

SHORT TAKES

Gambhir inaugurates 12-foot air purifier

New Delhi: After the installation of the second air purifier in Gandhi Nagar, East Delhi MP Gautam Gambhir on Sunday got another state-of-the-art air purifier installed in Krishna Nagar market. This is in furtherance to his plan to have giant air purifiers in all major markets of his constituency. Earlier, such air purifiers were installed at Lajpat Nagar and Gandhi Nagar markets through the initiative of Mr Gambhir. "This purifier may not solve the problem of pollution completely but as someone born and brought up in this city, I cannot just sit at home and let things worsen. Allowing people to breathe clean air should be the top priority of the government, but the chief minister and his colleagues are not concerned (about it)," said Mr Gambhir. The air purifiers are approximately 12 feet in height and cover an area of 1,000 sq metre. These fully automatic machines deliver two-lakh cubic metre of clean air daily and the schedule for these machines can be pre-determined. "The BJP MP has the vision to install giant air purifiers in all major crowded markets in his constituency," said a statement from cricketer turned politician's office.

Chargesheet filed against Khalid, Imam

New Delhi: The Delhi police on Sunday filed a supplementary chargesheet in a court here against former JNU student leader Umar Khalid and JNU student Sharjeel Imam in a case related to the alleged larger conspiracy in the communal violence in northeast Delhi in February. The chargesheet was filed before additional sessions Judge Amitabh Rawat against Khalid, Imam and one Faizan Khan under the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and sections related to criminal conspiracy, murder, rioting, sedition, unlawful assembly and promoting enmity on the grounds of religion, language, caste, etc of the Indian Penal Code, according to sources. The offences entail a maximum punishment of death penalty. The 930-page supplementary charge sheet was filed under sections 13 (unlawful activities), 16 (terrorist act), 17 (raising funds for terrorist act) and 18 (conspiracy) of the UAPA. The accused have been charged under IPC sections 120 B (criminal conspiracy) read with sections 109 (abetment), 114 (abetter present when offence is committed) 124A (sedition), 147 and 148 (rioting).

2 men arrested for snatching gold chains

New Delhi: Two men have been arrested for allegedly snatching gold chains from a woman journalist and the wife of a former Meghalaya police chief in southeast Delhi, officials said on Sunday. Another man to whom they sold the stolen items has also been nabbed, they said. The three accused have been identified as Alok Ranjan (23), Gufran (26), both residents of Tughlakabad and Vishwanath Das (32), a resident of Garhi village, East of Kailash, they said. On Friday, police received information that a gold chain has been snatched from a woman journalist at Amar Colony. Police rushed to the spot near Moolchand metro station and met the complainant, a journalist in an English newspaper, they said.

Indian artists to hit the cricket ground

New Delhi: Artists will be hitting the cricket ground in the upcoming third season of the Artist Event Cricket League (AECL). The founder of AECL, Ashish Mathur, said, "The main objective behind organising such a unique cricket league is to unite all the artists on a single platform. Cricket is one such team game that has the potential to create opportunities to know each other better and share better bonding. This has already been witnessed in the last two seasons." The matches will be played with a tennis ball with 12 overs for each side during the league stage and 15 overs for each side during the knockout stages. Overall, 16 teams will be participating with around 300 players, including famous artists.

Experts cite cold weather as reason 1,759 Covid deaths in November so far

New Delhi, Nov 22: Delhi, which has been reeling under the third wave of coronavirus, has reported a death rate of 1.58 per cent as compared to the national fatality rate of 1.48 per cent.

Experts attribute the high number of daily Covid deaths in the national capital to a large number of "critical" non-residents patients coming to the city for treatment, unfavourable weather, pollution and better "reporting and mapping" of fatalities.

They say the easing of restrictions has exposed the vulnerable population, such as the elderly and those having comorbidities, to the deadly virus.

In the month of November alone, the national capital has recorded 1,759 fatalities till November 21 at around 83 deaths per day. The number of deaths breached the 100-mark four times in the last 10 days.

Authorities reported 111 fatalities on Saturday, 118 on Friday, 131 deaths on Wednesday, the highest till date, and 104 on November 12. The average fatality rate in Delhi stands at 1.58 per cent at present, which is higher than the national death rate of 1.48 per cent, according to government data.A

Delhi records 121 deaths, 6,746 fresh cases in a day

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, NOV. 22

Delhi recorded 6,746 fresh Covid cases on Sunday and a positivity rate of 12.29 per cent while 121 more fatalities pushed the death toll to 8,391, authorities said.

These fresh cases came out of the 54,893 tests conducted on Saturday, including 23,433 RT-PCR tests, according to the latest bulletin issued by the Delhi health department.

On Friday, authorities had said 23,507 RT-PCR tests, the highest till date, were conducted a day before.

At 3.2 per cent, Punjab's fatality rate is the maximum among all states and Union Territories.

Maharashtra (2.6 per cent), Sikkim (2 per cent), West Bengal (1.8 per cent), Puducherry (1.7 per cent), Madhya Pradesh (1.6 per cent) and Uttarakhand (1.6 per cent) have recorded more deaths per 100 confirmed cases than Delhi.

Dr B.L. Sherwal, the managing director of Rajiv Gandhi Super Specialty Hospital, said,

The highest single-day spike till date here — 8,593 cases — was recorded on November 11 when 85 fatalities were recorded.

As many as 121 fatalities were recorded on Sunday.

This is the fifth time in the last 11 days that the daily number of deaths has crossed the 100-mark. Authorities reported 111 deaths on Saturday, 118 on Friday, 131 on November 18, the highest till date, and 104 fatalities on November 12.

The active cases tally on Sunday stood at 40,212 as compared to 39,741 on Saturday.

"Overall, more deaths occur during winters. This is one major difference we have observed in case of Covid fatalities, too."

The cold weather is not favorable for people with weak immune systems who are at higher risk of getting severely sick from SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes Covid he said.

"Seventy per cent of those who have died due to coronavirus were elderly or had comorbidities," he said. —PTI

City records coldest Nov. morning in 17 yrs

New Delhi, Nov. 22: Delhi's minimum temperature dropped to 6.9 degrees Celsius on Sunday, the lowest in the month of November since 2003, as a cold wave swept parts of the city. The city had recorded a minimum of 7.5 degrees Celsius on Friday, the lowest in the month in 14 years, according to the India Meteorological Department.

"The Safdarjung Observatory which provides representative data for the city, recorded a minimum of 6.9 degrees Celsius. It is Delhi's lowest minimum temperature in the month since November 2003, when the city recorded a minimum of 6.1 degrees Celsius," said Kuldeep Srivastava, the head of the IMD's regional forecasting centre.

The mercury dropped to 6.1 degrees Celsius at the Palam weather station, he said. For the plains, the IMD declares a cold wave when the minimum temperature is 10 degrees Celsius or below and is 4.5 notches less than normal for two consecutive days. "However, for small areas such as Delhi, a cold wave can be declared if the criteria is fulfilled even for a day," Srivastava said.

Delhi had recorded the lowest minimum temperature of 11.5 degrees Celsius last year, 10.5 degrees Celsius in 2018 and 7.6

TMC says it is 'rectifying' mistakes

■ **Continued from Page 1** Sabha, the Lok Sabha and the Union Cabinet. Who is Akash Vijayvargiya? He is an MLA in Madhya Pradesh who had hit municipal workers with a bat and was arrested in the case. Mukul Roy's son Shubhrangshu Roy (Bijpur MLA) is also in their party," he said.

Training his guns on the BJP over corruption charges, Mr Ghosh, a key accused arrested by the CBI in the Saradha chit fund scam, demanded the arrest of Mr Roy in the Narada sting operation case. "Is the BJP a washing machine? In the Narada case, arrested IPS officer S.M.H. Meerza's statement under Section 161 CrPC should be considered and Mr Roy must be arrested by the CBI because Mr Meerza spoke about the money being handed over to Mr Roy. I am also ready to face Mr Roy in a joint interrogation, in the Saradha case," he added.



People wearing warm clothes walk along a road in Gurugram.

Delhi's air quality 'poor', likely to deteriorate further

New Delhi, Nov. 22: Delhi's air quality remained "poor" on Sunday and government agencies said it is likely to deteriorate further due to unfavourable meteorological conditions. The city's 24-hour average AQI was 274 on Sunday. It was 251 on Saturday, 296 on Friday, 283 on Thursday and 211 on Wednesday.

The central government's Air Quality Early

Warning System for Delhi said Delhi-NCR's air is likely to deteriorate to the "very poor" category on Monday due to unfavourable meteorological conditions. The predominant surface wind direction was northwesterly and the maximum wind speed 12 kmph on Sunday, it said, adding that the wind speed is likely to drop on Monday.

degrees Celsius in 2017 in the month of November. The all-time record for

BSF claims it found tunnel

■ **Continued from Page 1** alert was sounded along the LoC in J&K's Poonch sector on Sunday after a flying object was spotted in the Mendhar sector. Official sources said the object was probably a drone, that was reportedly hit by the Army with a shell. SDPO Mendhar Z.A. Jafri told a local news agency GNS that the Army and the J&K police Special Operations Group

were conducting searches in the area.

J&K DGP Dilbag Singh said it was a 150-metre-long underground tunnel which was unearthed after investigations into the recent encounter near a toll plaza in Nagrota along the Jammu-Srinagar highway, in which four militants were gunned down by the security forces.

Mr Singh, after inspect-



People visit the India Gate at Rajpath amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic in New Delhi on Sunday.

—PTI

2 evening markets shut for violating Covid-19 norms

New Delhi, Nov. 22: The West Delhi district authorities Sunday ordered two evening markets in Nangloi to be shut for flouting various Covid safety guidelines including on social distancing and face mask, officials said.

The District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) in West Delhi issued an order Sunday, directing for closure of Punjabi Basti Market and Janta Market till November 30, a senior district official said.

"The government directives for wearing face mask, maintaining physical distancing and other such Covid safety measures were being flouted both by the vendors and shoppers in the two rehri-patri (street side) markets despite repeated instructions and warnings by officials," he said.

The district authorities, accompanied by police and NDMC teams, conducted inspection to ensure the closure of the markets and

removal of encroachments in both the markets.

Over 200 vendors dealing in various daily use items used to set up shops in the markets that opened in the evening hours daily.

The action comes two days after chief minister Arvind Kejriwal said his government did not wish to shut any market, and had assured their associations to support the government in preventing the spread of Covid infection through these places.

—PTI

Indo-Pak wars' veteran former Major General Chibber dies

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, NOV. 22

Major General (Retd.) R.N. Chibber, who participated in 1962, 1965, and 1971 wars



passed away on November 21, 2020.

Maj. Gen. Chibber was born on September 23, 1934, and was commissioned into the Army on June 2, 1955. An outstanding officer, Maj. Gen. Chibber participated in the 1962, 1965, and 1971 wars and commanded the 8 Jat Regiment. His expertise and exceptional strategy put him in the forefront as a brilliant officer.

He was posted in Afghanistan from 1972 to 1975 as military attaché. Maj. Gen. Chibber made a name for himself not only as an officer of exceptional competence but as a humanitarian and a man of great compassion. Maj. Gen. Chibber was colonel of the regiments for the Jats and known for uplifting his soldiers and their families throughout his career.

His colleague, Col. Makhan Singh Gill, said of Maj. Gen. Chibber, "He was a saint soldier; a highly respected and admired officer and loved deeply by those who knew him. Hundreds of messages started pouring in as news of his passing spread, each more touching than the previous one. It is a rarity to see a man who remained unforgettable in the hearts of so many even three decades after his retirement."

He is survived by his wife Suman, daughters, and their families.

Delhi Police ASI held for running extortion racket

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA
NEW DELHI, NOV. 22

The Delhi police has arrested its own assistant sub-inspector (ASI) in an extortion case of ₹2 crore from a businessman in Hauz Khas area.

The police said that ASI Rajbir Singh, who was posted with the Southwest zone police control room (PCR) unit, was also the kingpin behind the extortion from the businessmen. The police has also initiated the process to take away the 'police medal for meritorious service' conferred to him in 2019. ASI Singh is now in judicial custody. The police said that four other accused in the case were earlier arrested.

According to a senior police official, an FIR was registered at the Hauz Khas police station in which the complainant had alleged that on June 28 his father received a call where the caller introduced himself as gangster Kala who threatened him and asked him to pay ₹2 crore.

"During investigation, it was revealed that the SIM card and the mobile phone

was allegedly snatched on June 27 from a person in Haryana," said police. "However, the snatched mobile was not used to make the call. Instead, its SIM card was used in another mobile phone. That handset was procured from a man named Sawan by a person named Mukesh, both residents of Pankaj Garden," he said.

"Thereafter, Mukesh gave that handset to Parmod alias Kala, a resident of Jhajjar district, who made the extortion call from Rajasthan. The three accused—Mukesh, Sawan, and Sunny alias shooter—were then arrested by the police," said police.

During enquiry, it came to light that Parmod was using three mobile phones. The numbers were analysed and it was revealed that ASI Rajbir Singh was in continuous touch with Parmod.

"There is no place in the force for personnel like ASI Rajbir Singh, who is allegedly found involved in a serious criminal case," said Anil Mittal, the additional public relation officer (APRO) of Delhi police.

Woman held for bid to kill hubby's lover

Nagpur, Nov. 22: A 39-year-old woman has been arrested for allegedly trying to kill the live-in partner of her husband on the premises of a police station here in Maharashtra, police said on Sunday.

The accused Savita Sawwalakhe poured petrol on the victim on the premises of Pratap

■ **THE ACCUSED** Savita Sawwalakhe poured petrol on the victim on the premises of Pratap Nagar police station on Saturday evening. The accused has been booked on the charge of attempt to murder

Nagar police station on Saturday evening, an official said.

However, before Savwalakhe could act further, police personnel overpowered her, he said.

The accused and the other woman had visited the police station for a counselling session.

The accused has been booked on the charge of attempt to murder under the Indian Penal Code, he said. —PTI

Shah's visit to TN a success, Rajini briefs on 2021 plans

■ **Continued from Page 1** Mr Gurumurthy was closeted with Mr Shah for over two hours. Mr Rajinikanth is said to have told Mr Gurumurthy what his plans were for the next Assembly elections when the two of them met very recently.

Though the BJP and Mr Gurumurthy would like to rope in the actor in some way during the campaign to help the BJP get votes, it is not certain that Mr Rajinikanth is inclined to do so. After dropping plans to launch his own party, he does not want to involve

himself in politics, particularly when his support is sought not just by the BJP but also by Kamal Haasan's Makkal Needhi Maiyam.

In fact, Mr Rajinikanth not meeting Mr Shah triggered speculation in the media about his health. It was said he was unwell and that he had gone to his Kelambakkam farmhouse, which was swiftly denied by his publicity person, clarifying that he was very much at his Poes Garden residence and was hale and hearty.

However, Mr Shah did



Amit Shah

not seem to have missed meeting Mr Rajinikanth, going by his remarks at a meeting with the BJP leaders. Mr Shah said the party should not be dependent on celebrities and should be built on the strength of its ideological moorings.

Prior to addressing party members, Mr Shah met leaders from the AIADMK, PMK and DMDK and reportedly settled the seat-sharing question with them. The AIADMK leaders, O. Panneerselvam, Edappadi K. Palaniswami and D. Jayakumar, had agreed to give 20 to 25 seats to the BJP, another 25 to the PMK and 15 to the DMDK, which would also be given a Rajya Sabha nomination.

Though none of this information was confirmed by any of the leaders involved in the talks,

sources say the AIADMK is keen on contesting close to 165 of the 234 seats in the Assembly as it wants to form a government on its own without support from allies. They had also promised to give more seats to the BJP in the Lok Sabha elections, citing it as "MGR formula" that gave the Congress more MP seats and less MLA seats in the past.

Mr Shah had stressed on the need to weaken the DMK for them to win the elections and told the cadre not to give up on their efforts in building

the party. He cited examples of the BJP being extremely weak in some states and then rising to the level of capturing power. The BJP had a future in Tamil Nadu, he reportedly told the leaders. While leaving for New Delhi on Sunday morning, Mr Shah is said to have spoken to state higher education minister K.P. Annabalan on behalf of Anna University vice-chancellor M.K. Surappa. He had told the minister not to harass Mr Surappa through inquiry commissions and so on.

SHORT TAKES

BHARTI SINGH, HUSBAND SENT TO JUDICIAL CUSTODY

SAURABH JOSHI
MUMBAI, NOV. 22

A day after the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) arrested comedian Bharati Singh, the officials arrested her husband Harsh Limbachiya following his 15-hour long marathon grilling. The NCB produced the couple before the court on Sunday and they were remanded to judicial custody till December 4. The comedian was arrested on Saturday following raids at their Versova residence.

The NCB officials had seized 86.5 gram of cannabis from the couple's residence. The officials took them for questioning at the NCB office where the couple revealed they procured and consumed the banned substance. The agency subsequently arrested Singh stating that her place was searched based on the information given by one of the peddlers who was arrested during the drugs probe.

"The duo was questioned in connection with the ongoing probe. They have been remanded to judicial custody. The magistrate's court would hear the bail pleas on November 23," said an officer.

During the court proceedings, the officials sought Limbachiya's custody but did not seek Singh's as she was questioned by the NCB ahead of the arrest.

TARUN GOGO'S HEALTH CONDITION REMAINS CRITICAL

MANOJ ANAND
GUWAHATI, NOV. 22

Veteran Congress leader and former Assam chief minister Tarun Gogoi's health condition continues to remain critical despite minor improvement in his health parameters on Sunday.

The 86-year-old was admitted to Guwahati Medical College Hospital (GMCH) on November 2 following breathing problems because of post-Covid-19 complications.

The superintendent of Guwahati Medical College and Hospital Dr Abhijit Sarma on Sunday told reporters that he is on a mechanical ventilator with multi-organ dysfunction (MOD) and is experiencing difficulty in passing urine normally.

"Since Saturday, there has been no deterioration in his health and his laboratory parameters have improved marginally. But his condition is still critical and we will observe him closely for another 48 hours," he said.

"At present, he is passing around 100-120 ml of urine in 24 hours. It would be good if the quantity increases. A large group of specialists from various disciplines are constantly monitoring his health and we are also in touch with experts from AIIMS, Delhi, and they are satisfied with the treatment protocol," he added.

MERCURY DIPS IN MOST PARTS OF NORTH INDIA

New Delhi, Nov. 22: Minimum temperatures dipped in most parts of north India on Sunday with Srinagar recording a low of minus 3 degrees Celsius, while a cold wave swept parts of Delhi which recorded its coldest November morning since 2003.

The national capital's minimum temperature dropped to 6.9 degrees Celsius while the air quality remained "poor" and government agencies said it is likely to deteriorate further due to unfavourable meteorological conditions.

"The Safdarjung Observatory which provides representative data for the city, recorded a minimum of 6.9 degrees Celsius. It is Delhi's lowest minimum temperature in the month since November 2003, when the city recorded a low of 6.1 degrees Celsius," said Kuldeep Srivastava, the head of the India Meteorological Department's (IMD) regional forecasting centre.

For the plains, the IMD declares a cold wave when the minimum temperature is 10 degrees Celsius or below and is 4.5 notches less than the normal for two consecutive days.

Jammu and Kashmir's summer capital Srinagar recorded the coldest night of the season as the minimum temperature dropped several degrees below the freezing point across Kashmir region, while the weather department predicted a spell of wet weather in the Valley from Monday.

Central teams visit high Covid risk states

Efforts on to strengthen containment, surveillance, testing, infection prevention and control measures

SANJAY KAW
NEW DELHI, NOV. 22

With Covid-19 caseload in the country crossing the 91 lakh mark, high-level central teams were on Sunday deputed to Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Himachal Pradesh to support them in response and management of the virus. These states have been either reporting a rise in the number of active cases — those who are hospitalised or are in home isolation under medical supervision, or demonstrating a rise in the daily new cases of Coronavirus infections. Earlier, high-level teams were sent to Haryana, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Manipur and Chhattisgarh.

A senior health ministry official said that these three-member teams will visit districts reporting a high number of Covid-19 cases and support the state efforts towards strengthening containment, surveillance, testing, infection prevention and control measures, and efficient clinical management of the positive cases. He said that the teams will also guide in effectively managing the challenges related to timely diagnosis and follow up.

With 45,209 fresh Covid-19 cases reported in the last 24 hours, the infection tally in the country has mounted to 90,95,806. The death toll has also gone up to 1,33,227 with 501 more fatalities. The silver lining is that the total recoveries have surged to 85,21,617, pushing the national recovery rate to 93.69 per cent. Even the Covid-19 case fatality rate has declined to 1.46 per cent. There are now 4,40,962 active cases in the country, which comprise 4.85 per cent of the total caseload.

The country's Covid-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 30 lakh on August 23 and 40 lakh on September 5. It went past 50 lakh on September 16, 60 lakh on September 28, 70 lakh on October 11, crossed 80 lakh on October 29, and surpassed 90 lakh on November 20.

According to the ICMR, over 13.17 crore samples were tested up to November 22 with 10,75,326 samples being



Visitors walk beside closed shops in Shimla on Sunday after authorities ordered closure of markets due to spike in the Coronavirus cases. — PTI

tested on Saturday.

Of the 501 new fatalities, 111 were reported from Delhi, 62 from Maharashtra, 53 from West Bengal, 25 each from Kerala and Haryana, 24 from Uttar Pradesh, 23 from Punjab, 22 from Chhattisgarh and 20 from Karnataka. Total 1,33,227 deaths reported so far in the country include 46,573 from Maharashtra followed by 11,641 from Karnataka, 11,586 from Tamil Nadu, 8,270 from Delhi, 7,976 from West Bengal, 7,524 from Uttar Pradesh, 6,927 from Andhra Pradesh, 4,595 from Punjab and 3,846 from Gujarat. The health ministry stressed that more than 70 per cent of the deaths occurred due to comorbidities.

At 3.2 per cent, Punjab's fatality rate is the maximum among all states and UT. Maharashtra (2.6 per cent), Sikkim (2 per cent), Gujarat (2 per cent), West Bengal (1.8 per cent), Puducherry (1.7 per cent), Madhya Pradesh (1.6 per cent) and Uttarakhand (1.6 per cent) have recorded more deaths per 100 confirmed cases than Delhi.

Don't create scarcity of beds, pvt hosps told

Ahmedabad, Nov. 22: Amid a spike in Covid-19 cases in Gujarat's Ahmedabad city, the local civic body on Sunday warned private hospitals not to create an artificial shortage of beds for treatment.

Ahmedabad city currently has 2,906 active cases, led by its west zone with 479, and followed by 464 in north-west and 457 in south-west.

The Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation said there was no need to panic as 1,500 beds were available and it was in the process of requisitioning another eight to ten hospitals to enhance the numbers further.

It said some private hospitals were admitting Covid-19 patients who did not require hospitalisation in a bid to fill up beds and create "artificial scarcity".

The civic body said it had reached out to private hospitals across the city after a review meeting was chaired by additional chief secretary Rajiv Gupta, who is the special officer for Covid-19 in Ahmedabad city, and directed them to stop any such "unscrupulous and illegal practice".

The AMC said the office-bearers of Ahmedabad hospitals and nursing homes association have been intimidated about this issue as well.

The civic body also told providers of 108 ambulance service to ensure, as much as possible, that members of a family are admitted in the same hospital and not different ones. On Saturday, the city witnessed 354 new cases, among the highest single-day additions since the outbreak began in March, and five deaths. — PTI

GEHLOT ACCORDS TOP PRIORITY TO SAVE LIVES

Jaipur, Nov. 22: Rajasthan chief minister Ashok Gehlot on Sunday reviewed the Covid-19 situation in the state and reminded officials of the government's top priority to save lives and ensure strict compliance of anti-pandemic precautions by people.

Holding an extensive meeting to review the #Covid19 situation across the state, Taking stock of the prevailing conditions & ongoing efforts to contain the virus. Our top-most priority is to save lives, provide adequate treatment & encourage people to strictly follow health protocols, Gehlot tweeted. Reviewing arrangements to contain the infection, ensure compliance of decisions including that of the night curfew & also to make sure that people are not inconvenienced, he said. — PTI

FORMER K'TAKA MINISTER BAIG HELD IN IMA SCAM

VINAY MADHAV
BENGALURU, NOV. 22

Former Karnataka minister R. Roshan Baig, who had resigned as Congress MLA and joined the BJP, which helped Chief Minister B.S. Yeddyurappa form government, has been arrested by the CBI in I Monetary Advisory (IMA) gold scam.

On Sunday morning, the CBI took Baig for questioning. Late in the evening, the agency produced him before a CBI special court judge and Baig was remanded to judicial custody for 14 days. He was taken to the Parappana Agrahara jail.

IMA director Mansoor Ali Khan had started a gold investment scheme and collected over ₹4,000 crore from over 40,000 investors and cheated them.

The state government had handed over the investigation to the CBI, after Khan spilled the names of politicians and bureaucrats, including two IPS officers, as being beneficiaries.

Eye on 2024 polls, Nadda to go on 120-day India tour

New Delhi, Nov. 22: BJP president J.P. Nadda will embark on a 120-day nationwide tour to tone up the party's formidable organisational machinery with an eye on the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, as the saffron dispensation looks to focus on regions where it did not fare well in the last general election.

BJP general secretary Arun Singh told reporters that Mr Nadda will begin his travel from the first week of December and Uttarakhand will be the first state on his itinerary.

December 5 is the likely date for the beginning of his tour.

Mr Singh said the BJP president will visit every state, hold virtual meetings with heads of all booth units, the smallest organisational entity in the party, and meet every MP and MLA of the organisation besides its senior leaders, including district chiefs, in each state.

Mr Nadda will visit some booths to interact with ground workers, he added.



J.P. Nadda

● **BJP GENERAL secretary Arun Singh told reporters that Nadda will begin his travel from the first week of December and Uttarakhand will be the first state on his itinerary.**

● **SINGH SAID THE BJP president will visit every state, hold virtual meetings with heads of all booth units, the smallest organisational entity in the party, and meet every MP and MLA**

During the travel, he will also strategise with party leaders for strengthening the organisation in Lok Sabha seats and regions where the BJP did not win in the 2019 polls,

he said.

With assembly polls in four states, West Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Assam, set to be held in the first half of the next year, he will also review the party's preparedness for the elections, Singh said.

Mr Nadda will spend three days in big states and two in others.

The BJP-ruled states will give presentation to Nadda on various aspects of their work, including implementation of the central government schemes and on to how to further raise awareness about them.

He will also meet BJP's allies and hold public programmes and press conferences as well, Singh said. Mr Nadda's predecessor Amit Shah, now Union home minister, had also undertaken extensive nationwide tours during his term and is credited with playing an instrumental role in propelling the BJP to a strong position in a number of states where it used to be weak. — PTI

Azad: People, Cong delinked for long

AGE CORRESPONDENT
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, NOV. 22

There is a huge disconnect between the people and Congress leaders and "five-star culture" has crept into the party, veteran leader Ghulam Nabi Azad said Sunday as he called for an overhaul in the party organisation. Azad was one of the 23 senior leaders who had written to Sonia Gandhi seeking major changes in the Congress organisation.

His remarks come after the Congress' debacle in the Bihar Assembly elections, in which the party won only 19 of the 70 seats it contested.

"There is an urgent need to overhaul the party structure by conducting elections from block to district and state level," Azad said, saying Congress leaders at all levels should "shed five-star culture, at least during elections".

In West Bengal, meanwhile, the Congress, after its disastrous performance in Bihar, is facing

pressure from its Left alliance partners to become "more realistic" and settle for fewer seats in order to restrict the BJP and the Trinamul Congress in the state.

Differences have also cropped up over the West Bengal Congress' desire to project its chief Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury as the face of the alliance with the CPI(M).

Leaders of the Left are hopeful that the Congress would not place such a demand on the table to protect the alliance.

Describing the Congress as a "big letdown" for the Grand Alliance, CPI(M) Liberation general secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya hoped the party would adopt a "more realistic" approach during its seat-sharing talks with the Left Front in West Bengal.

Bhattacharya said the Congress too would be reviewing its poor show in Bihar and be reasonable while sealing a seat-sharing deal in politically sensitive Bengal, where the BJP is making all efforts to clinch power.

said child health expert Sachin Kumar Jain. As many as 72,87,819 children including around 1 lakh tribal children are enrolled in 97,135 anganwadi centres in the state. Madhya Pradesh has 42 per cent stunted, 18.6 per cent severely stunted, 25.8 per cent wasted, 9.2 per cent severely wasted, 42.8 per cent underweight and 14.3 per cent severely underweight children under the age of five.

Child health experts have expressed apprehensions over feasibility of the proposal to introduce milk. "The availability and self-life of milk raise question mark over feasibility of the proposal,"

● **THE GOVERNMENT directs the officials to act fast to contain a fresh wave of Coronavirus infections in the state.**

added. Slamming the BJP over the demand to unlock everything, Thackeray said that some people demand to start all the activities but if the state opens everything, would they be ready to take responsibility for it?

Meanwhile, deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar said that the lockdown will be decided after taking a review of the situation in the next 8-10 days. He said that a second wave of Covid-19 is expected.

The health department said on Sunday said the state's overall infection count increased to 17,80,208.

A total of 4,060 patients were discharged during the day. With this, as many as 16,51,064 patients have recuperated across the state till date. There are 81,512 active cases in the state at present.

Maharashtra's recovery rate is now 92.75 per cent, while the fatality rate is 2.62 per cent. Of the 5,753 total cases reported on Sunday, 1,135 were detected in Mumbai alone, which took the city's case count to 2,75,714, while 19 deaths pushed the toll to 10,675.

In Mumbai, as many as 2,51,804 patients have recovered so far. The Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR), which includes Mumbai and its satellite townships, reported 1,975 fresh cases.

This took its overall tally to 6,17,474 with 18,504 deaths. Nashik city reported 119 fresh cases, Pune city 323 cases, Pimpri Chinchwad 206 cases and Nagpur city reported 418 cases.



INDIAN NAVY PARTICIPATES IN SITMEX-20

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, NOV. 22

As part of effort to strengthen India's strategic maritime, Indian Navy participated in trilateral maritime exercise SITMEX-20, with Singapore and Thailand on November 21 & 22 in Andaman sea.

The 2020 edition of the exercise is being hosted by Republic of Singapore Navy (RSN).

This exercise comes soon after multilateral Malabar Naval war game in which Indian, US, Australian and Japan navies conducted complex and exhaustive exercises. Indian Navy (IN) ships including indigenously built ASW corvette Kamorta and missile corvette Karmuk participated in the second edition SITMEX.

The first edition of SITMEX, hosted by Indian Navy, was conducted off Port Blair in September 2019.

The SITMEX series of exercises are conducted to enhance mutual interoperability and imbibing best practices between Indian Navy, Republic of Singapore Navy (RSN) and Royal Thai Navy (RTN). RSN is being represented by the 'Formidable' Class frigate 'Intrepid' and 'Endurance' Class Landing Ship Tank 'Edeavour' and RTN by the 'Chao Phraya' Class frigate 'Kraburi' in the exercise.

MID-DAY | MEALS

Child health experts doubt feasibility of Gau Cabinet substituting egg with milk

Milk instead of 'egg' to fight malnutrition in MP

RABINDRA NATH
CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, NOV. 22

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Sunday reiterated his government's decision to not introduce the egg in the mid-day meal provided to children in schools and anganwadi centres in the state to combat malnutrition among them.

Chairing the first meet-

ing of the Cabinet committee on protection of cattle, christened 'Gau cabinet', Chouhan said milk, instead of egg, would be introduced in the menu to tackle malnutrition.

"Cattle resource development will be the cornerstone of the self-reliance policy being implemented by the government. The move will give a fillip to milk production. This will make the proposal to introduce milk in midday meal

● **CHILD RIGHT activists have been demanding introduction of eggs in the midday meals.**

● **THE BJP claims that any attempt to change the dietary habits of children belonging to a particular section of communities may lead to cultural conflict.**

a viable proposition", he said.

Child right activists have been demanding introduction of eggs in the midday meals.

The BJP has been maintaining that any attempt to

change the dietary habits of children belonging to a particular section of communities by adding egg to the menu may lead to cultural conflict.

"The BJP has always maintained that suitable

alternatives to eggs should be made available for children so as not to hurt religious sentiments. Milk is a good alternative to egg for the purpose," BJP spokesman Rajneesh Agrawal said here.

Child health experts have expressed apprehensions over feasibility of the proposal to introduce milk. "The availability and self-life of milk raise question mark over feasibility of the proposal,"

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	43,882.25	0.65
Nifty 50	12,859.05	0.68
S&P 500*	3,557.54	-0.68
Dollar (₹)	74.14	0.18
Pound Sterling (₹)	98.45	-0.35
Euro (₹)	87.92	-0.09
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	49,551▲65	0.13
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	44.36	0.36
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.877	0.017
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.849	-0.702

* As of Friday/Saturday

Govt plans 10% stake sale in Midhani via OFS

The Centre is planning to sell up to 10 per cent stake in defence PSU Mishra Dhatu Nigam Ltd (Midhani) in the current fiscal ending March, an official said. The company got listed on stock exchanges in April 2018 and the government had raised Rs 438 crore by selling 26 per cent stake through an IPO. The official said with the opening of space sector to foreign investment, Midhani shares are expected to attract investors.

CG Power lenders okay Murugappa takeover plan



Lenders to CG Power and Industrial Solutions have agreed to a one-time loan restructuring to pave way for the Chennai-based Murugappa Group taking over the scam-hit equipment maker. CG Power had total debt of Rs 2,161 crore, out of which a consortium of 14 banks have taken a haircut of Rs 1,100 crore and restructured the remaining. In August, TIIL had agreed to invest Rs 700 crore in CG Power for a 56.61 per cent stake.

Byju's raising \$200 mn from BlackRock, Rowe

Edu-tech major Byju's is raising about \$200 million (about Rs 1,483 crore) in fresh funding from investors, including BlackRock and T Rowe Price, according to sources. The development comes about two months after Byju's had raised about \$500 million (about Rs 3,672 crore) in a round that valued the company at \$10.8 billion. According to sources, Byju's has raised \$200 million in a fresh round of funding.

Petrol, diesel prices raised for third straight day

Petrol price was hiked by 8 paise per litre and diesel by 19 paise on Sunday, the third straight day of increase in rates as the firming international oil rates broke a nearly two-month-long hiatus in price revision. Petrol price in Delhi was hiked to Rs 81.46 per litre from Rs 81.38, according to a notification from oil marketing companies. Diesel rates went up from Rs 70.88 to Rs 71.07 per litre.

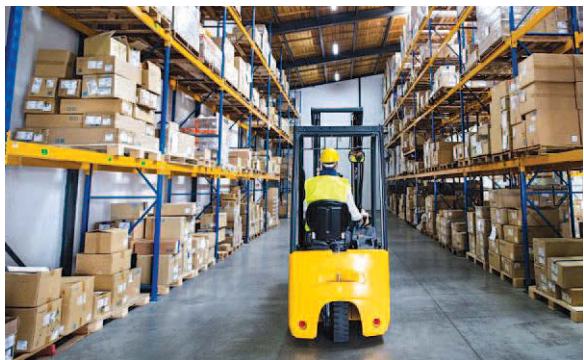
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■ Goods, services worth only ₹47,044 cr bought CPSE procurement down 62% this year

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, NOV. 22

Four more months left for the fiscal to end, the procurement of products and services by central public sector units is 62 per cent lower than last year's.

Central PSUs have made total procurement of products and services valued at Rs 47,044 crore, as per the latest update by government portal MSME Sambandh. This data is based on inputs provided by 109 central public sector enterprises. Comparatively, CPSEs made total procurement of Rs 1,24,021 crore in the last fiscal. Procurement was down even in the last fiscal. Against Rs 1,53,144 crore worth goods and services procured in 2018-19, last year's procurement was close to 20 per cent down. This year, the target pro-



curement by CPSEs itself is lower than last year's. As many as 114 CPSEs have set an annual target of procuring products and services worth Rs 1,10,782 crore for FY21.

As per the mandate set by the government, the CPSEs and government departments have to procure 25 per cent of their annual goods and services

from micro, small and medium enterprises. Of the total procurement reported till now, CPSEs have achieved this target. They have procured Rs 15,630 core worth goods and services from MSMEs, which is 33 per cent of their total procurement. However, compared with last year, the procurement till now lags behind by Rs

38,386 crore, or 59 per cent. Of their procurement, goods and services worth Rs 685 crore came from MSMEs owned by SC/ST entrepreneurs and Rs 390 crore from women entrepreneurs.

But the central PSUs have achieved only 32 per cent of their capex target in the first half of the fiscal, as per the data released by the government earlier. They have a capital expenditure target of Rs 1,15,934 crore for the fiscal 2020-21. Till the first half of the year, they have achieved only 32 per cent, or Rs 37,423 crore, of the target.

This is 13 per cent lower than the capital expenditure made in the first half of last fiscal. In H1 FY20, CPSEs had spent Rs 43,097 crore even when the total target was Rs 1,11,672 crore.

RBI has a million Twitter followers

FC BANKING BUREAU MUMBAI, NOV. 22

With one million Twitter followers, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has become the world's first central bank to achieve this milestone overtaking the US Federal Reserve, and the European Central Bank (ECB).

The US Federal Reserve has 6.77 lakh twitter followers and the Frankfurt headquartered ECB, the second most populous pow-

erful monetary authority in the world, has 5.91 lakh followers, Bank of England has 3.17 lakh followers and Bank of Canada has 1.8 lakh followers on its official twitter handle.

The 85-year-old RBI comparatively has been a late entrant on Twitter, present since January 2012. In comparison, the US Fed joined Twitter in March 2009.

The number of followers on RBI's Twitter handle, @RBI increased from 9.66 lakh on September 27, 2020

to 10 lakh on Sunday. In the current financial year, as many as 2.5 lakh new followers joined RBI's handle.

However, experts did not see it as an achievement. A senior banker said, "Obviously with India being the world's second most populous country and a huge number of them being active on social media, the RBI has got more followers on social media."

An analyst said, "Regulators are also becoming more active on

Economy improving, growth to turn positive in Q3: Goyal

BIJAY KUMAR SINGH NEW DELHI, NOV 22

India's macroeconomic situation is improving fast and the country's GDP growth will turn positive in the third and fourth quarters of the current financial year, eminent economist Ashima Goyal said on Sunday.

Goyal in an interview to PTI said the management of the Covid-19 pandemic and gradual unlock series announced by the government have helped in avoiding multiple Covid-19 peaks.

The growth estimates by different agencies are being continuously revised, she said.

"We are seeing the consensus negative forecasts shrinking below double digits now. Since unlock 4 in September that prevents states from restricting inter-state movements we are seeing supply chain disruptions easing and rapid pick-up in



Ashima Goyal

activity. Growth will turn positive in Q3 and Q4."

Goyal, who has been appointed as member of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the Reserve Bank of India, said there is progress on many reforms and that will make higher long-run growth sustainable.

"India's diversity and resilience as well as the benefits of surplus liquidity becoming available after a period of severe liquidity shortage are contributing to the turnaround," she said while stressing that she was speaking in her personal

capacity.

Replying to a question on high retail inflation, Goyal noted that it is due to transient supply-side factors such as unseasonal rains and supply-chain disruptions that are unlikely to persist. "Moreover, there are long-term changes that are likely to reduce inflation," she said.

Stating that while the repo rate as well as communication on targets and inflation paths anchors inflation expectations, she said liquidity and counter-cyclical macroprudential regulations can be used to stimulate growth.

"The RBI has implemented a number of excellent measures that are also reversed in time, without adverse effects such as the moratorium," Goyal, also a professor of economics of Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research, said.

—PTI

‘Car market growth uncertain but Maruti’s pole position certain’

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, NOV. 22

Maruti Suzuki, India's biggest car maker, which saw green shoots in sales during this festive season, says the outlook for the auto industry, the third largest employer in the country, was uncertain amid a Covid pandemic resurgence in Asia's third largest economy.

However, the maker of popular Vitara Brezza and Swift models, continued to maintain pole position with over 50 per cent market share in the last three years and 51 per cent last month despite new rival entrants like Kia Motors eating into its segmental share.

Significantly, Maruti held on to market leadership with only petrol and CNG cars. It discontinued diesel cars from April 2020, because the BS-VI emission norms widened the price difference with petrol-run vehicles by about Rs 1.5 lakh. Also, the average price difference between petrol and diesel



Shashank Srivastava

fuel became less than Rs 2, fuelling demand for petrol-driven vehicles.

The South Korean car maker Kia has emerged the fourth largest automaker within a year of entering the fiercely competitive car market, about 70 per cent of which is controlled by Maruti Suzuki and Hyundai Motors.

The passenger vehicle market is now heavily depended on which direction the Covid-19 deadly virus containment and the GDP growth would move.

"The festive sales from Navratri on Oct. 16 to Diwali on Nov. 16 was marginally better than last year due to pent-up

Market risks rising as DIIs remain net sellers

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, NOV. 22

Mutual fund investors have taken advantage of the sharp rise in stock prices in the equity market in November and booked profit by redeeming their investment.

As per November data, mutual funds have sold equity investments worth Rs 15,907.86 crore as on November 18.

Data made available by the Securities and Exchange Board of India shows domestic institutional investors (DIIs), consisting of mutual funds, insurance companies and banks, have been booking profit heavily this month, as inflows from foreign portfolio investors have surged dramatically post the US elections on November 3. Data for insurance companies and banks are not separately available.

Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty have soared to new all-time high in a liquidity driven rally while fundamentals are still fragile. This has made DIIs cautious of rising risks in the market, which rallied 70.23 per cent post-lockdown, from the low of 25,981.24 for the Sensex on March 23 to 44,230.10 points on November 19.

In the entire October month total redemption from equity investments among the mutual funds were of Rs 14,491.79 crore.

High redemptions by the mutual funds in recent months have made the equity market quite vulnerable and dependent on inflows from foreign portfolio investors.

SMALL TOWNS ACCOUNT FOR 16% OF MUTUAL FUND ASSET BASE

New Delhi, Nov. 22: The contribution of small towns, or B30 cities, to the mutual fund industry's average assets under management of over Rs 28 lakh crore stood at 16 per cent as of October-end, while state-wise Maharashtra remained the biggest contributor to the assets base, industry body Amfi said.

B30 (beyond top 30 cities) accounted for 16 per cent of the total industry average assets under management (AAUM) in October this year, and the balance was contributed by T30 cities, or the top 30 locations in India, the Association of Mutual Fund Industry (Amfi) said.

Assets from B30 locations increased to Rs 4.61 lakh crore as of October-end from Rs 4.47 lakh crore at September-end, a 3 per cent growth.

"There has been a constant increase in investments from B30 locations. They have close to 27 per cent share in the overall equity assets held by individual and it is growing at a reasonable rate," said Harshad Chetanwala of MyWealthGrowth.com. "This is encouraging as investors across country should get the benefit of investing in instrument like mutual funds" he added.

B-30 locations tend towards equity schemes as 65 per cent of assets are from equity schemes, while same is 35 per cent for 'Top 30' cities.

About 15 per cent of the retail investors chose to invest directly, while 24 per cent of HNI assets were invested directly. Besides, 47 per cent of the assets of the MF industry came directly," Amfi noted.

—PTI

revisits the world map in the coming months.

In September mutual funds had sold equities worth Rs 4,134.37 crore after high redemptions in August of Rs 9,213.44 crore, and in July of Rs 9,195.04 crore.

Considering that mutual fund investors had sold equities worth only Rs 501.50 crore in June, their current selling look quite high, and risks rising if FPIs stop investing due to any change in global situation.

PRESTIGE TO INVEST ₹2,000 CR IN FOUR HOUSING PROJECTS



New Delhi, Nov. 22: Realty firm Prestige Estates Projects Ltd will develop four new housing projects in Bengaluru, Goa and Hyderabad with an investment of nearly Rs 2,000 crore amid recovery in demand for residential properties.

The Bengaluru-based company will develop nearly 3,400 housing units in these four projects over the next three-and-a-half years.

"We have launched four new housing projects in the last few months. We are getting very good traction in all these four projects. We have already sold 50 per cent in Hyderabad," Prestige group chairman Irfan Razack told PTI.

Elaborating on these four projects, Prestige Estates executive director-business development Swaroop Anish said the company launched a middle income housing project 'Prestige Tranquil' in Hyderabad early this month.

The project, which is spread over nearly 8 acres and comprises 906 units, will be developed with an investment of around Rs 825 crore, including the land cost, Anish said.

Prestige Estates has started construction work on two housing projects in Bengaluru in joint development with land owners.

The first one 'Prestige Primrose Hills' at Kanakpura Road is an affordable housing project, which is spread over 15.5 acres having 1,680 units. The project cost is pegged at around Rs 475 crore.

The second project in Bengaluru is located at Whitefield named Prestige Waterford. The company is constructing 689 units in this nearly 17-acre project at a cost of around Rs 575 crore.

—PTI

Tata Steel testing Russian coal to cut dependence on Australia

ABHISHEK SONKAR NEW DELHI, NOV. 22

Tata Steel has tested coking coal samples from Russia for making steel through the blast furnace route, its managing director and chief executive officer T. V. Narendran said.

The development assumes significance in the local steel industry as a fruitful result of the experiment would break the monopoly of Australia in coking coal supply to India.

According to official data, the country imports about 56 million tonnes (mt) of coking coal worth around Rs 72,000 crore. Out of this, about 45 mt is imported from Australia.

"We have imported some coking coal from Russia. The east coast of Russia is a good source," Narendran told PTI.



The CEO said this while replying to a question related to the company's contribution to the steel ministry's ongoing efforts to reduce India's dependence on select countries for sourcing of coking coal.

Earlier, the ministry asked the steel makers to get coking coal from Russia and test the raw material at their plants and update on the result.

Coking coal is a key raw material used for making steel using the blast furnace route, besides iron ore.

"We support the government's initiative to look at Russia as a source (of coking coal). It is a good option for us to have, otherwise we are overdependent on Australia," he said.

He added that Australia also often has cyclone and weather issues. "For many reasons, it is good for us to have more than one option. We have explored and tried out some material."

Tata Steel produces steel using blast furnace at its 11-Mtpa (million tonnes per annum) plant at Jamshedpur in Jharkhand

and 3-Mtpa plant at Kalinganagar in Odisha.

When contacted Tata Steel for details about the experiment, a company spokesperson said, "There is no information available at the moment."

Earlier, Steel Authority of India Ltd (Sail) chairman A. K. Chaudhary also talked about similar initiatives being undertaken by the state-owned firm.

In an interview with PTI, he had said the domestic steelmakers depend heavily on imported coking coal.

The company is looking at new destinations and vendors for sourcing coking coal from the international market to avoid dependence on limited sources, Chaudhary said.

Besides Australia, part of coking coal demand is also met from South Africa, Canada and the US. —PTI

THE ASIAN AGE

23 NOVEMBER 2020

Avoid partisan approach, apathy to conquer Covid

Prime Minister Narendra Modi was spot on, calling Covid-19 the biggest threat to humanity after World War-II, as nations across the globe stare at the possibility of another wave of the pandemic. India is no exception; several states have started showing signs of a new wave. It is welcome that the Union government, realising the threat, has launched a series of measures to lessen its impact.

The work has started right in the national capital, which is in the throes of a third wave, and the Union and the state government have promised to work in tandem. The Delhi government has no plans to reintroduce a lockdown but will tighten the rules and rigorously enforce them. It has decided to keep a special watch on markets where more people congregate, and will hike the fine for not wearing a mask from ₹500 to ₹2,000. And most importantly, there will be a house-to-house survey for testing.

The Union government has sent expert teams to several states, which are now witnessing a new surge in the number of infections. The government had done so in the past, too, but it faced the allegations that there were political motives behind it. The teams' behaviour in several states ruled by parties opposed to the BJP had given credence to the allegations, too. Hopefully, the government has learnt its lessons and would not use the opportunity for politicking this time around. The teams should limit themselves to helping the local administration benefit from their expertise.

We have said in these columns earlier, too, that public health is a matter of concern for the public first, and that a government can do only so much without its cooperation. Reports say people have started taking it easy. Festivals, markets, public transport and entertainment avenues have been flooded. Even political leaders, elected representatives and senior bureaucrats appear in the public either with no masks or wearing them in the wrong way. Such callous attitude will undo all the good work done so far. There must be better awareness among all ranks of the people about the need to follow Covid-appropriate behaviour such as maintenance of social distancing, washing of hands and wearing masks.

The best lesson the micro-organism has taught humanity is that it can be stopped only by the joint efforts of all of its victims; a partisan approach helps it thrive. The United States, which is facing another dreaded run of the virus, is an example. Back home, the Kerala experience tells a similar story. The state, which performed remarkably in the first phase in containing the pandemic, failed the moment partisan politics took over. Onam was not the only culprit; anti-government agitations too contributed to the spread with the result that the state today contributes more than 10 per cent of the country's total daily caseload.

Concerted efforts by all the stakeholders is the need of the hour, for there are no human enemies in this war.

BJP's pointless exertions

In the popularity sweepstakes, the two top honchos of Tamil Nadu, Edappadi K. Palaniswami and O. Panneerselvam, gained nothing from turning up early at the Chennai airport to personally receive the Union home minister Amit Shah on Saturday. In fact, they were only trolled for breaking a convention and seen as kowtowing to a Big Brother political ally for no apparent collective common cause. If the two AIADMK leaders had any genuine reason for appeasing the BJP leader by going the extra mile and even hailing him as "Chanakya", they have not yet revealed it to the people of the state.

The people might ask about it when the time comes — perhaps, when they would go to them to seek their votes in 2021. But prior to that, what will be the fallout of the much-hyped visit of Amit Shah, for whom it was an extraordinarily long night with BJP functionaries and other visitors till 2.30 am on Sunday? The BJP cadre who stayed awake listening to one of their most prominent leaders may have returned home enthused over their party's projected future prospects in the state where their candidates have been generally vying with Neta in the vote count.

But beyond that what did the state BJP gain? In the run-up to the visit, the state leadership had said that the news of Mr Shah coming to town itself was sending shivers down the spines of Opposition leaders. Whatever he meant by that, a "Go Back" hashtag trended on Twitter for a day and even a man was arrested for hurling a placard towards the visiting dignitary from the welcoming crowd. Nothing, however, interfered with Mr Shah's engagements and nothing helped the BJP's popularity to soar either. For, more than visitors, it's local leaders who need to gain people's confidence, which definitely can't be done by taking out disruptive marches carrying spears, even if they are blunt.

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Kishwar Desai
London Diary



Anti-Semitism is why Meghnad quit; all hope for Christmas shots

Finally — the good news is that a vaccine is coming, hopefully by Christmas! Indeed not just one, but six are running a close race and are likely to touch the finishing tape almost simultaneously. Our own Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine was off to an early start but ran into a few problems. The UK has ordered 100 million of them. No one had foreseen Pfizer/BioNTech would get in ahead. So very quickly, we have ordered 40 million of these. The poor health minister has scrambled together enough money to also order five million of the Moderna vaccine. It looks like we may be vaccinating by late December. Maybe we need to be singing, "On the First Day of Christmas My True Love Gave to Me an AstraZeneca vaccine..."

On the personal front, it was quite a tumultuous week for us, as my husband, Meghnad Desai, left the Labour Party after 49 years! It had been a decision he had been mulling over for while as he felt that the anti-Semitism in the

party had not been dealt with and needed to be rooted out. He has fought against this racism his entire life. And when Jeremy Corbyn was recently readmitted to the Party (most of the trouble over anti-Semitism had been during his tenure as the head of the Labour Party) Meghnad felt enough is enough. Of course, it came after discussions and was not a sudden decision — as he has always been a well-respected member of the Labour Party, and has numerous friends within it. But most of them, even if they don't admit it, will know why he felt it was essential to quit. The irony is that Meghnad's autobiography is out this month — and one wishes he had been able to include a chapter on this very important move on his part! But perhaps he can discuss it now at the book launches.

So look out for some interesting revelations as Meghnad talks about his book, *Rebellious Lord*.

One is never sure if lifting the lockdown is good news or bad news. We now hear that

in early December we will go back to a partial lifting of the various restrictions. Everyone is fighting the big fear that it may be a dull winter, with seven days of Christmas celebrated with no more than six people. Since the government has been (as are other governments) befuddled by the virus and does not know what it is doing or can do, we just have to bump along.

Even Boris is in isolation because Tory MPs have not learnt about distancing. When he met a bunch of them, one of them was infected so "test and trace" pinged Boris and told him to isolate. As he already had Covid, he should be immune and not require isolation. But you can never be too careful. He does seem to enjoy his isolation as he can do his parliamentary business from his flat at the top of Number 11.

Last week we went through a perfect storm as one of Boris' closest advisers, Dom Cummings, was asked to leave along with his second in command.

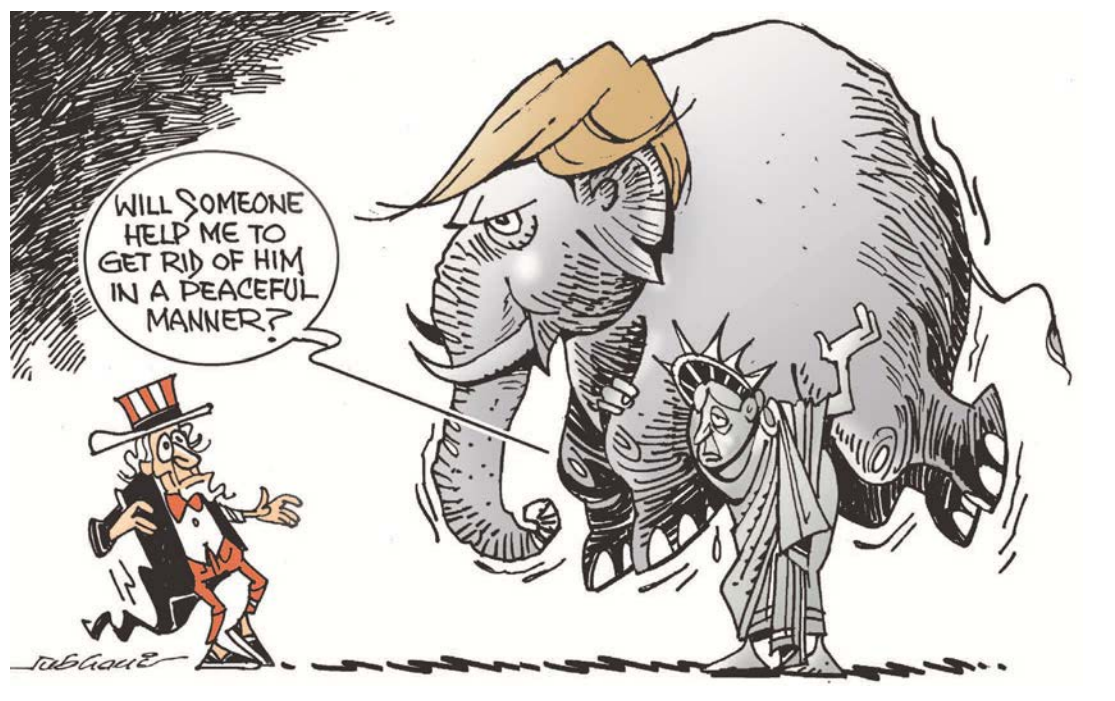
Apparently Carrie Symonds, the Prime Minister's partner, decided it was time for a Christmas cleanup and took over the reins. She is an environmental activist and suddenly Boris was supporting a Green economy. He announced that all petrol and diesel cars would be gone by 2030 and only electric cars will be allowed. This calls for a reality show called the "Kitchen Cabinet Files" Of course, no one knows what the economy will be like in 2030 — and one wonders why we are still talking about private cars — when we should be discussing more and more public transport.

One always has the fond hope that the UK government would be corruption-free. But the pandemic seems to have brought a sleaze virus into the system. We now hear about a host of scams in which cronies have been given millions in fees and contracts to deliver dubious supplies. The latest to come to light is a contract given to a fashion

store in Florida which promised to deliver three truckloads of PPE suits as the health service did not have enough PPE suits in stock. But the appointed contractor got a subcontractor who did not deliver. It was in a court case in Florida between the contractor and his subcontractor that it was revealed the contractor had collected millions in his fee in addition to the money for the supplies. Of course, in the panic over the pandemic many unfortunate decisions were taken the world over — but it seems these cases may have revealed some deeper malaise. I appeal to Carrie Symonds to cast a glance at this. All our hopes rest with her now... I suggest we start writing "Dear Carrie" letters to Downing Street, and action will undoubtedly be taken.

Kishwar Desai is an award winning author, and playwright. Her latest book, The Longest Kiss: The Life And Times of Devika Rani, will be published shortly.

Subhani



Theatres of the New Cold War



Manish Tewari

State of the Union

What would the new Cold War look like as China attempts to achieve its misconceived trust with the destiny of becoming the world's pre-eminent power by 2049, completing one hundred years as a modern Communist state albeit with capitalist characters?

Where then would China's push points lie? The first and obvious one — is the Western Pacific. China has been now for decades trying to break out of the first and the second island chains as well as surmount the Malacca dilemma effectively.

What are these island chains and do they serve any strategic purpose today in containing or constraining China? The first one embraces Kuril Islands, main Japanese archipelago, Okinawa, northern part of the Philippine archipelagos, Malay Peninsula and Taiwan. The second one comprises the islands of Japan stretching to Guam and the islands of Micronesia. China has so far succeeded in establishing a robust presence through its grey zone actions in the first island chain only. In the Spratly and Paracel Island chain in the South China Sea, China is growing land to augment its entitlement to the waters of the region. It is landfilling submerged reefs building artificial islands that are being fashioned into outlier military bases.

Herein lies the rub. These two island chains are strategically significant for the US and its hub and spoke security relationships from Japan all the way down to Australia. As General Douglas MacArthur, in his farewell address to the US Congress as far

back as 1951, explained, "All this was changed by our Pacific victory, our strategic frontier then shifted to embrace the entire Pacific Ocean which became a vast moat to protect us as long as we hold it. Indeed, it acts as a protective shield for all of the Americas and all free lands of the Pacific Ocean area. We control it to the shores of Asia by a chain of islands extending in an arc from the Aleutians to the Mariannas held by us and our free allies. From this island chain we can dominate with sea and air power every Asiatic port from Vladivostok to Singapore and prevent any hostile movement into the Pacific..." Maybe not so much militarily but geo-politically this thesis is as relevant today as it was in 1951. For the Chinese, therefore, it is equally important to break through this perimeter if they want to become a serious blue water power.

It would be instructive to note that China's shipping imperatives traverse the Taiwan Straits, pass through the South China Sea, and into the Indian Ocean via the Malacca Straits. West of the Indian subcontinent, it splits in two. One track skirts the northern tier of the Arabian Sea and transits through the Hormuz Strait into the Persian Gulf. The other lane continues on to the Horn of Africa and cones through the Bab al Mandeb Strait into the Red Sea. From there, it exits through the Suez Canal into the Mediterranean. These crucial sea lanes of communication and Commerce (SLOCs) are China's nemesis as 80 per cent of China's oil imports and crucial minerals flow from Africa and the Middle East, and to the major export mar-

kets of Europe along these waterways.

The North Arabian Sea is therefore a critical area for China. To protect its interests and project power Gwadar in southwest Pakistan seems the obvious answer to its problem. East of Hormuz it is already seen as China's sentinel in the Indian Ocean. Though economically unviable it enables direct transport linkages between China and the Indian Ocean thereby helping it overcome the choke points of the Straits of Malacca.

However, the moment China converts Gwadar into a full-fledged military base it would come in conflict with the entrenched powers in the region namely Iran, GCC countries and most importantly the US whose Fifth Fleet is headquartered in Bahrain and it maintains its biggest concentration of military personnel in the Middle East at the Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar. China will also have to contend with a new dynamic in the region the new-found relationship between the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain and Israel. India that sits on the other side of the Arabian Sea would be a natural antagonist of any Chinese presence in these waters.

The next theatre of the Cold War would be Africa where the Chinese have invested resources much before the formal commencement of the Belt and Road Initiative. China's first internationally acknowledged military facility was established in August 2017 at Djibouti in the Horn of Africa. The Chinese People's Liberation Army Support Base is oper-

The next theatre of the Cold War would be Africa where the Chinese have invested resources much before the formal commencement of the Belt and Road Initiative

ated by the Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN). This hub will facilitate the movement of the Chinese Navy across the entire Indian Ocean. However there are traditional powers in that area namely Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Libya, Algeria, to name but a few. They are not going to be comfortable with an alien military presence in their lands. Why would they want China to replace the United States as the outside power balancer in the region? It, therefore, will create multiple friction points for China, were it to flex its muscles.

The most portentous challenge lies in South Asia. China is already in a tense stalemate with India in Eastern Ladakh. Maldives has been targeted by China's voraciousness. Maldives debt to China is estimated to be at least \$1.5 billion that represents more than 30 per cent of its GDP. Under the Abdulla Yameen administration (2013-2018), massive BRI infrastructure loans were taken and contracts subsequently awarded to Chinese companies at inflated prices. Though things seem to look a tad more balanced after Ibrahim Mohamed Solih became President but the debts do remain on the Maldives national balance sheet. Similarly, the cumulative value of Chinese infrastructure investment to Sri Lanka amounts to \$12.1 billion between 2006 and July 2019. Were the Chinese to push these two countries for military concessions and with the US showing an interest in both Maldives and Sri Lanka the Chinese may have to deal with both India and the US in South Asia. This though is not in India's best interests as both these nations are considered within its eminent domain.

The author is a lawyer, Member of Parliament and former Union information and broadcasting minister. The views expressed are personal. Twitter handle @manishtewari.

LETTERS

CONG QUICK FIX

Congress MP and member of the G23 group of dissenters Kapil Sibal has rightly said the party had ceased to be an effective Opposition party, with no efforts made to strengthen the organisation. Significantly, seeking an overhaul of the party, interim president Sonia Gandhi appointed four dissenters in three panels to discuss issues related to the economy, foreign affairs and national security. However, this is only a quick fix. An AICC election and grooming of new leaders is the only forward.

Sankar Paul
Chakdaha, West Bengal

TWO-PARTY TRAP

US DEMOCRACY had been sliding into an anachronistic rabbit hole long before Donald Trump, Barack Obama or even JFK. A divided two-party system makes its effectiveness suspect. Institutions suffer as flexibility of officials is sacrificed at the altar of party discipline. This system has been relentlessly dividing the nation into two distinct and competing visions of national identity, with no middle ground. In order to do anything, a broad compromise is needed every time. Under Mr Trump's free-wheeling and cavalier dispensation these fault lines are only more pronounced. That even a pandemic with two lakh cases a day is unable to deter the polity from tipping over into the crevices should point to the urgency of the situation the solution to which can only be devised by centrists coming together to seed a third political entity, sooner than later.

R. Narayanan
Navi Mumbai

MINGLE WITH CARE

DELHI HAS BEEN fighting a tough battle against the deadly disease of Covid-19 over the last few weeks. Reasons that led to a spike in cases include increasing mass interactions brought about by festivities and thoughtless behaviour from the citizens. Winter, too, is more hospitable to the virus. Perhaps, it is time to exercise caution again. After all, self-regulation is the best regulation.

M.N. Musaeed
Mumbai

₹500 for the best letter of the week goes to Neha Jamal (Nov. 21). Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

IN BRIEF MAN DIES IN SHARK ATTACK IN AUSTRALIA

Sydney, Nov. 22: A man died Sunday after being attacked by a shark in Western Australia, the eighth fatality in the county this year.

Police were called to Cable Beach, a popular tourist spot on Australia's Indian Ocean coast, at about 8:40 a.m. The 55-year-old was pulled from the water with serious injuries and treated by police before paramedics arrived.

He died at the scene, police said. Park rangers immediately closed the beach. The man was the eighth to die in a shark attack in Australia this year, the highest toll since 1929 when nine died. The introduction of shark nets at popular beaches in the 1930s led to a significant fall in fatal attacks.

14 PRO-IRAN FIGHTERS IN SYRIA KILLED

Beirut, Nov. 22: At least 14 pro-Iran militia fighters from Iraq and Afghanistan were killed in air strikes in war-torn eastern Syria, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said Sunday.

The strikes on Saturday night in Deir Ezzor province, on the border with Iraq, were likely carried out by Israeli war planes, the Observatory said.

The Israeli army said it doesn't comment on foreign reports. More than 10 strikes hit positions of Iran-backed militias outside the border town of Albu Kamal, according to the war monitor.

The attack killed eight Iraqis and six Afghan fighters, it said.

It also destroyed two bases as well as several military vehicles, the Observatory added.

Iran-backed fighters are heavily deployed in a stretch of territory between the Syrian towns of Albu Kamal and Mayadeen, both former strongholds of the Islamic State group.

Along with Russia, Iran has been a key backer of the Damascus regime in its nine-year-long civil war. Israel has carried out hundreds of air and missile strikes on Syria since the civil war broke out in 2011, targeting Iranian and Lebanese Hezbollah forces.

NINE KILLED IN ISLAMIC STATE AMBUSH IN IRAQ

Samarra, Iraq, Nov. 22: Six Iraqi security personnel and three civilians were killed in an ambush Saturday carried out by the Islamic State group north of Baghdad, police and a local official said.

A police source said a roadside bomb hit a car and that jihadists opened fire on a rescue team of policemen and state-aligned paramilitary forces when they arrived at the scene, about 200 kilometres (120 miles) from the capital.

Four members of the Hashed al-Shaabi and two policemen died along with three civilians, Mohammed Zidane, the mayor of Zouiyi, 50 kilometres from the city of Tikrit, told AFP.

He updated an earlier civilian death toll of two.

There was no immediate word of casualties among the assailants, but Zidane said those killed among the Hashed, a coalition of mainly Shiite forces, were Sunni tribesmen.

Both the mayor and police said the ambush was the work of IS jihadists.

NIGERIA AMBUSH TOLL RISES TO 8, 2 BODIES FOUND

Kano, Nigeria, Nov. 22: The death toll in a jihadist ambush on a military convoy in north-east Nigeria's Borno state on Saturday rose to eight after two more bodies of soldiers were recovered, security sources said. Three security sources had initially told AFP six people, including five soldiers and an allied militiaman, were killed in the attack.

"The death toll from the ambush is now eight. The bodies of two more soldiers were recovered," said one of the sources. "It is now seven soldiers and one militiaman killed," he said. The toll was confirmed by another source.

Islamic State West Africa Province fighters armed with machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades opened fire on a convoy of soldiers and an anti-jihadist militia in Kwayamti village, 60 kilometres (36 miles) north of the regional capital Maiduguri.

The convoy was on its way to the town of Baga as a security detail for the state governor, Babagana Umara Zulum who flew by helicopter earlier in the day.

England plans tougher tiered steps on Covid from Dec. 2

UK media speculates PM will declare week of freedom around Christmas

London, Nov. 22: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson will set out a "Covid Winter Plan" to control the spread of Coronavirus in a speech on Monday, when he is expected to set out some tougher tiered measures to come in as England's lockdown officially ends on December 2. More areas are set to be placed into the higher tiers of tougher movement and household mixing restrictions and some tiers will be strengthened to safeguard lockdown progress to keep the deadly virus under control, Downing Street said.

Ahead of the nearly month-long stay-at-home lockdown, England had been placed in a three-tier system of graded social distancing rules based on the infection rates in particular regions. The government's Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) is expected to publish research on Monday saying that measures in the previous tiers were not strong enough.

More details of the so-called Covid Winter Plan are expected on Monday in a speech to the House of Commons, after Cabinet discussions on Sunday which Johnson will be conducting virtually as he continues to self-isolate following contact with an MP who later tested positive for Covid-19.

Some UK media reports also suggest that Johnson is expected to announce up to a week of freedom from Covid-19 restrictions at Christmas, subject to

an agreement with the devolved governments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. It will involve a UK-wide relaxation of rules, reportedly from December 22 to 28, so that several families can join in one "bubble" to celebrate Christmas on December 25.

"Everyone's efforts during the current national restrictions have helped bring the virus back under control, slowed its spread and eased pressures on the NHS," a Downing Street spokesperson said. "But the Prime Minister and his scientific advisers are clear the virus is still present — and without regional restrictions it could quickly run out of control again before vaccines and mass testing have had an effect. That would put in jeopardy the progress the country has made, and once again risk intolerable pressure on the NHS," the spokesperson said.

Downing Street also said that the Winter Plan will set out how people will be able to see their loved ones at Christmas, adding that ministers will be warning that this will not be a normal festive period. There are reports that the 10 PM curfew for bars and restaurants could be extended by an hour. Last orders would still be called at 10 PM, but people would have until 11pm to finish their food and drink. Johnson faces a rebellion from some MPs from within his own Conservative Party.

— PTI

US surpasses 12 million cases, 2.5 lakh deaths

Washington, Nov. 22: The United States surpassed 12 million Covid-19 cases Saturday, according to the Johns Hopkins University real-time tracker. The world's largest economy currently has 12,019,960 cases and 255,414 deaths, both by far the worst global tolls. The new toll comes just six days after the US crossed the 11-million case threshold.

Cases have been surging in the US at an alarming rate, forcing many cities to re-impose punishing lockdown measures. Health authorities have

urged people to stay home for next week's Thanksgiving holiday, when Americans usually travel from coast to coast to be with their families.

New York City has shut down schools for its 1.1 million students, while California began imposing a 10:00 pm to 5:00 am curfew from Saturday.

Chicago — the US' third-largest city — has been under stay-at-home orders since Monday.

On Friday, President Donald Trump's eldest son, Donald Trump Jr, announced he had tested positive for Covid-19. — AFP

CASES IN JAPAN HIT A RECORD FOR FOURTH DAY

Tokyo, Nov. 22: The daily tally of confirmed Coronavirus cases in Japan hit a record for the fourth straight day at 2,508, the Health Ministry said on Sunday. Japan has had fewer than 2,000 Coronavirus deaths so far. Opposition legislators and public flayed the government for being too slow in halting its "GoTo" tourism campaign, which encouraged travel and dining with discounts. — AP

VIRUS: RUSSIA HEALTH SYSTEM UNDER STRAIN

Moscow, Nov. 22: When Yekaterina Kobzeva, a nurse at a preschool in Russia's Ural Mountains, began having trouble breathing, she called an ambulance. It was four days before she managed to find a free hospital bed.

Russia's health care system, vast yet underfunded, has been under significant strains in recent weeks, as the pandemic surges again. — AP

DUTCH CULL 1.9 L CHICKENS AFTER BIRD FLU

The Hague, Nov. 22: Dutch authorities have culled some 190,000 chickens after a highly-contagious strain of bird flu broke out at at least two poultry farms, the agriculture ministry said Sunday.

Health workers slaughtered around 100,000 hens at a poultry farm at Hekendorp outside Gouda while 90,000 chicks were culled at Witmarsum, in northern Friesland.

In both cases "a highly-contagious strain of the H5 variant" was suspected, the ministry said in a statement.

There were no other poultry farms within a one kilometre radius of the outbreaks, it added.

"Both farms were cleared to prevent further spread of the disease," the ministry said.

Seasonal bird flu has been detected at various farms around the Netherlands since October, blamed mainly on migratory birds.

Dutch Agriculture Minister Carola Schouten on October 23 imposed preventative indoor containment on all commercial poultry farms after two dead swans were discovered carrying the highly contagious H5N8 variety of bird flu. — AFP

Don Pennsylvania lawsuit dismissed

TRUMP CAMPAIGN FOR RECOUNT OF VOTE IN GEORGIA

Washington, Nov. 22: The Trump Campaign has filed a petition for recount of votes in Georgia, days after US President-elect Joe Biden wrested the Republican stronghold by a little over 12,000 votes.

Democrat Biden became the first Democrat to have won the key battleground state since 1992 after a hand recount of nearly five million votes, that lasted for several days. Georgia hadn't voted for a Democratic presidential candidate since Bill Clinton in 1992.

In case of a recount, election officials in Georgia will have to re-scan the five million hand-recounted and audited legal ballots. "We are focused on ensuring that every aspect of Georgia State Law and the US Constitution are followed so that every legal vote is counted," the Trump campaign said. — PTI

when seeking such a startling outcome, a plaintiff would come formidably armed with compelling legal arguments and factual proof of rampant corruption, such that this court would have no option but to regrettably grant the proposed injunctive relief despite the impact it would have on such a large group of citizens," the judge said. Trump has refused to concede the November 3 election and has filed multiple lawsuits. — PTI

POMPEO MEETS TALIBAN, AFGHAN NEGOTIATORS

Washington, Nov. 22: US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has met negotiators from the Afghan government and the Taliban in Doha, amidst signs of progress in their stalled talks and an uptick in violence that threatens to jeopardise the peace push in the war-torn country.

This was the first meeting of the top American diplomat with the Taliban and the Afghans representatives after the US' recent announcement that it will reduce the number of American troops in Afghanistan and Iraq to 2,500 each by January 15 next year. The US currently has a little over 4,500 troops in Afghanistan. "Met with both Taliban and Islamic Republic of Afghanistan's negotiating teams in Doha," Pompeo said in a tweet. — PTI

Biden admin might engage more with India, says expert

Washington, Nov. 22: The incoming Biden administration will have a more deliberate and thoughtful engagement with India, a noted foreign policy expert has said, asserting that there will be an opportunity to work with New Delhi to balance the burgeoning influence of China in the region. Sohini Chatterjee, a faculty member at Columbia University who previously served as senior policy advisor in the Obama administration, said in some cases, there will be a "little bit of consistency" as both US President Donald Trump and President-elect Joe Biden believe that India is an important strategic partner in the region.

But Trump's relation-

ship with India was a bit more short-term and reactive, the Biden administration is likely to have a slightly more deliberate and thoughtful engagement with India, Chatterjee told PTI.

"I think there'll be an opportunity to really work with India to balance the kind of burgeoning influence of China in the region, and structure a dialogue that that seeks, in some ways to counter-balance that burgeoning influence," she said, adding that the QUAD engagement involving Japan and Australia would continue. Chatterjee said for the Biden administration at the minimum human rights will now be "on the table as a critical issue to address." — PTI

Protesters set ablaze part of Guatemala Congress building

Guatemala City, Nov. 22: Hundreds of protesters broke into Guatemala's Congress and burned part of the building Saturday amid growing demonstrations against President Alejandro Giammattei and the legislature for approving a budget that cut educational and health spending.

The protest came as about 7,000 people were

demonstrating in front of the National Palace in Guatemala City against the budget, which protesters say was negotiated and passed by legislators in secret while the Central American country was distracted by the fallout of back-to-back hurricanes and the Covid-19.

Video on social media showed flames shooting out a window in the leg-

islative building. According to media reports, security agents fired tear gas at protesters and there were people injured. Giammattei condemned the fires in his Twitter account Saturday.

"Anyone who is proven to have participated in the criminal acts will be punished with the full force of the law."

— AP

COVID | IMPACT

Coronavirus pandemic has reduced the annual gathering of world top leaders into a webinar

Masks, screens, empty chairs at virtual Saudi G20 summit

Riyadh, Nov. 22: Mask-clad reporters filed into a Riyadh ballroom-turned-media centre Saturday after mandatory temperature checks, to cover physically a virtual G20 summit originally conceived as a grand coming-out party for host Saudi Arabia.

The media room in the capital's Crown Plaza hotel would have been buzzing with hundreds of international reporters were it not for the Coronavirus pandemic that has reduced the annual gathering of

world leaders into a giant webinar.

As the summit opened, the handful of foreign media present pointed their cameras to a large flickering screen where world leaders popped up in multiple tiny windows — one shuffling papers, another seen calling for technical help and one casually chatting to an aide.

For Saudi Arabia, the first Arab nation to host the summit, the media centre — a cavernous chandelier-studded room

filled with mostly unoccupied work stations — is emblematic of a lost opportunity to showcase its ambitious modernisation drive.

"This is an act of God," said Adel al-Jubeir, the kingdom's minister of state for foreign affairs, referring to the pandemic that made a physical summit impossible.

The austere kingdom has seen a sweeping transformation in the past three years — a driving ban on women has been lifted,

cinemas reopened and social mixing of the genders has become increasingly common as the once-feared religious police were rendered toothless.

"It would have been nice to have thousands of people come to Saudi Arabia, walk the streets, meet Saudi men and women, see the changes that have happened in the country, feel the changes," Jubeir said at a media briefing ahead of the summit.

A physical summit would also have been an

opportunity to highlight the kingdom's tourism potential — the new "white oil" the petro-state is keen to develop to diversify its revenues.

Saudi Arabia is endowed with stunning landscapes, but tourism remains a hard sell in a country with strict social codes and an absolute ban on alcohol.

Still, the government sought to make the most of the physical media centre. Adorned with portraits of Saudi destinations, the centre could be mistaken

for a tourism fair.

Liveried waiters offered four different types of Arabic coffee — each from a different corner of the kingdom.

Coffee table books extolling Saudi culinary delights were placed next to guides on destinations such as the historic city of Al Ula and the mountain resort of Abha — places of immense natural beauty but little known outside the country.

The kingdom hosted a media dinner on the eve of

the summit in the historic town of Diriyah, close to Riyadh and known for its traditional mud-brick architecture.

Dressed in loose fitting traditional thobes and clutching daggers, dancers bobbed and swayed amid the ruins.

To highlight other government projects, journalists were offered official interviews and briefings on the sidelines of the summit that were unrelated to G20.

— AFP

SHORT TAKES

CHINA TO EXTEND YANGTZE FISHING BAN IN 2021

Shanghai, Nov. 22: China will prohibit all fishing in the Yangtze river estuary from Jan. 1, extending a ban along the length of the river that came into effect at the beginning of this year, the country's agriculture ministry said.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs said in a notice published on Friday that it had decided to extend the ban to a designated estuary zone off the coast of Shanghai, and it would no longer issue licenses to catch saury, anchovy, crab and eel in the area. China imposed a 10-year ban on fishing in Asia's longest river at the start of the year in a bid to replenish stocks and allow endangered species to recover.

As a result of overfishing, the catch on some parts of the river had fallen below half of peak levels, and the Yangtze sturgeon is believed to be on the brink of extinction. The ban is set to be extended to large Yangtze tributaries at the start of 2021. The ministry said earlier this year that around 280,000 fishermen in 10 provinces and regions would be affected by the ban.

HEATWAVES CAUSED RECORD DEATHS IN UK

London, Nov. 22: Heatwaves caused a record 2,556 excess deaths in Britain this summer as the country was struggling to contain the Coronavirus pandemic, according to a government estimate published on Thursday. Increasingly frequent and severe heatwaves are among the deadliest impacts of climate change, mostly hitting elderly people and other vulnerable groups the hardest, scientists say.

"Unless the government takes urgent action to address the climate emergency, the number of excess deaths due to heatwaves is likely to increase year on year," said Sandy Robertson of the UK Health Alliance on Climate Change, an advocacy group of health professionals. Britain suffered a series of heatwaves here in June, July and August in which many weather stations around the country broke or matched their maximum temperature records.

The estimate of 2,556 excess deaths was the highest since the government launched a plan to manage the health effects of hot temperatures after an estimated 2,234 people died in England during a pan-European heatwave in 2003. Researchers said high temperatures alone could not explain all the deaths, raising questions over whether the pandemic may have served to amplify the impact of the heat. Experts have questioned whether people might have hesitated to seek help for heat-related complaints for fear of catching Covid-19 in hospitals.

WILDLIFE DISEASES TO SPREAD NORTH

Anchorage, Nov. 22: As the world's climate warms, parasite-carried wildlife diseases will move north, with animals in cold far-north and high-altitude regions expected to suffer the most dramatic increases, warns a study to be published in the journal *Science*.

The study projects increasing spread over the next five decades of wildlife diseases caused by bacteria, fungi, viruses and infectious worms. There are serious implications for humans, said co-author Jason Rohr of the University of Notre Dame, Indiana. "We do know that 75% of emerging infectious diseases have a wildlife origin," said Rohr, who runs an ecology and public health lab at Notre Dame.

"We should be concerned for our own health when we see studies suggesting that there could be increases in infectious disease in wildlife." Climate change is already causing a surge in wildlife diseases, the study notes. And people are already being infected with diseases coming from wildlife, including Covid-19, Rohr said.

The study supports the "thermal mismatch" theory of wildlife disease, finding that cold-adapted species are at increased risk when their habitats warm and warm-adapted species are at increased risk when their habitats cool.

It is based on records of 7,346 wildlife populations comprising 1,381 terrestrial and freshwater species, from tiny insects to big mammals across all seven continents. It uses past climate records and varying scenarios for future climate conditions over the next five decades to calculate trends for parasites spreading.

Colombian survivors vow to rebuild from ruins of Iota

Winds, rains have killed 40 people across Central America, Colombia

Bogota, Nov. 22: When Category 5 Hurricane Iota roared over the small Colombian island of Providencia in the early hours of Monday morning, Yeisler Chamorro and his wife hunkered down underneath a mattress in their bedroom.

Nearly all the infrastructure on the island of some 6,000 people, near the coast of Central America, was damaged or destroyed by the storm, which sent rubble raining down on top of Chamorro, 29.

"I was saved by my mattress," Chamorro said, as he showed a Reuters reporter the temporary repairs he has made to the room's roof. "Stuff was falling on us, debris and everything, but thank God we survived. Material things you can get back, the important thing is life."

Iota's winds and heavy rains have killed around 40 people across Central America and Colombia, including at least two in Providencia.

In Nicaragua, it inundated low-lying areas still reeling from the impact two weeks ago of Eta, another major hurricane that killed dozens of people in the region.

"When I got up and looked out, the first impression I had was that the neighbors were dead," air conditioning technician Chamorro said.

"I had to go out to see how my relatives were...when I arrived I found out everyone was alive."

Many residents are still in shock over the destruction, Chamorro said, but the born-and-bred islander is committed to rebuilding.

"We'll fight and get ahead



A man recovers belongings amid mud and debris left by the overflowing of the Chamelecon River following heavy rains caused by Hurricane Iota, in La Lima municipality near San Pedro Sula, Honduras on Saturday. — AFP

because this is a new beginning," he said. "More than asking God why, we have to be grateful we're alive."

Colombia's government has credited an alerts system and shelters for the low death toll on the island, whose residents speak a Creole language as well as Spanish.

Larger island San Andres, part of the same archipelago and which also sustained damage in the storm, has become a destination for hundreds of evacuees from Providencia seeking to reunite with family members.

— Reuters

Hurricanes: No room in shelters, people take refuge under bridges

San Pedro Sula, Honduras, Nov. 22: Shelters for people whose homes were flooded or damaged by hurricanes Eta and Iota in Honduras are now so crowded that thousands of victims have taken refuge under highway overpasses or bridges.

The International Red Cross estimates that about 4.2 million people were affected by the back-to-back Category 4 hurricanes

in November in Honduras, Nicaragua and Guatemala. Several hundred thousand are in shelters or informal camps across the region.

But nowhere are the evacuated victims piled up more densely than in the northern Honduras city of San Pedro Sula, where some neighbourhoods are still under water.

The evacuees say they fear that even when they

are eventually allowed to return to their flooded neighbourhoods, they will find everything gone.

Orlando Antonio Linares oversees a municipal shelter at a school in San Pedro Sula, where almost 500 hurricane victims have taken refuge. There are about 84 shelters across the city, holding as many 100,000 people. "There is a shortage of everything," Linares said. — AP

ISRAEL STRIKES HAMAS AFTER ROCKET ATTACK

Jerusalem, Nov. 22: Israeli aircraft on Sunday struck multiple sites in the Gaza Strip in response to a rocket fired earlier from the Palestinian territory, Israel's military said.

There were no immediate reports of injuries. While several militant groups operate out of the Palestinian enclave, Israel holds Gaza's Hamas rulers responsible for all rocket fire out of the territory and usually strikes Hamas targets in response.

The Israeli military said in a statement that fighter jets and attack helicopters hit two rocket ammunition manufacturing sites, underground infrastructure and a Hamas naval forces training compound. Late Saturday, Palestinian militants in Gaza fired a rocket toward Israel, setting off air-raid sirens in the southern Israeli city of Ashkelon, the Israeli military said.

Israeli police said the rocket caused damage to a structure in the Ashkelon area, roughly 10 kilometres (6 miles) north of Gaza, but there were no injuries. Israeli media said the rocket struck a factory. — AP



Benjamin Netanyahu

THOUSANDS PROTEST, WANT BIBI OUSTED

Jerusalem, Nov. 22: Thousands of Israelis braved cool, wet weather Saturday night to extend months of demonstrations demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Several thousand people gathered outside Netanyahu's official residence in Jerusalem, the focal point of most of the demonstrations.

A similarly sized crowd protested outside Netanyahu's private home in the upscale coastal town of Caesaria. Smaller gatherings took place at junctions and overpasses across Israel. The protests, now in their sixth month, appeared to be smaller than in recent weeks.

Grassroots organisers could face a challenge getting out large crowds as winter arrives. Parts of Israel experienced heavy rain Saturday. Protesters say Netanyahu should resign while he is on trial for corruption charges and accuse him of mishandling the country's coronavirus crisis. The crisis has hit the economy hard and sent unemployment skyrocketing. Many of the protesters are young people who have lost their jobs.

Pompeo made an unprecedented visit to settlements located in the West Bank and the Golan Heights, marking the first time a U.S. secretary of state has appeared at such sites, which as illegal and, in many instances, a direct obstacle to a viable Palestinian state.

Pompeo also said the Trump administration would be taking further measures aimed at "countering" the boycott. — AP

EU denies gas plants a green tag, offers hydrogen loophole

Brussels/London, Nov. 22: The European Commission on Friday proposed that power plants fuelled by natural gas would not be not classed as a sustainable investment in Europe, although plants could possibly gain a green label by burning some hydrogen.

The landmark EU rules, due to be finalised this year, will force providers of financial products to disclose from the end of 2021 which investments meet climate criteria, and can therefore be marketed as "sustainable".

Gaining such a label is likely to help companies tap the growing share of investor cash looking to profit from the region's multi-trillion-euro shift to a net zero emissions economy by 2050.

In its proposal for the rules, the Commission said to be classed as a sustainable investment — one that makes a "substantial" contribution to mitigating climate change — gas power plants must have life-cycle emissions below 100 grams of CO2 equivalent per kilowatt hour (gCO2e/kWh).

That confirmed draft plans reported by Reuters and comes despite intense lobbying from the energy

sector for a more generous threshold. The rules face a four-week consultation, before the Commission drafts the final version. Sean Kidney, CEO of the Climate Bonds Initiative, who along with other experts advised the Commission on the rules, said the decision on gas was "a victory of science over the political economy."

"The Commission has held the line," he said.

Europe's most efficient gas plants produce more than three times the proposed emissions limit, and would need to use carbon capture technology to comply. However, some experts said gas plants could potentially earn a sustainable investment badge by burning a share of hydrogen.

That is because investments can also earn a green label by meeting criteria

which contribute to "climate adaptation" — building resilience against the impacts of climate change. Those criteria would require gas plants to implement adaptation measures, such as flood defences, and meet a "direct emissions" limit of 270gCO2e/kWh.

Today's gas plants exceed that limit. But they could meet it by burning roughly 20% hydrogen and 80% fossil gas, according to independent climate think-tank Ember.

Nathan Fabian, an adviser to the Commission on the rules, also noted that this "direct emissions" limit would not cover the emissions produced during the extraction and transport of gas.

"It appears to exclude the global warming potential of bringing gas electricity to the market, by excluding those upstream emissions," said Fabian, chief responsible investment officer at the U.N.-backed Principles for Responsible Investment investor group.

The rules also set out the criteria carmakers, industry and agriculture must meet to earn a green investment label.

— Reuters

PETROLEUM | EXTRACTION

Proposal will revise Obama-era rules crafted to improve safety

US to relax Arctic Ocean oil drilling safety rules

Arctic, Nov. 22: The Trump administration on Thursday proposed to loosen Obama-era safety regulations for the oil industry in the Arctic Ocean off Alaska to ease the way for petroleum extraction in the region, an effort that President-elect Joe Biden will likely throw out once in office.

A polar bear sow and two cubs are seen on the Beaufort Sea coast within the 1002 Area of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in this undated handout photo provided by the US Fish and Wildlife Service Alaska Image Library on December 21, 2005. U. Fish and Wildlife Service/Handout via Reuters.

The proposal would revise a suite of Obama-era rules crafted to improve safety in the extreme conditions of the Arctic after a Shell drilling rig ran aground in the Gulf of Alaska in 2012. The company later abandoned oil exploration in the Arctic and there are no active drilling operations there.

Now, much of the US portion of the Arctic Ocean — the Chukchi Sea and part of the Beaufort Sea — is off-limits to new oil and gas leasing under a 2019 judge's order that overturned President Donald Trump's effort to open vast areas of the Arctic and Atlantic oceans to oil leasing. Biden has also vowed

● **MUCH OF** the US portion of the Arctic Ocean is off-limits to new oil and gas leasing under a 2019 judge's order that overturned President Donald Trump's effort to open vast areas of the Arctic and Atlantic oceans to oil leasing.

● **PESIDENT-ELECT** Joe Biden has also vowed to ban all new drilling in federal lands and waters once he takes office.

to ban all new drilling in federal lands and waters once he takes office. The US Department of Interior, which oversees the government's offshore oil and gas program, said in a Thursday statement that the revisions would "remove unnecessary, burdensome provisions" in the 2016 rules. It would specifically

eliminate a requirement that oil operators submit a detailed operations plan before filing an exploration request, according to a fact sheet published by the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement.

The administration would also roll back a rule requiring operators to demonstrate they can

Mubarak is Qaeda's N. African leader

Dakar, Nov. 22: Al-Qaeda's North African branch said it has appointed a new leader after confirming the death of its former chief, who was killed in June by French forces, according to the SITE Intelligence Group.

The Washington-based group, which monitors jihadist sites, said in a video published Saturday, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, known as AQIM, showed the dead body of its former leader, Abdelmalek Droukdel, for the first time.

AQIM also said that Yazid Mubarak, also known as Abu Ubaida Yusuf al-Annabi, is the new leader.

Droukdel was killed in Mali by French forces who had been hunting him in the Sahel region for years.

Al-Qaeda's North African branch also confirmed the death of Swiss mis-

sionary Beatrice Stockly, who had been captured in January 2016 from Mali's northern city of Timbuktu. The group attributed her death to a failed attempt by "French crusaders" to free her, and also held the Swiss government responsible for "delaying the issue and making futile efforts" according to SITE.

AQIM has made millions of dollars abducting foreigners for ransom over the years and has made large swaths of West Africa too dangerous for aid groups to access. Rita Katz, director of the SITE Intelligence Groups, said via Twitter that Yusuf al-Annabi's appointment as the new leader of AQIM is not surprising, given that he has been featured by the group in its propaganda over the past few years and has been involved in its core operations. — AP

PDM holds rally despite govt ban

Peshawar, Nov. 22: Pakistan's newly-formed alliance of 11 Opposition parties on Sunday held its massive anti-government rally in Peshawar despite a ban imposed by the city administration owing to a spike in Covid-19 cases and security threats, with top coalition leaders predicting that the Imran Khan government will "have to go home by January". The fourth power show by the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) was held despite the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government's warning that it may lodge cases against the PDM leaders if a spike in Covid-19 cases was witnessed in the province after the rally.

The alliance earlier held three massive back-to-back gatherings in Gujranwala, Karachi and Quetta. Addressing the gathering, Pakistan People's Party leader Bilawal Bhutto Zardari vowed that January will be the incumbent government's "last month in power" and the people will decide how Pakistan will be governed. "They will go home in January," he said. "Time is near when you, the people, would hold this selected government and its selectors responsible for current crises...." he said. On criticism over PDM's decision to went ahead with the rally despite the government ban, Bilawal said the government "only remembers Covid when they want to stop our rallies and your protest".

"They don't remember Covid when it comes to regularising medical staff or increasing salaries," he said. In his speech, PDM chief and Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam (Fazl) leader Maulana Fazlur Rehman said that all political parties agree and it is the movement's "clear stance" that the Imran Khan government (your backing) and declare that this is not our government. Raise your voice against this government along with us, we will then be brothers.

Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz vice-president Maryam Nawaz left the venue in the middle of the rally after hearing the news of her grandmother's death. — PTI

NAWAZ SHARIF'S MOTHER DIES IN LONDON AT 91

Lahore, Nov. 22: Pakistan's former prime minister Nawaz Sharif's mother Begum Shamim Akhtar died in London on Sunday. She was 91. Begum Akhtar was not well for the last one month or so, according to the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party sources.

"On Sunday she breathed her last in London," PML-N deputy secretary-general Attaullah Tarar said. She had travelled to London in February last and had been living with Nawaz and her grandchildren. Tarar said the body of Begum Akhtar is likely to be brought back to Lahore on Monday and buried next to the grave of her husband Mian Sharif at the Jati Umra Raiwind residence of the Sharif family.

Tarar said an application is being filed with the authorities concerned for the release of Nawaz's younger brother and PML-N President Shahbaz Sharif on parole to attend the last rites of his mother. PML-N supreme leader Nawaz Sharif, declared 'absconder' by a Pakistani court, is unlikely to return to the country to attend the last rites. — PTI

went on to say: "We respect the army if it is our defence institution. But if it tries to become a political institution, it will have to tolerate criticism. Then it should not say 'don't take our name'."

"Even today, we are giving you this deadline; stop supporting them (government), withdraw (your backing) and declare that this is not our government. Raise your voice against this government along with us, we will then be brothers."

Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz vice-president Maryam Nawaz left the venue in the middle of the rally after hearing the news of her grandmother's death. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

Herrmann parts ways with AFI

New Delhi: Athletics Federation of India's High Performance Director Volker Herrmann, whose contract was extended by the Sports Ministry till the end of 2024 Olympics, has relinquished the post, saying he "could no longer meet the self-imposed expectations coming along with the role." An AFI source said that Herrmann resigned a few weeks ago but he did not give any "specific reason". The German was appointed in June 2019 for a term till the end of the postponed Tokyo Olympics in 2021.

In September, the ministry extended his contract till the end of 2024 Olympics but AFI sources said he did not sign the new contract. "After one-and-a-half fruitful and inspiring years in India, the day has come when I could not any longer meet the self-imposed expectations coming along with the role of AFI's high-performance director, which is why I resigned from my position three weeks ago," Herrmann wrote on his Facebook page.

— PTI

It's Medvedev vs Thiem in final

London: Instead of No 1 Novak Djokovic vs No 2 Rafael Nadal for the ATP Finals trophy, it'll be No 3 Dominic Thiem against

No 4 Daniil Medvedev. Nadal had won 71 matches in a row when grabbing the opening set, and he served for the victory in Saturday's semifinals when leading 5-4 in the second set. But Medvedev broke at love there and came all the way back to win 3-6 7-6(4) 6-3. That came after Thiem frittered away four match points in his semifinal against Djokovic because he was "tight and nervous" during a second-set tiebreaker. Thiem gathered himself and eventually reeled off seven of the match's last eight points after trailing 4-0 in the last tiebreaker, winning 7-5 6-7(10) 7-6(5).

— AFP

Afridi to lead Galle Gladiators

Karachi: Former Pakistan all-rounder Shahid Afridi will lead Galle Gladiators franchise in the coronavirus-hit inaugural Lankan Premier League (LPL) Twenty20 tournament to be played in Hambantota, Sri Lanka from November 26 to December 16. Afridi was on Saturday named captain of the Galle Gladiators team, which has been brought by Pakistani businessman, Nadeem Omar who also owns the popular Quetta Gladiators franchise in the Pakistan Super League. Initially, Omar had announced Sarfaraz Ahmed as captain of Galle Gladiators but he had to alter his decision after the wicket-keeper batsman was named in the Pakistan squad for the tour of New Zealand. The inaugural LPL has been in trouble as several leading players withdrew from the event. — PTI

Ronaldo scoring streak continues

Milan: Cristiano Ronaldo continued his scoring streak with another two goals as Juventus won 2-0 against Cagliari to move second in Serie A. Ronaldo has now scored eight goals in his last five matches. "When you have a champion like Ronaldo you can achieve any result, he is an example for everyone and he only has to continue like this," Juventus coach Andrea Pirlo said on Saturday. Juventus moved a point below league leader AC Milan, which visits Napoli on Sunday. Third-place Sassuolo is a point further back ahead of its match against Hellas Verona. "It was important for our growth to have a match like this," Pirlo said. "We played well from the first minute and dominated the match."

Live on TV

FOOTBALL

Indian Super League: Odisha FC vs Hyderabad FC from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

English Premier League: Burnley vs Crystal Palace from 11 pm on Star Sports Select 1, HD

WWE

Raw: Bouts from 6.30 am (Tuesday) on Sony Ten 1, HD

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RED-HOT SPURS

Tottenham on top of EPL after beating Man City

Manchester, Nov. 22: Pep Guardiola admitted Manchester City played perfectly into Tottenham's hands as Spurs shot to the top of the table with a 2-0 win thanks to goals on the counter-attack from Son Heung-min and Giovanni Lo Celso.

Spurs have not won an English top-flight title in 60 years, but showed their title credentials with a defensive resilience to frustrate City's domination of possession and ruthlessly take their chances as they scored with their only two shots on target.

Defeat leaves City already eight points off the leaders, albeit with a game in hand, down in 10th with just three wins from their opening eight games.

The writing was on the wall for the visitors after just five minutes when one simple ball over the top from Tanguy Ndombele caught Joao Cancelo sleeping and Son had the pace and precise finish under Ederson to register his sixth goal in 11 games against City.

"The stats speak for themselves, we were better in many departments but we conceded a goal we cannot concede," said Guardiola. "It was the perfect scenario for them. We knew (Harry) Kane drops and Son runs in behind. We have to defend better."

Everton win 3-2 Aided by another embarrassing missed penalty by Fulham, Everton ended their three-match losing streak with a 3-2 win on Sunday as Dominic Calvert-Lewin scored twice.

Two weeks after Ademola Lookman failed with a scuffed, injury-time "Panenka" penalty at West Ham, Ivan Cavaleiro took over spot-kick duties for Fulham but slipped as he attempted his shot, kicked the ball against his standing foot and saw it loop



Giovanni Lo Celso (right) celebrates his goal with fellow goalscorer Son Heung-min during their EPL game against Manchester City.

— Twitter

RESULTS

Fulham	2
<i>(Bobby Reid 15, Ruben Loftus-Cheek 70)</i>	
Everton	3
<i>(Dominic Calvert-Lewin 1, 29; Abdoulaye Doucoure 35)</i>	
Tottenham	2
<i>(Son Heung-min 5, Giovanni Lo Celso 65)</i>	
Man. City	0
Man. United	1
<i>(Bruno Fernandes 56 P)</i>	
West Brom	0
Sheffield Utd	0
West Ham	1
<i>(S. Haller 56)</i>	

over the crossbar. Everton was leading 3-1 at the time and although Fulham set up a tense finale with a second goal in the 70th minute by Ruben Loftus-Cheek, the visitors held on to return to winning ways. — AP

Atletico edge past Barca

Madrid, Nov. 22: Atletico Madrid delivered a major boost to their hopes of winning La Liga on Saturday by beating Barcelona 1-0 and consigning their opponents to their worst start to a league season in 29 years. Yannick Carrasco finished brilliantly from range after mistakes from Gerard Pique and Marc-Andre ter Stegen left the goal gaping but Barca, and a below-par Lionel Messi, failed to respond at the Wanda Metropolitan.

Instead, Atletico recorded their first league victory over Barcelona in 10 years, which puts them three points ahead of Real Madrid, with a game in hand, and second in the table, level on points with early leaders Real Sociedad.

Like any coach. I am responsible. We know we have to improve the results.

— RONALD KOEMAN
Barcelona coach

It also leaves their opponents languishing in 10th, with Barcelona's 11 points from their first eight games their worst tally at this stage since the 1991-92 season.

"Like any coach, I am responsible," said coach Ronald Koeman. "We know we have to improve the results. I continue to trust the players I have."

Real Madrid had earlier been held to a 1-1 draw by in-form Villarreal, another slip-up for the reigning

champions to enforce the sense that this could be Atletico's year.

And beating Barcelona in La Liga for the first time since 2010 — before Simeone arrived as coach — will do wonders for the team's belief and extends what is now a considerable advantage in the table.

It also extends Atletico's unbeaten run in the league to 24 matches.

"Today we were able to win but it absolutely doesn't change anything," said Simeone. "We're working well and I'm excited about this team."

Another disappointing day for Barca was soured further by the sight of Pique hobbling off in tears with what the club said was a "sprained right knee". — AFP

Rohit ready to bat anywhere in Test

New Delhi, Nov. 22: He has enjoyed and revelled in his new role as a Test opener but Rohit Sharma is ready to be flexible about his batting position in the eagerly-anticipated Test series against Australia as per the demands of the team management.

The senior batsman is expected to play a big role alongside Test vice-captain Ajinkya Rahane and Cheteshwar Pujara when skipper Virat Kohli returns to India after the opening Test for the birth of his first child.

"I will tell you the same thing that I have told everyone all this while. I will be happy to bat wherever the team wants me to but I don't know if they would change my role as an opener," Rohit said.

He believes that the team management will have figured out his role in the batting order by the time he would reach Australia after completing the strength and conditioning work at an National Cricket Academy in Bengaluru. He had picked up a minor hamstring injury during the IPL.

"I am sure the guys already in Australia must have figured out what are options when Virat leaves and who are the guys who will open the innings," Rohit said.

"Once I reach there, I will



Rohit Sharma

probably have a clearer idea of what's going to happen. I will be okay to bat wherever they want," added Rohit.

Rohit needs to leave for Oz in 3-4 days: Shastri

India head coach Ravi Shastri has expressed his apprehensions about senior players Rohit Sharma and Ishant Sharma's participation in the upcoming Test series if they don't reach Australia in the next few days.

"He (Rohit) was never going to play the white-ball series, they were just looking to see how long he needed the rest, because you can't afford to be resting for too long," Shastri told ABC Sport.

"If you need to play in the Test series or any red-ball cricket, you've got to be on the flight in the next three or four days. If you aren't, then it's going to be tough."

Shastri said that NCA's medical team is currently assessing Rohit.

— PTI



Cleiton Silva celebrates after scoring a goal for Bengaluru in their ISL match against Goa on Sunday.

— ISL

Angulo inspires Goa comeback

Goa, Nov. 22: Clever substitutions did the trick for FC Goa as the Gaurs rescued a hard-fought point after an entertaining 2-2 draw against Bengaluru FC in match four of the ISL 7 at the Fatorda Stadium here on Sunday. Cleiton Silva (27) and Juanan Gonzalez (57) put Bengaluru ahead before Goa hit back through a brace from Igor Angulo (66', 69').

Goa dominated possession early on, with Bengaluru happy to sit back and maintain their defensive shape. However, both teams failed to create clear-cut opportunities in the opening quarter.

Bengaluru registered their first shot on goal in the 11th minute when Ashique Kuruniyan cut inside from the left, beating three men, before switching onto his weaker right foot. However, his tame attempt on goal was well collected by Goa custodian Mohammad Nawaz.

Three minutes before the half-hour mark, the visitors got their lead in unusual fashion, a throw-in creating confusion in the Goa box. Harmanjot Khabra's throw from the left was flicked on towards the face of goal after Jorge Ortiz Mendoza's clearance.

Silva was the first to react and headed home to hand Bengaluru the lead. It wasn't until the 45th minute that Goa got their first shot on goal. Seriton Fernandes' cross found Angulo, whose deft flick went straight to Bengaluru keeper Gurpreet Singh Sandhu.

The visitors made one change after the change of ends, with Deshorn Brown replacing Kristian Opseth. Bengaluru soon doubled their lead and it came through a set-piece again, with Juanan getting on the scoresheet — the club's 100th goal in ISL history.

— Agencies

16-year-old Moukoko sets record

Berlin, Nov. 22: Erling Haaland scored four goals and Youssoufa Moukoko became the youngest player in Bundesliga history as Borussia Dortmund beat Hertha Berlin 5-2 to move second. The buildup had been all about Moukoko, who was eligible for his debut after turning 16 on Friday. But Haaland stole the show on a cold night in Berlin on Saturday before making way for the youngster's debut in the 85th minute.

"I think he's the biggest talent in the world right now. 16 years and one day, that's quite amazing. He has a big career ahead of him," Haaland said about Moukoko to ESPN.

"I'm over 20 years, I'm getting old now. That's



Youssoufa Moukoko

how it is." The first half was a hard-fought contest between two teams determined to close down the other's space. Dortmund dominated possession but struggled to find gaps in Hertha's committed defense.

In contrast, Hertha's Dodi Lukebakio was allowed too much room

when he surged forward in the 33rd minute and Matheus Cunha let fly from outside the penalty area to break the deadlock. It was a different story after the break. Haaland very quickly equalized when Emre Can sent a low cross to the far post for the Norwegian to convert from close distance.

Hertha was still recovering when Julian Brandt surged down the left and played a clever ball in to set up Haaland for his second in the 49th. Dortmund's players suddenly seemed to find plenty of space, and the visitors' attacks kept coming. A carefree back pass from Marvin Plattenhardt led to Haaland's third goal in the 62nd.

Haaland got ahead of Omar Alderete and rounded the goalkeeper to complete his hat trick. Raphaël Guerreiro scored Dortmund's fourth in the 70th. Cunha pulled one back with a penalty in the 79th, but Haaland replied a minute later with his fourth, set up by the 17-year-old Jude Bellingham.

BAYERN FRUSTRATED

Bundesliga leader Bayern Munich fought back to draw with Werder Bremen 1-1 as their nine-game winning run across all competitions ended. Maximilian Eggstein fired Bremen ahead before the break, but the visitors were unable to hold on.

— AP

HYDERABAD FC, ODISHA SEEK FRESH START

Bambolim (Goa), Nov. 22: A fresh start will be the mantra for both Odisha FC and Hyderabad FC when the two sides clash in the ISL, here on Monday. Both teams had seasons to forget the last time. Hyderabad ended a miserable campaign in which they lost 12 games and conceded 39 goals. And while Odisha did manage to do the double over their opponents, they too did not fare too well overall, letting in 31 goals. But these stats are just a number for Odisha coach Stuart Baxter.

— PTI

Lack of red-ball preparation a concern for India



Hemant Kenkre
Silly Point

The news coming out of the National Cricket Academy (NCA), Bengaluru, augurs well for Indian cricket, as far as their Test squad is concerned. The first was that India pacer, Ishant Sharma's progress was charted as 'looking good' by those incharge of his recuperation process at the Academy. The Delhi speedster was caught by a video showing him going through the paces under the watchful eye of former India seamer, Paras Mhambrey, the current India Under-19 bowling

coach. Ishant had checked into the NCA post getting an abdominal muscle tear during the IPL that recently concluded at the United Arab Emirates. The second bit of cheer came from the other Sharma, Rohit, who is also going through a procedure of strengthening exercises at the NCA to toughen his hamstring and get ready to take the fight to Australia in time to walk out to open the Indian innings in the first Test slated for December 17.

Both Rohit and Ishant

are important cogs in India's wheels for their Test campaign. With skipper Virat Kohli being available for the first Test only and leaving on paternity leave post that match, having the wounded warriors back in the squad will bolster the team chances of retaining the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. Having a fully fit team for red ball cricket, a complete deviation from the game that's played with the white ball, is something the team management must be looking forward to.

Facing-off against the number one Test team in the world is always going to be very difficult especially in conditions that are way different from those that the Indians have experienced while playing the IPL. The big issue that Indian boys will face is the

lack of actual match practice which is way different from intra-team matches played by the squad before the real thing. For starters many members of the Test side have not had a chance to get competitive, real-time match practice.

The only opportunity (of actual match practice) they will get will be in the form of a warm-up match against an Australia 'A' team starting six days before the Adelaide Test. The problem the Indian team facing is that a core group of its members have not had a competitive game of cricket since the lockdown. Those who are in the squads for the shorter formats — One Day (ODI) and Twenty20 (T20) Internationals — will have had a bit of time out in the middle unlike a few who last played the IPL (more

than a month before the Test series) and those who have directly joined the team to Australia.

As far as batsmen are concerned, apart from Kohli, KL Rahul, Mayank Agarwal and Shubman Gill, who will get a taste of competitive cricket, the others in Test squad will get an apology of a (warm-up) match before the first Test. Which effectively means Rohit, Prithvi Shaw, Cheteshwar Pujara, Ajinkya Rahane and Hanuma Vihari — virtually the Indian top and middle order — will be coming in from the cold to face the match-ready Aussies who have been playing the Sheffield Shield from October 10.

Never has the preparation of an Indian team, poised to play the current leaders of the World

Championship of Test Cricket (WTC), has been so bad, thanks to the extreme circumstances caused by a worldwide pandemic. Modern cricketers go from one international series into another without the luxury that players of the past got by playing many serious first-class matches at the start and in-between Test matches in a long (and tough) series. Today, a player will hope and pray that he finds his form from the start as there are no side matches to try and regain the same before the next Test.

The bilateral series and their schedules, that have been prepared over the last decade, are very tight. The reason being the game today is being driven purely by commercial interests and the attention of the authorities is more on the

bottom line than furthering the game per se. Going forward, the new normal will have many more series packed like a can of sardines which will slowly lead to the demise of the game, particularly the long format versions like Test cricket and first-class cricket.

Considering the circumstances, the two cricket boards could have rejigged the ODI or T20 series to accommodate a few practice matches. The good news of the chance of key Indian players being fit and able to play for the Border-Gavaskar trophy is being welcomed by the team's million fans.

The moot point is will they be able to deliver (according to expectations) against the toughest opponent, coming in straight from the cold?