students were getting "too political" in some universities.

It read: "The... attempts to coerce the student population to truth telling as though it were poison can only have the effect... of driving them to the other extreme, and it is only by allowing them to discuss political questions, conduct debates... and utilise facilities for training them in citizenship that their minds could be directed in healthy channels..."

Sometimes I choose snippets only for their headlines or humour. For instance, when a Minister was told in Parliament during a discussion on film censorship that he, as a bachelor, was not competent to offer any suggestions on the subject of kissing in films, the report was published with the brilliant headline: "Minister tight-lipped on kissing". A remark we often hear from our oldest readers is that the newspaper has changed, that more errors have crept in. But the archives show that *The Hindu*'s understated style of reporting, language, its commitment to truth telling as well as the occasional errors have all persisted through the decades.

The Hindu

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO DECEMBER 25, 1970

Scintillating Pallavi by D.K. Pattammal

Madras, Dec. 25: The pandal concerts at the Music Academy festival usually excite a lot of interest. This season the excitement has been conspicuously lesser than in previous years. Much of the music in the 1:30 p.m.-3 p.m. bracket, has been most unimpressive. In fact one of the performers was so standard that a distressed listener remarked that this artiste should have waited for another ten Vijayadasamis before thinking of singing in public. The Academy's model of selection of new artistes to perform in the pandal would appear to call for a thorough revision.

The concert of the conference President, Srimathi D.K. Pattammal, was one of stature characterised by high vidvat and mature performing ability. A tough, very intelligently thought-out 3 kalai Adi tala pallavi in Harihambhoji was sung with (brother D.K. Jayaraman also assisting) all the tempo variations in scintillating style. Another highlight of the concert was the skilled swara-singing for "Dasukovalena" (Todi), the misra jhampa kriti.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO DEC. 25, 1920

The Nellore riots

The Local Government have just published the papers relating to the Nellore riot including the report of Mr. M.E. Couchman who was deputed to inquire into the rioting and the Government's own order thereon. Mr. Couchman's findings, so far as the magistracy are concerned, are as follow. After referring to the previous history of the case, and after deducing, from the action of the District Magistrate (Mr. R. Ramachandra Rao) in 1912 and the subsequent period the reproachful proposition "that there was if anything a bias in the district in favour of taking risks where the decrees of Civil Courts were concerned", he absolves from blame Mr. Nedungadi, the District Magistrate concerned, on this ground and on the ground that he had no information of the intentions of Muhammadans from the police. "It is, however, impossible that he can have intended that the procession should be stopped if serious rioting would result from persisting in it." As regards the Magistrates on the spot, Mr. Couchman finds: "(1) The Magistrate should have made some attempt to personally reason with the rioters and warn them that firing was about to be ordered if they persisted in their unlawful actions."

FROM PAGE ONE

Govt. renews offer to farmers for dialogue

"The government must stop speaking only to itself, it must speak to the protesting farmers. It must speak about the issues that the protesting farmers have brought to the fore. The government must understand the nature and extent of the agitation. The government must act. Time for rhetoric is gone. Time for being smart and cunning is gone. Time for using words to solve problems is gone. There is a real problem, we need real solutions for this," Coordination Committee general secretary said.

Farmers too wanted peace, but the government must send a letter outlining the terms and conditions under which the three laws could be repealed for a good discussion. "If you publicly articulate that there is no question of repeal, these acts are good and you write letters that you wish to engage then this will not work," he added.

6,000 travellers from U.K. traced across States

The Health Department is also monitoring 111 persons who had moved to a different district after returning. As of Thursday, only one person – a 25-year-old man who had returned from the UK by air via Delhi – had tested positive and is undergoing treatment in Chennai.

2,116 in Kerala
In Kerala, eight persons have tested positive for COVID-19, from amongst the 1,609 travellers from the UK, who reached Kerala between December 9-23. Health officials have traced a total of 2,116 passengers from UK who arrived in the State till December 23.

All 1,609 passengers were tested using RT-PCR and they will be followed up for the next 14 days. Those who tested negative will be re-tested after the quarantine.

2,127 in Karnataka
A total of 1,016 of the 2,127 passengers who arrived from the U.K. in Karnataka from December 1 till December 22 have been tested. Out of them, six have tested positive and their samples have been sent for genome se-

quencing. No home isolation is allowed for passengers from the U.K. who test positive, irrespective of symptoms, till their genome sequencing is completed.

1,200 in Telangana
Seven persons, of a total 1,200, who had flown in to Hyderabad either directly or via U.K. since December 9, have tested positive for the coronavirus. The samples of these seven positive cases are being sent to the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB) Hyderabad to check whether they carried the mutated U.K. strain.

68 in Andhra Pradesh
A woman who returned from the U.K. to Rajahmundry has been kept in isolation after testing positive. Overall, information is being gathered on 68 persons who have returned to Andhra Pradesh from the U.K.

The Chittoor district administration received a list of 38 passengers who came from London via New Delhi and Bengaluru on Thursday. Efforts are on to get more details about them.

(With Bureau inputs)

Economic revival beating predictions: RBI bulletin

It added that despite headwinds, efforts by all stakeholders could put India on a faster growth trajectory.

In another article in the bulletin on the half-yearly review of government finances, officials of the Fiscal Division of RBI's Department of Economic and Policy Research warned that notwithstanding the severe impact of COVID-19 on government finances, it was imperative for the Centre and States to continue with the countercyclical fiscal measures to sustain the momentum of the recovery.

Social sector support
"Revenue expenditure measures undertaken to enhance social protections to the underprivileged and to address labour market dislocations might need to continue as the recovery is likely to be uneven across sectors," they added.

"Capital expenditure, which collapsed in the first half of this fiscal, will need to be scaled up as a priority. Public investment in healthcare, social housing, education and environmental pro-

tection is the need of the hour to build a more resilient and inclusive economy," they stressed.

The authors noted that views did not necessarily represent those of the central bank. Stating that two important forces – better handling of the pandemic and stimulus impact – were "conspiring to bless this turning of the page on the virus" the authors of the article on 'State of the Economy' stressed that India was bending the COVID infection curve. Since mid-September, barring localised surges, infections were falling week after week, and the recovery rate was nudging 95%, they said.

The authors said an analysis of 12 months ahead forward earnings reveals improvement in the outlook for many companies. Sectors such as auto and capital goods that were severely impacted in lockdown are expecting a turnaround in forward earnings. Healthcare, information technology and fast moving consumer goods firms were sighting stronger earnings outlook.

India files appeal in Vodafone case

This appeal also sets the stage for the government to challenge the order of a three-member tribunal at the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague that asked India to return \$1.4 billion to British oil and gas company Cairn Energy plc.

The government had used a 2012 law that gave tax authorities the power to reopen past cases, to seek taxes from Vodafone and Cairn over alleged capital gains made several years ago. Both Vodafone and Cairn

had challenged the tax demands under bilateral investment protection treaties and initiated arbitration.

Sources said the government believes that taxation is not covered under investment protection treaties with various countries and the law on taxation is a sovereign right of the country. While the treaties are primarily aimed at protection of investments, the tax is levied on 'returns' earned by entities. Vodafone Group declined to comment.

The incident took place around 6 p.m. The women were identified as Punamchand and Shanti Kumari.

Officials said Mr. Rao went to the demolition spot as the women had earlier thrown chilli powder on a sub-inspector who was with the GHMC officials.

No night curfew in Karnataka

Yediyurappa says decision dropped after taking opinion of Cabinet and public

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BENGALURU

Less than 24 hours after issuing an order imposing night curfew, the Karnataka government on Thursday did a U-turn and withdrew the curfew which was to be in place till January 2 morning.

This was following criticism not only from the Opposition Congress but also from within the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on lack of consultation, according to government sources.

In a short statement on Thursday, Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa said that the decision to withdraw the night curfew was taken "following public opinion that it was not required". The decision was taken after consultations with Cabinet colleagues and senior officials, he said.

Appeal to public
On the eve of Christmas and New Year celebrations, the Chief Minister appealed to the people to follow CO-



Cautious move: COVID-19 screening being conducted at the Kempegowda bus station in Bengaluru. ■ SUDHAKARA JAIN

VID-19-related rules and protocols strictly and cooperate with the government to contain the spread of the virus.

On Wednesday evening, the State government issued the order clamping night curfew between 11 p.m. and 5 a.m. starting from December 24 to January 1 (5 a.m. on January 2), 2021, for containing the spread of the new mutated strain of the coronavirus. Earlier on the same

day, the government had announced a curfew from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. but eventually not only cut it by two hours but also allowed a slew of concessions within this period.

BJP legislators, including Basanagouda Patil Yatnal and A.H. Vishwanath, had expressed their reservations on the night curfew. Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee president D.K. Shiva-

kumar too had termed the decision "illogical". "From morning to evening, any number of people can come together. We had elections, the Assembly session and thousands of people coming to markets," he said.

Conflicting messages
The State government's flip-flop has left the State's COVID-19 experts disconcerted.

In the absence of government restrictions, people should go in for self-imposed curfew and follow COVID-19 appropriate behaviour, they said. Otherwise, the State may witness a spike in cases in the first week of January, they warned.

Expressing displeasure over the government's U-turn on night curfew, a senior member of the State's COVID-19 expert committee said: "Messages by the government have to be clear and firm. You cannot waver on decisions on restrictions, especially during a pandemic."



The High Court had decided to increase the number of pilgrims a day to 5,000. ■ PTI

allowing them to enter the temple. An increase in the number of pilgrims will put the police and health officials under great strain and difficulty," the State said.

The petition said the High Court ignored a high-level committee report of December 18 that had already enhanced the number of pilgrims per day to 2,000 on weekdays and 3,000 on weekends, respectively.

"Entry to the temple is controlled by a virtual queue system managed by the police. Pilgrims are tested for COVID-19 before al-

Kerala wants cap on Sabarimala pilgrims

Govt. moves SC against HC order

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

The Kerala government has moved the Supreme Court against a State High Court decision to increase the number of pilgrims per day to the Sabarimala temple to 5,000, even as a new strain of COVID-19 from the U.K. threatens to put the clock back in the battle against the pandemic.

In the absence of government restrictions, people should go in for self-imposed curfew and follow COVID-19 appropriate behaviour, they said. Otherwise, the State may witness a spike in cases in the first week of January, they warned.

The Sabarimala temple pilgrimage, from December 20 to January 14, is expected to draw thousands from across the country.

The State, represented by advocate G. Prakash, said the threat of a new virus strain and the recently concluded local body polls in Kerala posed a real and present danger during the temple season.

"Entry to the temple is controlled by a virtual queue system managed by the police. Pilgrims are tested for COVID-19 before al-



Postal ballots for those aged above 80 in Kerala

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM
If the COVID-19 pandemic persists, the 2021 Assembly polls in Kerala will see the introduction of postal ballots for voters aged above 80 and the differently-abled, in addition to electors who test positive for COVID-19 or are in quarantine. Teeka Ram Meena, Chief Electoral Officer (Kerala), has said. "Postal ballots will be optional for them. We will send them a form seeking their preference," Mr. Meena told *The Hindu*.

DYFI activist stabbed to death in Kerala

KASARAGOD
A Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYFI) activist Abdul Rahman, 32, was stabbed to death by a group at Kanhangad here in Kerala on Wednesday night. His friend Shuhail was injured. The police filed a case against Muslim Youth League leader Irshad and two others on the basis of an eyewitness account. Tensions had prevailed in the Kalaravi constituency over the counting of votes in the recent local body polls. The police said there were indications that the murder could be a result of it.

Regulate COVID-19 messages on phone: NGO

MYSURU
An NGO involved in consumer rights advocacy is planning to approach higher authorities with an appeal to regulate the awareness messages on COVID-19 on phone. Consumer Voice, the NGO, says that the man-hours lost daily while listening to such messages is staggering. Such messages no longer served the purpose of educating the public, it said. Consumer Voice activists say there was growing consensus that what started as a good cause in March, had now become a nuisance.

A similar request was turned down on December 21



Arif Muhammad Khan

Janata Party (BJP) had backed Mr. Khan.

Chief Minister hopeful
Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said the government hoped Mr. Khan would change his mind. He spelt out the need for the special Assembly session at an hour-long press conference on Thursday.

The government feared the ongoing farmers' agitation could adversely impact

the State's food security. Kerala was predominantly a consumer State. It relied heavily on food imports from neighbouring States.

Kerala was anxious that the disruption in the agriculture sector would imperil its food security.

Mr. Vijayan said the Governor had no discretionary powers in the matter. He was legally bound to give his approval once a majority government decided to convene the Assembly. The Governor could not arbitrate on the topics of deliberation in the Assembly. Mr. Vijayan said the government was optimistic that Mr. Khan would give his assent.

In the past, the Governor has maintained that the Assembly had no mandate to evaluate the constitutional validity of the acts of Parliament.

ED attaches FDs, cash in gold smuggling case

It files chargesheet against Sivasankar

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has attached fixed deposits, along with cash seized from bank lockers, totalling ₹1.85 crore, in the Kerala gold smuggling case.

The attachment made under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act includes ₹1 crore belonging to M. Sivasankar, the Indian Administrative Service official who was Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister, the ED said.

The agency has filed a supplementary chargesheet in the case against him. Mr. Sivasankar was arrested by the ED on October 28, and he is currently in judicial custody.

The ED is conducting a probe based on the National Investigation Agency's FIR against Sarith P. S., Swapna Suresh, Faisal Fareed and

Sandeep Nair under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act.

Diplomatic baggage

The smuggling racket was busted after the Customs Commissionerate (Preventive), Cochin, seized 30 kg of gold, worth ₹4.82 crore, at the Trivandrum International Airport on July 5. The seized gold was camouflaged as diplomatic baggage addressed to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) consulate, which has immunity from security check at airports under the Vienna Convention.

In its additional complaint filed before the Principal Sessions Judge, Ernakulam, the agency said the accused also concealed the ill-gotten money and attempted to project the movable assets gained through it as untainted.

Jumbo menace worries A.P. farmers

Herd strays into Chittoor from Karnataka forests

STAFF REPORTER
CHITTOOR

Tension gripped about a dozen villages in V. Kota mandal here in Andhra Pradesh after a herd of 17 wild elephants strayed into the district from the forests of Karnataka in the early hours of Thursday.

By evening, the herd was seen roaming close to the fields at Kummaranadugu and Dandikuppam hamlets of the mandal.

According to information, the herd made its way to V. Kota after the forest officials tried to force it back into the forests. After reaching Madikeri in Kolar district, the herd all of a sudden crossed



No boundaries: Elephants crossing the State highway close to V. Kota on the A.P.-Karnataka border. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

the Palamaner-Hosur national highway and entered Chittoor. The farmers are a worried lot as wild elephants usually raid crops after dusk.

Safeguarding crops

Forest officials of Chittoor West division have deployed additional forces at vulnera-

ble villages to prevent the entry of the wild animals into fields and human habitations. "V. Kota mandal remained almost free from the menace of wild elephants this year. With good rains, agriculture activity is hectic here. At a time we are waiting for the harvest, the presence of the wild elephants

is a nightmare to us," said Srinivas Gowd, a farmer.

"Now, our immediate task is to drive the elephants towards Tamil Nadu, as the possibility of the herd retreating into Karnataka is remote. We are taking care to protect crops," Forest Range Officer (Palamaner) B. Srinivasulu told *The Hindu*.

Dam oustees struggle to find a place for the dead

Those hit by Kondapochamma project in Telangana's Mamidyalal village question official apathy



A farmer arguing with the relatives of a deceased villager at Tunkibollaram in Siddipet, Telangana, on Tuesday. ■ MOHD ARIF

R. AVADHANI
SIDDIPET

Yerrolla Yadagiri was about 50 years old. On Monday, while climbing the ramp before his house he fell and died. A few hours before that, M. Poshaiah, a 45-year-old government employee, died of cardiac arrest.

Both belong to Mamidyalal village, one of the villages submerged due to the Kondapochamma reservoir project in Siddipet district of Telangana.

The oustees of Kondapochamma have been rehabilitated at the Tunkibollaram

Rehabilitation and Resettlement colony. Three villages and one tanda – Mamidyalal, Bahilampur, Thanehdarpally tanda – were re-established here.

The relatives of the deceased tried to bury the bodies in pits dug side by side.

However, a farmer of the neighbouring area objected. There was a heated argument and finally the oustees buried the bodies in the huge pit they had dug.

More than 10 bodies have been buried so far on this land, marked for the construction of a complex.

'Visva-Bharati essence of self-reliance'

Modi says India is taking the message of the university, founded by Tagore, to the world

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday emphasised that Visva-Bharati embodied Rabindranath Tagore's vision for the country. The university was also an essence of "Atmanirbhar Bharat" (self-reliant India), he noted.

Mr. Modi was participating in Visva-Bharati's centenary celebrations via videoconferencing.

He said the institution had been a venerable source of energy for the country for the past 100 years. "100 years of Visva-Bharati is a matter of pride to every Indian. The journey of Visva-Bharati is unique as it reflects the ideas, philosophy, and efforts of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore for the future of the country. This place is a source of constant energy to the country which has given artists, musicians, economist and scientists to the country."

The university was set up



A milestone: The centenary celebration of Visva Bharati University in Birbhum district on Thursday. ■ PTI

by Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore in 1921 at Bolpur in West Bengal's Birbhum district.

Message to world

Mr. Modi reflected on how the university was a seat of learning and living in the lap of nature. The country was taking the message of Visva-Bharati to the world, he stated.

The Prime Minister also touched on the historic context in which the university was founded. "When we talk

about freedom struggle, the 19th and 20th century comes to our mind. But it is also a fact that the foundation of such movements was kept centuries ago," he said, referring to the "Bhakti" movement.

"The tradition of 'Bhakti' played a crucial part in the ideas that laid the foundation of these ideas that helped in the freedom struggle. In the 'Bhakti' period, these reformers gave the ideas that were not limited to a region. It gave a collective insight and self-reliance to people," he said.

Along with the "Bhakti" tradition, there was also a movement where people led "karm andolan", a movement based on active action where, for centuries, people of the country fought against oppression and for independence. He referred to Shivaji Maharaj, Maharan Pratap, Rani Lakshmi Bai and Birsa Munda as glowing examples of the tradition.

A number of educational

institutions, including the Benaras Hindu University, the Aligarh Muslim University and several other varsities, came up across the country. It was the collective of the three movements that led to the Freedom Struggle and a national awakening.

Touching on the Gurudev's ideas of "self-reliance", he said: "Tagore wanted to see our villages, atmanirbhar (self-reliant), our agriculture atmanirbhar, our art and literature atmanirbhar and also our businesses atmanirbhar."

"Gurudev spoke about self-empowerment (atmashakti) in self-reliance (atmanirbhar). The university is called Visva-Bharati, which brings a synergy between country and the rest of the world. Atmanirbhar Bharat also draws its inspiration from here," he asserted.

Mr. Modi touched upon the new National Education Policy, saying it drew its inspiration from Gurudev's ideas of holistic learning.

I was not invited by university, says Mamata

She says Amartya Sen was insulted

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said on Thursday that she had not been invited to mark the start of the centenary celebrations of Visva-Bharati University on Thursday, and also accused the Central university of insulting Nobel laureate Amartya Sen.

"When did they invite me...For today's foundation day, there was no invitation, no phone...I want to thank those who have nurtured the institution for 100 years. Those who at helm of affairs today they are temporary, their days are numbered," Ms. Banerjee told presspersons at the State Secretariat.

She said the university authorities had sought time to meet her during her visit to Bolpur later next week, but she could not give them time.

Asked about Prime Minister Narendra Modi referring to a connection between



Mamata Banerjee

Gujarat and Rabindranath Tagore at the virtual inauguration of the centenary celebrations, she said that his language itself proved there was "political intention". She dubbed the event as a "political event" and a "BJP event".

Ms. Banerjee also referred to a development where the Visva Bharati named Nobel laureate Amartya Sen among "unauthorised occupants" of land in Santiniketan and sent a letter to the West Bengal government in this regard.

Agro park to come up in Singur

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday announced the setting up of an agro industrial park in Singur, the town that had become synonymous with fight against land acquisition during the Left front government.

The announcement has raised many eyebrows in the political circles.

Ms. Banerjee said no land would be acquired for the project and land would be allotted to industrial houses which wanted to set up facilities at the industrial park.

Singur was the site of the proposed small car project of Tata Motors in the seventh Left Front rule. After the Tatas decided to leave the project site in October 2008, the semi-constructed shed on the nearly 996 acres remained for almost eight years. Singur had become a symbol of anti-land acquisition movement.

IN BRIEF



U.P. to monitor migrants outside State

LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh government has said it would deploy its officers in cities like Delhi, Mumbai and Kolkata for the protection of migrant labourers. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has given instructions to officers to protect the safety and honour of labourers in foreign countries, the government said.

Bodo council: 3-party alliance wins floor test

GUWAHATI

The BJP-forged alliance won the composite floor test in Assam's autonomous Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) on Thursday amid alleged violence and unruly scenes. United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) president Pramod Boro, who was appointed BTC's Chief Executive Member on December 15, garnered the support of 22 of the 40 members in the council. The UPPL heads the alliance.

Stay on eviction notice by Centre to senior artists

NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court has stayed the eviction notices issued by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs to three senior citizen artists who have been residing at their government allotted homes at Asian Games Village Complex here since 1987.

Two Jaish militants killed in Baramulla

SRINAGAR

Two Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) militants were killed in an encounter in Baramulla in north Kashmir on Thursday. The militants were trapped during a search and cordon operation in the Wanigam Payeen area. "The hiding militants opened fire on the search party, triggering an encounter," the police said.

Filming at monuments free of cost till Aug. 2021

NEW DELHI

Film and photo shoots on themes of "national importance" at most centrally-protected monuments across the country would not incur the usual fee starting from Friday till Independence Day 2021, according to an Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) notification on Thursday.

Navies of India, Vietnam to hold passage exercise

NEW DELHI

Indian Navy ship INS Kiltan, which arrived in Vietnam on Thursday to deliver relief material under Mission Sagar-III, will hold a Passage Exercise (PASSEX) with the Vietnamese Navy in the South China Sea (SCS) later this week, the Navy said. "The current visit seeks to enhance maritime cooperation," it said.

COVID-19 cases decline by 5,391 in 24 hours

India registers 312 fatalities, with 93 in Maharashtra alone

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

India on Thursday registered a net decline of 5,391 COVID-19 cases from the total active caseload registered in the last 24 hours, said a release by the Union Health Ministry. The genome sequencing of the positive samples collected from passengers who have come from the U.K. is being undertaken, it said.

"The active caseload of the country currently stands at 2,83,849 and the share of active cases in the total positive cases has further shrunk to 2.80%. Daily recoveries have outnumbered the daily new cases since nearly a month [27 days]. In the last 24 hours, 24,712 persons were found to be positive in the country. During the same period, 29,791 recoveries were registered, ensuring a drop in the active caseload. India has recorded less than 30,000 daily new cases



Keeping track: Health workers registering samples taken for COVID-19 testing in Vellore. ■ VENKATACHALAPATHY C

continuously since the last 11 days," noted the Ministry.

It added that Maharashtra has reported the maximum number of single-day recoveries with 7,620 newly recovered cases; 4,808 people recovered in Kerala in the past 24 hours followed by 2,153 in West Bengal. The Ministry said 76.48% of the new cases were from 10 States and Union Territories,

with Kerala reporting the highest daily new cases at 6,169, followed by Maharashtra and West Bengal with 3,913 and 1,628 new cases respectively.

India has registered 312 fatalities in the past 24 hours with Maharashtra seeing the maximum casualties (93) and West Bengal and Kerala following with 34 and 22 deaths respectively.

Objection to new mosque untenable

Foundation rejects Jilani's plea

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
LUCKNOW

ed at Dhannipur "illegal" and impermissible under the Shariah.

Mr. Jilani had allegedly told presspersons that the proposed mosque violated the Waqf Act, arguing that mosques or land for them cannot be bartered. It also violated the Shariah, he had said.

Zufar Faruqi, chief trustee, Indo-Islamic Cultural Foundation, said the objection regarding the prohibition on barter or exchange of waqf properties "is false or seemingly made without reading of the judgment of the Supreme Court".

ed at Dhannipur "illegal" and impermissible under the Shariah.

Farooq Abdullah, who heads the Peoples Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD), on Thursday chaired a meeting of the grouping's constituents in Srinagar and asked J&K Lieutenant-Governor Manoj Sinha to release recently detained senior leaders "if the government wants democracy to survive in J&K".

Dr. Abdullah, who discussed the results of the District Development Council (DDC) polls with the alliance partners, said, "If the L-G administration and Centre wants democracy to survive in J&K, all those detained re-

Centre may accept Sumi's ceasefire offer

Security agencies worked on his return with an eye on concluding Naga deal

VIJAYITA SINGH
NEW DELHI

The Union government is likely to accept NSCN-K (National Socialist Council of Nagaland - Khaplang) leader Niki Sumi's offer to revive the ceasefire agreement and the anti-terror cases lodged against him would be dealt with appropriately, a senior government official said.

Security agencies have worked on Sumi's return to India with an eye on concluding the Naga peace deal.

The development comes ahead of Union Home Minister Amit Shah's visit to Manipur and Assam on December 26 and 27.

Sumi is wanted by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) for allegedly planning the attack on an Army convoy in Manipur's Chandel district on June 4, 2015. As many as 18 Army personnel were killed in the ambush carried out by NSCN-K cadres who came from Myanmar. He carries a reward of ₹10 lakh on his arrest. The attack preceded the NSCN-K's decision to unilaterally abrogate the ceasefire with the Centre in March 2015. Sumi was expelled from a Myanmar-based camp of the NSCN-K in June last, following which Indian security agencies have been trailing him. He floated a new outfit on December 18.

A statement signed by Sumi and issued on Wednesday said, "NSCN/GPRN has been striving all these years to achieve an honourable and acceptable political solution to the Naga issue. NSCN/GPRN is also conscious of the overwhelming sentiments among the Naga peo-



National Socialist Council leader Niki Sumi. ■ FILE PHOTO

ple for an early solution to this long standing issue."

The official said, "If Sumi has to join the peace talks, then it is imperative that he agrees to a ceasefire pact with the Centre. This is one of the prerequisites of him coming to the dialogue table. The Naga peace deal has been lingering for decades."

When asked about the terror cases against Sumi, the official said, "The Centre will take a measured view but this is not the first time that cases will be dropped against a wanted person who has agreed for a peaceful solution."

Ban in 2015

The Union Home Ministry had banned the NSCN-K led by S.S. Khaplang in 2015 after the Chandel ambush.

On September 10, 2015, the NIA said in a statement, "S.S. Khaplang is head of the NSCN (K) group and Niki Sumi is holding the charge of armed wing of said group. They were closely associated with the decision to attack Assam Rifles personnel at In-

Nepal House dissolution an internal issue'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Dissolution of the Nepal's parliament is an "internal matter" that is meant for the country's "democratic processes", said an official of the MEA on Thursday.

"We have noted the recent political developments in Nepal. These are internal matters for Nepal to decide as per its democratic processes. As a neighbour and well-wisher, India will continue to support Nepal in moving forward on the path of peace, prosperity and development," said MEA spokesperson Anurag Srivastava.



Firm demand: Farooq Abdullah, centre, and other Gupkar pact leaders at a meeting in Srinagar on Thursday. ■ NISSAR AHMAD

cently should be released immediately".

The veteran NC leader was referring to the detention of the three close aides of Peoples Democratic Party president Mehbooba Mufti –

former minister Naeem Akhtar, former legislator Peer Mansoor and former PDP deputy chairman Sartaj Madani.

Dr. Abdullah also pitched for restoration of the 4-G mo-

bile Internet services. "Prime Minister Narendra Modi talks about 5G in the country, while people of J&K are craving for high-speed Internet services. I urge the L-G administration and the Centre to ensure restoration of 4G internet services as soon as possible," he added.

On the future of the Gupkar alliance, Dr. Abdullah dismissed the rumours of divisions. "We are here to stay and nobody should have any doubt in it," he said.

Gupkar alliance spokesman and Peoples Conference (PC) chairman Sajad Lone also criticised the administration for detaining leaders of the alliance.

machinery. They are located at Anantapur, Kurnool, Krishna, Chittoor, Guntur, Kadapa, Vizianagaram, East/West Godavari, Visakhapatnam, Nellore, Prakasam and Srikakulam in Andhra Pradesh; Bengaluru, Kolar, Yadgir and Mandya in Karnataka; Khurda in Odisha; Krishnagiri in Tamil Nadu; and Mahaboob Nagar, Narayananpet, Khammam, Hyderabad, Ranga Reddy, Vikarabad, Medchal, Malkajgiri, Nalgonda and Mahabubnagar in Telangana.

Properties attached in various States

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has attached assets worth ₹4,109 crore in connection with a ponzi scam involving ₹6,380 crore collected from over 32 lakh investors in six States.

The attached properties include 2,809 land parcels, Haialand Amusement Park of Arka Leisure and Entertainments Private Limited spread over 48 acres in Andhra Pradesh, shares of various companies, plants and

Nine B-schools to compete in BLOC finale

Boardroom Challenge 2020 will be webcast from 10.30 a.m. on December 26

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

Nine B-schools will compete in the grand finale of the Business Line on Campus Boardroom Challenge 2020.



Prabhakar Pawar,
steward, Mumbai

"Har kisi ko apni jaan pyari hoti hai (Everyone considers their own life precious)," says Prabhakar Pawar over the phone from Mumbai. This statement explains why the 28-year-old steward at The Table, a plush fine dining restaurant in Mumbai's Colaba area, was a little apprehensive about his workplace's long-awaited reopening on a Sunday in October, after a string of lockdowns since March. As someone whose job description includes setting tables, seating guests, taking orders, serving food and topping wine glasses in one of the city's more popular venues teeming with hobnobbing crowds, potential death was never an occupational hazard for Prabhakar until COVID-19 broke out and made it a hazard for everyone. The threat remains but his duty continues, albeit with a few differences. Prabhakar explains, "The restaurant came up with digital menus with QR codes, so we don't have to hand out menus to people and take them back. We take orders and talk to guests from a distance, but things like clearing the table and filling up glasses have to be done up close. For that, we sanitise right before and after. Sanitisers are kept everywhere for us." So are masks and gloves, he says, adding, "Keeping a mask on for the entire shift was difficult at first, but it's the best thing to do for our own sake and for our families. We are all used to it now." A typical shift at the restaurant lasts between eight and nine hours. It helps that footfall is being kept deliberately low: "We don't allow more than 30 people at a time," says Prabhakar, "And most of those who come in are regulars. They, too, were scared at first, but they kept returning after seeing how well we take care of them."



B Prabhuraj,
food delivery executive, Chennai

Near-empty streets. Road blocks announcing 'Containment zones' in bright lettering. Contactless delivery. In his two years with food delivery platform Swiggy, B Prabhuraj had not experienced anything like he did during the initial months of the pandemic. The 25-year-old delivery partner lives in Mogappair West with his parents. "I usually deliver food within the region," he says. When he started venturing out after the initial lockdown was lifted, Prabhuraj was taken aback at how the city he loved and grew up in had changed.

"Everyone remained indoors fearing the virus," he says, "I realised how I could help people by taking hot food to their doorsteps." Prabhuraj once navigated by lanes and a took a five-kilometre detour instead of a straight, shorter route to ensure the customer got her food on time. "The road I was to

take was blocked since there was a containment zone nearby," he explains. He gradually got accustomed to the new ways of working. "In 'Contactless Delivery', I would place the package at the door and send its WhatsApp image to the customer," he says.

"They would collect it

after I leave." Masks and gloves entered the picture and Prabhuraj does admit that a fear crept in about the safety of his parents – his father, especially, since he was diabetic. "Which is why after my shift, I would head straight for a bath and enter home only after that," he explains.

Prabhuraj is glad for some changes the pandemic brought about. "In the past, we delivery boys have faced several disrespectful customers," he says. "But these days, most of them treat us well; they understand how difficult our jobs can be." And despite him refusing, Prabhuraj recalls being offered tips to the tune of ₹100. More than anything, it is this new-found empathy in people that he cherishes. "I will be always grateful for that," says Prabhuraj.

In a year dominated by social distancing norms and lockdowns, some in the food and dining industry had no choice but to step out and meet our demands. Three such unsung heroes describe their journey at work since March

At your service, in a PANDEMIC

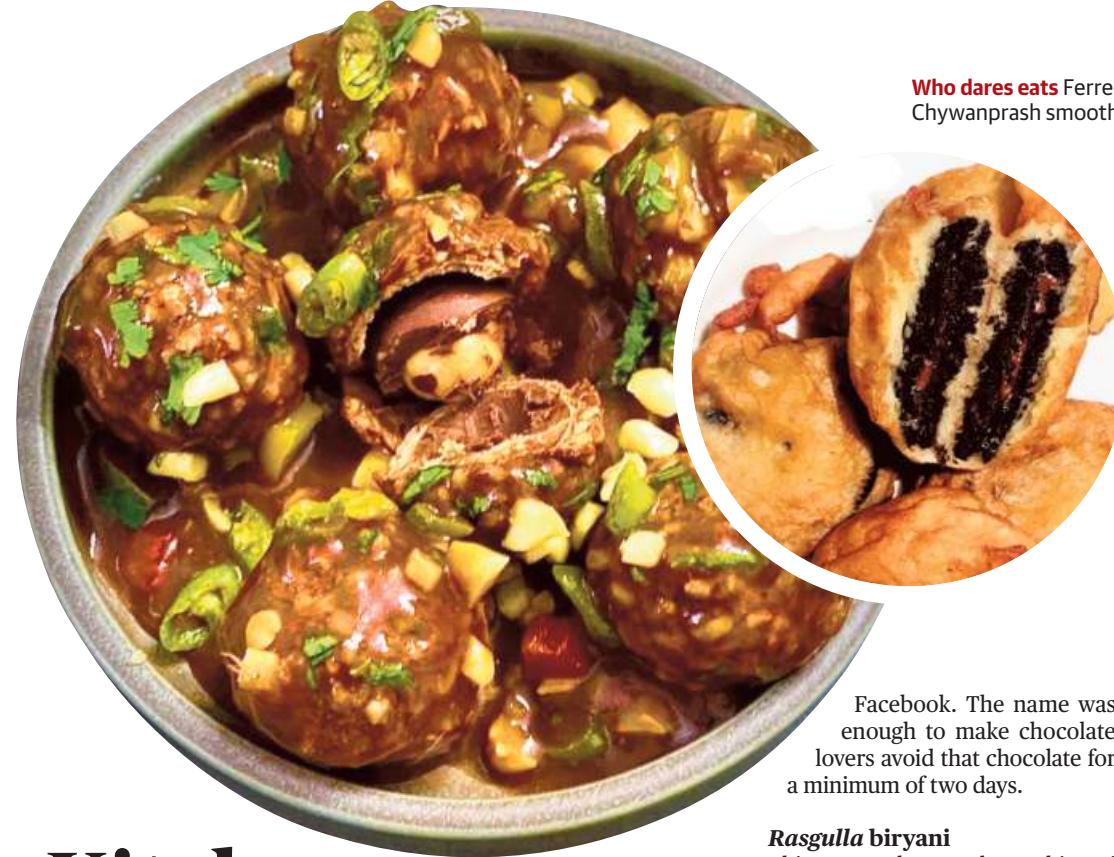
MEGHNA MAJUMDAR, PRABALIKA M BORAH AND AKILA KANNADASAN

Arjun Jenna,
kitchen assistant, Gachibowli

Arjun Jenna went to his hometown Cuttack, in Odisha, two days before the total lockdown was announced. He had originally planned to be back at work within a week. When the lockdown was announced, Arjun didn't know what to do. He was worried about his job: he was a tandoor kitchen assistant at Sheraton Gachibowli. A single call to the executive chef, however, allayed his fears. Arjun says, "I was assured of my job and the chef made me calm down, pointing out that it was not my decision to stay back home [but a Government-mandated requirement that no one could be blamed for]. Our human resources team also called and said the only thing that mattered at the moment was safety. They discussed safety precautions for everyone at home and also suggested that I do my part by asking my friends and relatives to maintain safety precautions."



Arjun says he tried his best to be back in Hyderabad when people were taking chances and travelling by road. Finally, in August, he and some of the other men from his village hired a car and travelled back to Hyderabad. "I did the quarantine and the tests, and after I went through all the safety standards mentioned by the hotel, I came back to work." At work, things are different and more difficult. "Working with a mask in the tandoor kitchen is extremely tough. I take short breaks to let the heat out. Ingredients that come to the kitchen go through various checks, we work with our gloves on which is again a new practice but I am not complaining. We are also trying and keeping it less crowded. So we have to work extra. It is tiring but is meant for our safety," he says, adding, "I am thankful my family isn't here with me. Each time I step out to go to work, I could be exposed to the virus."



Who dares eats Ferrero manchurian, Oreo pakoda and Chyawanprash smoothie ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Kitchen experiments, 2020 style

Staying indoors with a stocked pantry for nearly a year has led to some innovative but bizarre recipes. How many of these 2020 creations can you stomach?

PRALIKA M BORAH

Watching Kalen Allen share his thoughts on stomach-churning food videos is not only fun, but also a reminder not to go overboard with creativity and have your taste questioned. Take, for example, musician Jason Derulo's #millimeal, a sweet dish he made to celebrate his 40 million subscribers. Kalen

called it 'disgusting'. The lockdown let the inner chef come crawling out and create fusion dishes. Think beyond Indo-Chinese, Indo-French or even Asian-European cuisine. After all, who wants to have a Sprite pie or chocolate curry?

Ferrero Rocher manchurian
This dish that made eyes pop in disgust on many Indian food pages on



Tarika Singh on Twitter dedicated this smoothie to comedian Vir Das. She claimed to have been inspired to whip up this smoothie after Das shared a joke on Chyawanprash and Indian food and drinks on Vir Das: For India on Netflix. The creator was kind enough to share the recipe: 200 ml milk of choice, half an apple, 1 tbsp peanut butter, 2 tsp flax seeds, 1 tsp Chyawanprash and a little bit of honey.

Still not convinced? Then look up Kurkure milk shake and malai momo, gulab jamun pizza or noodles with dal, sabzi and green leafy vegetables.

All these dishes have left chefs wondering how taste buds function for many.

NOTHING MUCH TO MULL OVER

Socially distanced
on Christmas?
Raise your spirits
with the classic,
easy to make
mulled wine



Raise a toast Mulled wine at Olive bistro, Sharad's presentation ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT, SANJAY BORRA

PRABALIKA M BORAH

Christmas and New Year call for that extra festive spirit; something nice to sip while you chat and celebrate the evening away. With the dip in temperatures adding to the atmosphere, nothing can be more soothing and comforting than cupping your hands around a warm glass of an aromatic drink. How about making some mulled wine to go with your baked Christmas goodies? Mulled wine is warm, spicy and fruity; the aroma while the traditional Christmas beverage is being prepared is enough to kindle the celebratory mood.

Mulled wine, also called spiced wine, is made with red wine, spices and citrus fruit peels. Cinnamon, star anise, cloves and nutmeg are commonly used spices; they are heated with the wine in a pot. One can also use allspice, cardamom, bay leaves, vanilla pods or ginger. Star anise and cloves should be added with caution as their flavour gets too strong when left to stew. To add zing to the drink, add a touch of citrus and since oranges are in season, add them for that extra festive kick. Alter-

Mulled wine

INGREDIENTS

- 750 ml red wine
- 75 ml brandy
- 60 gm brown sugar
- Peel of 2 oranges or mandarin
- 2 star anise
- 8 to 10 cloves
- 2 pieces of cinnamon

METHOD

Add all ingredients to a pan. Boil the mixture on low heat for about four to five minutes and let the sugar dissolve completely. When it has cooled a bit, strain the liquid into a heat resistant jar or kettle. Serve while lukewarm.

Recipe by Sharad Arora

natively, lemon can also be used.
Garnish with whole fresh cinnamon sticks instead of scooping a wilted soggy piece from the pot and pared orange or lemon peel. Serve in style.



At a time when most sectors were impacted by the pandemic, art showed its strength. The year saw a coming together of the community in support of each other, and in reflection of our turbulent times



The shows must go on (Clockwise from far left) Sharmila Karri in her studio and one of her works; Anita Rao creating relief on clay; Parvathi Nayar and her Unforgiving Son ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



The year of artistic resilience

NIVEDITA GANGULY

Back in the beginning of 2020, Art Basel – one of world's largest art fairs – was preparing for its golden jubilee celebrations with great fervor in multiple international locations. That is when the tumultuous effect of the pandemic gripped the world. The celebrations and fairs were either cancelled or shifted online. This, perhaps, was the early indication of a change the art market was set to witness throughout the year.

From digital viewing platforms and social media movements to webinars, online shows and dialogues with artists and art connoisseurs across continents, the art market has reinvented itself this year. At a time when most sectors were impacted by the pandemic, art showed its resilience, with a coming together of the artistic community in support of each other, in support of art.

During the early months of lock-

down, a few not-for-profit groups were formed to support budding artists, especially students of Fine Arts across the country. One such group is YoungArt-Support started by Vadodara-based artists Ekta Singh and Abhishek Verma along with Mumbai-based Al-Qawi Nanavati. The initiative managed to raise ₹1.50 lakh for over 40 works by artists within initial months of lockdown. Another peer-support movement is ArtChainIndia, a social media initiative by Delhi-based artists Ayesha Singh and Purvai Rai. ArtChainIndia encourages artists to sell their work directly on Instagram, and support fellow artists by buying their works.

"The year brought in a wave of mixed experiences for artists. While many of us worked in isolation through the initial months of lock-



down, it also brought about a camaraderie never seen before. The struggle brought the community of artists together," says Hyderabad-based artist Varunika Saraf.

However, the kind of conversations that physical shows generate, were missing. "It was tough for artists who work with installations and sculptures. The online platform can hardly do justice to such works," she feels. Varunika feels that the year, though challenging, also gave her time to concentrate more on research and image making. In June and August, she participated in Sangam, an online show by the Heidelberg Kunstraum centre in Germany, where she and two other artists presented their works in Germany for the first time.

For Chennai-based visual artist Parvathi Nayar, the pandemic found its impressions in her collaborative works merging photography, poetry and art.

Parvathi, whose photo poetry is displayed at HELD at Goethe Institut, Chennai, says the pandemic has left its imprints in her works in ways she has never earlier explored. Her initial responses were through the lens-based medium, "focussing on the act of seeing, not just looking." These took the form of photopoetry – poetry wrapped around photographs. She also created videos on water and our perennial water crisis, called 'Water Exchanges', for the international digital media art festival <de>confine, part of the Institut Français' November Numerique programme. Curated by Media Art South Asia, it features artists, curators and researchers from France and South Asia.

"I fear, deeply, the havoc caused by this unseen killer that stalks the streets and enters our homes. It is hard, but I search for ways of moving beyond the anxiety to record what this experience means, in small ways. I use time to recalibrate and focus inwards, to rethink what it means to be human and to be an artist, in the interiorities of the home and the world," says Parvathi.

According to artist and curator Avani Rao, it is important to document these impressions of the pandemic that 2020 brought along. "These extraordinary, unprecedented times are being imprinted in a myriad ways in the works of artists across India," she says.

The year saw artists express themselves in various mediums about their impressions of life in 2020.

Avani managed to bring together works of 36 artists for a show titled 'COVID Expressions' at Iconart Gallery in Hyderabad. In addition to her paintings, Avani also displayed an installation of a health worker in a PPE suit and the vestiges of a burnt human body.

Inventive times

Anita Rao, a Visakhapatnam-based student of Andhra University's Fine Arts Department, spent lockdown experimenting with styles. One of her impressions of the pandemic included a dip-tych showcasing two erupting volcanoes – the good and grim sides of the world during lockdown. She is now working on relief work in a clay slab, a medium she has never tried before.

According to self-taught artist Sharmila Karri, the pandemic presented challenges as well as new opportunities. Online viewing platforms opened up new avenues for emerging artists while the isolation of the lockdown brought out creativity in different ways. "There was a time when I was left with very little art supplies; that's when I took up the project of upcycling daily use objects – something as mundane as a roller pin – and presented my thoughts on it. These would be my most prized possessions from one of the toughest years for any artist," says Sharmila.

In this series, we look back at the various challenges and victories of life in 2020.



The traditional and modern

British auction house Christie's (Milano) will be presenting Mapping Modern and Contemporary Art, an online auction running from January 20 to February 10, 2021. Building on the concept of The Grand Tour: An educational visit through Europe and beyond, which took place in the 17th and 18th Centuries, Christie's will create a sale, mapping Italian modern and contemporary art from 20 regions, including works by international artists who have been inspired by the country or have lived and worked in Italy for a period of time or have been strongly inspired by Italian culture.

Some of the artists whose works will be up for auction are:

Mario Radice, who was born in Como in 1900 and died in Milan in 1987, was fascinated by rationalist architecture and was one of the first Italian artists to break from figurative art to join the abstract movement flourishing



Rare aesthetics (Left) Composiz R S P, (Above) Rossoverde ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

across Europe at the time. His works were shown in nine Venice Biennale shows from 1940 to 1979.

Luigi Ghirri (1943 to 1992) was a photographer known for his colour images of gardens, monuments, and the studio of Giorgio Morandi, which he photographed in 1989. He started his career in the 1970s. Piero Dorazio (1927 to 2005), is known for his gestural, atmospheric paintings of grids crosshatched with fluid

brushstrokes. The 1950s was an important time for Dorazio, he travelled widely, encountering new artistic movements that helped broaden his aesthetic horizons. He visited America in 1953 and was exposed to the Abstract Expressionism.

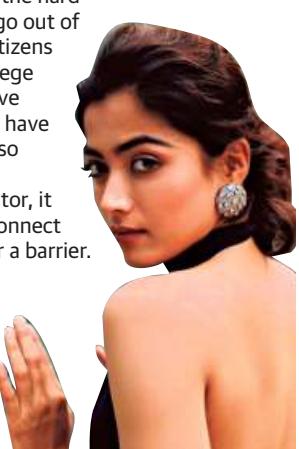
While stationed in Rome for his military service, Franco Angeli (1935 to 1988) met a sculptor named Edgardo Mannucci. Mannucci had connections with a painter called Alberto Burri and Angeli found the painter's work fascinating. He adapted Burri's techniques in his own work. In fact, the overall aesthetic of broken or ruined things became a key aspect of Angeli's work. The painting in the sale, Aertura a sinistra, a very early work, dating from 1960, the second year Angeli took up painting.

In the 1950s, Carla Accardi (1924 to 2014) was involved in the wide-reaching attempts to revolutionise abstraction through the hybridisation of geometric abstraction and gestural painting, whilst using a reduced two colour palette to explore the relationship between figure and ground. Rossoverde dates to 1966.

www.christies.com

Rashmika goes Bollywood

Actor Rashmika Mandanna is set to make her Hindi film debut with *Mission Majnu*. Written by Parvez Shaikh, Aseem Arrolla and Sumit Batheja, and directed by Shantanu Bagchi, the film stars Siddharth Malhotra in the lead as a RAW agent. Ronnie Screwvala alongside Amar Butala and Garima Mehta are the producers. A statement from the production team says the film is inspired by true events in the 1970s, and will present the story of India's courageous mission in Pakistan. Siddharth says, "Mission Majnu celebrates the hard work of RAW agents who go out of their way to protect the citizens of our country. It is a privilege to tell the story of our brave agents." Rashmika adds: "I have been fortunate to receive so much love from audiences across languages. As an actor, it is always the story that I connect with and language is never a barrier. Mission Majnu is written beautifully, and I am excited to be part of a team that has so much passion." The film is set to go on floors in February 2021.



POOCHE CAFE



PEANUTS



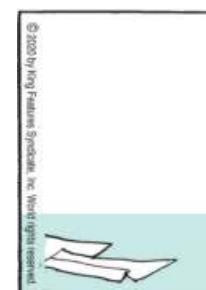
HAGAR THE HORRIBLE



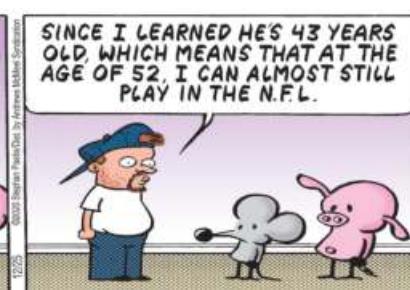
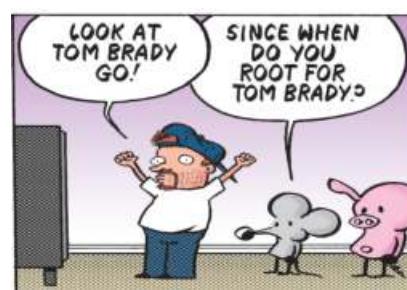
CALVIN AND HOBBES



TIGER



PEARLS BEFORE SWINE



EU leaders hail post-Brexit deal

The agreement comes after months of talks on key issues, including fishing rights

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

BRUSSELS

Political leaders in Europe on Thursday hailed the belated sealing of a U.K.-EU post-Brexit deal that aims to lay the groundwork for long-term future cooperation.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen was more measured. "At the end of a successful negotiations journey I normally feel joy. But today, I only feel quiet satisfaction and, frankly speaking, relief," she said, citing British playwright Shakespeare: "Parting is such sweet sorrow." But she also showed her steely side, warning that, protected by the deal from unfair British competition, "The single market will be fair and remain so."

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson lauded what he termed "a good deal for the whole of Europe," which offers "a new stability and a new certainty" to relations.

Britain formally left the EU in January after a deeply divisive referendum in 2016, the first country to split from the political and economic project that was born as the continent rebuilt in the aftermath of Second World War.

London remains bound by the EU's rules during a transition period that runs until midnight on December 31, when the U.K. will leave the bloc's single market and customs union.

Irish premier Micheal



Brexit breakthrough: Boris Johnson holding a press conference in Downing Street on Thursday. ■ GETTY IMAGES

Martin — whose EU member State would have been hard hit by a no-deal — said the accord was the "least bad version of Brexit possible".

"There is no such thing as a 'good Brexit' for Ireland. But we have worked hard to minimise the negative consequences," he said.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel said she was "confident" that the deal was a "good outcome" as it now goes over to EU member States to agree.

For French President Emmanuel Macron — often portrayed as a bogeyman by the British tabloids — "Europe's unity and firmness paid off".

Next crucial step

The final 2,000-page agreement was held up by wrangling over fishing as both sides haggled over the access EU fisherman will get to Britain's waters after the end of the year.

Following the announcement of the political accord, Ms. Von der Leyen's Com-

mission will send the text to the EU member States.

They are expected to take two or three days to analyse the agreement and decide whether to approve its provisional implementation.

The U.K. Parliament will also have to interrupt its end of year holidays to vote on the deal before the December 31 cut-off.

Once it is signed off and the text published in the EU's official journal it will go into effect on January 1 when Britain has left the bloc's single market.

The European Parliament will then have a chance to retrospectively approve the deal, at some point in 2021, EU officials said.

And the 11th hour deal heads off the threat that Britain could crash out of the club after 47 years of shared history with no follow-on rules.

With Britain outside the EU single market and customs area, cross-Channel traders will still face a bat-

tery of new regulations and delays.

Economists expect both economies, already weakened by the coronavirus epidemic, to take a hit as supply chains are disrupted and costs mount.

Key compromise

But the threat of a return to tariffs will have been removed, and relations between the former partners will rest on a surer footing.

It is also a success for Ms. Von der Leyen and her chief negotiator Michel Barnier, who led almost 10 months of intense talks with Britain's David Frost.

Under the new deal, EU fishing fleets will have to give up a quarter of their current catch in British waters over the next five and a half years, officials said. After this transitional period, access to its rich fishing grounds would be negotiated on an annual basis.

This represents a compromise. Earlier in the negotiations, Britain was pushing for an 80 or 60% cut in the EU's share, phased in over only three years. Boats from the continent will also be allowed to work in British inshore waters less than 12 nautical miles from shore during the transition. But it will still be a bitter pill to swallow for many fishing communities in northwestern Europe, which have worked what are now U.K. waters for centuries.

tions were likely to do the same.

Real estate developer Charles Kushner pleaded guilty to charges, including tax evasion and witness tampering in 2004.

His pardon had been expected by many, given his family connection. Jared Kushner is married to Mr. Trump's daughter Ivanka.

Those pardons drew outrage, and Wednesday's ac-

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Xi Jinping tightens grip on China

Tackling of virus, muscular approach, economic recovery have helped mute critics

ANANTH KRISHNAN

A year that began in China with the country's leadership facing searching questions about its handling of a new pandemic that struck the city of Wuhan ends with President Xi Jinping firming up his political control.

If 2020 started as China's annus horribilis, the year has, in the eyes of many strategic experts in Beijing, only hastened China's ascendancy and narrowed the gap with the United States, its great rival.

Beijing, having broadly controlled the coronavirus at home, is now leading a global economic recovery, as well as adopting, as India discovered through this summer's border crisis, an increasingly muscular posture abroad. In contrast, the U.S. has struggled with both its response to the pandemic as well as unprecedented political divisions at home, manifested in a closely fought election that ended with the defeat of President Donald Trump, whose term in office marked a deterioration in relations with China triggered by a trade war.

A crisis in Wuhan

Few in China would have ex-

pected the year to end as it does. China's initial fumbling

of the pneumonia outbreak

that began last December, when the leadership in Wuhan delayed action for three weeks, has now become a footnote, with the leadership showcasing China's re-

covery as underlining the su-

periority of its political system.

Back in February, the death of the whistle-blower doctor Li Wenliang had led to an outpouring of criticism, which prompted Beijing to fire the Communist Party leaders in charge of Wuhan and Hubei province. Mr. Xi then acknowledged the pandemic had posed "a major test" of China's governance.



In control: A file photo of Chinese President Xi Jinping at the National People's Congress in Beijing. ■ AFP

carbon neutral by 2060, which will require a reduction of coal in the energy mix from 58% to less than 50% by 2025.

Assertive Posture

If 2020 has reinforced the belief in Beijing of its global ascendancy, it has also been marked by an increasingly muscular approach abroad on all of its frontiers.

China's homegrown aircraft carrier, the Shandong, sailed across the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea after being inducted into the navy this year and will be combat ready by early 2021. Beijing has made clear to the new administration in Washington it will brook no interference in its "internal affairs", even as it has pursued increasingly hard-line policies in Hong Kong, where a new national security law has tightened its grip, and in Xinjiang, where it has hit out at any criticism over the internment of more than one million Uighurs in "re-education" centres.

In early May, China appeared to disregard three decades of a carefully built consensus with India as it mobilised two divisions along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), in a move that officials in Delhi saw as aimed at unilaterally redrawing the LAC in Ladakh.

A clash in Galwan Valley in June that led to the loss of 20 Indian soldiers and an unknown number of Chinese soldiers marked the most serious border crisis with India since the 1960s, leading many former Indian officials to describe 2020 as a major inflection point in relations with China.

As the year ends, a sub-zero LAC remains tense with neither side agreeing on a plan to disengage, with the expectation in India of continued hostilities as the snow melts in the spring and tensions on the border to dominate the relationship next year.

NEWS ANALYSIS

That has prompted Mr. Xi to double down on his push for greater self-reliance, which he has called a "dual circulation" model that strikes a better balance between relying on domestic consumption and external trade.

A key Party plenum held in October discussed "a new development pattern" for the 14th five-year plan (2021-2025) and also laid out a "Vision 2035" blueprint that emphasises more sustainable growth.

China is still struggling with rising debt, a problem worsened by this year's economic relief measures, and is also pushing for cleaner growth, with Mr. Xi this year announcing a target to go

Trump pardons more allies: White House

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

WASHINGTON

U.S. President Donald Trump issued a new raft of pardons on Wednesday for allies including the father of his son-in-law Jared Kushner, adding to a long list he has granted in his waning days in office.

In addition to the pardon for Charles Kushner, Mr.

Trump also pardoned his 2016 campaign chairman Paul Manafort and former adviser Roger Stone, the White House said.

They were among 26 people pardoned and three who had all or part of their sentences commuted on Wednesday by Mr. Trump.

Those pardons drew outrage, and Wednesday's ac-

tion was likely to do the same.

Real estate developer Charles Kushner pleaded guilty to charges, including tax evasion and witness tampering in 2004.

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Pearl killing: Pak. court orders release of accused

It overturns govt. detention orders



Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh

found guilty and jailed.

Pearl's murderer took place three years after Sheikh, along with Jaish-e-Mohammad chief Masood Azhar and Mushtaq Ahmed Zargar, was released by India in 1999 and given safe passage to Afghanistan in exchange for the nearly 150 passengers of hijacked Indian Airlines Flight 814.

He was serving a prison term in India for kidnappings of Western tourists in the country.

The court also acquitted his three aides who were serving life terms — almost two decades after they were

found guilty and jailed.

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MARKET WATCH

	24-12-2020	% CHANGE
Sensex	46,974	1.14
US Dollar	73.55	0.28
Gold	49,624	0.24
Brent oil	50.91	0.43

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	478.55	7.80
Asian Paints	2648.25	5.70
Axis Bank	610.20	17.75
Bajaj Auto	3374.75	65.10
Bajaj Finserv	8992.55	-20.70
Bajaj Finance	5184.90	96.00
Bharti Airtel	517.30	10.10
BPCL	377.55	3.15
Britannia Ind	3618.25	-7.10
Cipla	833.20	8.55
Coal India	136.25	1.20
Divis Lab	3749.60	61.00
Dr Reddys Lab	5201.80	-22.30
Eicher Motors	2436.75	-9.95
GAIL (India)	120.15	1.90
Grasim Ind	897.15	-4.85
HCL Tech	919.35	-3.25
HDFC	2455.15	52.10
HDFC Bank	1397.10	21.45
HDFC Life	657.25	8.65
Hero MotoCorp	3073.10	33.05
Hindalco	236.95	0.75
Hind Unilever	2402.25	31.90
ICICI Bank	513.55	9.95
IndusInd Bank	852.80	-2.55
Infosys	1236.05	-17.00
Indian Oil Corp	90.25	2.10
ITC	208.60	0.85
JSW Steel	366.25	-0.60
Kotak Bank	1960.60	39.85
L&T	1262.20	-2.60
M&M	710.90	-0.60
Maruti Suzuki	7446.05	-3.90
Nestle India Ltd.	18566.35	-166.35
NTPC	99.95	1.40
ONGC	93.15	2.35
PowerGrid Corp	190.00	0.05
Reliance Ind	1994.15	50.30
SBI Life	873.90	18.95
State Bank	266.85	3.85
Shree Cement	23826.75	-67.65
Sun Pharma	590.45	15.85
Tata Motors	175.95	6.75
Tata Steel	622.30	0.90
TCS	2909.35	0.60
Tech Mahindra	947.25	-0.90
Titan	1495.90	5.05
UltraTech Cement	5044.75	10.80
UPL	449.40	-2.55
Wipro	382.20	-3.35

EXCHANGE RATES

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	73.34	73.66
Euro	89.42	89.84
British Pound	99.86	100.30
Japanese Yen (100)	70.73	71.04
Chinese Yuan	11.23	11.28
Swiss Franc	82.54	82.90
Singapore Dollar	55.21	55.49
Canadian Dollar	57.16	57.41
Malaysian Ringgit	18.06	18.15
Australian Dollar	55.74	55.98

Source: Indian Bank

IN BRIEF



Ramamoorthy to join Krea as its first Pro VC

CHENNAI
Former CMD of Cognizant India Ramkumar Ramamoorthy will join Krea University as its first Pro Vice-Chancellor in January 2021. He will be responsible for professional learning, according to a press release. He will help drive the mission and strategy of the university for its professional programmes. He has over 30 years' experience in the IT industry and academia. PTI

Aurobindo to make COVAXX's vaccine

HYDERABAD
Aurobindo Pharma on Thursday said it had entered into an agreement to develop, commercialise and manufacture U.S. firm COVAXX's COVID-19 vaccine candidate for India and the United Nations Children's Fund agency. The first multistage, synthetic peptide-based vaccine candidate in clinical trials, it need no special cold storage facilities.

Amazon India e-com unit loss widens to ₹5,849 cr.

NEW DELHI
Amazon Seller Services, the India online marketplace unit of e-tail giant Amazon, saw its losses widening to ₹5,849.2 crore for FY20 over FY19, as expenses grew more than 25%, as per regulatory documents. Amazon Seller Services had recorded a net loss of ₹5,685.4 crore in FY19. Its revenue, however, grew 43% to ₹10,847.6 crore in FY20 from ₹7,593.5 crore in FY19. PTI

'E-com sites not to sell mobile signal boosters'

MUMBAI
With mobile network boosters becoming a major reason for poor service quality, the Department of Telecom (DoT) has asked online sellers to pull down listings of such equipment, an official statement said. The DoT has also carried out raids across multiple locations in South Mumbai over the last two days which led to the removal of 68 illegal boosters (or repeaters), it added. PTI

Sensex jumps 1.14% as Brexit deal hopes spur global markets

Reliance Industries, HDFC twins shine; foreign fund flows add impetus

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

MUMBAI

Equity indices marched higher for the third session on the trot on Thursday, propelled by Reliance Industries and financial stocks, amid a positive trend in global markets on prospects of a Brexit trade deal.

A sharp jump in the rupee and persistent foreign fund inflows added to the momentum here, traders said.

The 30-share BSE Sensex surged 529.36 points or 1.14% to 46,973.54. The broader NSE Nifty climbed 148.15 points or 1.09% to 13,749.25.

Axis Bank topped the Sensex gainers chart, spurring 3.04%, followed by Sun Pharma, ONGC, Reliance In-



Revving up: FII activity may be muted till the year end but may pick up again from the first week of January. ■PTI

dustries, HDFC, ICICI Bank, Bharti Airtel, Bajaj Finance and Kotak Bank. Index heavyweights RIL, HDFC and Bajaj Finserv were laggards, dropping up to 1.32%. Global equities extended gains as the U.K. and the European

However, Infosys, Nestle India, IndusInd Bank, Dr Reddy's, HCL Tech and Bajaj Finserv were laggards, dropping up to 1.32%. Global equities extended gains as the U.K. and the European

equities extended gains as the U.K. and the European

Cash flows, not ratings may decide loans in future: Vyas

Trend has already begun with SBI, says ED of UCO Bank

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Moving on from ratings criteria for grant of loans, banks are likely to focus on cash flow-based lending in time to come, according to a top executive of UCO Bank.

"Banks will focus on cash flow-based lending in time to come and this has already been started by SBI," Ajay Vyas, executive director, UCO Bank said at a virtual panel discussion on 'Re-defining corporate financing in new normal' organised by PHD Chamber.

Various SBI officials have advocated cash flow-based lending models over the traditional asset-based, or rat-



ings-based ones. In cash-flow lending, a financial institution grants a loan that is backed by the recipient's past and future cash flows. Mr. Vyas further noted the turnaround time (TAT) for grant of loans needs to come down and emphasised that it was important to move on

from ratings criteria for grant of loans.

AI for lending

According to Mr. Vyas, artificial intelligence, algorithms and prediction analysis are the future of lending norms for banks to follow.

On banks' exposure to the realty sector through non-banking financial companies (NBFCs), DMD, Commercial Credit Group-II (North & South), SBI Thekepati Keshav Kumar said, "it is wrong to say that banks were lending to NBFCs and [hence] indirectly to the real estate companies as very few NBFCs have stakes in the real estate sector."

VRL bought 18.5 crore shares at ₹159.94 apiece, the firm said in a statement on its website. It made the purchase through block deals. The move comes weeks after the firm's failed attempt to delist Vedanta Ltd. from the Indian stock exchanges. The delisting failed due to an insufficient number of shares being offered in the buy-back proposal of VRL.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

London-based Vedanta Resources Ltd. (VRL) has raised its stake in its India listed unit, Vedanta, to 55.11% by buying from the open market shares worth ₹2,959 crore. Prior to the purchase, its stake stood at 50.13%

"This is to inform that the bank has entered into a binding agreement to divest its entire equity stake of 64.4% i.e. 1,61,00,000 shares of face value of ₹10 each in Centrum Home Finance Ltd (CBHFL), to Centrum Housing Finance, subject to approvals from regulatory authorities," Central Bank of India said.

According to a separate filing by Centrum Capital, the parent of Centrum Housing, the cost of acquisi-

Mrs Bectors surges 107% on debut

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Shares of Mrs Bectors Food Specialities closed at a premium of 107% against the issue price of ₹288.

On Thursday, the stock made its debut and opened at ₹501, reflecting a jump of 73.95% from the issue price on the BSE. It closed at ₹595.55. The company's market valuation was ₹3,498.65 crore on the BSE.

"Monthly expiry has also contributed to the higher volatility. Nifty's closing near the previous week high indicates strong rollovers on the back of healthy FII flows seen this month. This week has seen moderation in flows from both FIIs and DIIs. We can expect FII activity to pick up sharply from the first week of January," he said.

The rupee rose 21 paise to 73.55 against the U.S. dollar.

IL&FS gets approval to sell China road asset

Sale to address debt of ₹2,600 crore

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

IL&FS Group said it has received approval for sale of its Chinese road asset – Chongqing Yuhe Expressway Co. Ltd. (CYEC) – to China Merchants & PingAn Infrastructure Phase 1 Equity Investment Fund (Tianjin) Co. Ltd., a group company of PingAn Insurance (Group) Company of China.

IL&FS Group holds 49% stake in CYEC through its step-down Singapore-based subsidiary ITNL International Pte. Ltd. (IPL).

The balance 51% is held by Chongqing Expressway Group (CEG).

"PingAn has bid at an aggregate equity valuation of \$281 million for 100% stake. This values IPL's 49% stake at approximately \$138 mil-

lion (₹1,020 crore). PingAn will also take over the ₹1,600-crore debt in CYEC (as of October 2018).

"IPL will now be signing definitive agreements and filing an application with NCLT to complete the transaction," according to a statement from IL&FS.

"On completion, sale of this asset will address nearly ₹2,600 crore of IL&FS debt," it said.

SBI Life buys ₹186-cr. stake in NBFC Paisalo

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

HYDERABAD

SBI Life Insurance on Thursday acquired 8.99% stake in non-deposit taking NBFC Paisalo Digital for ₹186.20 crore.

The open market transaction is about ₹160 crore.

Centrum Capital said the deal was expected to close in about 2-3 months.

CBHFL is a financing and mortgage firm jointly promoted by Central Bank of India, National Housing Bank, Specified Undertaking of Unit Trust of India and Housing and Urban Development Corporation.

The company's assets under management stood at ₹1,211.7 crore as of September 30. Total income was ₹65.81 crore.



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Two additional IPL teams approved

At least four corporate giants are understood to be in the race to own them

BCCI AGM

AMOL KARHADKAR
MUMBAI

The BCCI's Annual General Meeting in Ahmedabad on Thursday has, in principle, approved the proposal to add two new teams to the Indian Premier League (IPL). The IPL Governing Council has been asked to work out the modalities. In all likelihood, the IPL will expand to a 10-team affair in 2022 with a rejigged format.

The Governing Council and the IPL executives will have to look at the financial and logistical factors, besides the additional window required for the increased number of games.

At least four corporate giants are understood to be in the race to own the teams. Since the BCCI has more than a year to finalise the deal, it is unlikely to compromise on the base price of the two outfits.

Decision on Olympics
BCCI decided to defer its stance on participation in the 2028 Olympics as the members sought clarity on various issues like the financial impact of tweaking bilateral commitments, affiliation to the Indian Olympic Association and the anti-doping clauses that cricketers will have to adhere to.

The members were told that the office-bearers will provide further clarity during the Special General Meeting (SGM), which could be convened late in January.

At the AGM, it was also decided that even if the central



Top brass: Arun Dhumal, Sourav Ganguly, Jay Shah, Rajiv Shukla and Brijesh Patel at the BCCI AGM in Ahmedabad on Thursday. ■ VIJAY SONEJA

government declines tax exemption for hosting the T20 World Cup in 2021, the Board will not forego its right to host the tournament.

If required, the BCCI will bear the tax liability of approximately ₹300 crore instead of getting into a dispute with the International Cricket Council (ICC), the governing body.

Golden silence

As expected, the AGM didn't touch upon president Sourav Ganguly alleged unethical conduct of endorsing products that are direct competitors of the BCCI sponsors. It is understood that a couple of senior members broached the topic with Ganguly before the meeting and have left it to him to act suitably.

Since the audited accounts for 2018-19 and 2019-20 were presented to the

inclusion of two new teams in the IPL approved in principle. IPL Governing Council asked to chalk out the details

■ AGM defers decision on BCCI's official stand on Olympic participation, decides to seek more details from the ICC

■ Sourav Ganguly and Jay Shah to continue as representatives in the ICC Board and Chief Executives' Committee respectively

■ National Cricket Academy to have zonal centres. Office-bearers authorised to finalise the venues

■ Stakeholders in domestic cricket - players and officials - to be compensated in case domestic season is curtailed due to the pandemic.

Efforts on to host as many tournaments as possible from February to May

■ BCCI umpires and scorers' retirement age raised from 55 to 60 years

■ Rajiv Shukla returns as vice-president after being elected unopposed

■ Brijesh Patel and Kharil Majumdar retain their positions in the IPL Governing Council. Pragyan Ojha nominated as the Indian Cricketers' Association representative

■ Office-bearers authorised to form cricket committees and sub-committees

members less than 24 hours before the meeting, the accounts were not ratified and kept pending for the SGM.

The members were in-

formed that the BCCI will continue to disburse a lump-sum advance and reconcile the accounts once the statements are ratified.



The takeaways

Chetan named chairman of selectors

Kuruvilla and Mohanty join Joshi and Harvinder in the five-man panel

AMOL KARHADKAR MUMBAI

Former India pacers Chetan Sharma, Abey Kuruvilla and Debasis Mohanty have been appointed National selectors. Chetan will replace Sunil Joshi as the chairman of the panel on the basis of having earned more Test caps (23 to 15).

This was announced on Thursday after the Cricket Advisory Committee (CAC) of Madan Lal, R.P. Singh and Sulakshana Naik interviewed 11 candidates for the three vacant posts in the five-member selection committee. Joshi and Harvinder Singh, who is with India's squad in Australia, will continue as selectors.

Chetan was preferred from the North Zone over Vijay Dahiya, Ajay Ratra, Nikhil Chopra and Maninder Singh while Kuruvilla was picked ahead of Ajit Agarkar and Nayan Mongia from the West.

Mohanty, the Odisha



New faces: The pace trio of Mohanty, Chetan and Kuruvilla has found a place in the selection committee. ■ TWITTER/BCCI

speedster, was elevated from the National junior selection panel for the East Zone slot, pipping his Statemate Shiv Sundar Das and former Bengal seamer Ranade Bose.

Chetan – infamously remembered for the last-ball six he conceded to Pakistan's Javed Miandad in Sharjah in the 1986 – represented India in 23 Tests and 65 ODIs from 1984 to 1994.

He was the first Indian to perform a hat-trick in ODIs, against New Zealand during

the 1987 World Cup. Chetan was BCCI president Sourav Ganguly's teammate in the 1993-94 Ranji Trophy final for Bengal after switching allegiance from Haryana towards the end of his career.

Interestingly, the thrilling Ranji Trophy final between Haryana and Mumbai in which Chetan played a pivotal role in helping the former win its only Ranji title was also Kuruvilla's First Class debut.

Kuruvilla, having worked as a junior National selector and a talent scout

CHETAN
I will work to the best of my ability to do justice to the role

for Mumbai Indians, is active on the domestic circuit.

Huge honour

"It's obviously a huge honour and a bigger responsibility. I thank the BCCI for bestowing faith in me and I'm looking forward to justifying it," Kuruvilla told *The Hindu*. He played his 10 Tests and 25 ODIs in a 21-month span starting March 1996.

Mohanty worked as a bowling coach in domestic cricket and with the National Cricket Academy. The speedster played two Tests and six ODIs from 1997 to 2001.

The selection committee:

Chetan Sharma (chairman, North), Sunil Joshi (South), Abey Kuruvilla (West), Harvinder Singh (Central), and Debasis Mohanty (East).

Compensatory package if season is curtailed

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI

In an encouraging development for the domestic cricket fraternity, the BCCI's AGM on Thursday agreed to work out a compensatory package should the domestic season end up being a curtailed one due to the pandemic.

The COVID-19 outbreak has resulted in the postponement of the domestic season, which usually starts

in August. Only the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy – the senior men's T20 tournament – has been announced and it will start from Jan. 10.

This has left the women and age-group cricketers, apart from the long-form specialists, in limbo. Even for men cricketers, the match fees from T20s are not that high. Besides, thousands of other support staff – coaches, physios, trainees, umpires, match referees, scorers, video analysts and groundstaff – are in danger of being severely impacted financially.

The AGM authorised the office-bearers to form a working group for offering a package in the event of a truncated season.

"It could well be a case of multiple domestic tournaments clashing with the IPL this time around, but no one would mind it as long as it's safe," said a member who attended the meeting.

are not able to participate due to cancellation of matches/tournaments owing to COVID-19".

The office-bearers were also authorised to decide how the domestic season will play out.

The objective of the group, according to a BCCI statement, will be "to compensate the players, match officials and others involved in cricketing activity if they

IN BRIEF



Indians get to grips with tackling Aussie menace

Hands-on support from coaching staff as team undergoes intense training

INDIA IN AUS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA MELBOURNE

Melbourne on standby if Sydney is untenable

MELBOURNE
Cricket Australia on Thursday said Melbourne had been placed on standby to host the third Test between India and Australia if Sydney's COVID-19 situation renders it "untenable". PTI



Australia will blow away India at MCG: Warne

MELBOURNE
Spin legend Shane Warne believes Australia will "blow away" India in the Boxing Day Test as the visitors are still a "bit shocked" by the loss at Adelaide. "I think Australia is probably going to blow them away," said Warne. PTI

One of the tour's finds, pacer T. Natarajan bent his back at the nets and often managed to beat stand-in skipper Ajinkya Rahane and Cheteshwar Pujara.

Set to play in the second Test against an in-form Aus-

tralian team, K.L. Rahul had a long hit at the nets, and so did Rishabh Pant.

As the players got busy at the nets after warming up, the coaching staff – chief coach Ravi Shastri, bowling coach Bharat Arun and batting coach Vikram Rathour – were seen exchanging notes from the practice session.

They also had a long chat with Rahane, who will lead the team in the remaining three Tests in the absence of Virat Kohli, who has flown back to India for the birth of his child. Shastri was also seen in discussion with Rahane after the batsman's session.

Prithvi Shaw, who is going through a lean patch, had a long workout with Kuldeep Yadav backing him up.

Meanwhile, watched by head coach Justin Langer, Steve Smith and Marnus Labuschagne had an intense session, with former Sri Lanka off-spinner Suraj Randiv bowling to them.



Guiding hand: Ajinkya Rahane is all ears as coach Ravi Shastri elucidates a point at Thursday's training session. ■ AFP

All top players for Australian Open

'Doubtful' Federer and Serena named among entries

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE MELBOURNE

Roger Federer and Serena Williams were among the entries announced on Thursday for the coronavirus-disrupted Australian Open, with tournament director Craig Tiley vowing a "happy Slam" after months of painstaking planning.

All the world's top players have signed on, led by World No. 1 Novak Djokovic and Ashleigh Barty.

There was a question mark over Swiss great Federer, who warned this month he was in a "race against time" to fit after two rounds of knee surgery. But he has begun training in Dubai and was among those entered to play at Melbourne Park as he targets a seventh title.

US superstar Williams, who like Federer turns 40 next year, is also committed as she once again attempts to pull level with Margaret Court as a 24-time Grand Slam champion. Her last tri-

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US superstar Williams, who like Federer turns 40 next year, is also committed as she once again attempts to pull level with Margaret Court as a 24-time Grand Slam champion. Her last tri-

umph at the Majors came in 2017 when she was pregnant.

The opening Grand Slam of the year, which will be played in front of at least 50 percent of normal crowds, has been pushed back three weeks until February 8. All players must undergo a mandatory 14-day quarantine on arrival, during which they will constantly be tested for COVID-19 but allowed to train for five hours a day

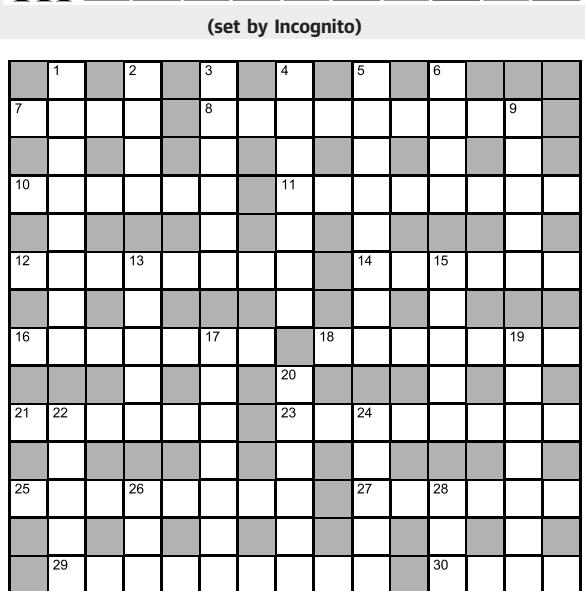
in a bio-secure bubble. The men's and women's qualifiers will be held in Doha and Dubai respectively from January 10-13, with players arriving in Melbourne from January 15 on special charter flights.

A slimmed-down, 12-team ATP Cup, the relocated Adelaide International, and a ATP 250 tournament will all be played in Melbourne once players are out of isolation.

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SCAN TO PLAY



ACROSS

- Only fair (4)
- Occur beyond collapsed pier (9)
- Like bird's behind (6)
- Love apples and minced meats too (8)
- How a switch may be used intermittently? (2,3,3)
- Show sappers some flesh (6)
- Bengali is confused about Hercule Poirot, for example (7)

18 O Christ! That could be a bird (7)

21 Hits insect on board ship (6)

23 Place cleaning implements around journalist's retirement quarters (8)

25 Grape tea prepared for large mammal (5,3)

27 Pa's piano is with headless rascal (6)

29 Is Santa confused about saint and devil-worshippers? (9)

30 More than 6 balls? (4)

■ DOWN

1 Bother! Inn sauce is spilt! (8)

2 King leaves Scottish island after taking some tincture for eye problem (4)

3 Stewed and pickled isn't OK... confused? (6)

4 Abandon what one might do after untying the painter (4,3)

5 Without commencing stamp cancellations, get currency in erstwhile GDR (8)

6 Talent is present (4)

9 Injection sent back in same needle (5)

13 Dark time near end of twilight (5)

15 Six Romans and Romeo try celestial maiden? (5)

17 Keeps away from wild ass at bin (8)

19 Fought winged creature in endless comedy (8)

20 Old boy's ditty about one side of a coin... (7)

22 Animals in Miramar Estate (5)

IN BRIEF

BFI team's term extended again

The Boxing Federation of India (BFI) on Thursday decided to further extend the term of its existing office-bearers and executive committee. At an emergency general body meeting, held via video conferencing, BFI decided "to extend the tenure of existing office-bearers and EC members by three months or till elections are held, whichever is earlier, and to hold the annual general meeting (AGM) and elections in February, 2021.

Lanka exempts England players from travel ban

COLOMBO The England team will be allowed to fly to Sri Lanka despite flights from Britain being suspended due to a new coronavirus strain, the island's cricket authorities said on Thursday. England is due to arrive in Sri Lanka on January 3 for two Tests in Galle starting on January 14. Sri Lanka Cricket chief executive Ashley de Silva said the visitors would be tested for coronavirus before departure and on arrival, and would also have to undergo quarantine for 10 days after landing in Sri Lanka. AFP

Tatum tips Celtics over Bucks in heart-stopper

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

LOS ANGELES Jayson Tatum banked in a game-winning three-pointer over Giannis Antetokounmpo with 1.5 seconds left to give Boston Celtics a 122-121 NBA season-opening victory over Milwaukee Bucks on Wednesday.

Antetokounmpo, the two-time defending NBA Most Valuable Player, had a chance to tie it from the free-throw line with four-tenths of a second left, but the Greek superstar missed his second free throw after being fouled at the rim and the Celtics came away with the win on their home floor.

Tatum, who said he "played terrible" after making only 12 of 28 shots from the floor, still finished with 30 points with seven rebounds and two assists.

Jaylen Brown led the Celtics with 33 points, five rebounds and four assists.

Houston's home opener against Oklahoma City Thunder was postponed as COVID-19 concerns – in-

Real overcomes Granada

Roma pips Cagliari in a thriller, moves back to third spot

EURO LEAGUES

REUTERS
MADRID A towering header from Casemiro and an added-time strike from Karim Benzema saw Real Madrid beat a stubborn Granada side 2-0 at home on Wednesday to notch a fifth consecutive La Liga victory and go level on points with leader Atletico Madrid.

The champion lacked sparkle in the first half but came alive in the second period and after a flurry of chances from the home side, Brazilian midfielder Casemiro powered in a cross from Marco Asensio to give it the lead in the 57th minute.

Granada continued to trouble Zinedine Zidane's side deep into the second half until Benzema raced clear and thumped the ball low into the net to seal the points.

Meanwhile, A.S. Roma bounced back from Sunday's mauling at Atalanta to beat Cagliari in a 3-2 thriller and move back up to third in Serie A.



On a roll: Casemiro and Benzema gave Zidane's men their fifth successive victory. ■ REUTERS

Roma, beaten 4-1 at Atalanta on Sunday after a second-half performance which left coach Paul Fonseca fuming, has 27 points, seven behind leader A.C. Milan.

Sassuolo is one point behind in fourth after also winning by the odd goal in five, away to Sampdoria.

Atalanta, seventh with 22 points, lost ground after it squandered a two-goal lead in a 2-2 draw at Bologna.

Important results: LaLiga: Real

Madrid 2 (Casemiro 57, Benzema 90+3) bt Granada 0; Real Betis 1 (Rodriguez 71) bt Cadiz 0.

Serie A: Hellas Verona 1 (Ilic 63) lost to Inter Milan 2 (Martinez 52, Skriniar 69); Roma 3 (Veretout 11, Dzeko 71, Mancini 77) bt Cagliari 2 (Joao Pedro 59, 90+1-pen); AC Milan 3 (Rebic 10, Calhanoglu 17-pen, Hernandez 90+2) bt Lazio 2 (Alberto 27, Immobile 59); Bologna 2 (Tomiyasu 73, Paz 82) drew with Atalanta 2 (Muriel 22-pen, 23); Napoli 1 (Insigne 90+2) drew with Torino 1 (Izzo 56).

Merchant and Sarang felicitated by SFI

KAMESH SRINIVASAN
NEW DELHI

The Swimming Federation of India (SFI) announced the plan to have separate national championship for water polo, while felicitating Bharat Merchant and Avinash Sarang who had helped India to the silver in the 1970 Bangkok Asiad.

The golden jubilee celebration, conducted virtually by the swimming fraternity, helped Bharat and Avinash to walk down the memory lane and recall minute details of the path to the silver medal, and the warmth of reception on return.

Bharat, the youngest member of the team then, and eventually the top scorer, narrated the story of losing a thriller final to Japan, after the team was "relieved" to make the final. He also remembered the Sikh community bringing food to the Indian team.

"The Prime Minister Indira Gandhi spoke to me for a minute and we went to the reception by the President V.V. Giri. Coming to Mumbai was celebration for three months", Bharat said. He

was selected in the Asian All Star team, to play against Combined European team.

Avinash Sarang, on a tour of the US, remembered the last-minute clearance of the team by the IOA, after the hard work at the preparatory camp.

Influence of legends

Members of the water polo team that won the Asian Games bronze at home in 1982, Captain Utpal Mitra, goalkeeper Romen Das and forward Sushil Kohli, shared the influence of the legends of the 1970 team.

Ajay Apte, who represented the country in the 1986 Asiad, and active as the Chief Referee in nationals, suggested ways to regain past glory in water polo.

Meenakshi Pahuja, champion open water swimmer, spoke about popularising the sport among the girls.

The scores:

Sporting Club 200/9 in 40 overs (Priyansh Rath 75, Ashutosh Kumar 47, Krish Singhani 4/50) lost to Sonnet Club 201/3 in 38 overs (Akash Malhotra 102, Akash Yadav 53 n.o.).

Hanish and Bhawan scalp three each

Hanish Yadav and Bhawan Rohilla took three wickets each to help Sporting Club beat Mount Club by 80 runs in the fifth Shanti Devi memorial tournament.

The scores:

Sporting Club 182 in 39.3 overs (Tarun Kaushik 39 n.o., Shivam Gupta 47, Manish Sehrawat 31, Yash Bhardwaj 3/28) bt Mount Club 102 in 25.5 overs (Hanish Yadav 3/32, Bhawan Rohilla 3/36).

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Aakarsh hits century

NEW DELHI: Aakarsh Malhotra's 102 and Akash Yadav's unbeaten 53 set up Sonnet Club's seven-wicket victory over Sam Sports Academy in the seventh S.N. Dubey (under-16) cricket tournament here.

The scores:

Sam Sports Academy 200/9 in 40 overs (Priyansh Rath 75, Ashutosh Kumar 47, Krish Singhani 4/50) lost to Sonnet Club 201/3 in 38 overs (Akash Malhotra 102, Akash Yadav 53 n.o.).

Cosmos in line for hat-trick

BENGALURU: Cosmos, who is in fine nick, may complete a hat-trick in the Bangalore St. Leger (2,800m), the chief event of the races to be held here on Friday (Dec. 25). False rails (width about 3m from 1,600m to the winning post) will be in position.

1 MOUNT JOY PLATE (Div. II), 1 (1,200m), rated 15 to 35, 2-00 pm: 1. Bloom Buddy (IO) Anjar Alam 60, 2. Golden Vision (8) Suraj 59.5, 3. Dreams Ahead (7) M.D. Praveen 58, 4. Shivalic Gold (4) Chethan G 57.5, 5. Activated (II) R. Marshall 56.5, 6. Capita Gain (I) Raja Rao 56.5, 7. Prerana (2) Md. Aliyar 56.5, 8. Valour (14) Irvan 56.5, 9. Zee Zep Top (9) R. Pradeep 56.5, 10. Hitomi Sakuma (12) R. Ravi 55.5, 11. Roc Girl (4) Jagadeesh 55.5, 12. Polar Express (5) Chandrasekhar 55, 13. Blarney Stone (3) Arshad 54.5 and 14. Florenia (13) Sat Vanishi 54.5.

1. GOLDEN VISION, 2. BLOOM BUDDY, 3. BLARNEY STONE

2 TOPMOST PLATE (1,400m), rated 15 to 35, 5-0 & over, 2-30: 1. Lightning Attack (14) Vaibhav 60, 2. Armin (11) Naveen K 59.5, 3. Fantastic App (4) R. Pradeep 56, 4. Casey (9) M. Naveen 59, 5. Zhu Zhu Zest (1) Darshan 59, 6. Hafnium (5) Trevor 58.5, 7. Sadaqat (13) Ashhad Asbar 58.5, 8. Gold Mist (2) P. Surya 57, 9. Raw Gold (6) P.P. Dhebe 57, 10. Ultimate Power (8) Jagadeesh 56.5, 11. Halfsies (3) S. Asgar 56, 12. Kingfield (7) P. Mani 56, 13. Paradiso (12) Arshad 56 and 14. Revan Star (10) Sat Vanishi 54.5.

1. HAFNIUM, 2. ZHU ZHU ZEST, 3. FANTASTIC APP

3 KOLAR PLATE (1,200m), rated 30 to 50, 5-0 & over, 3-00: 1. Benediction (II) Jagadeesh 60, 2. Venus Bay (1) Ashhad Asbar 59.5, 3. Cabral Rapido (4) Md. Aliyar 59, 4. Wings Of Desire (3) Trevor 59, 5. Darshasini (9) P. Surya 58, 6. Masada (10) Arshad 58, 7. Propine (12) Rayan 57.5, 8. Ultimate Speed (8) J.H. Arul 57.5, 9. Birchwood (13) P. Mani 57, 10. Tokyo Rose (14) Akshay K 57, 11. Tio Rico (2) Likith Appu 56.5, 12. Ispellangertall (6) M. Naveen 56, 13. Reczai (7) P.P. Dhebe 54.5 and 14. Radiant Treasure (5) S. Mubarak 52.5.

1. VENUS BAY, 2. WINGS OF DESIRE, 3. BENEDICTION

4 NARASIMHARAJA TROPHY (2,000m), rated 60 & above, 3-30: 1. Royal Crystal (8) S. John 62, 2. Roma Victor (3) Akshay K 57, 3.

4. NARASIMHARAJA TROPHY (2,000m), rated 60 & above, 3-30: 1. Royal Crystal (8) S. John 62, 2. Roma Victor (3) Akshay K 57, 3.

GOOD GOVERNANCE DAY

December 25, 2020

Haryana Remembers

**The Great Freedom Fighter
Mahamana Pandit
Madan Mohan Malviya**

and

**Bharat Ratna & Former Prime Minister
Sh. Atal Bihari Vajpayee
On Their Birth Anniversary**

**State Level Programme
will be organized at
Haryana Niwas, Chandigarh**

**Chief Guest
Sh. Manohar Lal
Chief Minister, Haryana**

**Programme will be conducted at
District, Tehsil & Block level**

“ The significant aspects of Good Governance are development and accountability. Through e-Services, our Government has encouraged accountability in the State so that the benefits of all Government Schemes reach the last person in the queue. **”**

- Manohar Lal
Chief Minister, Haryana

Information, Public Relations and Languages Department, Haryana
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