





## SHORT TAKES

## CITY'S PETROL PRICE AT 2-YEAR HIGH OF ₹83/LITRE

**New Delhi:** Petrol price on Saturday breached the ₹83 per litre-mark in Delhi for the first time in more than two years after a rally in international oil prices forced a 13th increase in rates in the last fortnight. Petrol price on Saturday was raised by 27 paise per litre and diesel by 25 paise, according to a price notification of oil marketing companies. Petrol price in Delhi rose to ₹83.13 per litre from ₹82.86. Diesel rates went up from ₹73.07 to ₹73.32 per litre. This is the highest rate for petrol and diesel since September 2018 and followed the 13th increase in rates since November 20 when oil companies resumed daily price revision after nearly a two-month hiatus. In 16 days, the petrol price has gone up by ₹2.07 per litre and diesel rate has risen by ₹2.86. ICICI Securities said vaccine hopes are driving oil prices up. Brent crude oil is up 34 per cent from lows in end-October 2020 driven by hope that coronavirus vaccines would lead to demand recovery. "The oil price surge is despite a second wave of Covid in Europe and US (which has led to demand recovery reversal), and surge in Libyan oil output from 0.1 million barrels per day (bpd) to 1.25 million bpd," it said. — PTI

## Man shot at over monetary dispute

**New Delhi:** Four men shot at and injured a 30-year-old man over a monetary dispute in southeast Delhi's New Friends Colony area, police said on Saturday. The incident took place around 7.40 pm on Friday, they added. Umair Ali Khan was called by one Daud to CC market for mediation with one Parvez Miglani about settling some money dispute, police said. "When he reached there, Daud, Atish alias Kabir, Fahad and an unidentified man argued with him and fired at him. Khan sustained injuries in his both legs," deputy commissioner of police (south-east) R.P. Meena said. Khan was rushed to Holy Family Hospital by his friend Shoaib, he said. A case has been registered in this connection at NFC police station under relevant sections of the law, they said. Daud is a resident of Abul Fazal enclave while Kabir and Fahad hail from Zakir Nagar. Raids are being conducted to arrest them, police said.

## Delhi's air quality turns 'severe': IMD

**New Delhi:** Delhi's air quality turned "severe" on Saturday with slow wind speed allowing the accumulation of "locally generated" pollutants, according to India Meteorological Department (IMD) officials. However, it is expected to improve by Monday as the wind speed is likely to pick up. At 10 am, the city's air quality index (AQI) was 401, which falls in the "severe" category. The 24-hour average AQI was 382 on Friday, 341 on Thursday, 373 on Wednesday, 367 on Tuesday, 318 on Monday and 268 on Sunday. Air pollution in the neighbouring cities of Ghaziabad (AQI 446), Greater Noida (401) and Noida (406) also entered the "severe" zone. An AQI between zero and 50 is considered "good", 51 and 100 "satisfactory", 101 and 200 "moderate", 201 and 300 "poor", 301 and 400 "very poor", and 401 and 500 "severe". The wind speed remained slow allowing the accumulation of pollutants generated locally, V K Soni, head of the IMD's environment research centre said. "Easterly winds carrying moisture also led to the formation of secondary particulate matter. All these factors together pushed the air quality in the 'severe' zone," he said. However, Soni said, the air quality is likely to improve to the "poor" category by Monday as the wind speed is expected to pick up. According to the IMD, the maximum wind speed is likely to be 8 kmph on Saturday, 10 kmph on Sunday and 15 kmph on Monday. The minimum temperature in Delhi was 11 degrees Celsius on Saturday and the maximum is expected to settle around 28 degrees Celsius, the weather department said.



Farmers take rest on tractor-trolleys at night during their ongoing protest against the Centre's new farm laws at Singhu border in New Delhi on Saturday. — PTI

## City BJP prez Adesh Gupta picks 9 more spokespersons

SHASHI BHUSHAN  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 5

In an attempt to appease all and accommodate recommendation to senior leaders, Delhi BJP president Adesh Gupta has appointed nine more spokespersons thus taking the total strength of spokespersons to 21. The appointments also created dissent among a section of the party, who questioned the presence of nearly two dozen spokesmen in the city unit.

In October, while announcing his team, Mr Gupta appointed 12 spokespersons and Laxmi Nagar MLA Abhay Verma was made the chief spokesperson. Now, Mr Gupta appointed nine more spokespersons—Virender Babbar, Puja Suri, Khemchand Sharma, Brajesh Rai, Sarika Jain, Neha Shalini Dua, Nighat Abbass, Ajay Sehrawat, and Shubhendu Shekhar Awasti.

Interestingly, many Delhi BJP office bearers are not aware or know about some of these newly appointed spokespersons. Taking a dig at such a huge team of spokespersons, a senior party leader said, "BJP president J.P. Nadda has appointed 23 national spokespersons and Mr Gupta has appointed 21 spokespersons for a small state unit of Delhi. Too many appointments show Mr Gupta tried to accommodate people in the media and make everyone happy."

Delhi BJP spokespersons, Harish Khurana and Praveen Shankar Kapoor, grew in the party after both were given additional responsibility of media relation department. Mr Khurana has been made the in-charge of media relation department and Mr Kapoor has been made the new head of media relation department.

## BJP MP, MLA at loggerheads over issue of a road divider

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 5

BJP MLA Anil Bajpai and councillor Shyam Aggarwal are at loggerheads over the existence of a road divider for finding solution to traffic jams on the Gandhi Nagar main road. While Mr Bajpai favoured removal of the divider from the main road, Mr Aggarwal wrote to lieutenant-governor Anil Bajjal and demanded recovery of cost from officers who illegally removed the road divider. Traffic jams at Gandhi Nagar are a regular feature. On June 24, Mr Bajpai wrote to the executive engineer of the Gandhi Nagar division of PWD requesting removal of the divider on Gandhi Nagar main road. "Some years ago, dividers were put on some parts of Gandhi Nagar main road, which has cre-

## Akbar did not have sterling reputation, Ramani tells court

**New Delhi, Dec. 5:** Journalist Priya Ramani on Saturday told a Delhi court hearing a criminal defamation complaint filed by former union minister M.J. Akbar against her that he did not have a "sterling reputation" as claimed by him.

Ms Ramani, who had accused Mr Akbar of sexual misconduct around 20 years ago, stated this through senior advocate Rebecca John during the final hearing of the matter.

She claimed before the court that a number of women have accused Akbar of sexual misconduct and, by his own account, he was having a consensual relationship while he was married to someone else, "which was not a sterling reputation".

Mr Akbar had filed the complaint against Ramani for allegedly defaming him by accusing him of sexual misconduct around 20 years ago when he was a journalist.

Ms Ramani had said the allegations against Mr



Priya Ramani

Akbar, made in the wake of the #MeToo movement in 2018, were her truth and were made in the public good.

"He (Akbar) himself says he was in a consensual relationship (with one of his juniors, who, during the #MeToo movement, accused him of rape) which was hampering his family life. Is this the conduct of the man with a sterling reputation? As a man who is married to someone else, he is having a consensual relationship..."

"At least 15-16 women tweeted against Akbar. Akbar was, according to himself, in a relationship

with a junior who was 20 years younger... this is not sterling reputation," John told Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate (ACMM) Ravindra Kumar Pandey.

She claimed in the court that many women had made allegations against Akbar but he chose to file the case against only Ramani.

"He knew there were other women... he has admitted before the court about reading an article which carried allegations by several women," she said. As the hearing remained inconclusive, the court will take up the matter on December 10.

Akbar had filed the complaint against Ramani on October 15, 2018.

He had resigned as union minister on October 17, 2018.

Akbar had earlier told the court that Ramani had defamed him by calling him with adjectives such as "media's biggest predator" that harmed his reputation. — PTI



A health worker, wearing protective gear, collects swab sample for Covid testing from a man at Vijay Ghat slum area in New Delhi on Saturday. — PTI

## Govt starts process for upgradation industrial areas

**New Delhi, Dec. 5:** The Delhi government has rolled out the process for upgradation and redevelopment of existing industrial areas, a month after chief minister Arvind Kejriwal announced setting up of new industrial zones in the city exclusively for hi-tech and service sectors.

In a notice earlier this week, the government's Industries department invited "expression of intent" from developers for upgradation, redevelopment as well as operation and maintenance of the existing industrial areas, officials said.

The government is also considering redevelopment of industrial clusters in Delhi on public-private partnership model, the notice stated. — PTI

## Key Delhi-Noida border road shut Heavy traffic snarls as farmers' stir continue

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 5

On the tenth day, thousands of farmers stayed put at various borders across the national capital. Meanwhile, the blockade at Tikri, Singhu, Jharoda, Jhatikara, Auchandi, Lampur, Piao Maniyari, Mangesh, Ghazipur, and Chilla borders have thrown the traffic out of gear. The diversion of traffic from these border points has led to long jams on alternative routes in the national capital. A key route connecting Noida and Delhi was completely closed on Saturday as farmers opposing the Centre's new farm laws intensified their stir at the border.

The Delhi traffic police, on Saturday, once again took to Twitter and informed commuters regarding the closure of Singhu, Lampur, Auchandi, Safiabab, Piao Maniyari, and Saboli borders.

Meanwhile, the Delhi-Noida Link Road via Chilla border had one carriage-way (Delhi to Noida) open until Saturday morning. However, the protesters blocked it at around 11.00 am. The Noida traffic police had earlier advised commuters to opt for the Delhi-Noida Direct expressway or Kalindi

DELHI TRAFFIC police, once again took to Twitter and informed commuters regarding the closure of Singhu, Lampur, Auchandi, Safiabab, Piao Maniyari, and Saboli borders.

Kunj routes instead of the Chilla border to travel to and from Delhi.

"The National Highway-44 is closed on both sides. Commuters may take alternative routes via National Highway-8, Bhopra, Apsara border, and Peripheral expressway," said the Delhi traffic police.

"Traffic has been diverted from Mukarba & GTK Road. Avoid Outer Ring Rd, GTK Road, NH-44," the Delhi traffic police tweeted.

According to the police, Badusarai border is open only for light motor vehicles like cars and two-wheelers while Jhatikara border is open only for two-wheelers.

"However, if anyone needs to commute towards Harayana, they can go via Dhansa, Daurala, Kapashera, Rajokri National Highway-8, Bijwasan/Bajghera, Palam Vihar, and Dundaheha borders," the traffic police said.

Since the Ghazipur border on National Highway-

24 is closed for traffic due to the protests, the police advised commuters coming from Ghaziabad to Delhi to use the Apsara or Bhopra borders or the Delhi-Noida Direct expressway.

"The Chilla border on Noida Link Road is closed for traffic from Noida to Delhi due to farmers' protests near Gautam Buddha Dwar. People are advised to avoid Noida Link Road for coming to Delhi and use DND," it said in a tweet.

Punjabi singer Diljit Dosanjh, who recently had a war of words with Bollywood actress Kangana Ranaut on Twitter, also reached the Singhu border to support the farmers' agitation.

"It's a peaceful protest and we request the Centre to fulfil the demands of the farmers. Farmers' issues should not be diverted by anyone and farmers have created a new history, which will be narrated to the future generations," said Diljit, while addressing the farmers.

Meanwhile, several farmers from Bilaspur in Uttarakhand reached Ghazipur border to join the protesting farmers on Saturday.

Following the Covid-19 outbreak, a medical camp has also been set up at the Tikri and Singhu borders.

## Directions issued to make arrangements for farmers, says Jain

**New Delhi, Dec. 5:** Delhi minister Satyendar Jain on Friday visited the Singhu border, a site of the ongoing farmers' agitation, and said the AAP is available to serve the agriculturists at all times.

"The farmers are the backbone of our nation. If standing with the farmers is politics, then everyone should be involved in this revolution," he said.

"Instructions have been issued to make more arrangements for fire and water proof tents," Jain was quoted as saying in a statement.

It said Mr Jain visited the Singhu border which is witnessing the ongoing farmers' agitation in solidarity with the protesters and also to review the amenities made available for them by Delhi government during their peaceful revolution.

He said health camps, ambulances, water supply are being provided to the farmers.

The minister also alleged that the Punjab chief minister and BJP were "working in unison to harass the farmers", and that if they wanted, a solution could have been devised at the earliest.

We have set up health camp, ambulances, 24-hour water supply.

Delhi government is providing full support to the farmers. I want to say that the farmers are the backbone of the nation and they have been forced



Satyendar Jain

to travel for kilometres," he said.

"Capt Amarinder Singh came to Delhi, met with Union minister Amit Shah and went back. He did not come to meet the farmers who are protesting in Delhi's cold. Capt Singh staged an act to nullify the bills, when in reality, he didn't at all," Jain alleged.

On the amenities provided by the Delhi government, Jain said, "We have provided for more than 300 toilets, 40 tanks of water, and ambulances and health teams are also available. The only problem we are facing is that toilets across the barricades are not seeing water supply since yesterday."

He said he will appeal to the police to allow provision of water in the toilets, adding that instructions have been issued to make arrangements for providing fire and water proof tents. — PTI

## HC quashes parts of JNU adverts for prof, associate prof appointment

**New Delhi, Dec. 5:** The Delhi High Court has quashed parts of two Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) advertisements that pertain to appointment to two posts, one of professor and another of associate professor, following a plea by some faculty members alleging illegalities in procedure.

The high court directed the university to revisit the issue and work out the roster points afresh with regard to the two posts challenged by the teachers, and complete the exercise within three months.

The court was dealing with a plea filed on behalf of two assistant professors, affected by the recruitment process, and two professors, who are not affected but chal-

THE HIGH COURT directed the university to revisit the issue and work out the roster points afresh with regard to the two posts challenged by the teachers, and complete the exercise within three months

lenged the legality of the procedure.

The petition claimed that they were proposing to apply for the vacancies under the reserved category but the university had converted one of the posts from schedule caste (SC) to schedule tribe (ST) category, while another post was de-reserved and converted to an unreserved seat.

The other two petitioners are professors in the university and are not

affected by the selection process pursuant to the advertisements, but have impleaded themselves in the plea only with the purpose of highlighting the alleged illegalities in filling up the reserved posts by the varsity.

Justice Jyoti Singh said it is obvious that the petitioners are confining their claim only to the two posts in the advertisements and there is no reason why the entire advertisements should be quashed.

"It is open to the university to initiate a fresh recruitment process and advertise the two posts after the above exercise is completed," the court said. The judge said that the burden to "prove that the reservation rosters were correctly recast, was on the university, which in

my view, it has failed to discharge. Mere statements and denials that there has been no de-reservation or exchange of reservation points would not be enough for the university to rebut the data/tables placed on record by the petitioners."

Senior advocate Akhil Sibal, representing the petitioner teachers, submitted that the appointments to the teaching posts in the universities have to follow the policy of "post-based reservation", which mandates that specific teaching posts be designated or reserved for persons belonging to specific reserved categories such as SC, ST and OBC (other backward classes).

The reservations shall not apply to the vacancies, he said. — PTI



## IN BRIEF

### HUBBY SEEKS MAINTENANCE FROM WIFE

**Thane, Dec 5:** A man from Bhiwandi in Thane district of Maharashtra has been booked for allegedly harassing his wife for delivering a baby girl and demanding ₹30,000 as "maintenance" from her parents for the child, police said on Saturday.

Besides the man, his parents were also booked under section 498A (Husband or relative of husband of a woman subjecting her to cruelty) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), an official said.

The woman (21) was harassed by the accused, identified as Dilshad Gaba Momin, Sonu Gaba Momin and Naushad Momin, for delivering a baby girl and was asked to bring ₹30,000 from her parents towards "maintenance" of the child, the official said quoting the complaint.

Police are yet to make any arrest in the case.

## CONG WARNS MAHA ALLIES OVER RAHUL COMMENTS

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
MUMBAI, DEC. 5

The Congress has appealed to its allies in the Uddhav Thackeray-led MVA government to refrain from commenting on the party's leadership to ensure a 'stable government'.

"Being a working president of MPCC I must appeal to colleagues in MVA if you want the stable govt in Maharashtra then stop commenting on leadership of Congress. Everybody should follow basic rules of coalition," Congress minister Yashomati Thakur tweeted.

"Our leadership is very strong and stable. Formation of MVA is the result of our strong belief in democratic values," she said in another tweet. Her comments came on the backdrop of NCP chief Sharad Pawar's criticism of Rahul Gandhi's leadership that he seems to lack "consistency".

However, Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut said Mr Pawar's statement should be viewed as a 'guidance.' "Such statements are often made about Rahul Gandhi. But Sharad Pawar is a tall leader. When an experienced leader like him says something, it must be viewed as a guidance," he said.

## ONE HELD FOR FLOATING FAKE AIRPORT PORTAL

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO  
BHUBANESWAR, DEC. 5

A three-member team of IGI Airport police station, New Delhi, on Saturday arrested a youth from his in-laws house at Naraharipur village in Odisha's Bhadrak district for allegedly committing a cyber fraud amounting to ₹1 crore.

The accused, identified as Rajendra Malik of Bairy village in Jajpur district, was held while hiding at his in-laws house to avoid police action.

According to the police reports, Malik runs a travel agency through which he used to "make" online train and flight tickets using fake identity documents. He also used to dupe people of thousands of rupees on the pretext of getting them a job at IGI Delhi Airport.

Malik who lives in Bhubaneswar floated a website faking the official website of IGI Airport. In the website, he advertised for various posts and asked job aspirants to deposit ₹1,000 registration fee. Thousands of youths fell victim to Malik's design and deposited the money.

"The accused has looted people of over ₹1 crore by promising them jobs at IGI Airport. Besides, he has cheated people in many other way. We are probing all cases," IGI Airport police station inspector Vijaya Kumar who led the three-member team said.

A complaint was lodged against Rajendra on December 2 by a resident of Delhi. Based on the complaint, the Delhi police booked a case under Section 420, 468 and 471 of the Indian Penal Code team reached Bhadrak and arrested him on Saturday morning.

"Based on the complaint, we launched the investigation and successfully reached the accused. We are interrogating the accused to know further details about the cheating and fraud perpetrated by him," the police said.

Soon after his arrest, the accused was produced in the local Dhannagar Court which remanded him in the transit remand of Delhi police.

# Sportspersons from Punjab to return awards

**Chandigarh, Dec. 5:** Several former sportspersons from Punjab including Padma Shri and Arjuna awardees left for Delhi on Saturday to return their awards in support of the farmers' protest against the Centre's three agriculture reform laws.

They will join the farmers camping at the national capital's Singhu border on Saturday before returning their awards to the president the next day.

Farmers from Punjab and Haryana have been camping at five Delhi gateways for the past nine days to press their demand for a repeal of the recently enacted farm laws.

"We have left for Delhi today and will join the farmers' protest," said former wrestler Kartar Singh, who is a Padma Shri and Arjuna awardee.

"Many former players like Sajjan Singh Cheema who could not join us because of health or other issues have given

their sports awards to us," he said.

The sportspersons said they have sought time from President Ram Nath Kovind to return the awards. "If are not allotted a time to meet the president, we will place our awards outside the Rashtrapati Bhavan on Sunday," said former hockey player Rajbir Kaur.

Other former sportspersons who are headed to the national capital are Dhyani Chand awardee hockey Olympian Gurmail Singh, Arjuna awardee Kabaddi player Hardeep Singh, and Arjuna awardee weightlifter Tara Singh.

On Friday, former national boxing coach Gurbax Singh Sandhu, during whose tenure India won its maiden Olympic medal in the sport, Padma Shri boxer Kaur Singh and Arjuna awardee boxer Jaipal Singh had announced that they would return their awards. — PTI

## Doctor brothers from Haryana set up free medical camp at Singhu border

**Sonapat (Haryana), Dec. 5:** Two brothers who are doctors and belong to a farming family of Haryana's Sirsa district are providing free medical care to the agitating farmers who are up in arms against the Centre's three farm laws.

A medical camp has been set up at the Singhu border by Sukhwinder Singh Brar and Ramanjit Singh Brar with the help of their doctor friends.

Both the brothers are private practitioners at Chandigarh. "Everyday, we are giving medical care to almost 1,500 people com-

ing up with different complaints," Dr Sukhwinder said over the phone.

At the camp, they have kept a range of medicines in the boot space of two cars. "We have medicines which can take care of several health-related issues," he said.

"Most of people are coming with complaints of hypertension, joint pain among elderly ones, diarrhoea, constipation etc," said Sukhwinder.

A team of 10-15 people including paramedic staff are working at this camp to provide medical care, he said. — PTI



Farmers protest against Centre's farm reform laws at Delhi-Noida border near Ghazipur on Saturday.

— PTI

## People have a right to protest peacefully: UN

**United Nations:** People have a right to demonstrate peacefully and authorities should let them do so, Stephane Dujarric, spokesperson for UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has said on the farmers' protests in India.

India has called the remarks by foreign leaders on protests by farmers as "ill-informed" and "unwarranted".

As to the question of India, what I would say

to you is what I've said to others when raising these issues is that people have a right to demonstrate peacefully, and authorities need to let them do so, she said.

MEA spokesperson Anurag Srivastava said, "We have seen some ill-informed comments relating to farmers in India. Such comments are unwarranted, especially when pertaining to the internal affairs of a democratic country." — PTI

## Opp parties extend their support to Bharat Bandh

**New Delhi/Kolkata/Chennai, Dec. 5:** Several Opposition parties on Saturday announced support to the Bharat Bandh called on December 8 by farmer unions against the new agri-marketing laws and held protests in various parts of the country to express solidarity with the agitators who have stayed put on Delhi borders for 10 days.

It will be an emphatic Bharat Bandh on December 8, All-India Kisan Federation president Prem Singh Bhangu said on Saturday evening after the fifth round of talks between the farmers and the central government failed to break the logjam.

The RJD, the Trinamul Congress and the Left parties, besides a joint platform of ten central trade unions, announced their support to the countrywide strike, while DMK leader M.K. Stalin led the protests in Tamil Nadu.

The Congress asked the Prime Minister not to test the patience of farmers. "Pick your pen, apologise to 'anndata' and annul the black laws immediately," party spokesperson Randeep Singh Surjewala tweeted with the hashtag of "8 December Bharat Bandh".

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi called on all Indians to support farmers' demand for a complete rollback of three contentious agricultural laws.

The ruling TMC in West Bengal said it has decided to extend its "moral support" to the December 8 nationwide strike and would stage sit-ins in various areas for three days. — Agencies



Children of farmers take online classes during protest against the new farm laws at Singhu border in New Delhi on Saturday.

— PTI

# Support for agitation grows, MP farmers leave for Delhi

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY  
BHOPAL, DEC. 5

Farmers from various districts in Madhya Pradesh on Saturday started for Delhi to join the ongoing stir in the national capital demanding scrapping of the three farm laws passed in the parliament recently.

Small groups of farmers took out rallies in Shivpuri, Dewas, Gwalior, Mandsaur and Raisen in protest against the farm bills and then left for the Delhi in trucks to join the ongoing agitation.

In Dewas, around 40 farmers marched to the local district collector's office and submitted a memorandum to deputy collector demanding scrapping of the farm laws.

In Mandsaur, the local 'Kissan Sabha' staged a demonstration in protest against the farm laws and threatened to intensify the agitation if the Centre did heed to their demand.

Ruling BJP here, however, claimed that the call by some farmers' bodies to oppose the farm laws have no impact in Madhya Pradesh.

"No recognised farmers' bodies in MP have so far joined the stir. Only some local leaders have been trying to provoke the farmers to join the agitation. But, they have failed", BJP spokesman Rajneesh Agrawal said.

Mr Agrawal said no farmer has joined the stir and only middlemen in the agriculture sector are opposed to the farm laws because they are well aware that the laws will



Punjabi actor and singer Diljit Dosanjh addresses farmers at the Singhu border in New Delhi on Saturday. He asked the demonstrators to be patient and peaceful in their agitation and requested the government to accept their demands.

— PTI

## Farmers bring their own food, tea at meeting, again

**New Delhi, Dec. 5:** Meeting the government for the fifth time on Saturday with their demands for scrapping the three new farm laws, union leaders decided to have their own tea and food, ferried from their langar (community kitchen) at Singhu border, where thousands of farmers are protesting for over a week.

The fifth round of talks began at 2.30 pm and was attended by 40 representatives of various farmer organisations.

Union leaders said they had their own food and tea during a break, rather than having what was arranged by the government at Vigyan Bhavan,

the meeting venue. During their last meeting on Thursday also, the farmer leaders had their own lunch, tea and even water. Farmers' leaders had earlier on Thursday told the government to focus on resolving the issues instead of trying to be a good host by offering lunch.

Union agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar, railways, commerce and food minister Piyush Goyal and minister of state for commerce Som Parkash, who is an MP from Punjab, are holding talks with the representatives of the farmer groups at the Vigyan Bhavan. — PTI

# Farm reforms not done in a jiffy, says FM

**New Delhi, Dec. 4:** Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Friday said the farm reform legislations were brought in after elaborate stakeholder consultations and a lot of homework, and will benefit farmers.

Asserting that the reforms were not done in a jiffy, she said the agriculture minister is meeting farmers with an open mind and hoped that a solution will be found soon.

"Between 2014-2020, we have proven that we take MSP (Minimum Support

Price) seriously," she said. Ms Sitharaman said that the agriculture ministry has gone through the process of talking to stakeholders and these are the things that have been in discussions for very long time.

She also said that national parties, state level parties have all mentioned it at different times that these are reforms which were long awaited.

"Many parliamentary committees have also discussed some aspects... it is not something which is just done in a jiffy. They



Nirmala Sitharaman

have gone through the grind for sometime," she said.

Ms Sitharaman said that if there are farmers who have some doubt, "I am glad the agriculture min-

ister is engaging in a meaningful conversation with them with an open mind. I am sure something will come out of it".

On MSP, she said that between 2014 and 2020, compared to similar numbers of years previously, the government has proven that it takes MSP "seriously".

"We procure under MSP much more than what the earlier governments' have done. We have allotted and also directly given the farmers a lot more money under MSP than what was done before," she noted.

"More money, more crops being procured only proves that the intention of the government has been that MSP continues, APMCs continue. So doubts on those need not be there," the minister said.

The government and the agitating farmer unions have so far failed to end the standoff over the new farm laws as the protesters have refused to budge on their demands. Another round of discussions is scheduled to be held on Saturday in a bid for a resolution. — PTI

# PM to lay foundation stone for new Parl Building Dec. 10

**New Delhi, Dec 5:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi will lay the foundation stone on December 10 for a new Parliament building and the construction is expected to be completed by 2022 at an estimated cost of ₹971 crore, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla said on Saturday.

"The existing temple of democracy is completing 100 years... It is a matter of pride for our countrymen that the new one will be built by our own people as a prime example of Aatmanirbhar Bharat," Birla said here announcing details of the new proposed building.

"The new building will showcase the cultural diversity of the country.

Hopefully, in the 75th year of independence (2022), Parliament session will be held in the new building," he said.

Birla said the new building will be earthquake resistant and 2,000 people will be directly involved in the construction of the new building and 9,000 indirectly.

He said as many as 1,224 MPs can sit together in the building, while a new office complex for all MPs of both the houses would be built at the site of the existing Shram Shakti Bhawan.

The existing Parliament building will be conserved as it is an archaeological asset of the country, Birla said.



A model of the proposed new Parliament building in New Delhi on Saturday.

— PTI

The existing building is a British era building, designed by Edwin Lutyens and Herbert Baker who were responsible for planning and construction of New Delhi.

The Foundation Stone of the existing Parliament House was laid on February 12, 1921 and the construction took six years and cost ₹83 lakh at that time. The opening cer-

emony was performed on January 18, 1927 by the then Governor-General of India, Lord Irwin.

The new building will have an area of 64,500 square metres and is being

built at an estimated cost of ₹971 crore, Birla said.

He said the outlook of the new building will be similar to the existing one.

"There will be a basement, ground, first and second floors in the new building and its height will be same as the old building so that both are in symmetry," he said.

The Lok Sabha Speaker said the invitation will be extended to all political parties. While some would attend physically and others would attend virtually, Birla said, while adding that the ground laying ceremony at 1 pm on December 10 would follow all Covid-related guidelines.

As per rules, the speaker

of the lower house of parliament is also the custodian of the parliament building.

Sufficient steps have been taken to control air and noise pollution during the construction work for the new parliament building, which will have separate offices for all MPs and those will be equipped with the latest digital interfaces as a step towards creating 'paperless offices'.

The new building will also have a grand Constitution Hall to showcase India's democratic heritage, a lounge for members of Parliament, a library, multiple committee rooms, dining areas and ample parking space. — PTI



## SHORT TAKES

MP GOVT HOSPITAL  
BABY DEATH TOLL  
RISES TO 13RABINDRA NATH  
CHOUDHURY  
BHOPAL, DEC. 5

One more infant died in district hospital in Shahdol in Madhya Pradesh in the last 24 hours taking the toll of newborns in the hospital in the past one week to 13.

A 6-month-old kid who was undergoing treatment in the special newborn care unit (SNCU) of the hospital died late on Friday evening.

The kid was suffering from acute cold related diseases and was in critical condition, doctors in the hospital said.

With this, the toll of infants in the hospital in the past one week mounted to 13.

Meanwhile, Shahdol district collector Satendra Singh visited the hospital on Saturday to begin a probe into the death of newborns. He visited the SNCU and pediatric intensive care unit (PICU) of the hospital.

The state government has rushed 3 child specialists to the hospital to treat the sick newborns.

Meanwhile, state health and family welfare minister Prabhuram Choudhury on Saturday announced plans to increase 20 SNCU beds in the district hospital in Shahdol.

He said all measures were being undertaken to strengthen the medical facilities for children in the hospital.

He, however, said there were no lapses in treatment of 13 infants who died in the hospital in the last one week.

MARATHA QUOTA:  
MAHA GOVT FORMS  
5-LAWYER PANEL

**Mumbai, Dec. 5:** The Maharashtra government has set up a coordination committee of five lawyers in connection with the hearing before the five-judge Constitution bench of the Supreme Court regarding lifting of interim stay on the Maratha quota.

State PWD minister Ashok Chavan, who heads the cabinet sub-committee on Maratha quota, said this in a statement issued on Saturday.

He said that as per the state's demand for vacation of the interim stay on Maratha reservation, the top court's Constitution bench will hear the government's petition on December 9 at 2 pm. "If members of the Maratha community, historians, researchers wish to give suggestions, they should communicate with this coordination committee of lawyers. It will study the suggestions and forward them to the government lawyers appearing in court," Mr Chavan said.

In September this year, the top court had stayed the implementation of Maharashtra's 2018 law Socially and Educationally Backward Classes Act that granted 16 per cent quota to the Maratha community.

The government had filed an application seeking vacation of the apex court's stay amid protests from pro-quota organisations. The Bombay high court, while upholding the Act, had earlier said that 16 per cent reservation was not justified and that the quota shouldn't exceed 12 per cent in jobs and 13 per cent in admissions to educational institutions. —PTI

SPICEJET PLANE  
UNDERSHOOTS  
RUNWAY IN ASSAM

**New Delhi, Dec. 5:** A SpiceJet plane undershot the runway while landing at the Guwahati airport on Friday, but no one was hurt in the incident, senior DGCA officials said.

Aviation regulator Directorate General of Civil Aviation has grounded the two SpiceJet pilots who were operating the SG960 Bengaluru-Guwahati flight, they said on Saturday.

"They (pilots) have been off-rostered. It (matter) is under investigation," one of the officials told PTI.

Officials said that while the plane landed before the designated point on the runway, none of the passengers were affected.

"However, some of the runway lights were damaged while landing the SG960 Bengaluru-Guwahati flight," an official said.

SpiceJet did not respond to PTI's queries on this matter.

It was not clear how many passengers were on board the plane when the incident occurred.

The SpiceJet plane, which has registration number VT-SLL, is fit for flying and has conducted multiple flights post the runway incident on Friday, the officials said. —PTI

## BJP's Roy named in TMC MLA's murder case

BJP leader plans to move HC for quashing chargesheet against him

RAJIB CHOWDHURI  
with agency inputs  
KOLKATA, DEC. 5

In a major blow to the BJP, it's national vice-president Mukul Roy, also a key strategist of the party for the next year's Assembly Election in West Bengal, was chargesheeted by the criminal investigation department (CID) of the state police on Saturday in the murder of Trinamul Congress MLA of Krishnaganj Satyajit Biswas in Nadia in February last year.

Mr Roy has been booked under Sections 302 (murder) and 120B (criminal conspiracy) of the IPC in a chargesheet before the additional chief judicial magistrate at Ranaghat Court in Nadia in the high profile case which saw Biswas being shot dead from point blank range at a Saraswati Puja mandap



► **MUKUL ROY** is one of the five accused and also faced questioning by the state detective agency. In May last year, three accused, including Abhijit Pundari, were chargesheeted after their arrest. But Mr Roy was spared.

near his residence.

The senior BJP leader's name was not in the last two chargesheets in the same case however.

Alleging political vendetta, he wondered, "It can happen, why not? Afterall who is the CM? Who is adding the names in the chargesheet? Who is the minister of the department concerned? Doesn't she know who are the accused in the case? So it is hilarious if I am chargesheeted on her instructions."

Mr Roy is planning to move the Calcutta high court to appeal to quash the chargesheet against him.

He is one of the five accused, named in the FIR, and also faced questioning by the state detective agency. In May last year, three accused including assailant Abhijit Pundari were chargesheeted by the CID after their arrest. But Mr Roy was spared.

In September Ranaghat BJP MP Jagannath Sarkar, who also faced the CID's grilling during a probe in the same case, was slapped with IPC sections 302 and 120B in a supplementary chargesheet filed by the CID before the court for his alleged role in conspiracy after his call records

revealed his conversation with Abhijit and another accused before the MLA's murder. The CID had then suspected Mr Roy's role but sought more time, which was granted by the court till December 14, for a probe against him.

When contacted, Roy rubbished the charges and said that he had "never believed in violence in politics". "There are at least 45 cases pending against me. I do not believe in the politics of violence and never indulge in such kinds of things. I challenge chief minister Mamata Banerjee, who is also the police minister to say it in public that I have such kind of taste. I was never involved in such things when I was with her party and not now when I am a member of another political party. I have total faith in the judiciary of our country," Mr Roy said.

TMC-BJP clash, houses  
ransacked; bombs hurled

**Barabani (West Bengal), Dec. 5:** A few people were injured and some houses were ransacked in a clash between TMC and BJP supporters in West Bengal's Paschim Bardhaman district on Saturday, police said.

Both sides hurled bombs at each other and a police contingent has been sent to the spot to bring the situation under control, a police officer said. The clash broke out when a BJP rally under its state-wide "aar noi anyay" (no more injustice) campaign reached Barabani More.

The BJP alleged that TMC supporters beat up saffron party cadre, while the ruling party dismissed the charge and termed it

► **THE CLASH** broke out when a BJP rally under its state-wide 'aar noi anyay' (no more injustice) campaign reached Barabani More

an incident of "infighting" within the BJP.

Union minister and Asansol MP Babul Supriyo alleged that local TMC leaders were behind the incident. "Local TMC leaders are behind the attack. Those involved with the coal mining mafia were also involved in the incident. This is the reality of West Bengal," he said.

The BJP claimed that seven of its supporters were injured in the clash. Condemning the inci-

dent, BJP state chief Dilip Ghosh alleged that law and order has collapsed in West Bengal. "The rule of law has ceased to exist in West Bengal. Only if the BJP comes to power, law and order will be restored in the state," he said.

Dismissing the allegations, TMC spokesperson Kunal Ghosh said, "The clash was a result of infighting within the BJP. The TMC is not involved in the incident. The saffron party is trying to create an issue to malign us."

Asansol mayor and district TMC chief Jitendra Tiwari also denied the allegations and termed them as "baseless" and "politically motivated" to malign the party.

West Bengal  
mantri slams  
'Yes men' in  
Mamata govtRAJIB CHOWDHURI  
KOLKATA, DEC. 5

Further fuelling the spirit of revolt within the Trinamul Congress and Mamata Banerjee government, West Bengal forest minister Rajib Banerjee on Saturday complained that sycophants, instead of the "eligible and efficient" like him, have occupied the "front row."

In an explosive outburst, addressing an event in Tollygunge, the minister said that even corrupt elements are put at the forefront of political activities.

"If you can be a yesman then you will get a higher score (at the party). The eligible and efficient, working transparently and tirelessly for people always, are not getting priority. This often pains me," he said.

The minister added that "those who sit idle in air-conditioned rooms are now holding leadership positions."

"Those of us in politics often believe that power is everything and we will be successful if we can enjoy power. Such people are now available in plenty. They only think they have to do politics only for power." Asked of his target he later said, "People understood whom I referred to."

The state minister also claimed, "I am not like the sycophants who say something good is bad and vice versa to be in the front row. So my marks are less than theirs. People of Bengal know my eligibility and efficiency. They have seen how I worked for them from North Bengal to South Bengal. But obstacles were there."

Reacting to Rajib's anguish, panchayat minister Subrata Mukherjee said, "I do not know why Mr Banerjee talked this and in what circumstances."

Classes 1- 8 to remain  
shut till Mar. 31 in MP

**Bhopal, Dec. 5:** Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that schools for Classes 1 to 8 in the state will remain shut till March 31 next year in view of the coronavirus pandemic.

He also said that no test would be conducted for the students of these classes this academic year and they would be evaluated on the basis of their project work. The chief minister said this during a review meeting of school education department held on Friday.

"There will be no regular classes for the students of Classes 1 to 8 in the state till March 31, 2021. No test would be conducted for students of Classes 1 to 8 and they will be evaluated on the basis of the project work," Mr Chouhan

was quoted as saying in a press release.

"Schools for Classes 10 and 12 will resume shortly for the Board exams. But social distancing and other norms will be fully observed in the classrooms to prevent the spread of Covid-19," he said.

Students of Classes 9 and 11 will be called to schools once or twice a week, Chouhan added.

Earlier, state school education minister Inder Singh Parmar had told PTI that the state has partially reopened schools from September 21 for Class 9 to 12 with limited students amid strict adherence to Covid-19 protocols.

He had said that the government might consider allowing more number of these students to attend classes gradually. —PTI

In Modi's Varanasi, BJP  
loses 2 seats in local polls

**Lucknow, Dec. 5:** In a setback for the BJP in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Varanasi constituency, the party has lost two seats in the legislative council elections after holding on to them for 10 years. Both the seats — one reserved for teachers and the other for graduates — were won by Samajwadi Party candidates.

On Saturday, the SP's Ashutosh Sinha won the Varanasi Division Graduates' seat a day after his party colleague Lal Bihari Yadav won from teachers' constituency.

BJP candidate Manvendra Pratap Singh "Guru Ji" won the Agra Division Graduates' seat, while SP's Ashutosh Sinha won Varanasi Division Graduates' seat and Maan Singh Yadav won from the Allahabad-Jhansi Division

IAS officer on duty for Legislative  
Council polls dies of heart attack

**Lucknow, Dec. 5:** An IAS officer on election duty for the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Council polls in Varanasi died after suffering a heart attack, an official said on Saturday.

District magistrate, Varanasi, Kaushal Raj Sharma said Ajay Kumar Singh (50) was deployed as an observer in the ongoing elections to teachers' constituency and graduates' constituency in Varanasi.

Singh suffered a heart attack at around 9.30 am

Graduates' seat, election office said.

While SP has wrested Varanasi and Allahabad-Jhansi seats from the BJP it lost the Agra seat to BJP.

on Friday while on his way to the counting centre. He was taken to a hospital where he died on Saturday, Sharma said.

An officer of the 1998-batch, Singh was posted as a secretary in the National Integration Department and Human Rights Commission of Uttar Pradesh (Lucknow).

His wife Neena Sharma is a senior IAS officer posted as a secretary in the infrastructure and industrial development department. —PTI

Counting of votes for the Meerut and Lucknow Graduates' seat was continuing and the results are expected late in the night. —Agencies

J'hand opts in, all states accept  
borrowing plan for GST shortfall

**New Delhi, Dec. 5:** Jharkhand has accepted the Centre's borrowing proposal and will get Rs 1,689 crore through the special window to meet the GST revenue shortfall, the finance ministry said on Saturday.

With this, 3 Union Territories and all 28 states have accepted the Centre's borrowing plan to meet the shortfall in tax collection.

All the 28 states and 3 Union Territories with legislature have decided to go for Option-1 to meet the revenue shortfall arising out of the GST implementation. Jharkhand, the only remaining state, has now communicated its acceptance of Option-1, the ministry said in a statement.

The states & UTs who choose Option-1 are getting the amount of shortfall arising out of GST implementation through a special borrowing window put in place by the

Centre. The Centre has already borrowed ₹30,000 crore on behalf of the states in five installments and has passed it on to 26 states and 3 UTs on October 23, November 2, November 9, November 23 and December 1.

From the next round of borrowings, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh too would receive funds raised through this window. The next installment of ₹6,000 crore will be released to the states/UTs on December 7, 2020, the ministry added.

Under the terms of Option-1, besides getting the facility of a special window for borrowings to meet the revenue shortfall, states are also entitled to get unconditional permission to borrow the final installment of 0.50 per cent of Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) out of the 2 per cent additional borrowings permitted by the Centre. —PTI

MVA allies  
may fight  
BMC polls  
togetherBHAGWAN PARAB  
MUMBAI, DEC. 5

Buoyed by the results of legislative council elections in Maharashtra, the Shiv Sena has hinted that they might contest the all-important polls B r i h a n m u m b a i Municipal Corporation polls (BMC) together with the Congress and NCP.

"The Vidhan Parishad election results have shown the benefits of staying together. The MVA will now contest the BMC polls jointly along with other elections in the state," said senior Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut.

The Sena Rajya Sabha MP also said that the results have shown the trends in Maharashtra. "Those who were saying that the MVA government doesn't enjoy the support of people have been proved wrong. Even in the BJP's stronghold of Nagpur, the MVA candidate has been elected, which shows people are with this government," he added.

In the Vidhan Parishad elections held for six seats early this week, the MVA emerged victorious on four seats, whereas one seat each went to the BJP and an independent.

The BMC is the richest municipal corporation in the country and with an outlay of over ₹33,000 crore. Its budget is higher than even small states like Kerala, Goa and Northeast states. The Sena has been ruling the civic body for over 24 years, the majority of its part in an alliance with the BJP. However, in 2017 civic polls, both the parties had contested separately, with the BJP coming within a whisker of wresting the power by winning 82 seats as compared to Sena's 84 seats in the 227-member BMC.

'Hindus will be  
beaten up if  
they visit  
church'

► **Continued from page 1** sought to create communal issues to drive a wedge and then consolidate its position, remains undeterred by facts.

"We will not allow Hindus in programmes during Christmas when they are locking gates of temples in Shillong," Mr Nath said while addressing a crowd of around 70 people dressed in saffron and shouting "Jai Shri Ram".

Although the Christian population in the northeastern state's Cachar district is relatively small, Christmas is traditionally celebrated by the Oriental School at Ambikapaty near Silchar. People from various religions gather there to mark the birth of Christ every year.

farmers have stayed put at various border points of Delhi since November 26 as part of their protest against the Centre's farm laws.

"We have said that MSP (minimum support price) will continue. There is no threat to this scheme and it is baseless to doubt (that it will be scrapped)," Mr Tomar said, reiterating the Centre's assurances on this score. The farmers have said the new laws will do away with MSP — a guarantee of sale of crops and prices. "We don't intend to affect mandi (wholesale markets) in the states, they are not affected by the law either," he added.

Saturday's talks began after a high-level meet between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and senior cabinet ministers, including home minister Amit Shah. Sources said that Mr Modi, who defended his government's laws at a public event in Varanasi

last week, was briefed about the protest and the status of negotiations. Farmers on Friday announced a "Bharat Bandh" on December 8 and threatened to intensify their agitation and block more roads leading to the national capital if the government does not accept their demands.

"At this juncture, we have transport unions, retail businesses and other associated groups who have shown solidarity with us. Our movement is not just about farmers," All India Kisan Sabha's finance secretary Krishna Prasad said on Saturday. Outside the meeting venue, employees of the Indian Tourist Transporters Association (ITTA), which has supplied vehicles for the transit movement of the protesting farmers, were seen holding a banner which read "We support farmers" and shouting slogans backing the peasants' agitation.

## No headway in talks, govt proposes meet Dec. 9

■ **Continued from page 1** between the government and representatives of farmers, thousands of whom are protesting at various borders of the national capital against what they claim are the laws meant to end the mandi system and minimum support price procurement system to give for benefits of corporates.

According to a PTI report, at the meeting the government managed to convince the farmers' representatives to continue with the talks. Sources added that some kind of division emerged among the participating farmer leaders on various issues proposed by the ministers. Later in the evening, the ministers began talking to smaller groups of three-four farmers' leaders out of the total 40 representatives present there.

After the meeting Union agriculture minister Tomar said that a new proposal would be placed



NGO volunteers and social activists take part in a candle march in support of the farmers protesting against the farm laws in Bathinda on Saturday. —PTI

before the farmers after discussions within the government.

"Today different issues were discussed. We wanted a fair solution but it couldn't happen during today's talks. There will be another meeting on December 9. We have told the farmers that the government will discuss all issues. We will try to find a solution," Mr Tomar said.

"If we would have got

some solutions from the farmer leaders it would have been easier. We will still wait for that," he added. Mr Tomar also urged farmer leaders to send their elderly and children — many of whom are among thousands camped out around the national capital in protest — back home citing winter and the Covid pandemic.

Undeterred by the winter chill, thousands of



# The Asian Age

6 DECEMBER 2020



Shashi Warriar

Off the beaten track

## The evolution of the indigenous BPO

A friend of mine, a professor of business communication at a business school nearby, dropped in recently after renewing his driving licence. “What’s up?” I asked. “I just thought of something more for us Indians to be proud of,” he said.

“What?” I asked. “Well, Indians thought up aircraft and plastic surgery long before the people in the West thought of them,” he replied, “but there’s also something in management science that we invented long ago.”

“What?” I asked. “Business Process Outsourcing,” he replied. “BPO. The backbone of some of our business... The West invented the term and took credit for the concept, as usual. But we thought of it first. You see it all over the place.”

Pictures came to mind of ranks of young people wearing headphones, speaking in fake American accents answering tedious telephonic questions from overseas customers, or ranks of computers recording inter-bank transactions, and so on. I couldn’t make the connection. “How so?” I asked.

“Back in the 1980s,” he replied, “when I was in Bangalore, if you wanted to register a company, you went to the Registrar of Companies. You did your paperwork, and, when it was done, you handed over an envelope containing his private fee for your work. He’d say, ‘Heh, heh, *saar*, this is not necessary,’ and place the cover in his drawer. A few years later, it had changed. You handed him the cash when the job was done, and he counted it before putting it away. And a few more years down the line, you never even got to see the registrar. You handed your papers and the fee to an agent outside his office and you got your registration a day or two later.”

“I don’t understand,” I said. “Forgive me for being so slow.” “I see you haven’t thought about it,” he said, straightening up and using the professorial tone that he might use on a backbencher who’s just slept through a lecture. “The purpose of governance in India is to create and manage queues. Where there are queues, there are people willing to pay to jump them. Governance is about helping people to jump queues for a consideration. The longer the queue, the bigger the consideration, and the happier the officials. Okay?”

“Okay,” I replied. “That’s why no one bothers about overpopulation,” he continued. “The greater the population, the longer the queue. The idea was, the more the people suffer, the longer the queue, and the more people are willing to pay to jump.”

“Right,” I agreed. “But that’s old hat,” he went on. “Thirty years back, someone saw the virtue of a freer economy. Simple: the more money people have, the more they’ll pay to jump the queue. So they loosened up bits of the economy, and watched the money roll in. And that was when they thought of BPO. People were beginning to complain about corruption, you see.”

“But what’s BPO got to do with corruption?” I asked. “Everything!” he said, happily. “Officials began to outsource their business to agents. The agent collects the money and delivers papers. He settles with the officials afterwards, outside the office. One side-effect: it keeps the officials safe. A surprise check at the office will produce no evidence that anyone’s taken any money under the table!”

“And it doesn’t end there. The government can hire more people for the vigilance department whose people conduct raids. Since there are queues for those jobs as well, they can make more money there, and depend on the vigilance fellows — who have paid to get those jobs — to do what they can to sustain the system, but the people can be lulled into thinking that someone is doing something about corruption. Brilliant!”

“Yes,” I said, not knowing what else to say, “but what does all this have to do with your driving licence?”

“Ah!” he said. “I should have told you. I got my licence from a new transport office at Melkar, some 30 kilometres from Mangalore. It’s a new office, and my wife I only had to wait two minutes to get our work done. So, you see, the agent tells the officials when it’s time to expand the office to get more work done. So there are more jobs, more buildings, more of everything, and they make money out of all that, and at least some people are happy because they get their work done really fast.”

“The system has evolved. It used to create queues and take what the traffic would bear. Now, it manages queues so that the people running the system get the best possible income with the least possible risk. It works in good times and in bad. In good times, people earn more, and are willing to pay more. In bad times, the population increases, so there are more people willing to pay...”

“Terrific!” I said. “You should write a paper about this!”

“No way!” he said, horrified. “Officials hate whistleblowers, and they protect themselves. Remember the officer who gave the Wadhawan family a certificate allowing them to travel to their farmhouse during the lockdown? The Wadhawan family is in trouble, but the official who signed the certificate is the police commissioner of Pune. If I write a paper about this, it’ll cost me my job!”

“Right,” I said. “It works very well for officials. But the people are suffering, aren’t they?”

He looked a little shame-faced, but only for a moment. “For an answer to that,” he said, “we have to look to the West.”

“How so?” I asked.

“Before the French Revolution,” he said, resuming his professorial persona, “someone told the French Queen, Marie Antoinette, that the people of France were suffering. ‘The masses are starving,’ he said, ‘they have no bread to fill their bellies.’”

“And how did Marie Antoinette respond?” I asked.

“Let ‘em eat cake!”

*Shashi Warriar has written fairy tales, thrillers, a semi-fictional biography, satires, and a love story. Besides writing, he teaches strategic communication at a business school.*

Subhani



## Battle of ‘Bhagyanagar’ concludes in stalemate



Sriram Karri

It begins with the name. Always. You can hold on to it or change it, but the decision is never easy. Ask parents as they go through greater anxiety in deciding the name of their child to be over any other birthing issue. Should we continue to be Hyderabad, or become Bhagyanagar?

When a city of over one crore was thrown the challenge, over which its nearly 77 lakh registered voters brooded hard during a fortnight of the most shrill vituperative campaign that forced the attention of the nation, in which less than half turned out to vote in the midst of a pandemic, some turning nostalgic for a chance to vote on paper ballots again, the Hyderabad or Bhagyanagar duel, with all its underlying implications of this symbolism and euphemism, ended in an uneasy stalemate.

**A SPLIT VERDICT**  
The ruling TRS, receiving yet another drubbing by the BJP in the state, received 12,04,167 votes (35.81 per cent) to the saffron party’s 11,95,711 (35.56 per cent), the MIM holding on to its fortress, winning 6,30,866 votes (18.76 per cent), a distant but formidable third. The TRS has 55 divisions in the 150 municipal council, while the BJP has 48. The MIM held on to its 44. A high court judgment on Monday will give us the result for the last seat. The ruling TRS in short had only 8,456 votes more than its challenger.

The Bhagyanagar reference resonates strongly amongst both its supporters and opponents, and is a very viscerally fundamental call to people to

decide on their idea of “mini India” as the city perceives itself to be. Over half of them said they would rather watch from the sidelines. The half that matters, the one that turned up to vote, was nearly split. Statistically, combining the MIM votes to TRS does mean a decisive rejection of the name change idea and all other implications, but it is still largely an uneasy stalemate.

**SAFFRON-PINK BATTLES AHEAD**  
The TRS has failed to defend its 99 incumbent seats won in the last elections, losing 44 out of them to the BJP. Where it has won too, it is the BJP, which was a close second in most. More importantly, the BJP has stolen the narrative and set the agenda — it has successfully portrayed the TRS as a dynastic, nepotistic, corrupt, decadent party and government, which has failed to deliver its promises, all of which are explained by their policy of appeasing Muslims under pressure from the MIM.

The TRS, in turn, tried hard to set its stated narrative of continuity and development as an alternative paradigm but was unconvincing. The TRS called the BJP communal, fanatic, insane, divisive and a big failure, even promising to be the nucleus of a new formation that would challenge Narendra Modi on a national level.

As a voter said, “while according to the TRS, it was a vote between development and communalism, the BJP dubbed it a battle between a dynasty’s corrupt politics versus nationalistic

Hindutva without appeasement. People see the picture in their own way, without the funnel vision of parties — as a battle between corrupt, nepotistic development versus communal nationalism”.

In this round, the advantage is still with TRS-MIM but the momentum has been taken by the BJP. The impasse will be broken by battles, nay, war, that lies ahead.

**A MULTI-CUT STRATEGY**  
The BJP has demonstrated successfully, with three different electoral coups — in Nizamabad Lok Sabha elections in 2019 defeating K. Kavitha, incumbent MP and daughter of chief minister K. Chandrashekar Rao; in a byelection in Dubbaka last month, in which they humbled the TRS strategist in-charge, T. Harish Rao, minister and CM’s nephew; and finally, the GHMC, in which they had dented the hitherto invincible image of K.T. Rama Rao, CM’s son and heir apparent.

As a BJP leader said, “daughter, nephew and son have been given a drubbing each. Each individually and three together add up to what people feel — a strong anti-KCR family and TRS emotion. The next defeat is reserved for KCR in the Assembly elections”.

Meanwhile, the next byelection is in sight, in

**The BJP has demonstrated its strategic edge successfully with three different electoral coups — defeating K. Kavitha in the 2019 LS elections, humbling T. Harish Rao in a byelection in Dubbaka last month, and finally, the GHMC, in which they have dented the image of K.T. Rama Rao**

Nagarjunasagar constituency, whose sitting TRS MLA passed away on December 1.

**BJP’S SECOND SOUTH-EERN BASTION**

Despite the fascinating changes in Tamil Nadu and Kerala politics, it is unlikely the BJP is realistically close to winning power on its own in any southern state as Telangana.

In 2013, MIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi told me in an interview, explaining why his party was opposed to the formation of a separate Telangana. “The YSRC and TDP will die out in this region because they will be dubbed as Andhra parties. A new regional party may win and come to power based on sentiment, but as we have seen in Jharkhand and other such states, such parties lose credibility soon because of corruption and family domination. Telangana will become very vulnerable to a BJP onslaught.”

Owaisi’s words, spoken when Narendra Modi was chief minister of Gujarat, have come very true. The BJP is not coming for some 60 MLA seats or 17 Lok Sabha seats; it is coming to make more fundamental changes to how south India perceives itself.

For too long, most people argued and believed that the five southern states are not rife as a social soil for a political Hindutva to bloom. Pakistan is too far away, far less people understand Hindi, education and prosperity levels are relatively higher and delivery of development and welfare much more effective for decades here. The case of Karnataka was dismissed as an exception.

Not any longer. Not the way Telangana is rapidly shifting from pink to saffron. Not unless the development alternative introspects and reinterprets itself as a stronger moral alternative, not a merely more convenient substitute.

## LETTERS BITTER LESSON

The BJP, by design or default, has become synonymous with election strategy and planning. At the outset in 2014, its campaign slogan of development was followed through, with the PM at the vanguard, to push the DeMo and then the GST. Then Hindutva took the lead for the genesis of the CAA, centred on the “alien” theme. In its campaign for Hyderabad municipal elections, it landed back on its majority track given the high percentage of minority voters in the city. This too has paid dividends. But then the MLC elections in Maharashtra has in many ways underscored its shortcomings in managing the national economy, regional leadership and more importantly, consultative politics. And now the farmers’ crisis could turn out to be a bitter lesson.

**R. Narayanan**  
Navi Mumbai

## DON’T CLIMB DOWN

**IF THE BJP BLINKS** and concedes all the demands of the farmers, then it should be prepared to face the next mass agitation; this time by the united secular Opposition the forces of which are bound to descend in hordes on the arterial routes of Jammu and Kashmir and, in the vicinity of the capital, as well as in some of the Northeastern states. Their demands — restoration of the pre-August 2019 status for J&K and complete scrapping of the CAA and other citizenship-related laws. Is the Saffron leadership ready to tackle such a delicate situation on the home front when two of the deadliest enemies of India are trying hard to undermine the sovereignty of the country?

**Arun Malankar**  
Lucknow

## FIRST JOLT

**THE SHIV SENA** on Saturday has rightly said the results of the elections to five Maharashtra Legislative Council seats showed that the “overconfident” BJP was losing ground in the state. Significantly, in a major jolt to the BJP, the Nagpur seat was breached by the Congress for the first time in more than 55 years. BJP lost all five seats it contested.

**Sankar Paul**  
Chakdaha, West Bengal

## NOT KHALISTANIS

**THIS REFERS TO** “Trudeau’s ‘concern’ on farmers unwarranted”. India’s demarche to the Canadian government over Justin Trudeau’s remark on the farm crisis in India was a strong diplomatic move. But why are BJP motormouths and the *godi* media hellbent on trashing farmers as Khalistanis and ISI agents? None other than the top leadership of BJP has indulged in this name calling. Indian history is complex and the actor, Deep Sidhu, was within his rights to feel inspired by Jarnail Bhindranwale. He was careful to draw the distinction between that sympathy and the federalism cause. It was Barkha Dutt who overstepped her brief as a reporter and cancelled his nuanced stand.

**Deepak Singhal**  
Noida

Every Monday the best letter of the week wins ₹500. Email: [asianage.letters@gmail.com](mailto:asianage.letters@gmail.com).

A.G. Noorani



## Indians are not alone in falling for the ‘strong man’ myth

It is not fashionable to cite old classics. But if one turns to Roman, Greek and, more so, the English classics, one is struck by their relevance to modern times. Take this, from John Stuart Mill’s essay on representative government: “There are nations who will not voluntarily submit to any government but that of certain families, which have from time immemorial had the privilege of supplying them with chiefs.” This applies to South Asia.

He added, “But there are also cases in which, though not averse to a form of government — possibly even desiring it — a people may be unwilling or unable to fulfil its conditions. ... Thus a people may prefer a free government, but if, from indolence, or carelessness, or cowardice, or want of public spirit, they are unequal to the exertions necessary for preserving it; if they will not fight for it when it is directly attacked; if they can be deluded by the artifices used to cheat them out of it; if by momentary discouragement, or temporary panic, or a fit of enthusiasm for an individual, they

can be induced to lay their liberties at the feet even of a great man, or trust him with powers which enable him to subvert their institutions; in all these cases they are less unfit for liberty: and though it may be for their good to have had it even for a short time, they are unlikely long to enjoy it.”

India is passing through this dangerous phase. It ought to have known better. Indira Gandhi all but tore up the constitution during her regime and installed herself as a dictator. A wave of anger swept across the country and she lost the 1977 election. But the small men who formed a government fell apart over the loaves and fishes of office. In 1980, the people returned her to power, unmindful of her past record.

Now, Narendra Modi is following in her footsteps. He undermined the cabinet, suborned the civil service, but his greatest challenge was political. As soon as he came to power in 2014, he called for a ‘Congress-free India’. He began campaigning from day one.

Hyderabad just held municipal

elections. Modi was about to descend to the city to campaign against two parties: the Telangana Rashtra Samithi and the All India Majlis-i-Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen, which was founded by the legendary Bahadur Yar Jung and now led by the indomitable Asaduddin Owaisi. Modi sent his deputy Amit Shah to campaign for the BJP. Owaisi asked, “Why not Donald Trump?”

There is no doubt that Modi enjoys popularity across the country, though it is on the decline. He was elected to power in 2014 and 2019. Why? By common consent, the government led by the extraordinarily upright Manmohan Singh was scarred by his ministers’ corruption. He was perceived as ‘weak’. Nor did he receive the support of his party and its president Sonia Gandhi, which it was her duty to extend. She was focused on grooming her mediocre son. The Congress is in a deep crisis.

Modi is out to wipe out not only the Congress but also all regional parties and establish one-party rule. To what can we attribute his rise?

Besides presiding over the Gujarat pogrom in 2002, Modi oversaw the state’s economic revival. Businessmen courted him and vice versa. He portrayed himself as a ‘strong man’, and the country fell for him.

But Indians are not alone in falling for the ‘strong man’ myth. Countries like Hungary and Poland also revel in democracy in form, but dictatorship in reality. In The Myth of the Strong Leader, Archie Brown writes: “The central misconception, which I set out to expose, is the notion that strong leaders in the conventional sense of leaders who get their way, dominate their colleagues, and concentrate decision-making in their hands, are the most successful and admirable.”

“While some leaders who come into that category emerge positively than negatively, in general huge power amassed by an individual leader paves the way for important errors at best and disaster and massive bloodshed at worst. ... [T]he myth of the strong leader is a central thread which unifies the discussion of democratic, revolutionary,

authoritarian and totalitarian leaders. Those in the first of these categories can do far less damage, precisely because there are constraints upon their power from outside government.

“It is, nevertheless, an illusion — and one as dangerous as it is widespread that in contemporary democracies the more a leader dominates his or her political party and cabinet, the greater the leader. A more collegial style of leadership is too often characterised as a weakness, the advantages of a more collective political leadership, too commonly overlooked.”

Stalin and Mao created famines, as did Churchill in Bengal. Thatcher had to be booted out of power by her party, while Attlee is highly regarded by history. This is true of both domestic and foreign policies. Modi is in decline. Witness the mammoth protests by Punjab’s farmers. But his end is not very near.

*The writer is an author and lawyer, and one of India’s top constitutional experts. By arrangement with Dawn.*



## SHORT TAKES

MINE MISHAP:  
NICARAGUANS  
SEARCH MINERS

**Managua, Dec. 5:** An unregulated gold mine collapsed Friday in southern Nicaragua near the border with Costa Rica, leaving about 10 wildcat miners missing.

Vice President Rosario Murillo said firefighters and rescue personnel were being sent to the scene in the hamlet of La Esperanza.

Murillo did not specify how many people were trapped, but local media put the number at 10 to 15. They reported that one injured miner was able to escape and report the collapse. President Daniel Ortega said that “we hope we don’t have major tragedies” at the mine.

HIGH CARBON  
MONOXIDE LEVEL  
KILLS 18 MINERS

**Beijing, Dec. 5:** Eighteen of the 23 workers were killed in a coal mine in China due to an excessive level of carbon monoxide, local officials said on Saturday.

The accident happened at around 5 pm on Friday at the Diaoshuidong coal mine in the district of Yongchuan in Chongqing Municipality, state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

Eighteen miners were confirmed dead due to excessive level of carbon monoxide, it said. Rescuers, including police officers and firefighters, are trying to reach the trapped miners.

The cause of the accident is under further investigation, the report said. The Diaoshuidong coal mine, which was established in 1975 and became privately-owned in 1998, has an annual production capacity of 120,000 tonnes of coal, according to the local emergency management department.

Hydrogen sulfide poisoning in the mine left three dead and two injured in March 2013, Xinhua report said.

CRIME VICTIM  
CHASES, SHOTS  
MAN IN FLORIDA

**Miami, Dec. 5:** A man who says he was the victim of a burglary attempt chased a man down a South Florida street and shot and wounded him with an assault-style rifle as he begged for his life, authorities said.

Corthoris Jenkins, 28, was charged with attempted first-degree murder with a firearm, court documents showed Friday. Jenkins told investigators he was playing video games when a man burst into his Miami-area apartment on Tuesday, the Miami Herald reported.

Instead of calling 911, Jenkins grabbed the rifle and ran after the man, who fell to his knees in the street, a police detective said in court. “He begins to what appears to be to beg for his life,” Miami-Dade Detective Iry Watson told a judge on Wednesday afternoon. “But the defendant takes the assault rifle and shoots him multiple times.”

Authorities said the man who was shot remained hospitalised on Friday, and detectives have not yet been able to talk to him.

2 TRUMP ALLIES  
APPOINTED BY  
PENTAGON

**Washington, Dec. 5:** The Pentagon has appointed two close allies of President Donald Trump to a defence advisory board, continuing a post-election purge in the final weeks of the administration.

The acting secretary of defence, Christopher Miller, who was installed by Trump on Nov. 9 after he fired then-Defence Secretary Mark Esper, said in a written statement Friday that nine members of the Defence Business Board had been replaced with the appointment of 11 new members.

The new members include Corey Lewandowski and David Bossie, who are among Trump’s most vocal supporters. The nine others are Henry Dreifus, Robert McMahon, Cory Mills, Bill Bruner, Christopher Shank, Joseph Schmidt, Keary Miller, Alan Weh and Earl Matthews.

“These individuals have a proven record of achievement within their respective fields and have demonstrated leadership that will serve our department and our nation well,” Miller said. He also said the nine individuals removed from the board had been serving in “expired positions,” although this was not explained.

Biden proposes scaled-down  
Prez inaugural to avoid Covid

US President-elect suggests lot of virtual activity with emphasis on safety

**Washington, Dec. 5:** US President-elect Joe Biden has said the presidential inauguration on January 20 will not be a “gigantic” event, but something closer to what the Democratic convention was like, with a lot of virtual activity across America and an emphasis on safety due to the raging Coronavirus pandemic. Biden said he expected to be sworn in on January 20 on the platform already being constructed on the steps of the US Capitol, but plans to avoid the crowds that typically gather on the National Mall and along Pennsylvania Avenue to view the ceremony and parade that attracts millions of people.

“My guess is there probably will not be a gigantic inaugural parade on Pennsylvania Avenue, but my guess is you’ll see a lot of virtual activity in states all across America engaging even more people than before. That’s in train now and I’m not in a position to give you an example of exactly what it will look like,” he said when asked about the inauguration planning at a news conference on Friday in his hometown of Wilmington, Delaware. “But, I promise you, it’ll be available either virtually or in-person for many and my guess is, there will still be a platform ceremony, but I don’t know exactly how it’s all going to work out. The key is keeping people safe,” he

said. Biden, 78, suggested that the festivities could end up looking like the virtual convention Democrats held in August, with on-line activity in the states. “We are in discussion with the House leadership and the Senate leadership as to what they plan for the inauguration, particularly those 200,000 spots they control. But I think you’re going to see something



An aerial picture taken on Saturday shows a general view of Taksim square and Istiklal avenue in Istanbul during a weekend curfew aimed at curbing the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. — AFP

that’s closer to what the convention was like than typical inauguration,” he said. He said that his first and foremost objective was to keep people safe but also allow them to celebrate. “We’re in consultation. My team is in consultation with folks who help us put on the convention, as well as with our colleagues in charge of the inauguration,” he said.

Vaccine will not be  
mandatory: Biden

**Washington, Dec. 5:** US President-elect Joe Biden said on Friday that Americans will not be forced to take the Coronavirus vaccine and he is willing to get vaccinated publicly to assuage any concerns about its efficacy and safety. “I don’t think they should be mandatory. I wouldn’t demand it to be mandatory, but I would do everything in my power just like I don’t think masks have to be made mandatory nationwide,” Biden told reporters at a news conference in Wilmington, Delaware.

Biden was responding to a question if Covid-19 vaccine be made mandatory. Biden, who is due to take office on January 20, said he will make sure that the vaccine is both free and available and that any follow up on the vaccine is free and available that relates to any health complications from it. “I will do everything in my power as the president of the United States to encourage people to do the right thing,

and when they do it, demonstrate that it matters. That’s why I said in my inaugural speech I’m going to ask people to commit for 100 days to wear a mask, not because I’m asking it for any reason to punish this is not a political issue,” he said.

“It has become one. But if people do it for 100 days in the middle of what will be still a raging crisis and the vaccine is able to be distributed, they are going to see deaths drop off the edge,” he said.

“They are going to see hundreds of thousands of people not getting sick; and my hope is they will be then inclined to say okay, it’s worth the patriotic duty to go ahead and protect other people,” Biden said. On Friday the US recorded 2,861 new deaths. It has seen more than 14 million confirmed cases in total and more than 275,000 deaths. Biden said he is willing to get inoculated in public to assuage any concerns about its efficacy and safety. — PTI

## Congress urged to pass \$900 bn stimulus

**Washington, Dec. 5:** US President-elect Joe Biden on Friday urged Congress to pass the \$900 billion stimulus package required to provide relief to people and small businesses who have been badly hit by the deadly Coronavirus pandemic.

“Americans need help, and they need it now, and they need more to come early next year,” Biden said at a speech in

Wilmington in Delaware, noting that he is encouraged by the bipartisan efforts in the Senate for the economic relief bill of about \$900 billion.

“It’s a bipartisan effort. If Congress as they work out the details of this relief package they’re going to have to focus on resources for direct public-health responses to Covid-19. We need meaningful funding for vaccines now,

Distancing rules  
back in S. Korea

**Seoul, Dec. 5:** South Korea’s capital on Saturday began enforcing stricter distancing rules as the country added nearly 600 new Coronavirus cases for the second straight day.

The restrictions require large stores, gyms, movie theaters, barbershops and amusement parks to shut down after 9 pm, and restaurants to provide only deliveries and take-outs after that time.

Public transportation will also be reduced after 9 pm in an aim to discourage unnecessary gatherings.

The 583 cases reported by the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency brought the national caseload to 36,915, including 540 deaths.

The agency said 411 of the cases were from the densely populated Seoul metropolitan area, where health officials are struggling to track infections tied to various places, including hospitals, churches, schools, saunas and gyms. The country had reported 629 new cases on Friday, its highest daily jump in nine months. — AP

BAHRAIN 2ND NATION TO GRANT  
PFIZER SHOT FOR EMERGENCY USE

**Dubai, Dec. 5:** The island kingdom of Bahrain said Friday it has become the second nation in the world to grant an emergency-use authorisation for the coronavirus vaccine made by Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech.

The state-run Bahrain News Agency made the announcement on Friday night, following an earlier announcement by the United Kingdom on Wednesday, making Britain the first in the world.

“The confirmation of approval by the National Health Regulatory Authority of the kingdom of Bahrain followed thorough analysis and review undertaken by the authority of all available data,” the kingdom said on its

state-run Bahrain News Agency. Bahrain did not say how many vaccines it has purchased, nor when vaccinations would begin.

It did not immediately respond to questions from *The Associated Press*. Pfizer later said that the details of its sales agreement with Bahrain, including the “timing of delivery and the volume of doses,” was confidential and declined to comment.

“We have developed detailed logistical plans and tools to support effective vaccine transport, storage and continuous temperature monitoring, Pfizer said. “Our distribution is built on a flexible just in time system which will ship the frozen vials to the point of vaccination.” — AP

Bureaucrats face  
axe if caught for  
graft, says Imran

**Islamabad, Dec. 5:** Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan has said the government will introduce a new system of “reward and punishment” for the civil servants under which corrupt bureaucrats will be sacked instead of just transferring. Speaking at a ceremony to celebrate the completion of two years of Pakistan Citizen Portal at the Prime Minister House on Friday, Khan said he was dissatisfied over the performance of the current local governments, the *Dawn* reported. “The government was introducing a new system of ‘reward and punishment’ for the civil servants. Under the new system officials would not be transferred but sacked if found involved in corruption and irregularities,” he said.

He also said under a separate new system introduced at the village level funds would be transferred directly to the councils. “A new local government system is being introduced which will usher in a revolution. It will be implemented at the village level where people will be able to elect their representatives who will directly receive funds every year,” he added. — PTI



Imran Khan

BLAST KILLS ONE  
IN RAWALPINDI

**Islamabad, Dec. 5:** At least one person was killed and seven others wounded in a rare bomb attack in the Pakistani city of Rawalpindi on Friday, police said.

Rawalpindi, the country’s fourth-largest city, is known for its military garrison and adjoins the capital Islamabad.

“One person was killed and seven others wounded. It was a timed device and was planted near a bus terminal,” Rawalpindi police spokesman Sajjad ul Hassan said.

No group immediately claimed responsibility. The police spokesman said investigators were probing all angles, including the possibility of terrorism. — AFP

Lanka to hurry  
Easter Sunday  
probe: Minister

**Colombo, Dec. 5:** Sri Lankan government will expedite the ongoing probe of Easter Sunday suicide bombings that killed 258 people, including 11 Indians, last year, a senior Cabinet minister said on Saturday.

Nine suicide bombers, belonging to local Islamist extremist group National Thawheed Jamaat (NTJ) linked to ISIS, carried out a series of blasts that tore through three churches and as many luxury hotels in Sri Lanka, killing 258 people, including 11 Indians, and injuring over 500 on the Easter Sunday on April 21, 2019.

“Sri Lankan government will expedite the ongoing probe of Easter Sunday suicide bombing. I will meet the Attorney General on Monday to see how we could proceed,” Sarath Weerasekera, the minister of public security, told the parliament.

He was reacting to an

opposition lawmaker charging that the current government appeared not interested now to carry on with the probe.

Niroshan Perera, the opposition member told parliament, that the head of the local Catholic Church Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith had just a few days ago had expressed doubt if the investigations were leading nowhere. Ranjith said if the current government showed no genuine interest in the investigations to see its conclusion the catholic minority would lose confidence in the government.

Assuring there was no attempt to sweep the investigation under the carpet, Weerasekera said the legal process would be expedited from next week. Weerasekera said 257 people have been arrested and 86 of them are currently under detention orders while 172 are in remand custody. — PTI

NMC hosp founder  
‘stopped’ by India

**Mumbai/Dubai, Dec. 5:** The founder of troubled hospital operator NMC Health has filed a legal challenge against a move by Indian immigration authorities to prevent him from departing to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) last month, according to his court petition.

B.R. Shetty’s NMC, listed in London and UAE’s biggest hospital group, went into administration in April following months of turmoil over its finances and the compa-

ny’s disclosure that it had \$6.6 billion in debt, well above its earlier estimates. Shetty had said November he planned to return to the UAE and denied reports he had fled the country after the hospital group’s implosion.

His petition, filed in the Karnataka high court on November 30, said immigration officials at Bengaluru airport stopped him boarding a flight to the UAE on Nov. 14, “without assigning any reasons whatsoever”. — Reuters

## SPACE | ODYSSEY

Hayabusa2 left the asteroid Ryugu, about 300 million kilometres away, a year ago

## Japan awaits spacecraft with asteroid soil samples

**Tokyo, Dec. 5:** Japan’s space agency said the Hayabusa2 spacecraft successfully separated a capsule and sent it toward Earth to deliver samples from a distant asteroid that could provide clues to the origin of the solar system and life on our planet.

The Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency said the capsule successfully detached Saturday afternoon from 2,20,000 kilometres (1,36,700 miles) away in a challenging operation that required

precision control.

The capsule is now descending to land in a remote, sparsely populated area of Woomera, Australia, on Sunday. Hayabusa2 left the asteroid Ryugu, about 300 million kilometres (180 million miles) away, a year ago.

After the capsule release, it is now moving away from Earth to capture images of the capsule descending to the planet. Yuichi Tsuda, project manager at the space agency JAXA, stood

up and raised his fists as everyone applauded the moment command center officials confirmed the successful separation of the capsule.

Hayabusa2’s return with the world’s first asteroid subsurface samples comes weeks after NASA’s OSIRIS-REx spacecraft made a successful touch-and-go grab of surface samples from asteroid Benu.

China, meanwhile, announced this week its lunar lander collected underground samples and

sealed them within the spacecraft for return to Earth, as space developing nations compete in their missions.

Many Hayabusa2 fans gathered to observe the moment of the capsule separation at public viewing events across the country, including one at the Tokyo Dome stadium. In the early hours of Sunday, the capsule, protected by a heat shield, will briefly turn into a fireball as it reenters the atmosphere 120 kilometres (75 miles) above

Earth.

At about 10 kilometers (6 miles) above ground, a parachute will open to slow its fall and beacon signals will be transmitted to indicate its location. JAXA staff have set up satellite dishes at several locations in the target area to receive the signals, while also preparing a marine radar, drones and helicopters to assist in the search and retrieval of the pan-shaped capsule, 40 centimeters (15 inches) in diameter. — AP



Journalists wait for the start of a live telecast at JAXA's Sagamihara Campus in Sagami, near Tokyo on Saturday. — AFP



INDIAN TOP 10  
BESTSELLERS

## NON-FICTION

- A PROMISED LAND**  
Barack Obama,  
Penguin Viking, ₹1999
- JUGALBANDI: THE BJP BEFORE MODI**  
Vinay Sitapati,  
Penguin Viking, ₹799
- THE BATTLE OF BELONGING**  
Shashi Tharoor,  
Aleph, ₹799
- REMNANTS OF A SEPARATION**  
Aanchal Malhotra,  
HarperCollins, ₹599
- JINNAH HIS SUCCESSES, FAILURES AND ROLE IN HISTORY**  
Ishtiaq Ahmed,  
Penguin, ₹999
- PORTRAITS OF POWER**  
N.K. Singh,  
Rupa, ₹595
- THE INDIA WAY**  
S. Jaishankar,  
HarperCollins, ₹699
- THE COMMONWEALTH OF CRICKET**  
Ramachandra Guha,  
4th Estate, ₹699
- A NEW IDEA OF INDIA**  
Harsh Madhusudan & Rajeew Mantri,  
Westland, ₹799
- MY YEARS WITH RAJIV: TRIUMPH AND TRAGEDY**  
Wajahat Habibullah,  
Westland, ₹799



## FICTION

- SHUGGIE BAIN (2020 BOOKER PRIZE WINNER)**  
Douglas Stuart  
Picador, ₹499
- THE DISCOMFORT OF EVENING (2020 INTERNATIONAL BOOKER PRIZE WINNER)**  
Marieke Lucas Rijneveld,  
Faber & Faber, ₹499
- HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT**  
Jeffrey Archer  
Pan Macmillan, ₹450
- A TIME FOR MERCY**  
John Grisham,  
Hodder & Stoughton, ₹699
- HAMNET**  
Maggie O' Farrell,  
Tinder Press, ₹699
- DAYLIGHT**  
David Baldacci,  
Pan Macmillan, ₹650
- WHAT THE BODY REMEMBERS (20TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION)**  
Shauna Singh Baldwin,  
Tara-India Research Press, ₹599
- INSIDE STORY**  
Martin Amis,  
Jonathan Cape, ₹799
- THE EVENING AND THE MORNING**  
Ken Follett,  
Pan Macmillan, ₹499
- PRIVATE MOSCOW**  
James Patterson & Adam Hamdy,  
Century, ₹699



Bahrison, New Delhi

## The good doctor's submissions



Indranil Banerjee

review

The coronavirus pandemic holds many lessons for India, primary among which is the need for a robust public health system. In times of crisis, the private sector healthcare industry can and surely will help but the brunt must be borne by the government sector, which operates beyond the dictates of profitability and with a freedom mandated by the fact that it is an arm of the government.

Much before the current pandemic exposed the terrible gaps in our healthcare system, one doctor had gone to great lengths to make the public aware of the serious shortcomings of Indian medical institutions, systems and practitioners.

Dr Samiran Nundy, one of the country's leading surgeons in the field of gastroenterology and former head of the department of gastrointestinal surgery at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), had painstakingly put together an encyclopaedic book on the ills of the Indian healthcare system. Although the primary focus

of the book was on the corruption in the medical profession, the book's many, well-researched papers dealt with the larger issue of the state of healthcare in India.

In his introduction, Dr Nundy had focussed on the heart of the matter, asserting that "public health must remain a public responsibility and neither the lack of financial resources, the inability to manage systems, the unwillingness to govern responsibly nor an unfamiliarity with technology should become an argument or excuse for outsourcing healthcare to private enterprise. Corruption arises precisely because of these issues but these are remedial situations."

The root of the problem is low government spending on healthcare. "India is a poor country", he writes, "but there is no justification for the fact that for many years now the total public expenditure on healthcare has hovered between 0.8 per cent and 1.1 per cent of the GDP. It is not that funds cannot be provided."

Of course, as many of us know, there is money, espe-

cially when it is not being spent on populist vote catching schemes or freebies like free power and loan waivers. The several lakh crores of the taxpayers' money which have gone to garnering votes for the next elections could well have been spent on the country's tottering government healthcare system.

Apart from political profligacy, there are additional problems as some of the papers in the book elucidate. Authors Ritu Priya and Prachinkumar Ghodajkar in their chapter titled "The Structural Basis of Corruption in Healthcare in India", point out some factors that have eviscerated the Indian healthcare system. "Since the 1980s, the role of the nation state has

weakened in social welfare; commercial entities have become stronger and shape state policies rather than the other way around. They, or the new institutional structures developing under their influence, operate increasingly on market principles informed by 'new public management' approaches, often contrary to the welfare and service orientation of healthcare", they explain.

This is troubling because, as the authors of this paper point out, the "conventional logic of the buyer and seller in the marketplace does not apply to the health sector" since "the user often does not have the choice of not buying the services, as it can be a matter of life and death or discomfort and disablement". This is the basic underlying problem associated with medical care.

Added to these are structural problems that have fuelled corruption in healthcare, according to the authors. These create "conditions for an increasing segment of healthcare professionals moving away from the expected moral moorings of healthcare providers and thereby increasing distrust of the profession and healthcare services in society at large."

The book is really a magnum opus on not just corruption but the plethora of ills plaguing the country's healthcare system, including issues such as the rise of the medical-industrial complex, problems of regula-

tion, government spending, the unholy nexus of doctors and pharmaceutical companies and much more.

There are a total of 41 chapters or papers in the book written by a diverse set of experts in their own fields. This book is for practitioners, policy makers, researchers as well as the lay reader, who now more than ever must make herself aware of the myriad and very serious problems ailing our healthcare apparatus.

Ultimately, the message, as far as the good doctor is concerned, is clear: "Governments at both centre and state levels, must continue to be the primary player in healthcare, and certainly in primary healthcare. The specious difference between providing and purchasing care must be called out. Even if government were to purchase the services, it must still provide those services to the people at little or no cost."

In these times of crisis, the grave inadequacies of our government-run healthcare system are destined to adversely affect millions. The lessons Dr Nundy has learnt over years of medical service need to be disseminated among all thinking Indians, as well as the country's leadership.

The writer is an independent commentator on political and security issues



## IS 'SERIOUS MEN' TAUTOLOGY AND OTHER NIGGLING QUERIES



Aditi Sriram

essay

Published in 2010, to well-deserved global success, *Serious Men* by Manu Joseph is about a pair of opposites: a brahmin scientist, Arvind Acharya, and his dalit assistant, Ayyan Mani, and how their lives intersect in cunning, cruel, and even collaborative ways. Acharya is the director of the "Institute of Theory and Research", and committed to proving that alien life exists. Mani hardly appears on his radar, except as a meagre clerk in his office. But in fact — and this is how Joseph delights and seduces his readers — the phone-answering, mail-receiving assistant has been regularly interfering with Acharya's work. The results are a shocking professional climax, a romantic one, and lots of ethical ones. *Serious Men* is a witty page-turner, and brilliant in how it recasts the word 'serious' to connote everything but.

Ten years later, the word takes on

still new meanings: unstoppable, deadly. The coronavirus is serious; the consequences for humanity are serious. In such a world, have opposites become irrelevant? Has seriousness given us more in common?

Not according to Acharya, who dismisses all scientific approaches other than his own as myopic. In an argument about how best to identify extraterrestrials, he derides his colleague's proposal to emit radio signals into space.

"I will not support people who presume that somewhere, far away in space, there could be beings so human that they will build machines that will send us a radio signal. Man is not searching for aliens. Man is searching for man. It's called loneliness. Not science." (— p. 50 of Google e-book)

Maybe, but man's loneliness might well have been the primordial urge which led him to seek distant shores, build cities, and devise the technology that, today, keeps us connected twenty-four-seven. Acharya, however, is weary of such primitive

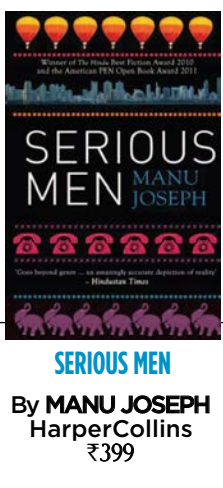
impulses; his experiment is far more sophisticated, since it is searching for microbial particles. Still: how would he feel nowadays, if he could not sit in his office daily, work in his basement laboratory, and shout at his colleagues face-to-face? He continues to anticipate the alarm clock that blares in his home every morning at 7.45 a.m., even though his daughter, who used it, is long settled abroad. Might he acknowledge that his search for aliens, in whatever form they exist, is to dispel a certain interstellar loneliness?

We'll never know, because Acharya would have stalked off in a huff by now, feeling nauseous by such unworthy (and unscientific) questions while Mani would have lingered behind, eavesdropping for his own ulterior motives. Indeed, Joseph's characters conduct their vitriolic scheming in parallel hallways: the hallowed, hushed ones in the Institute; the

concrete, rat-infested ones in the BDD chawl where Mani lives. Recalling his own experience living in a chawl as a novice reporter, Joseph says he was "struck by this unnecessary design flaw: the way people live in Bombay". He uses Mumbai's tropy-turviness creatively, to ensure that his novel's action is as steamy in an office basement as it is in a chawl attic. Covid or not, nobody really wants to be alone.

A decade ago, *Serious Men* was about the chasms between things: Scientists and laymen. Humans and extraterrestrial life. The rich and the poor. Women and men. Lust and love. Humour and severity. Truth and fiction. Secret games and invisible science. English writing and vernacular lives. A decade later, it is a book — as well as a film — about the social distances between these things. A question for Joseph, Mani, Acharya and all of us, is how this distance will narrow or widen in the coming days, months and years.

Aditi Sriram teaches writing at Ashoka University. Her first book, *Beyond the Boulevards: A Short Biography of Pondicherry*, was released in 2019. She also freelances for several publications including The New York Times, The Atlantic and The Washington Post.



Douglas Stuart (44) has taken home the 52nd edition of the prestigious Man Booker Prize for his debut novel *Shuggie Bain*. While writing the story of young Shuggie and his alcoholic mother, Agnes, Stuart drew from his experiences of growing up gay in economically-ravaged Thatcher-era Glasgow. Stuart dedicated the book to his mother who died when he was 16.



## 'Even forthright women can be submissive'

As the first Indian female newsreader and radio jockey, Saeeda Bano left behind a pioneering legacy. SHAHANA RAZA, her granddaughter who translated her memoir, *Off the Beaten Track*, remembers her as an emotionally resilient person in a chat with SUCHETA DASGUPTA

Aside from being an Indian radio pioneer, who broke bread with India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, your grandmother was one of India's first independent Muslim women. Not only was she living by herself in the 1940s, in the 1930s, she drove a car unchaperoned. This is a freedom not available to most Indian women, Hindu or Muslim, even today. Did Saeeda Bano consider herself a feminist?

Did Saeeda Bano consider herself a feminist? I don't know that for sure, but she most definitely knew she was ahead of her times, that the life she led was *Dagar se Hatt kar*, off the beaten track, which is why she used it as the title of her autobiography.

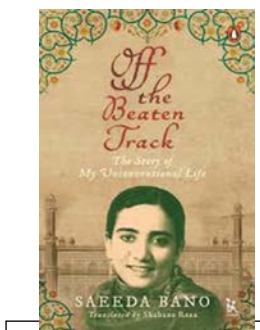
Your grandmother was more sporting than studious. She was not, in that sense, the typical intellectual feminist. Would you consider her a rebel in her household? How well was she loved by her family?

Relatively speaking, compared with her older siblings, Saeeda Bano was definitely the rebel in her family. The fact that she was allowed to be herself, especially by her father, went a long way in filling her with confidence and also proves they loved her for who she was.

In the book, she refers to herself as a girl with "a strange blend of complicated traits in her personality. Yes, she was more sporting than studious, but she also read voraciously. After marriage she receives both love and importance from her husband's family as well, especially from her father-in-law Justice Mohammed Raza.

What, to your mind, did she have to give up in order to lead the life that she did and accomplish what she did?

In order to achieve what she did, Saeeda Bano had to, first and foremost, give up the emotional comfort and the financial security that comes with being part of a loving joint family. Embracing uncertainties, she forsook



By SAEEDA BANO  
Translated by SHAHANA RAZA  
Penguin Random House, ₹499

the familiarity and convenience of living in an easygoing city like Lucknow and went off to Delhi at the time of Partition in August 1947, tackling courageously the various challenges that came her way during this crucial time in history. To lead her life according to the dictates of her own conscience, she schooled her heart to face social disapproval.

One of the most charming episodes in the book is to do



with Saeeda's friendship with the singer and courtesan, Begum Akhtar. This friendship was forged despite of women observing purdah from courtesans. Surprisingly, her interactions with Akhtari met with little resistance at her in-laws' and she managed to create from them a family tie. Was her husband's family relatively liberal or was it due to her personal charisma that this became possible?

Bit of both, I would say. Initially, there was some feeble, lukewarm resistance from her family. Ultimately she managed to persuade her husband Abbas Raza to visit Akhtari Bai's *kotha*.

Was it Saeeda who broke the ice between lawyer Ishtiaq Abbasi's acquaintances and Akhtari Bai. But after Akhtari approached my grandmother at the radio station and said, "Bittan, please get me married to Ishtiaq Abbasi sahab," she took the bull by the horns. In her inimitably bold style, she called Ishtiaq *bhai* over for tea and candidly asked him to marry Akhtari! The rest, as they say, is history.

There is a documentary on Begum Akhtar called *Hai Akhtari*, on YouTube for which director Kalidas Swaminathan interviewed my grandmother. In that, you can hear Saeeda Bano narrate this entire incident in the most delightful manner, exactly as it is written up in this book.

While reading the book, I noticed that when Saeeda examines the relationship of her lover, three-time Delhi mayor Nuruddin Ahmed, with his English first wife, Billy, she concludes that it had faced challenges due to Billy's not belonging to his own culture of compliant, coquettish or circumspect, women. But she herself was neither of those. Why this inconsistency?

Since I never had the opportunity to see my grandmother with Nuruddin Ahmed

## How Mowgli grew up, grew old and loved his mothers



Rachna Chhabria

review

When I received a copy of *Feral Dreams* — *Mowgli and his Mothers*, written by Stephen Alter, the herd of elephants tramping through the jungle on the cover gave me a big hint of what the pages hold. *Feral Dreams* takes the story of Mowgli, the human child, the main character of Rudyard Kipling's novel, *The Jungle Book*, forward in time.

For animal lovers, it is one big jungle treat. Alter's Mowgli is found by the elephant matriarch in Hathi Talao Wildlife Sanctuary, she hands the baby to the monkeys for feeding. Growing up with the monkeys and other wild animals, the boy, given the name Mowgli by the elephant matriarch, considers himself one of the jungle creatures.

The first part of the book brings the jungle to life, the banyan tree with its aerial roots where the boy is sitting with the troop of monkeys. "Drawing in a deep breath through his nostrils, he smelled the mouldering leaves and a sour earthy odour that he recognised as the passing scent of a sloth bear that had wandered by a short while ago."

By the end of the first chapter Mowgli is caught by the forest guards, while they are transporting him to the town, the herd of elephants led by the matriarch, rescue Mowgli, taking him back into the sanctuary. Mowgli's relationship with the elephants and the monkeys is so beautifully expressed through their conversation, that feels more like a telepathic link than a verbal dialogue, written in italics, it elevates the book to another level altogether, as do the descriptive paragraphs that bring the jungle with its sights, sound and smell to life, literally thrusting the reader smack into the middle of it all.

Mowgli's relationship with the elephant matriarch is reminiscent of a mother-son bond, and his relationship with a young monkey, reminded me of the interaction between siblings.

By the end of part one, Mowgli is found near the waterhole in an emaciated condition by two forest guards who bring him to the Calvary Mission Children's Home in Shakkarganj run by an American missionary Miss Elizabeth Cranston. Mowgli now christened Daniel lives with the other orphan children under the strict care of the principal Miss Cranston.

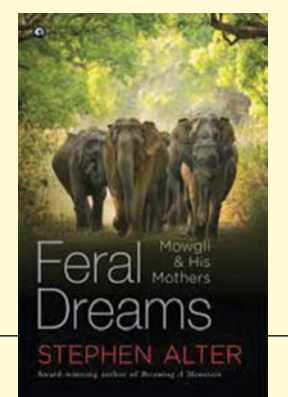
In the children's home, Daniel is bullied by the other children, as his behaviour is different from theirs, he isn't as humanised as them. Slowly Daniel learns Hindustani and a smattering of English, he learns to wear clothes, eat like a civilised person and sleep on a mattress.

As the story progresses, after one particularly harsh bullying episode, when Daniel is distraught, Miss Cranston decides to adopt him as her son. When Miss Cranston gives refuge to a dacoit, it results in her and Daniel's deportation to America.

The book chronicles Daniel's journey in life, from the jungle to civilisation, from childhood till his sixties. From Daniel's relationship with his two mothers, Daniel is more comfortable with the elephant matriarch than Miss Cranston. He is awkward with her and is seldom able to express himself well with her. Sadly, as he grows up, he distances himself from her, but a patch-up of sorts is brought about by his live-in partner, Nadia.

The ending made me smile, Daniel paid a wonderful tribute to both his mothers. The book has so many breathtaking scenes that a reread is a must. I fell in love with Alter's mastery of his craft and his firm grip over the story held my attention till the end.

Rachna Chhabria is a Bengaluru based children's author and a freelance writer



FERAL DREAMS — MOWGLI

By STEPHEN ALTER  
Aleph, ₹599



## SHORT TAKES

## Covid-hit Hamilton may miss next GP

**Manama:** Formula One world champion Lewis Hamilton, who was diagnosed with coronavirus this week, is struggling with the illness and is in doubt for next week's season-ending Abu Dhabi Grand Prix, Mercedes team boss Toto Wolff said on Friday. The seven-time champion won the Bahrain Grand Prix last weekend and was ruled out of Sunday's Sakhr Grand Prix after waking up on Monday with mild symptoms. The 35-year-old is now in the process of isolating for 10 days according to the established protocols.

"He is not great," said Wolff after Hamilton's replacement George Russell posted an outstanding time-topping lap in opening practice. "Covid-19 is something you mustn't take lightly and he is in safe hands." — *AFP*

## Anderson retires from int'l cricket

**Christchurch:** Plagued by injuries, New Zealand all-rounder Corey Anderson, who once held the record for fastest ODI hundred, called time on his international career and signed a three-year deal with USA's Major League Cricket. The 29-year-old, who has played 13 Tests, 49 ODIs and 31 T20Is for New Zealand, didn't feature in any of Black Caps' assignment for the past two years. In the 93 international games across formats, he scored 2,277 runs with two hundreds and 10 half-centuries. He also picked up 90 wickets. "It's been a huge honour and (I am) extremely proud to represent New Zealand," Anderson, who holds the record for the fastest ODI century for his 36-ball innings against West Indies in 2013, was quoted as saying by *'Cricbuzz'*. — *PTI*

## NZ's push for 1st Test win stalled

**Hamilton:** New Zealand's push for an innings victory over the West Indies in the first cricket Test was stalled on the third day Saturday by a bold, counter-attacking partnership for the tourists' seventh wicket between Jermaine Blackwood and Alzarri Joseph. New Zealand seemed to be coasting to a win within three days when captain Kane Williamson enforced the follow-on with a 381-run lead after dismissing the West Indies for 138 in reply to their first innings of 519-7 declared. — *AP*

**Scores: West Indies 138** (Campbell 26, Southee 4-35) & **196/6** (Blackwood 80\*, Joseph 59) vs **New Zealand 519/7** decl.

## PCB to probe team Covid cases in NZ

**Karachi:** The Pakistan Cricket Board has started a probe into how as many as 10 players tested positive for Covid-19 after landing in New Zealand. The investigation has been launched after it emerged that some players from one or two teams in the ongoing domestic Quaid-e-Azam Trophy had complained of coughing, fever and sneezing — symptoms of a possible Covid-19 infection — just few days before they left for the tour of New Zealand. "They tested positive after reaching Christchurch where the entire squad is now quarantined at a managed facility after the 10 positive tests," a PCB source said. — *PTI*

## Live on TV

## CRICKET

**Australia vs India:** Second T20 from 1.40 pm on Sony Six, Ten 1

**South Africa vs England:** Second ODI from 1.30 pm on Star Sports 1

## FOOTBALL

**English Premier League:** West Brom vs Crystal Palace from 5.30 pm; Sheffield vs Leicester City from 7.45 pm; Tottenham Hotspur vs Arsenal from 10 pm; Liverpool vs Wolverhampton from 12.45 am (Monday) on Star Sports Select 1, HD

**Indian Super League:** Mumbai City vs Odisha from 4.50 pm; Goa vs Kerala Blasters from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

**Italian League:** Verona vs Cagliari from 5 pm; Roma vs Sassuolo from 7.30 pm; Crotone vs Napoli from 10.30 pm; Sampdoria vs AC Milan from 1.15 am (Monday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

## FORMULA ONE

**Sakhir Grand Prix:** Main race from 10.35 pm on Star Sports Select 2

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Editor — T. Venkatram Reddy, RNI Registration number 57290/94, Price in Nepal - Nep. Rs. 20.00 per copy.

## Sub-plot thickens

## Cricket fraternity divided over concussion rule

**Sydney, Dec. 5:** Indian batting great Sunil Gavaskar finds nothing wrong in Yuzvendra Chahal coming on as a "concussion substitute" for Ravindra Jadeja but doesn't like the concept of teams being provided cushion for a batsman's inability to face bouncers. Chahal replaced Jadeja, who got hit on the head, in the first T20 International and did a star turn with figures of 3 for 25 in the team's 11-run victory in Canberra.

"First and foremost let me say that match referee is a former Australian cricketer David Boon. He was okay with Chahal substituting for Jadeja. They normally say like-for-like and Chahal is not an all-rounder but if he goes out with the bat whether it's one run or 100 run, he is an all-rounder," Gavaskar told *India Today*.

"An Australian match referee had no objection to that. So I don't see why there is so much of noise about it."

One of the greatest batsmen to have played the game, Gavaskar however doesn't endorse the concept as he feels it is a leverage given to batters for a technical deficiency.

"On the business of concussion substitute itself, I don't agree with it. May be I am old fashioned and I have always believed that if you are not good enough to play the bouncer and get hit on the helmet, then you don't deserve a substitute. I am sorry," Gavaskar said, forthright in his observation.

"But at the moment, it is being allowed as part of the rules of the game and according to the rules of the game, there was no problem with Chahal playing instead of Ravi Jadeja."

## 'RULES SHOULD BE USED FAIRLY'

Former Australia captain Mark Taylor has cautioned against



Ravindra Jadeja (third from left) has a trainer tend to his leg during the first T20 international between India and Australia at Manuka Oval, in Canberra, on Friday.

— AP

## INDIANS READY TO HIT TEST MODE

**Sydney, Dec. 5:** India will look to figure out their playing XI as the Test squad gets into the groove by taking on Australia 'A' in a three-day warm-up game at Drummoyne Oval from Sunday. With India and Australia playing the second T20I on the same day, the visiting Test squad has been named India 'A' for the first of the two practice games scheduled ahead of the four-Test series.

The tour games will be a chance to sort out India's

abusing the concussion substitute rule, saying it is for the protection of players and needs to be used fairly and responsibly.

"The concussion rules are there to protect players," Taylor was quoted as saying by *'Sydney Morning Herald'*.

"If they are abused there's a chance it will go like the runner's rule. The reason the runners were outlawed was because it started to be abused. It's up to the players to make sure they use the concussion sub fairly and responsibly." — *PTI*

combinations both in the batting and bowling departments ahead of opening Day-Night Test scheduled at Adelaide from December 17. In batting, Mayank Agarwal is set to open the innings but there is a question mark over his partner with the choice being between Prithvi Shaw and Shubman Gill.

While Shaw was preferred in the New Zealand series, he struggled for consistency in the IPL. Gill, on the other hand, have scored

440 runs for Kolkata Knight Riders. The other option is K.L. Rahul, who has been in rampaging form and also formed a formidable pair with Mayank for the Kings XI Punjab, but the last time he had played a Test was in September 2019.

In the bowling department, Jasprit Bumrah, who was rested for the opening T20I, is expected to play the practice match as he looks to get into Test mode.

— *PTI*

## MARSEILLE SCORE FIFTH STRAIGHT WIN, GO SECOND

**Nîmes (France), Dec. 5:** Marseille's 2-0 away win at Nîmes on Friday saw them climb second top of Ligue 1 with a game in hand on all their closest rivals.

Paris Saint-Germain are top on 25 points with Marseille a point behind and four clubs, Lille, Lyon, Monaco and Montpellier all on 23.

After a defeat and a draw in their last two games PSG face the prospect of being knocked off top spot with a tough away clash at Montpellier on Saturday while fellow front-runners Lille and Monaco face-off on Sunday.

— *AFP*

## Pujara subjected to racism in UK

**Leeds, Dec. 5:** English county side Yorkshire finds itself in the centre of a raging issue with their former players and employees backing cricketer Azeem Rafiq's claims of "institutional racism" at the club, including reference to India's Cheteshwar Pujara with a generic name.

Former West Indies international Tino Best and Pakistan's Rana Naved-ul-Hasan provided evidence in support of Rafiq as part of an ongoing investigations into his allegations.

According to *ESPNcricinfo*, two former Yorkshire employees — Taj Butt and Tony Bowry — have also given evidence against the club which has institutionalised racism.

"(There were) continuous references to taxi drivers and restaurant workers when referring to (the) Asian community," Butt, who was employed within the Yorkshire Cricket Foundation as a community development officer, was quoted as saying by the cricket portal. "They called every person of colour 'Steve'. Even (India) batsman Cheteshwar Pujara, who joined as an overseas professional, was called Steve because they could not pronounce his name."

Butt tendered his resig-



Cheteshwar Pujara

nation within six weeks of joining.

Having worked as a coach until 1996, Bowry was the cultural diversity officer at the Yorkshire Cricket Board from 1996 until 2011, before he was appointed as a cricket development manager to develop the game for black communities.

"Many youngsters struggled to make progress, and the few that did found the environment of the dressing rooms very difficult and unwelcoming, as a direct result of racism they faced," Bowry said.

"It affected performance... they were labelled trouble-makers." — *PTI*

## NorthEast Utd two good for EB

**Goa, Dec 5:** NorthEast United FC piled further misery on SC East Bengal with a 2-0 win in their Hero Indian Super League Season 7 encounter here.

A Surchandra Singh (33') own goal and an injury-time strike from Rochharzela (90') helped the Highlanders remain unbeaten and climb to second spot in the league table.

East Bengal are yet to score in the league. SCEB will be disappointed that a good display did not lead to points, with a couple of key refereeing decisions going against them.

SCEB coach Robbie Fowler made a solitary change to his starting XI which suffered a 0-3 defeat to Mumbai City FC with Sehnaj Singh coming in place of Daniel Fox.

NEUFC coach Gerard Nus continued to shuffle his squad making five changes to the side that drew against FC Goa. Gurmeet, Ashutosh Mehta, Mashoor Shereef, Kwesi Appiah and Ninthoinganba

Meetei were back in the playing eleven.

## MUMBAI EYE THIRD STRAIGHT WIN

With a well-oiled unit at their disposal, in-form Mumbai City FC will be eyeing their third successive win when they take on Odisha FC in Bambolim, Goa, on Sunday.

Mumbai first registered a 1-0 win against FC Goa and then routed East Bengal 3-0 in their last game.

Much will again depend on how strikers Adam Le Fonde and Bartholomew Ogbeche fare. Fondere scored a brace in the game against East Bengal.

The team has utility midfielders like Ahmed Jahouh, Cy Goddard and their role as feeders will be important in the larger context of the game.

On the other hand, Odisha FC are still winless in the tournament. They have drawn one and lost two of the three games they have played this season.

— *Agencies*

## HANDBALL LEAGUE TO KICK OFF FROM DEC. 24

**Jaipur, Dec. 5:** The inaugural edition of the Premier Handball League (PHL) will be held from December 24 to January 10 at the Sawai Mansingh Indoor Stadium here, the national federation said on Saturday.

The PHL, being held under the aegis of Handball Federation of India, will have 33 matches in 18 days this season. "This is going to be a significant moment in Indian handball history as the PHL will infuse fresh air to the sport which has immense potential at grass-root level," HFI president Jagan Mohan Rao said at the launch of the PHL here.

The first season will have six men's teams — Telangana Tigers, UP Icons, Maharashtra Handball Hustlers, KingHawks Rajasthan, Bengal Blues and Punjab Pitbulls — battling for the title.

The PHL will see more than 80 players taking part in the inaugural edition as each team will consist of 14 players.

— *Agencies*

## Dominic rescues point for Everton

**Burnley, Dec. 5:** Dominic Calvert-Lewin scored his 11th Premier League goal of the season on Saturday to rescue a point for Everton in a 1-1 draw against struggling Burnley.

Everton were the surprise early season pacesetters in the English top-flight but have lost their way in recent weeks, defeated in four of their previous five league games.

Carlo Ancelotti's team trailed early at Turf Moor after a fine strike by midfielder Robbie Brady but England forward Calvert-Lewin levelled on the stroke of half-time.

But neither side could find a winner. Everton edged up to seventh in the table while Burnley remained in the bottom



Everton's Dominic Calvert-Lewin scores against Burnley during their English Premier League match at Turf Moor in Burnley on Saturday.

— AP

three.

James Rodriguez went close to putting the visitors in front early in the second half but was denied by Burnley goal-

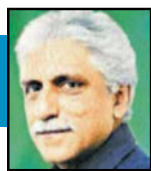
keeper Nick Pope while England's Jordan Pickford denied Chris Wood late on with a fine save.

Burnley had scored just

four times in their opening nine matches but they went ahead in the third minute thanks to Brady's low 25-yard strike.

— *AFP*

## Chahal for concussed Jadeja was a legitimate switch



Ayaz Memon  
Over The Top

India's recovery after losing the ODI series in the first two matches itself has been smart and impressive. Winning the third ODI against the trend of play showed resolve, resilience and wherewithal, which was being seriously questioned. It also created the confidence to win the first T20 international.

There was some quirky luck for India when Yuzvendra Chahal, who came in as 'concussion

substitute' for Ravindra Jadeja did the star turn, picking up three wickets. Without Jadeja's batting and Chahal's bowling, India would never have won, so maybe the Man of the Match award should have been shared between the two!

That the Aussies did not like how the substitution was carried out was evident from coach Justin Langer haranguing match referee David Boon during the innings changeover.

Australia's objections, as one understands from reports, was on two fronts.

One, since Jadeja continued batting after being hit on the helmet, was this strictly a case for concussion substitution? Second, was Chahal for Jadeja a "like for like" replacement which this rule demands? Debate on the matter will doubtless continue for some time. What's clear though is that the decision of the referee is final and binding, so Chahal for Jadeja in the first T20 was a legitimate switch.

The momentum is now with India, and if the T20 series can be won, it will be a shot in the arm for the team which looked so beleaguered in the first two ODIs. There is no scope for

excuses at the highest level and India — to put it bluntly — were outplayed and outclassed by the Aussies in the first two matches of the ODI series.

But it must also be acknowledged that unlike the Aussies, who've played a bilateral series in England and also some domestic Sheffield Shield cricket — plus the IPL for those who were in the league — India's players have had no such opportunities apart from the IPL.

Even being in a bio-secure bubble at home is an advantage, which is why I think this turnaround by the Indian team has been quite remarkable. Issue now is sustenance — of form and fitness — and resource management by

the support staff as there is still a lot of cricket remaining on this tour.

Jadeja, for instance, will not play in the remaining two T20s. That is a major blow considering he is a genuine all-rounder and has been in excellent form with bat though his bowling has been found wanting. In the T20s for instance, will he be replaced by Chahal? And if so does that weaken the Indian batting?

This is Kohli/Shastri's immediate vexing problem. In a slightly longer time frame is the bigger concern: will Jadeja be fully fit for the first Test? The Test series which starts on December 17 is the main assignment and India will want all their

players ready, physically and mentally, more so with Virat Kohli returning home after the first match.

Hopefully, Rohit Sharma will be on the flight to Australia after the NCA medical staff assess him on December 11, but there are still other areas to cover adequately. Some of these may be linked to injury and rehab (like Jadeja), some to form and having back up players in place.

This is where I believe Hardik Pandya and T. Natarajan can be of great value. Though neither was in the original Test squad, their presence in Australia can be exploited. Both Pandya don't have to go through the mandatory quarantine process which

any other player would have to. And their skills are no less pertinent.

While Pandya was left out from the Test squad because he isn't bowling much, his batting in white ball cricket on this tour has been magnificent. He could be an asset as a batsman alone. Debutant Natarajan has impressed hugely in the two white ball matches he's played.

As a left arm seamer he brings variety in the attack. He wasn't originally in the ODI squad too. Drafted in late, he made an impact. Even if he's not played, just the experience of being with the team in such an important series would be an invaluable learning curve for Natarajan.