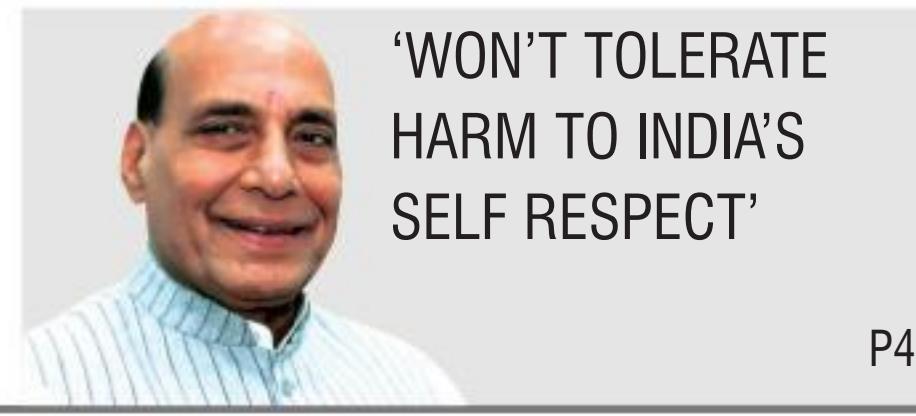




SONIA HOLDS
MEET WITH
'LETTER WRITERS'

P4



'WON'T TOLERATE
HARM TO INDIA'S
SELF RESPECT'

P4



PEOPLE'S PARLIAMENT, ALWAYS IN SESSION
POMPEO POINTS FINGER
AT RUSSIA OVER
CYBER ATTACK ON US

P11



PINK BALL IN
ALL TESTS?
"NOT NOW"

P12

WEATHER

Generally cloudy sky. Mist/shallow fog in the morning. The maximum and minimum temperatures would be around 22 and 05 degrees Celsius respectively.

RAINFALL: Nil

RELATIVE HUMIDITY

Max: 94% Min: 39%

TEMPERATURE

Max: 21.8°C (-1) Min: 3.9°C (-4)

SUN RISES SUN SETS

07:10 hrs 17:19 hrs

MOON RISES MOON SETS

12:17 hrs 23:12 hrs

THUMBNAILS



A rickshaw puller wraps himself in a blanket to beat the biting cold. In the Capital on Saturday. ■ SUBRATA DUTTA

Wistron removes VP overseeing India ops:

Apple's contract manufacturer Wistron on Saturday removed its vice-president Vincent Lee, who was heading operations in India after finding fault in the process of wage payment during its internal investigation. The Taiwanese electronics services major admitted the mistakes at its end and apologised to the workers. Meanwhile, Apple said that it has placed Wistron on probation.

P8

Design of Ayodhya mosque, hospital unveiled: The design of a mosque and a hospital to be built on a five-acre land in Ayodhya's Dhannipur village allocated by the Supreme Court in the Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri Masjid case was unveiled at the IICF office in Lucknow. The UP State Sunni Central Waqf Board had formed the trust, Indo-Islamic Cultural Foundation, to construct the mosque and other utilities on the plot. Prof SM Akhtar of JMI, through video conferencing displayed designs of the mosque and 200-bed hospital that will come up at the site.

In a major development, the Enforcement Directorate on Saturday attached six assets worth about Rs.12 crores of former chief minister Farooq Abdullah and others in connection with its money-laundering probe linked to alleged financial irregularities in the Jammu and Kashmir Cricket Association (JKCA).

The 83-year-old Farooq was chairman of the JKCA when the alleged irregularities took place. Farooq has however denied the allegations. The ED is learnt to have issued a provisional attachment order under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act and the attached properties are located in Jammu and Srinagar.



The properties attached are largely ancestral dating from the 1970s with the most recent one built before 2003. There can be no justification for the seizures because they fail the very basic test of having been acquired as the proceeds of the "crime" being investigated

OMAR ABDULLAH
FORMER J-K CHIEF MINISTER AND NC LEADER

The attached properties include three residential houses, one at Gupkar Road, Srinagar; one at Tehsil Katipora, Tangmarg and one at Bhatinda in Jammu, commercial building at post Residency Road area of Srinagar.

Two immovable assets are residential, one is a commercial property while three other plots of land have also been attached by the ED, sources said.

While the book value of these attached properties is

Rs. 11.86 crore, their market value is about Rs.60 to 70 crore, ED officials added.

The former CM and NC patron has been questioned by the ED in this case several times, the last being in October at Srinagar.

Reacting to development, former chief minister and NC leader Omar Abdullah in a series of tweets said; "My father has seen the media reports regarding attachment of his properties in the ongoing investigation in to the

JKCA matter. Not surprisingly the media was tipped off regarding the seizure before he had received any official notice or documentation".

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While the book value of

3rd Covid wave in Delhi under control now: CM

Pointing to the city's over 1,100 fresh Covid cases and 1.3 pc positivity rate, Kejriwal says with people's efforts Delhi has 'effectively and successfully surpassed the third wave of coronavirus'

SNS & PTI

NEW DELHI, 19 DECEMBER

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal today asserted that the third wave of coronavirus (Covid-19) outbreak in the city was under control now.

"There was a time in November when the daily cases went up to nearly 8,600. But, even then it wasn't a panicky situation in Delhi, and 7,000 beds were available. We fought it all together. The fresh cases count today is 1,133," the CM said while addressing a virtual press conference.

The highest single-day Covid spike in Delhi till date ~ 8,593 cases ~ was reported on 11 November.

According to the Delhi government's latest health bulletin released this evening, the count of fresh Covid cases stood at 1,139, which took the national capital's coronavirus caseload to 6,15,914. These new cases, the lowest since 24 August (1,061 cases), were detected out of 87,330 tests, including 47,460 RT-PCR tests.

Delhi today logged 32 fresh Covid fatalities, which pushed its toll to 10,251, the health bulletin said.

The CM pointed out that the Covid pandemic situation in Delhi has improved significantly as the positivity rate, which had gone up to 15.26 per cent in early November, was



now down to 1.3 per cent ~ one of the lowest so far in Delhi and nationally too.

He said that on 19 November Delhi had recorded 131 coronavirus-linked deaths ~ the highest single-day Covid fatality count so far ~ and that now it has also come down and should dip further.

"It seems, together all of us have brought the third wave of pandemic in Delhi under control," Kejriwal said, adding that the city's recovery rate was currently over 96 per cent.

Delhi's active cases tally, which was around 45,000 in November, was now down to about 12,000, he said. This tally today dropped to 10,358 from yesterday's 11,419, according to the bulletin. The recovery rate currently stood at 96.65 per

cent.

"The daily average test count falls in the region of 90,000 in Delhi. Someone had advised us to show improvement in testing figures through fraudulent procedures... Many reports came from other states that fraud testing is taking place. I issued strict orders, and I can say that all our test figures are genuine," Kejriwal said.

He said, "Every citizen of Delhi stood beside the government and fought this battle against the Covid-19 pandemic. I salute coronawarriors, frontline workers; thank the Centre, political parties and religious organisations for their support and cooperation."

He also pointed out that since there was no vaccine yet, people could not afford to be

complacent about the Covid situation, and advised them to "still be vigilant, observe safety norms like wearing masks and observing social distancing".

"Today, Delhi is conducting 4,500 tests per million population in a day. The number of tests per million population is 670 in Uttar Pradesh, 800 in Gujarat, 4,300 in the US and 4,800 in the UK," Kejriwal claimed.

During its fight against Covid, Delhi gave "various new techniques to the world like home isolation and plasma therapy to fight against the pandemic", he said.

The national capital witnessed the third Covid wave in October, he said. "The citizens of Delhi took the situation very seriously and fought this battle against Covid-19 as a war, and

today, I am very happy to say that due to the efforts of the citizens of Delhi, the third wave of Covid pandemic in the capital has also come under control. We can see that the third wave of Covid-19 pandemic in Delhi is over," Kejriwal was quoted as saying in a statement issued by the Delhi government later.

In November, there was the day when the number of new Covid-19 cases in Delhi touched nearly 8,600. Not only in India, but also across the globe, this was the highest number of Covid-19 cases reported in a day from a city," he said.

In a tweet, the CM said, "With the efforts of the people of Delhi, we have effectively and successfully surpassed the third wave of Corona."

According to the health bulletin, the number of containment zones in Delhi dropped to 5,991 today from yesterday's 6,276. It stated that out of the total number of 18,770 beds in Covid hospitals, 15,655 were vacant. It also said that 267 beds in Covid care centres were occupied by persons under quarantine, including travellers who have returned by Vande Bharat Mission and bubble flights.

The bulletin said 5,95,305 patients have recovered in the city so far. The number of patients under home isolation dropped to 5,943 from yesterday's 6,605, it added.

Delhi court takes cognisance of sedition charge against Sharjeel

PTI

NEW DELHI, 19 DECEMBER

A Delhi court on Saturday took cognisance of the offence of sedition against JNU student Sharjeel Imam in a case related to the violence during protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act in December last year, which resulted in damage to public property and injuries to police near Jamia Millia Islamia.

Additional Sessions Judge Amitabh Rawat took cognisance of the offences under sections 124A (sedition), 153A (promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language), 153B (imputations, assertions prejudicial to national integration), and 505 (public mischief) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) against Imam.

The Delhi Police had filed another supplementary charge sheet against Imam in the case in July this year. The police had alleged in the charge sheet that Imam gave inflammatory speeches at several places,

including Jamia Millia Islamia and Aligarh Muslim University during anti-CAA protests.

The charge sheet said that Imam allegedly gave speeches inciting hatred, contempt and disaffection towards the Centre and instigated the people which led to the violence in December last year.

The present case has emerged from a deep-seated conspiracy which was hatched under the garb of opposing the Citizenship Amendment Bill. Earlier even before the Presidential assent, the present accused (Imam) along with his associates were involved in circulating falsehood by canvassing in the Muslim dominated areas about this Bill that the Government of India intended to take away the citizenship of Muslims and also that the Muslims will be put in detention camp," it alleged.

MCDs mayors call off dharna near CM house

PTI

NEW DELHI, 19 DECEMBER

The dharna launched by the mayors and other leaders of the BJP-ruled municipal corporations of Delhi in front of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's residence was called off after 13 days on Saturday.

The protesters, who were on an indefinite fast for the last three days, were offered juice by Union Housing and Urban Affairs Minister Hardeep Singh Puri, Delhi BJP president Adesh Gupta and the co-incharge of the party's city unit, Alka Gurjar.

"These mayors and lead-

ers were not protesting for themselves or the party, they were protesting because dues of Rs 13,000 crore have not been paid and the salaries of the sanitation workers and other employees of the municipal corporations are affected," Puri said.

The agitation demanding the Rs 13,000 crore dues from the Delhi government will continue in other forms, he said and hoped that the chief minister will have a "change of heart" and will find solutions to the problems being faced by people.

The decision to call off the dharna came amid a dete-

JOBS & CLASSIFIEDS QUEST

PUBLIC NOTIFICATIONS

PUBLIC NOTICE

A notice of intended marriage has been received from Mr. Andrew Lu Siu Mr. Le Yu Sheng Rio Sheng Shi Terrey, 47, South Tangya Road, PS Tijolia, Kolkata, West Bengal-700046 presently residing at 1502, Tower-E, Sunworld Vanalika, Sector-107, Noida Distt, Gautam Budh Nagar (UP) and Ms. Ummi Nabi Nabi Dho Mr. Uppak Kalan Nath Rao C 16, Sector 49, Noida Distt, Gautam Budh Nagar (UP) in the office of the undersigned, any person interested therein, may file objections to it on any day upto 13.01.2021 in the office of the undersigned.

Marriage Officer
Noida, Gautam Budh Nagar (UP)

CHANGE OF NAME

I, SRI Sushanta Biswas, R/o. Vill. Tunighata, P.S.: Habra, WB-743271, declare that my wife is Deepanwita Biswas and Deepanwita both are same person, vide an affidavit of 1st Class JM Barasat on 27.11.20.

I, MANJURI Chattopadhyay vide affidavit dated 20.11.2020, sworn before at Barasat First Class Magistrate Court that Manjuri Chattopadhyay and Manju Datta is same and one identical person.

TECHNICAL person experienced in Production Unit, seeks job in supervisory position. Can handle legal matter. All contact: 6289748816.

1) Debjan Das, W/o. late Dr. Nirmalendu Das, P-68, Senhati, Kolkata-700034, Police Station: Behala.

2) Devarchana Das, D/o. late Dr. Nirmalendu Das, P-68, Senhati, Kolkata-700034, Police Station: Behala.

If both of you, as mentioned above, are claiming to have any interest in the estate of the deceased abovenamed are hereby cited to come within 2 (two) weeks from the date of publication and to show cause as to why probate of the last Will and Testament dated 20th day of April, 2001 of the deceased abovenamed should not be granted by this Court unto R.K. Agarwal alias Ram Kumar Agarwal, son of late Kesuram Agarwal, residing at Mittal Pharmacy, A.T. Road, Tinsukia, Assam, Pin-786125 and presently camping at 2nd Floor Flat, Block FD-400, Sector-III, Salt Lake City, Police Station: Bidhannagar South, Kolkata-700106, North 24 Parganas being the executor named in the last Will and Testament dated 20th day of April, 2001 of the deceased under pain and contempt of the Law and further to do and receive as to Law and Justice shall appear and what you shall do herein you shall duly certify with these presents to our said Justices.

For Registrar Udayanarayanan Betal Advocate Bar Association, Room No. 9 High Court, Calcutta Chamber C/o. Mr Rajendra Banerjee, Advocate 9, Old Post Office Street 1st Floor, Above U.B.I. Calcutta-700001 26.02.2020

LEGAL NOTICES

NEW GA No. 1 of 2020. Old GA No. 439 of 2020. PLA No. 138 of 2018.

In the High Court at Calcutta. Testamentary and Intestate Jurisdiction.

In the Goods of: Dr. Nirmalendu Das, son of late Jogesh Chandra Das, late residing at P-68, Senhati, Kolkata-700034, Police Station: Behala, previously at Port Blair (Andaman), Police Station: Port Blair in the District of Andaman, a Hindu

You are hereby informed

SITUATION WANTED

ACCOUNTANT M.Com. (62),

retired, independently Final

Accounts through Tally ERP-9,

G.S.T. Rt. seeks placement.

Cont. No: 6290877500.

EXPERIENCED lady aged 60, wants office job. Ph. No:

9972816728.

A GRADUATE male Executive Assistant / Executive Secretary (55), seeks change. Computer literate. Experienced in Personnel / HR / Accounts / Administration / Marketing etc. Contact: 9239025641 / 9051139443.

The Sunday Statesman

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Bhubaneswar-751 010.

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Telefax: 0674-2588061

Email: bhubaneswar@thestatesmangroup.com

statesmanbbbs@gmail.com

SILIGURI

13A, Dabgram Industrial Growth

Centre,

The Sunday Statesman

AIR-SURCHARGE: Kathmandu - Re. 2, Eastern Region - Re. 1

All other stations in India - Re. 1

4 labourers killed, 2 hurt in Delhi factory roof collapse

SNS & PTI

NEW DELHI, 19 DECEMBER

Four labourers were killed and two others were injured after the roof of a factory collapsed in West Delhi's Khayala today, officials said.

The building, which was being used as a motor winding factory, is located at Vishnu Garden area in Khayala.

The Fire Department received a call about the incident at around 10 am following which four fire tenders were rushed to the spot, said Atul Garg, director of the Delhi Fire Service.

Six labourers, including three women, were inside the factory when the incident occurred, additional deputy commissioner of police (West) Subodh Kumar said.

They were taken to two nearest hospitals, Deen Dayal Upadhyay Hospital and Guru Gobind Singh Government Hospital, Kumar said. Four of them were declared dead by doctors, while two others were undergoing treatment.

The deceased persons were identified as Saina (36), Guddi (45), Twinkle (25) and Ramesh (35).

The owner of the factory was



The NDRF and Delhi Police personnel during rescue operation at the site of the collapsed factory building at Vishnu Garden in the Capital on Saturday.



Floods have wreaked havoc in the state and as a result of this, highways in the state have suffered huge damage. We need additional funds to carry out repair works.

B S YEDIYURAPPAN
KARNATAKA CHIEF MINISTER

The Sunday Statesman
NEW DELHI, 20 DECEMBER 2020

03

Centre intimidating 'Arthiyas' for backing farmers: Pb CM

Calling recent IT raids on Punjab grain agents 'motivated' & 'oppressive', Captalleges this is part of Modi govt's 'vendetta politics' to 'demolish farmers' protest against agri laws by hook or by crook'

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
CHANDIGARH, 19 DECEMBER

Punjab chief minister Captain Amarinder Singh today castigated the Narendra Modi-led central government for its alleged intimidatory tactics against 'Arthiyas' (grain commission agents) supporting the agitating farmers, and warned that such draconian measures will further aggravate the anger of the people against the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-ruled Centre.

Terming the "clearly motivated" Income Tax (IT) raids against some Punjab Arthiyas as an "obvious pressure tactic" to curb their democratic right and freedom, Capt Amarinder said these "oppressive actions" will backfire against the ruling BJP.

The CM said it was evident that having failed to persuade, mislead and divide the farmers into ending their prolonged protest against the Centre's controversial farm laws, the Modi

government was now trying to weaken their struggle by targeting the Arthiyas,

who have been actively supporting the farmers' agitation since its very beginning.

The IT raids were conducted at the premises of several big Arthiyas of Punjab within a span of just four days of issuing notices, without waiting for responses to the notices, the CM noted, describing it as a "clear debasement of the due process of law".

Even the local police were not informed or taken into confidence, as is the normal procedure, and instead, the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) was used to provide security during such raids by the I-T teams, he said.

"What is this if not a clear case of vendetta politics by the Centre, which is hell-bent on demolishing the farmers' protest by hook or by crook?" asked the CM.

The night-long raids, which were conducted in the presence of two bus-loads each of CRPF personnel, at the premises of Vijay Kalra (president of Punjab Arthiya Association), Pawan Kumar Goyal (president of Samana Mandi), Jaswinder Singh Rana (pres-



ident, Patiala), Manjinder Singh Walia (president, Nawanshehar), Hardeep Singh Ladda (president, Rajpura) and Kartar Singh and Amrik Singh (Arthiyas, Rajpura). A total of 14 Arthiyas across Punjab have received notices from the IT department. Capt Amarinder charged that this was not the first instance of "misuse" of a central agency by the BJP-led government to "browbeat dissidents into succumbing to its writ and dik-

tats". "These bullying actions of the government do not augur well for the world's largest democracy," he said. Pointing out that even the Supreme Court had upheld the people's right to protest peacefully, the CM charged that the Modi government's actions amounted to "gross violation" of the apex court's directions and the spirit of the Constitution, which granted every citizen the right to raise his voice.

Capt Amarinder said it was "unfortunate" that instead of hearing the voices of the farmers, who have been battling cold and Covid for more than three weeks now while protesting against the Centre's agri laws ~ with nearly 2 dozen of them losing their lives during their protest so far ~ the central government was resorting to all kinds of "cheap manoeuvres" to break their will. Punjab education minister Vijay Inder Singla also alleged that the Modi government was using all kinds of tactics to crush the ongoing farmers' agitation against its new farm laws.

He said the raid of the Income Tax (IT) department at the house of the president, Federation of Arthiya (grain commission agent) Association of Punjab, Vijay Kalra, was part of such "vendetta politics". Singla said the IT raids were being conducted on various commission agents of Punjab since Friday. He added that the farmers and commission agents have lived together in brotherhood for many years.

The minister said two buses full of CRPF personnel along with the team of the IT department raided the house of Kalra. Similarly, at Patiala the house of Patiala district president of the association, Rajendra Rana, also witnessed raids by the IT department with the CRPF jawans in tow.

Similar raids were conducted at the residence of Samana commission agent association president Pawan Bansal and that of Nawanshehar association president Bittu.

Singla said when Capt Amarinder and the Congress party raised voices against the three farm laws, the Enforce-

ment Directorate sent notices to the CM and registered cases against him and his family members.

"Now when the Centre has not been able to control the farmers' agitation, it has started conducting raids on presidents of commission agents across the Punjab," he charged.

Jairam Ramesh tenders apology to Vivek Doval in defamation case

PTI
NEW DELHI, 19 DECEMBER

Congress leader Jairam Ramesh on Saturday tendered an apology to Vivek Doval, the son of National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, before a Delhi court in connection with a criminal defamation case.

Vivek Doval had filed a criminal defamation complaint against the Caravan Magazine and Ramesh for allegedly defaming him through an article and a press conference based on it respectively.

Ramesh said his remarks were based on a news article and added that "some independent verification of these facts may have been in order".

Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Sachin Gupta heard the matter and closed the case against the Congress leader after Doval accepted the apology. The case, however, will continue against the magazine. In his statement made before the court, Ramesh said, "I want to clarify that these statements or accusations were made drawing conclusions from an article that was published the previous day in The Caravan magazine. As the case progressed, I realised that perhaps some independent verification may have been in order."

"However, the general elections were close and the questions raised in the article seemed appropriate for being highlighted in making certain insinuations against you (Vivek) and your family. Thus, I would like to offer my apologies to you and your family for any hurt the statements may have caused. I would also urge the INC to

remove the press conference available on their website," the former Union minister said. Doval had claimed that the allegations levelled by the magazine and later, repeated by Ramesh at a press conference were baseless and false, and damaged his reputation in the eyes of his family members and professional colleagues.

In his complaint, Doval had said the magazine and Ramesh attempted to "deliberately malign and defame" him to "settle scores" with his father. The Caravan, in an online write-up titled "The DCompanies", had said Vivek Doval "runs a hedge fund in the Cayman Islands", which is "an established tax haven", and it was "registered merely 13 days after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government demonetised all existing Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 currency notes in 2016".

According to the complaint, Ramesh had held a press conference, reiterating the "baseless and unfounded facts" as narrated in the article. Doval had alleged that the contents of the article presented "no illegality" on his part, but the entire narration was presented in a manner that suggested "wrongdoings" to the readers. With regard to Ramesh, the complaint said the press conference addressed by the Congress leader went "beyond the mere narration in the article" and that he was already geared and armed to launch an attack, "merely waiting for the publication of the article", which could then provide a "smokescreen to the otherwise targeted and deliberate attack on the reputation of the complainant and his family".

"Thus, I would like to offer my apologies to you and your family for any hurt the statements may have caused. I would also urge the INC to

Rajnath and Nadda to address event marking 3 yrs of Jai Ram Thakur govt



STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
SHIMLA, 19 DECEMBER

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and BJP national president Jagat Prakash Nadda will virtually address the function to be organised on completion of 3 years of the Jai Ram Thakur government in Himachal Pradesh on 27 December.

State BJP chief and Shimla MP Suresh Kashyap while addressing a meeting of all the district and block chiefs said on 27 December the BJP government in Himachal will be completing its three years and it will be celebrated as a festival.

"Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and J P Nadda will address the function and people of the state virtually on the occasion," he added.

Kashyap said BJP will celebrate this occasion on block

level in all the 68 assembly constituencies and two LEDs will be installed in each constituency where a maximum of 50 people each will witness this event. All the state office bearers, district office bearers and BJP leaders will be present in their own constituency and the main event will take place in Shimla, he said.

He further stated that BJP state incharge Avinash Rai Khanna, co-incharge Sanjay Tandon, Union Minister of State for Finance Anurag Thakur, former Chief Ministers Shanta Kumar and Prem Kumar Dhumal will also join this occasion virtually.

He termed the three years of Jai Ram Thakur government in Himachal Pradesh a complete success and said this was for the first time that a government had taken care of all sections of the society.



INTERNATIONAL GITA MAHOTSAV

17-25 December, 2020

INAUGURATION

Monday, 21 December, 2020 (10:30 AM)

Gita Yajna
10:30 AM
Purushottampura Bagh, Brahma Sarovar
Chief Guest
Sh. Jai Ram Thakur
Chief Minister, Himachal Pradesh

Inauguration of International Gita Seminar
11:00 AM
Srimad Bhagavadgita Sadan, Kurukshetra University
Preside Over By
Sh. Satyadeo Narain Arya
Governor, Haryana
Sh. Jai Ram Thakur
Chief Minister, Himachal Pradesh

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Information, Public Relations & Languages Department, Haryana
www.prharyana.gov.in



Unplanned lockdown did not win battle in 21 days as PM claimed, but destroyed lives

TAKING A DIG AT THE PM'S REMARKS THAT THE MAHABHARATA WAR WAS WON IN 18 DAYS AND THE WAR AGAINST COVID WILL TAKE 21 DAYS

CONGRESS LEADER RAHUL GANDHI

THUMBNAILS



Activists of Delhi Pradesh Mahila Congress protest against price hike of LPG and other essential commodities, near Palika bazar, in the Capital on Saturday.

SUBRATA DUTTA

Kerala govt offices to get 'green' tag: The offices of government institutions and public sector undertakings in Kerala will soon turn 'green', thanks to an eco-friendly initiative of a state-run agency. Those offices, which avoid using plastic and disposable items in day-to-day activities and encourage the use of articles that can be reused and recycled, would be declared as green, officials said.

PTI

Two held under anti-conversion law released

MORADABAD (UP), 19 DECEMBER

Two brothers who were arrested earlier this month under the anti-conversion law were released on Saturday following an order by an Uttar Pradesh court.

The Muslim man and his brother were arrested on 4 December after they visited the registrar's office in Moradabad to record his marriage to a Hindu woman, whose family filed a complaint.

A video purportedly showed Bajrang Dal activists asking the couple if the woman had given notice to the district magistrate over her intention to change her religion, a requirement under the new ordinance.

The Kanth police had submitted a report that it could not find evidence of the case after Pinki denied the allegations of forced conversion, following which the chief judicial magistrate ordered the release of the brothers.

AIADMK starts campaign for 2021 elections

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
CHENNAI, 19 DECEMBER

After unleashing a rain of development projects in the past few days across the state, Tamil Nadu chief minister and AIADMK co-coordinator Edappadi K Palaniswami today kickstarted the party's campaign for the Assembly elections scheduled in 2021 on his home turf in Edappadi of Salem.

The CM paid a visit to Sendraya Perumal Temple in Periyasoragai and started the campaign after offering prayers to the deity. While opposition DMK and Makkal Needhi Maiam of Kamal Haasan started their respective campaigns in early December, defying the normal practice of starting campaign after the announcement of election dates.

On Saturday, the party leaders and cadre gathered near the temple and gave a grand welcome to the Palaniswami. The CM started the campaign by address-

ning the public from the vehicle designed for his political campaigns. Tamil Nadu government gave the nod for public and political gatherings with 50 per cent occupancy in open spaces starting from 19 December.

Following the event, the chief minister also went ahead to attend a series of government functions including the event to inaugurate Amma clinics in Edappadi.

Tamil Nadu is gearing up

for the first assembly election after the demise of two stalwarts of AIADMK and DMK — J Jayalalithaa and M Karunanidhi respectively.

The upcoming election has gained more importance as super Rajinikanth announced his decision to launch political party and to contest. More over BJP central leadership also planning big for the state as they never openly talked about the continuation of its presence in AIADMK alliance.

The election is also important as Kamal Haasan is plan-

ning to form a third front and even contemplating to have alliance with Rajini, who is more or less inclined to have a tie up with BJP.

Meanwhile, minister for fisheries Jayakumar, speaking to local TV, said that there is no crisis in the party due to which the campaign started early. "In Tamil Nadu, we have launched the schemes of AIADMK founder and former CMs MG Ramachandran and J Jayalalithaa that have reached the public. So, there is also a common view that people of Tamil Nadu encourage campaigns. Hence, this is just a meeting with the public which is for the good," he said.

AIADMK is planning to face the elections in Tamil Nadu in alliance with BJP. The CM on Friday announced that he will start the campaign from Saturday on request of the party members. He also said that the party will contest along with the existing constituents including BJP in the Assembly polls scheduled next year.

party and more such meetings would be held.

He said "Chintan Shivir" like those held in the past in Shimla and Panchmarhi would be organised.

The Congress had organised both the Panchmarhi and Shimla 'Chintan Shivirs' when the party was in the opposition. While the Panchmarhi Shivir was organised in September 1998 when Gandhi had just taken over the party's reins, the Shimla Shivir was held later in July 2003.

Another Congress leader Harish Rawat said that every leader spoke about unitedly working towards strengthening the party.

Those attending the meeting from among the letter-writers were Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha Ghulam Nabi Azad, deputy leader of the party in the upper House Anand Sharma, former chief ministers Bhupinder Singh Hooda and Prithviraj Chavan,

and MPs Manish Tewari, Vivek Tankha and Shashi Tharoor.

Former Madhya Pradesh chief minister Kamal Nath and senior leader P Chidambaram were also part of the meeting, the sources said.

Among Sonia loyalists were A K Antony, Ambika Soni, Ashok Gehlot, Harish Rawat, Ajay Maken, Pawan Bansal and Bhakt Charan Das.

Sources said a number of issues were discussed at the meeting, where the letter-writers expressed the view that they were neither "dissenters" nor "rebels". They said they had only raised issues in the party's interest to strengthen it, the sources said.

The Congress has already decided to hold elections for the post of Congress president and that process is underway. This followed a stormy Congress Working Committee meeting in August after the letter's contents became public.

Congress in-charge of NSUI Ruchi Gupta quits post

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, DEC 19

Ruchi Gupta, the Congress joint secretary-in-charge of its student wing NSUI, resigned from her post on Saturday citing delays in organisational appointments.

Her resignation came on a day Congress president Sonia Gandhi met a group of party leaders, including some who had written to her seeking complete organisational overhauls.

During the meeting, they discussed ways to strengthen the party at all levels and it was decided to hold conclaves similar to Panchmarhi and Shimla to chalk out the way ahead.

"I regret to announce that I have resigned. I am grateful

to Rahulji and Sonia ji for giving me this opportunity," Gupta, a key Rahul Gandhi appointee, tweeted.

"Congress has a crucial role in the Indian polity today but," she said, tagging two Op-Eds by her -- one which was published on Saturday and the other from last year.

In a message posted by her on the National Students' Union of India (NSUI) office bearers' WhatsApp group, Gupta said, "I am writing to you to announce that I have resigned.

"As you know, important organisational changes have remained pending for very long: the national committee took 1 year 3 months; state president orders have remained pending for months."

Kerala local body polls: Cong requires overhaul

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
19 DECEMBER

its fold helped LDF in making inroads into the Christian-dominated vote base in central Kerala.

It has been pointed that there was minority consolidation in many places in response to BJP's expected gains. This seems to have worked against the UDF.

The Church is learnt to be not on good terms with many Congress leaders and it is completely disappointed with the current UDF leadership. The distancing of Catholics, which has by and large remained with Congress, was one of the major reasons for the UDF's setback. The Jacobite faction of the Malankara Church also abandoned the Congress as it has not taken a stance favouring them in the church dispute.

The UDF suffered in its Central Kerala fortresses, especially in Kottayam, Idukki and Pathanamthitta districts, which always used to be safe vaults for the UDF.

The Congress as well as the UDF will need serious introspection as to why they failed miserably in cashing in on the prevailing political situation in Kerala which was adverse for CM Pinarayi Vijayan, whose office has been in the thick of the gold smuggling scandal.

The expulsion of the Jose K Mani faction of Kerala Congress (M) was a major factor in the severe drubbing it received in its strongholds in central Kerala, Kottayam and Idukki districts.

The entry of Jose K Mani faction of Kerala Congress (M) in

needs to evolve a detailed strategy to bring back the alienated groups in its fold. For making it possible, a complete overhaul is required in the party.

Row over Raman's threat to bureaucrats

SNS
RAIPUR, 19 DECEMBER

cautioned.

Criticising Raman for using threatening language, senior Congress leader Shailesh Nitin Trivedi said such language is unbecoming of the former CM and his stature. The kind of language Raman is using shows that he is increasingly getting frustrated after losing power, Trivedi alleged.

Lashing out at Raman for his remark against bureaucrats, chief minister Bhupesh Baghel advised him not to use threatening language against the government officials and employees. He ran the state government for 15 years with the help of same officers, and now the former CM is trying to threaten them, Baghel added.

"At present, we are running the government and bureaucracy is legally bound to implement our policies, programme and directions. Therefore, it would be better if the former CM doesn't threaten the government machinery", the CM further

irked by the decision.

Raman said that officers

should not lick the heels of

those in power today.

Two years have already been

passed and the current

regime is bound to bite the

dust in next assembly election, he claimed.

Earlier in the day, the former CM, who is generally considered a soft-spoken and mild-mannered person, lost his cool and rebuked officers in Kawarha for last minute cancelling the permission for a sit-in against the government.

The Congress as well as the UDF will need serious introspection as to why they failed miserably in cashing in on the prevailing political situation in Kerala which was adverse for CM Pinarayi Vijayan, whose office has been in the thick of the gold smuggling scandal.

The expulsion of the Jose K Mani faction of Kerala Congress (M) was a major factor in the severe drubbing it received in its strongholds in central Kerala, Kottayam and Idukki districts.

In this situation, Congress needs to evolve a detailed strategy to bring back the alienated groups in its fold. For making it possible, a complete overhaul is required in the party.

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Those who left CPI-M to join BJP have allegations against them, would have had to leave the party eventually...!

CPI-M BENGAL SECRETARY SURYAKANTA MISHRA
AFTER TWO CPI-M LEGISLATORS JOINED THE SAFFRON PARTY AT MIDNAPORE

THUMBNAILS



Students wing activists during a demonstration against new farm laws at College Street in Kolkata on Saturday. ■ SNS

Two drown as boat capsizes: A 42-year-old woman and her minor nephew drowned after their country boat capsized in a canal in Nadia on Saturday, police said. The incident happened in Haringhata area when the boat overturned in the canal due to strong wind. ■ PTI

3 killed in fire at market near Kolkata



BHANGAR (WB), 19 DECEMBER

Three persons were killed as a fire broke out at a market in West Bengal's South 24 Parganas district in the early hours of Saturday, officials said. A short-circuit caused the blaze that first broke out at a kerosene outlet in the Ghatakpur Bazar area in Bhangar, around 20 km from Kolkata, they said.

Drums of kerosene stocked in the shop started exploding, following which the flames spread to an adjacent eatery, shop and a house, they said.

The owner of the eatery, in his early 50s, along with two teenagers who used to work in it went inside the shop in order to save some valuables and douse the blaze, officials said.

However, they couldn't come out in time and were killed. It took five hours for three fire tenders to bring the blaze under control, officials said. Goods worth lakhs of rupees gutted in the fire, they said. ■ PTI

Deep rot & malaise taken root in TMC: Suvendu in open letter

He said individuals in charge of party were treating it as their personal fiefdom



Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Suvendu Adhikary and others during a rally at Midnapore town in West Midnapur on Saturday. ■ AJHARUL PATHAN

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
MIDNAPORE, 19 DECEMBER

Hours before taking saffron flag from the hands of Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Suvendu Adhikary shredded his former party in an open letter addressing to the grassroots members of Trinamul Congress saying 'an extremely deep rot and malaise' has taken root in the Trinamul Congress and 'individuals currently in charge of the party are treating it as their personal fiefdom'.

His letter, without naming anyone, conveys his resentment at ace poll strategist Prashant Kishor, drafted by Mamata Banerjee to help her fight off the BJP's formidable challenge this time.

He said the Trinamul Congress is not anyone's fiefdom and the party was not built by any individual person in a day and if anyone goes by this idea, they have no idea of the truth.

"Neither West Bengal nor Trinamul Congress is anyone's fiefdom," Adhikary wrote in his six pages long letter to the TMC party workers.

"The party was not built in one day with the contribution of one person. It was a continuous effort on a mammoth scale, the culmination of which we saw in the results 10 years ago," he added.

He called it "extremely painful" that some in charge were treating the party like their fief.

"The very people on the backs of whom the party was created are now being sidelined, humiliated and ousted. In their stead, the individuals have now hired external assistance, people with no knowledge of ground realities and no knowledge of the sacrifice it actually takes to work for a shared goal as ambitious as creating the West Bengal of our dreams," he wrote.

He further added that West Bengal is standing at a critical juncture as the people of the state are destined to make a choice in the 2021 Assembly elections that will impact them forever.

Ex-Mamata Banerjee's aide alleged that instead of 'Nishkam Karma Yogi', the TMC, which the ordinary people built brick by brick selflessly without any desires, is now filled with individuals who do not bother about anyone but themselves.

He said the party was filled with "Sakam Karma Bhogis" or "individuals who are not bothered about anyone but themselves, individuals who will take monetary compen-

Kalyan slams Amit Shah, Suvendu; terms BJP as most corrupt party

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, 19 DECEMBER



He challenged Mukul Roy, BJP vice president, and said, "BJP will not cross 50 in 2021 election".

He said during the Left Front tenure, Lakshman Seth held sway in Tamul, Haldia and Contai and all the contractors who owed allegiance to him used to work for him. The same racket of contractors and middlemen was run by Suvendu Adhikary in these places, he alleged.

Banerjee dared Suvendu to name the nephew but said that he lacked the guts to utter his name.

The MP slammed Amit Shah and Suvendu for saying that Abhishek wants to become the next chief minister.

He said, "Amit Shah is deliberately dishing lies to baffle people. I'm assuring you that no member of Mamata Banerjee's family is longing for chief ministerial post." He also said Suvendu was never in the party since its inception.

Mr Banerjee said that BJP is an anti-farmer party but Mamata Banerjee was on hunger strike for twenty six days for the cause of farmers and land movement.

He also added that the farmer's income in West Bengal has

Bengal is standing at a critical juncture as the people of the state are destined to make a choice in the 2021 Assembly elections that will impact them forever.

With sections within the Trinamool Congress terming him a 'traitor', Adhikary said he had decided to quit the Trinamul as it had betrayed the people's mandate.

"I have not left the Trinamul...It is Trinamul that has left its ideals behind in its relentless pursuit of power instead of service," Adhikary wrote.

Continuing his tirade against Abhishek Banerjee, Adhikary said, "Instead of focusing on the all-round development of the State and the country, we are now see-

ing a situation in which the sole agenda is the enrichment of few particular individuals and their families."

With sections within the Trinamool Congress terming him a 'traitor', Adhikary said he had decided to quit the Trinamul as it had betrayed the people's mandate.

"I have not left the Trinamul...It is Trinamul that has left its ideals behind in its relentless pursuit of power instead of service," Adhikary wrote.

"Our fight is bigger than any individual. Our fight is for a better future. Our fight is to restore West Bengal to its former glory," he wrote.

Friday was the fourth day

in Phase II of the two-month old programme where government officials are holding multiple camps across Bengal's 23 districts.

Swasthya Sathi-a basic health coverage for secondary and tertiary care, up to Rs 5 lakh per year per family which covers all pre-existing diseases that can be availed at all government hospitals and empanelled private hospitals-has generated the maximum queries and applications under *Duare Sarkar*.

A total of 11 state government-run schemes have been made available to eligible people at camps.

The flagship schemes include the *Kanyashree* (a cash transfer scheme aimed

Four 'Quad' countries reaffirm commitment to free, open Indo-Pacific

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 19 DECEMBER



This was the second meeting of the 'Quad' senior officials

this year. The first meeting had taken

place on 25 September, which was followed by 'Quad' foreign ministers meeting in-person in Tokyo in October, signalling the intent of the member countries to enhance their engagement.

In a press release, the external affairs Ministry said officials underscored the importance of enhancing the resilience of supply chains" and highlighted the need to "ensure safe, effective and affordable access to Covid-19 vaccines."

The officials exchanged views on regional and global issues of common interest. They also reviewed ongoing and proposed practical cooperation in the areas of connec-

tivity and infrastructure development, and security issues, including counter-terrorism, cyber security, maritime security, humanitarian and disaster relief, with the objective of promoting peace, security, stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region.

They appreciated the Vietnamese chairmanship of the ASEAN and expressed satisfaction with the outcomes of the 15th East Asia Summit held in November this year.

The officials reiterated their firm support for ASEAN-Centrality and ASEAN-led mechanisms particularly the leaders-led East Asia Summit, in the regional architecture for the Indo-Pacific, and their readiness to work with ASEAN and all other countries towards realising a common and promising vision for the Indo-Pacific.

RSS ideologue M G Vaidya dead at 97

NAGPUR, 19 DECEMBER

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) ideologue and the organisation's first spokesperson Madhav Govind Vaidya died here on Saturday after a brief illness. He was 97. Vaidya, who had recovered from coronavirus infection, died at a private hospital in Nagpur, his grandson Vishnu Vaidya told. The last rites will be held on Sunday. Vaidya, who became a RSS volunteer almost two decades after the organisation was set up, had seen it all during his eight decade-old association with it: the three bans, isolation, internal conflicts over joining politics, ferment and resurgence, changing power equations with the BJP and the latter's storming to power at the Centre in 2014. ■ PTI

Mamata: Project under state finance dept bags 'Digital India award-2020'

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA 19 DECEMBER

A project under the state finance department has bagged the prestigious 'Digital India award-2020' for innovative initiatives in digital governance, announced chief minister Mamata Banerjee today.

President Ram Nath Kovind will present the award on 30 December.

Taking to Twitter, Miss Banerjee today tweeted: "It gives me immense pleasure to inform that 'e-Abgari' project of Excise Directorate, under the Finance Department, has been declared as WINNER of the prestigious DIGITAL INDIA AWARD-2020 for exemplary and innovative initiatives in the realm of Digital Governance."

ER to increase local train services in Sealdah Division from 21 December

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, 19 DECEMBER

The Eastern Railway is considering plans to increase the number of local train services in Sealdah Division from 21 December.

The decision, according to sources, has been taken considering the huge demand for suburban train services particularly in this division.

Notably, about 920 local trains were operated in this division in the pre-Covid times.

TENDER

Central Coalfields Limited
"A Miniratna Company"
(A Subsidiary of Coal India Limited)
NOTICE

All the tenders issued by CIL and its Subsidiaries for procurement of Goods, Works and Services are available on website of Coal India Ltd. www.coalindia.in / respective Subsidiary Company (CCL, www.centralcoalfIELDS.in), CIL e-procurement portal <https://coalindiatenders.nic.in> and Central Public Procurement Portal <https://eprocure.gov.in> in addition, procurement is also done through GeM portal <https://gem.gov.in>

Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER QUALITY CONTROL & PROCUREMENT DIVISION PHE JAL SHAKTI DEPARTMENT HMT, SRINAGAR. Phone: - 0194- 2496307, E-Mail:- xenmandp@gmail.com

Closure of e-NIT No: PHE/M&P/01 of 2020-21/ e-Tender Dated: 18-05-2020

Subject: - Closure of e-NIT for Supply of Alumina Ferric Grade-IV conforming to IS 299:2012 with upto date amendments.

Ref: 1. This office NIT No: PHE/M&P/01 of 2020-21/e-Tender Dated: 18-05-2020.

2. DPC meeting held on 13-11-2020 circulated vide No:JSD/Misc/16857-58 dated: 13-11-2020.

As per the DPC Decision in its meeting held on 13-11-2020 circulated vide No: JSD/Misc/16857-58 dated: 13-11-2020, the above referred e-NIT stands short closed.

**No: PHE/QC&PD/ 6155-58
Dated: 16-12-2020
No. DIPK-10655/20 Dated: 19-12-2020**

**Sd/- Executive Engineer,
QC&PD Jal Shakti HMT Srinagar**

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IMPORTANT NOTICE

In continuation to the Public Notice published in various newspapers on 15.12.2020 & 19.12.2020 regarding Cancellation/Partial Cancellation and Frequency

Reduction of special trains due to fog, it is notified for the information of rail passengers that special train no. 02549/02550 Kamakhya - Anand Vihar (T) - Kamakhya Express Special will run four days a week and remain Cancelled rest of three days of week as per following detail :-

Train No.	Train Name	Running Days	Dates of Resumption from originating station	Days of Cancellation	Dates of Cancellation from originating station
02549	Kamakhya - Anand Vihar (T) Express Special	Mon, Tue, Thu, Sat	21, 22, 24, 26, 28, 29, 31.12.2020, 02, 04, 05, 07, 09, 11, 12, 14, 16, 18, 19, 21, 23, 25, 26, 28 & 30.01.2021	Wed, Fri, Sun	20, 23, 25, 27, 30.12.20, 01, 03, 06, 08, 10, 13, 15, 17, 20, 22, 24, 27, 29 & 31.01.2021
02550	Anand Vihar (T) - Kamakhya Express Special	Wed, Thu, Sat, Mon	23, 24, 26, 28, 30, 31.12.2020, 02, 04, 06, 07, 09, 11, 13, 14, 16, 18, 20, 21, 23, 25, 27, 28, 30.01.2021 & 01.02.2021	Fri, Sun, Tue	22, 25, 27, 29.12.2020, 01, 03, 05, 08, 10, 12, 15, 17, 19, 22, 24, 26, 29, 31.01.21 & 02.02.21

Note: For any kind of information passengers are requested to contact Railway Enquiry No. 139 or visit Indian Railways' website: www.enquiry.indianrail.gov.in

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Democratic despots?

The mark of interrogation in the title of this comment is essential if only to iterate the counter-intuitive nature of the proposition propounded by the well-known scholar of democracy John Keane in his latest book, *The New Despotism*. In it, Keane explores how populist leaders across the globe are holding sway on their "subjects", and offers ideas for taking on the forces and structures representing these mainly democratic "populist despots". This is not unproblematic, to say the least. But that has not, predictably, stopped the global left-liberal establishment and its sub-continental groupies committed to identity politics and a communitarian worldview from heaping encomiums on Keane - which are well-deserved, given the book itself is a piece of high-quality scholarship from an academic at the top of his game. The problem is not so much with Keane, who obviously has a point of view and the analytical ability to go with it even if one does disagree with the elitism embedded in his argument, but with the armies of the semi-literate who will try and use his important intervention as a tool for institutional tinkering. This has happened once before with the Canadian political philosopher Will Kymlicka and his significant contribution to the multiculturalism-citizenship debate, with disastrous consequences. Many nations, in Western Europe in particular, which adopted his academic argument in institutionalising a multiculturalist (arguably illiberal) policy of state, have since been desperately rolling it back. For, the realisation struck home in Western capitals that policy makers had over-compensated in their rush to wash away the sins of colonialism, racism and all-round bigotry to a point where it got counter-productive in terms of individual rights, free speech and gender equality.

Already, an important review of Keane's book asserts "democracy and democratic institutions across the globe are under an eclipse... In countries as disparate as the Philippines, Turkey, Hungary, Poland, Brazil, Tajikistan, China, Russia, Vietnam and Saudi Arabia, one sees the attenuation of power-sharing institutions, lack of accountability, rampant electoral malpractices, the rising tide of corruption and cronyism, and systematic attempts to squelch dissent. That established democracies like the United States, India and the United Kingdom are also not immune to this malaise only underscores its severity."

First, there is the equalisation implicit in such a formulation, wherein a theocracy (Saudi Arabia), a totalitarian communist state (China) and a semi-democratic autocracy (Tajikistan) are put in the same box with democracies - from fledgling Poland and Brazil to mature and vibrant India, UK and USA. Keane attempts to explain this away with an intellectually innovative, if problematic, rejection of conventional terminology - 'authoritarianism', 'populism', 'totalitarianism', or 'dictatorship' - in analysing governance systems in relation to democracy. Instead, he offers the concept of 'the new despotism' at the core of which is the notion of 'voluntary servitude'. In Mickey Mouse terms, this is that old argument - change the people because they vote the wrong blokes in - dressed up in new, if meticulously stitched, clothes. Critics of Narendra Modi, Boris Johnson, Rodrigo Duterte et.al would do well to wait before uncorking the champagne.

Lahore's power-show

There were no winners or losers in last Sunday's meeting in Lahore, convened by the Opposition parties in Pakistan under the umbrella of the People's Democratic Movement. Ostensibly, the objective was to debunk the governance of Imran Khan. He has binned the meeting as "pathetic", an epithet that arguably applies as much to his prime ministerial term since July 2018. And yet, quite the most robust assertion was his rejection of the National Reconciliation Ordinance to save what he calls their "looted wealth". "All this," he said, "was just to blackmail me into giving them an NRO to protect themselves. Let me once again reiterate: I will never give an NRO," the Prime Minister said in his immediate response to the agitprop. The demand and rejection of the ordinance, as demanded by his detractors, is perhaps a pointer to the extent of the canker of corruption that has permeated the system. "Whatever future plans of further blackmail the PDM may have, my message is categorical. There will never be an NRO from my government no matter what tactics the looters devise," the premier said. The PDM had organised its sixth power-show at the historical Minar-i-Pakistan where the leadership of the alliance had lampooned the Prime Minister and his government. Well might the organisers call the meeting decisive and historic but it was neither. The Opposition threat to offer resignations en masse from the national assembly, and thus force fresh elections, appeared to have been abandoned. After occupying political centrestage for days, the issue was expected to come to a boil on Sunday. In the event, the Opposition appeared to have had second thoughts. The ruling class in Pakistan has been no stranger to such movements ever since Mohammed Ali Jinnah played the country's midwife in 1947. Sunday's performance by the Opposition was a feeble rerun to expose an ugly truth, indeed the core issue that Imran Khan hasn't categorically denied. On closer reflection, he has merely turned down the Opposition demand for a self-defence mechanism. No more and no less. The gathering incurred disdain from ministers as well. Planning Minister Asad Umar said: "In [a] speech in the opposition's Karachi gathering, [they] rejected Urdu as the national language, today in a speech Punjabis were declared as the partners of the English. Insulting Pakistan's institutions, repeating Indian narrative in speeches, violating the sanctity of Quaid's mausoleum; what path have they taken to save their stolen wealth?"

Love and jihad

Before 1955 when the Hindu Code Bill came into being, Hindu men could marry as many women as they liked, and some rich ones went on until they had even 13 or 14 wives all in the same house



There is a particular problem in a Hindu girl marrying a Muslim boy. At a young age few think of understanding each other's conception of marriage. The vigour of youth leads them to fall in love and possibly plunge into marriage. The Muslim method is *nikah* which according to the authoritative *Dictionary of Islam* (by Thomas Patrick Hughes and published by Rupa & Co) literally means conjunction or (in this context) usual sexual process (Webster Dictionary).

Legally, Hughes goes on, it implies a marriage contract. Unlike in Hinduism it is not a sacrament. Roman Catholicism does not permit even divorce. In Christianity, the churches view marriage as a union, divine and indivisible. Thus, Hindus and Christians look upon marriage as a union of permanence whereas in Islam it is a contract between two parties. For the husband, divorce or *talaq* is easy and a matter of waiting for three months after he speaks out his first notice to the wife.

The celebrated IAS couple Tina Dabi and Athar Amir have filed for divorce in Jaipur, two years after the two tied the knot. Their love story and marriage in 2018 had made national headlines. A video of IAS officer Tina Dabi has gone viral with a claim that she is married to a Muslim man and now she is separated from her husband after two years of marriage because her husband tortured her to wear a *burqa*, convert to Islam, read *namaz* and adopt Khan in her name.

Even without divorce, he can marry up to four women at a time and if divorces are given, there is no limit on the number of wives he can have in the course of his life. Hinduism and Christianity insist on only one wife. If therefore I had a daughter who wished to marry a Christian boy I would have no objection in principle. For a Muslim boy, I would have to explain the differences at length; enumerate the risks she would be taking.

Now to turn to the boy's side, if he is a faithful or *momin*, he should bring forth as many Muslims (children) into this world as possible. So that at one time there would be more Muslims than the others in the world.

The *Dictionary of Islam* by Hughes quotes the *Hadith* (The Traditions, the second holy book after the *Quran*) as quoting the Holy Prophet advising men to marry women who will love their husbands and be more prolific, for I wish you to be more numerous than any other people. That is why some fearful Hindus have used the word *jihad* in this context.

To be fair every Muslim young man is unlikely to know all this. He only knows that his family would have no objection to his marriage to a girl of any religion so long as she reads out the *kalimah*, from the *Quran*. Thereafter she is a virtual Muslim. Before 1955 when the Hindu

Code Bill came into being, Hindu men could marry as many women as they liked, and some rich ones went on until they had even 13 or 14 wives all in the same house. I have as a child visited two families, one in Junagadh and one is Kolkata, with the husband and two wives each. In both cases, the women seemed to get on well with each other. My own aunt was a second living wife. She was nearly a graduate and the husband a doctor and a very nice gentleman. This combined family of two mothers and six children lived together happily near Lonavala on the then Bombay-Poona highway.

Sri Ramchandra's father Dasaratha had three wives Kausalya, Sumitra and Kaikayee. Sri Ram did leave Sita after his return to Ayodhya from Lanka on the ground that he wanted to be seen to be upright. He did not

marry again.

Going back to Islamic practices, one is the *Mut'ah* marriage, contracted for a limited period, for a certain sum of money. Such marriages are still legal amongst the *Shi'ahs*. They establish the legality of *mut'ah* upon the traditions. *Mut'ah*, or "temporary marriages" are continual upon declaration and acceptance, as in the case of *nikah*, and the subject of the contract must be either a Muslim, a Christian, or a Jewess; she should be chaste, and due inquiries should be made into her conduct.

Some dower must be specified, and if there is a failure in this respect, the contract is void. There must also be a fixed period, but its extent is left entirely to the parties: it may be a year, a month, or a day, only some limit must be distinctly specified. In permitting these marriages a custom in old Arabia to assign to a traveler who became a guest for the night some female of the family.

Raja Ghazanfar Ali Khan, the first Pakistani High Commissioner to India, was invited to a particular annual party by the Maharajah of Bharatpur whose Divan he had been some years earlier. The rule of the occasion was that guests should be accompanied by their wives. Ghazanfar Ali's wife had not yet come to Delhi and therefore he contracted a *Mut'ah* marriage for the evening party.

Some Islamic countries have legislated to modernize their Sharia laws. For example, in Pakistan, the rule governing marriages is the Muslim Personal Law (The Sharia Application Act 1962). In this law, there are severe restrictions on polygamous marriages.

To quote section 6 of the law, no man, during the subsistence of an existing marriage,

shall, except with the previous permission in writing of the Arbitration Council, contract another marriage. An application for permission shall be submitted to the Chairman and shall state the reasons for the proposed marriage, and whether the consent of the existing wife or wives has been obtained thereto.

On receipt of the application, the Chairman shall ask the applicant and his existing wife or wives. The Arbitration Council so constituted, may, if satisfied that the proposed marriage is necessary and just, grant permission. Clearly the sharia has been subjected to an amendment. Its crux is that a no-objection clearance is essential from the existing wife.

Malaysia, which too is predominantly Muslim, with the *sharia* governing marriage, divorce and succession, has also placed restrictions. A man cannot marry a second wife unless the first wife consents, and further, the first wife must fill in a no-objection form.

In Tunisia, by a legislation enacted in 1956, polygamy was prohibited and made a criminal offence. The Syrian Law of Personal Status of 1953 made the permission for a second marriage dependent on the proved ability of the husband to support a second wife while the Iraqi law of 1959 said that there should be some "lawful benefit" involved. In the case of Egypt, a bill which aims at restricting polygamy and the right of the husband unilaterally to repudiate the first wife, was passed in 1962. This information is based on *An Introduction to Islamic Law* by Joseph Schacht, Universal Law Publishing Company, Delhi, 1997.

Justice MC Chagla, in his autobiography, *Roses in December*, had occasion to write: "I am horrified to find that in my country, while monogamy has been made the law for the Hindus, Muslims can still indulge in the luxury of polygamy. It is an insult to womanhood; and I resent this discrimination between Muslim women and Hindu women".

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ASIAN VOICES

The Great Conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn

On 21 December, the first day of winter this year, the two gaseous giants in the solar system - Jupiter and Saturn - will put up a spectacular display in the evening sky. They will be so close that they will appear, from our perspective, to overlap completely, creating a rare "double planet" effect. However, while they may appear to the naked eye extremely close, within 0.1 degree of each other, in reality, they are separated by more than 400 million miles. To visualise this distance, a 0.1 degree separation is about the thickness of a dime held at arm's length. This celestial synchronisation, also referred to as the "Christmas Star," has not occurred in nearly 800 years. Last time they were so close together was on March 4, 1226.

The spectacle is a curious effect of their orbits around the Sun. Since Jupiter takes 11.9 years to circle the Sun and Saturn 29.5 years, the faster moving Jupiter catches up with the slower moving Saturn and overtakes it roughly every 20 years. Astronomers call the moment of overtaking "Great Conjunction." At conjunction, separation between two objects in the sky as viewed from Earth is minimum. Moreover, at great conjunction, Earth, Jupiter and Saturn align themselves along a straight line so as to make the two Jovian planets appear very close together. Great conjunctions are rare though because more often than not, Earth is not aligned along a straight line with Saturn and Jupiter when they are at conjunction. The duo will then

The Daily Star
appear to be separated by a few degrees. Furthermore, the event can happen while the Sun is up blocking the conjunction from view. Indeed, during the last great conjunction on May 31, 2000, the planets never came anywhere as close together as they will this month. Besides, we could not see the overlap because the alignment occurred too close to the Sun and thus was lost in the glare of the twilight. The same was true the time before, in December of 1980. This time around, after sunset on Monday, December 21, which is also the winter solstice, Jupiter and Saturn will appear to the unaided eye as a single bright object low in the southwestern sky.

This dazzling display of two celestial objects kissing each other on the longest night of the year can be seen from everywhere in the world. It will become visible in Bangladesh soon after sunset but only for a short time. The conjoined planets will sink below the western horizon about an hour later. Also, the further north viewers are, the less time they will have to catch a glimpse of this astronomical event. How can we spot the planets with naked eye? In the weeks leading up to the great conjunction, Saturn will be to the upper left of Jupiter, slowly dancing toward Jupiter.

PERSONAL TRADE

WANTED old Rolex, Omega watches and Kashmiri Jamewar shawls with embroidery work. Contact: 9007364736

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

editor@thestatesman.com

Maoists of Calcutta in the Sixties

SIR, Isolated from the Revolution Theology of the Roman Catholic Church in the 1960s, in Central America, and Latin America, the Maoists of Calcutta in the 1960, revolutionized the thinking pattern in West Bengal. Terms like "communism", "Marx and Lenin" and "farmers rights" which were earlier swear words, gained widespread social and political acceptance. A massive degree of social and political consciousness led to the sweeping Left Front victories in the national level (New Delhi). Ajay Sinha (IAS, 1966 batch) was packed off to Agartala, when the then chief minister Siddhartha Ray, discovered that he possessed the best library on Marxist literature. He returned to the West Bengal cadre, only after a change of government at the state level, and at the nation-

al level in 1977. Dipanjan Roy Chowdhuri (ex-St. James School, Calcutta) was an outstanding scholar. He stood first in the Cambridge School Certificate "O" Level in West Bengal, and also in the all-India list in 1960. Stirring up students' politics along with Asim Chatterjee, he was responsible for keeping Presidency College closed in 1966-67, for the entire academic year. Sumit Bhaduri (ex-Hindu School, College Street, Calcutta) and a Maoist activist attained a distinguished First Class in B.Sc Chemistry Hons, from Presidency College in 1968. Dipanjan attained a distinguished First Class in B.Sc Physics Hons from Presidency in 1964. With special authorization from the state government, the then Inspector General of Police, Ranjit Gupta, ensured that the brilliant students Dipanjan and Sumit, were driven in police Black Maria vehicles from Presidency jail to Dum Dum Airport, and flown to London for higher studies. Dipanjan completed his doctorate in Physics from London University, in record time and Sumit completed his Tripos in Chemistry from Cambridge University. Returning from London in 1974, Dipanjan joined academics, and towards the end of

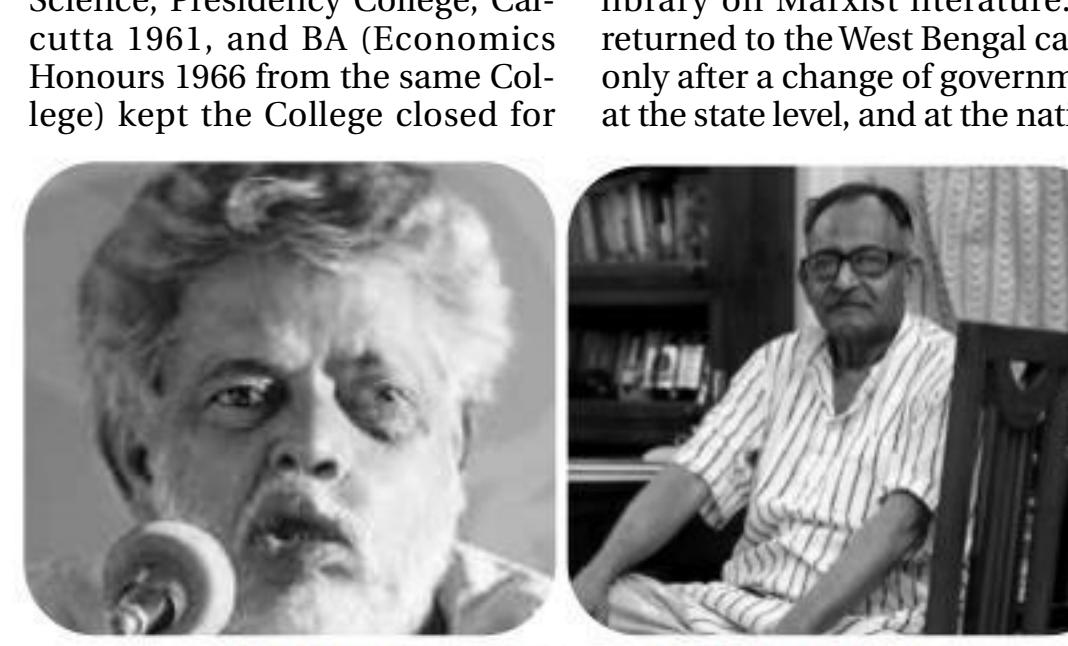
TARGETING HATE

SIR, Compliments to *The Statesman* for publishing the brilliant article, "Targeting Love", by Govind Bhattacharjee (17 December). The beauty of our nation lies in its unity in diversity. Over decades, India has showcased to the world the true meaning of secularism. Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Jains, Christians, Buddhists, etc., have been living in absolute peace and harmony. The essence of brotherhood has always been an asset of our great country. There are not many countries in Asia which are as multi-cultural as India, and we citizens of this great land have always been proud of this fact. However, time and again several efforts have been made by opportunistic people and institutions to disturb and destabilise this atmosphere of love and unity. The recently passed Uttar Pradesh Unlawful Religious Conversion Prohibition Ordinance, 2020, is one such draconian law which is reflective of such efforts. This is clearly a politically motivated move by the Uttar Pradesh government to target one particular community. The Prime Minister talks about the ideology and philosophy of unity propagated by Mahatma Gandhi and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, however does not implement it practically.

Yours, etc., Anupam Neogi, Kolkata, 17 December.

the 1980s, returned to Presidency College, as professor of Physics. He remained associated with social activist fora like the Association for Democratic Rights. Sumit remained in England with the corporate world. Discovering arms and bombs in Presidency College, Siddhartha Ray the then chief minister shut the college down in 1971-72, for an entire academic year. The college was converted to a Central Reserve Police Force camp. Aspirations for Revolution will always be in the air. The Maoists were disappointed when they realized that Indian security forces could reach anywhere in India, within two hours of any "prairie fire". One sympathizer, without any participation in any active action for the Maoists, is immersed in viewing renowned Cinema and in the study of the methods of Cinema. In a sudden heart attack, Dipanjan Ray Chowdhuri died at his South Kolkata residence on 23 October, 2020.

Yours, etc., Abhijit Ghosh Dastidar, Kolkata, 17 December.



TASNEEM SIDDIQUI

16 December - the blackest day in Pakistan's history - has come and gone. There was not even a token remembrance of this day of shame at the national level in Pakistan. Only a couple of seminars were arranged by some research institutes and NGOs where learned speakers even after 50 years, did not unequivocally condemn the military action/genocide and the shameful surrender by Pakistani forces.

They instead indulged in polemics of numbers and the role India played in dismembering the country. Does it matter now whether the number of killed was 35,000 or a million, or 'only' 5,000 women were raped and not 100,000? India - our declared enemy No. 1 - did what it had to do in a situation created by our paranoid rulers.

They did not have the courage to tell the audience that there would have been no Pakistan if Bengalis, represented by Maulvi Fazlul Haq had not supported the Lahore Resolution in 1940, and if SH Suhrawardy had refused to accept the 'typographical' error ('state instead of states') in 1946 in the AIML meeting in Delhi.

They also did not tell the audience that the same Suhrawardy (who was the Prime Minister of Bengal till 14 August 1947 and enjoyed huge popularity), was unseated from the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan on flimsy grounds and was almost declared persona non grata.

They also did not have the courage to say that from day one, the bureaucratic-military alliance, dominated by Muhamjirs and Punjabis, treated East Pakistanis as second-class citizens, and their aspirations and expectations as part of an independent nation, were spurned with contempt. Whether it was their legitimate share in political power, allocation of resources, national integration, language or culture, they felt a sense of deprivation from the very beginning.

Learned Pakistani speakers also did not tell the audience that East Bengali's love for Pakistan was more profound than any other province because they were the most exploited people, firstly at the hands of the rapacious East India Company, who after the Battle of Plassey, reduced prosperous Bengal to penury, and secondly by landlords and business interests, who had initially partnered

A Pakistani introspects on birth of Bangladesh

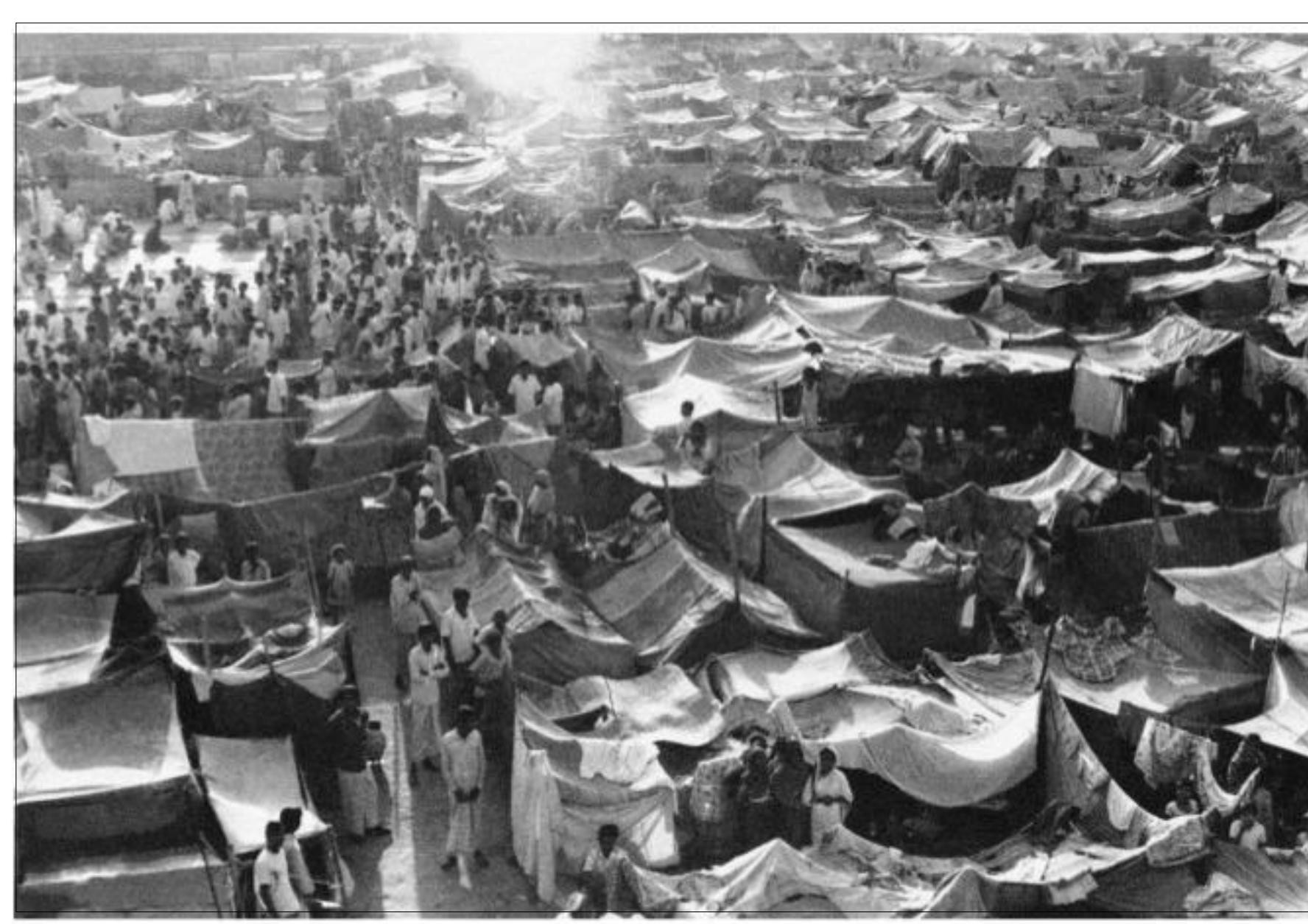
with Britishers and later on continued loot and plunder on their own.

It was unfortunate that most (West) Pakistanis believed that Bengalis were lesser Muslims as their culture and language was dominated by Hinduism, and Ayub Khan had the guts to say that they "have all the inhibitions of downtrodden races". The obnoxious propaganda that the debacle of 1971 took place because Hindu teachers had brainwashed the Bengali youth still persists. It was also unfortunate, that with few exceptions, no voices were raised by West Pakistani leaders or intelligentsia against the military action, and the destruction which came in its wake. As a matter of fact, most of them were in cahoots with the Pakistan army.

Now let us come to another important point. Is it not a fact that from the mid-1950s West Pakistani ruling elite started considering the eastern part as a liability and threat to their rule? Initially they exploited the foreign exchange earned through jute export, but then thought that rampant poverty and absence of infrastructure in Bengal would require huge resources which would hamper the progress of the Western wing.

They also realized that sooner or later a constitution would be framed, followed by general elections. Since the eastern wing had 55 per cent of the then population, the national assembly and federal government would naturally be dominated by them. What happened between August 1947 and December 1971 is a sad story of power play, shenanigans, intrigues and betrayals to stop dominance of East Pakistanis in national politics.

Most Pakistani treat Ayub Khan's rule as the 'golden period'. In mid-sixties, even acclaimed economists had declared Pakistan as a 'model of development' for third world countries. But it is ironic that in 1971, the same people found that Bangladesh was a basket case. And a basket case it was. Over 40 million people crammed in 54,000 square miles, East Bengal being a deltaic country had a history of natural disasters i.e. floods and cyclones, result-



ing in food shortages and frequent famines. Over-population, poverty, disease, hunger and lack of infrastructure was a daunting challenge for any government.

Initially, Bangladesh faced the twin-menace of political and economic instability as well. It was not easy for a poor country to come out of the trauma of a costly war of 'liberation'. To top it all there were problems of military interventions, poor governance, institutional vacuum, corruption and polarization in society.

Given all these factors, these difficulties looked unsurmountable, but from 1980s onwards growth picked up. Initially it was lacklustre, but once it was on track, there was no looking back. Since the beginning of the new millennium, Bangladesh's growth momentum has not declined. To the surprise of many, its economy grew 8 per cent in the past fiscal year even surpassing those of India and China. Its

exports have touched \$40 billion and foreign exchange reserves are impressive. In one of his recent articles, Prof SM Naseem of Quaid-e-Azam University has pointed out that apart from steady GDP growth, Bangladesh has achieved significantly higher progress in terms of social indicators. As a matter of fact, given its level of economic development, Bangladesh has over-performed in social development. Special mention needs to be made about the population's growth rate of 1.1 per cent per year, and rise in average life expectancy surpassing those of India and Pakistan by 4 and 6 years respectively.

Compared to Bangladesh, where does Pakistan stand today? After three or four superficial cycles of high growth, we are back to square one. This year if we achieve a GDP growth rate of 1.5-2 per cent, it will be a miracle. Our exports remain stagnant at \$25 billion. Our foreign

and domestic debts have crossed all limits and foreign exchange reserves are down to \$15 billion.

Having a population growth of 2.1 per cent and youth bulge of 60 per cent, we are sitting on a demographic time bomb. In HDI, we are at serial number 140. Whether it is routine immunization, infant mortality, gender balance in primary and secondary education or sanitation, we are almost at the bottom and regressing.

A question can be asked: if Bangladesh had remained a part of Pakistan could it have become a 'development surprise' in a generation's lifetime, or would it have remained as under-developed as most parts of Pakistan are even after 73 years of independence?

The writer is a retired Pakistani civil servant who had served in erstwhile East Pakistan and as Chief Secretary of Sindh. He is Chairman of Salan - Action Research for Shelter, Karachi.

NOW AND AGAIN

Signs of the times

SHOVANLAL CHAKRABORTY

Recently the parks in our locality have opened up once again. People who had been confined to their homes have restarted their routine walks, and can be seen enjoying the lush foliage and the fresh breeze. The only difference is that most of them wear masks and cannot identify those they cross. This has led to a new game of 'mask charades' - a method of communication between masked morning walkers.

If the person crossing looks like the old uncle you have not seen for a long time, you bow a bit and do a half-hearted dive for the feet, without breaking your stride if possible. This translates to mean "due respect Uncle!" On the other hand, if it's a young friend you met every evening for tea, the signal is a quick thumbs up. Done with sufficient energy, it communicates the hopeful "Aal izz well".

Older aunties shuffling along in tight salwar suits, shrug their shoulders and raise their eyes heavenwards while sighing dramatically as if to say "God knows when this blessed virus will let us have a kitty party again!" Lovers meeting on a park bench, maintain a safe distance and flutter their eyelashes surreptitiously, hoping that vigilant aunties will not catch the undercurrents of romance being rekindled.

Some friends meeting after ages, flap their elbows outwards. Yet others touch their index fingers to thumbs to communicate the universal "looking good" sign. A brief wave of the hand or a crinkling of the eyes is sometimes the code to indicate recognition and a hello. One friendly neighbour who used to flash a toothy smile as he crossed after every round, now touches his palm to his heart in a gesture of social solidarity.

The smiles, the grimaces and the words are all hidden - and we have evolved into a new means of communication.

In the mid-eighties the celebrated thespian Shambhu Mitra used to conduct a workshop on drama in Kolkata Doordarshan. He used to show photos of various expressive eyes to teach communication on stage. Who knew then that those teachings would come in handy in daily life.

100 YEARS AGO

HOWRAH SANITATION

To The Editor Of The Statesman

SIR, - The mether-service in Howrah is now in complete suspension and the sufferings of the people may be better imagined than described. The other day in response to an application by the ratepayers for a hydrant in the locality of Mirpara Lane, from the central part of which the existing hydrants are at a distance of about a quarter of a mile, the Deputy Chairman and the Engineer intimated that for want of funds the prayer could not be granted; although it was brought to their notice that people of the locality die in numbers of cholera and other epidemics simply because they are obliged to use filthy tank water. I suggest that an expert be deputed by the Government to secure funds by curtailing unnecessary expenditure and by reducing the number of supervising officers who are believed to be in excess in proportion to mathers the number of whom are urgently required to be increased at once.

P.C. SAMANTA.

Salkhia.

CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS DINNER

To The Editor Of The Statesman

SIR, - The children's Christmas cheer comes but once a year; when it does approach, you are always good enough to aid the effort by inserting in The Statesman an appeal on behalf of "The Union Chapel Poor Children's Christmas Dinner Fund." The friends of Union Chapel again purpose providing a Free Christmas Dinner for about 500 needy children outside their own circle. The dinner will take place in the Hall adjoining the said Church on Monday afternoon next. A really good spread and an appropriate programme of entertainments will be provided. The co-operation of the benevolent is heartily solicited. Subscriptions in aid of the object will be sincerely appreciated. Needy children are selected regardless of creed or denomination. Generous friends like to do something at this season to brighten the lot of the poor Calcutta children during Christmas.

J.C. EASTERBROOK.

Pastor, The Manse,

Dhurrumtollah Street.

STIPENDS OF ADDITIONAL CLERGY

To The Editor Of The Statesman

SIR, - The question of the pay of the Additional Clergy appears most serious, inasmuch as the Rev. W.H.G. Holmes points out in his letter that subscribers to the Fund have dwindled down to about a dozen, and that to meet responsibilities it has become necessary to draw on invested savings. This is indeed appalling. Here are clergy of the Additional Clergy Society recruited chiefly from England, living under the same conditions and with the same duties to perform, as their fellow workmen, the Government Chaplains on the Establishment. The former after nineteen years' service receive Rs 400, and the latter Rs 1,300. What a contrast, and why? Surely this calls for some reform, and urgent immediate action. To plead for subscriptions from the public is all very well, and it would solve the question if an amount could be raised sufficient to bring the pay of the Additional Clergy on a level with Government Chaplains.

A LAYMAN.

POLITICAL DIARY | KALYANI SHANKAR

Decisive phase for the Congress



Will the New Year bring cheer to the 135-year-old Congress Party? With elections scheduled in the next few months, Congress chief Sonia Gandhi seems to have set the ball in motion by trying to set her house in order.

The Congress not only has to pull up its socks but also deal with indiscipline and factionalism, and unite leaders. Facing a leadership crisis with two reluctant leaders at the top - Sonia Gandhi and her son, Rahul Gandhi - the party is going through its worst-ever internal crisis.

So Sonia has begun a weeklong exercise by meeting some of the

leaders, including the dissidents this week. The timing of the meetings is significant as it comes amidst a churn in the party over the leadership issue and the growing number of dissidents.

The first thing is to assuage the feelings of dissidents. She must be feeling the loss of her close aide Ahmed Patel who was a bridge between her and the party. Now former Madhya Pradesh chief minister Kamal Nath seems to have taken the initiative to bring the dissidents and Mrs. Gandhi face to face.

Eyebrows were raised at the letter written by 23 leaders in August to the party chief seeking change. Signatories included senior leaders like Ghulam Nabi Azad, Anand Sharma and Bhupender Hooda. Former minister Kapil Sibal, who was one of the 23, publicly criticised the party leadership, saying, "The time for introspection is over". Later, another senior Congress ex-minister P. Chidambaram, too, suggested strengthening the party core.

Among the dissenters, Sonia plans to meet the Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha, Ghulam Nabi Azad, Deputy Leader Anand Sharma, former Haryana Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda, former Maharashtra Chief Minister Prithviraj Chavan and former Union Minister Shashi Tharoor. Former Finance Minister P. Chidambaram, Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot and Madhya Pradesh Congress chief Kamal Nath are also among the invitees. However, she may need a larger conclave, as were held at Pachmarhi or Shimla in the past. The recent Bihar Assembly polls and the high-profile Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation polls where the Congress performed poorly as compared to the BJP have necessitated a fresh strategy.

The second reason is upcoming Assembly polls to five states - Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Assam and Puducherry. The Congress is ruling only Puducherry. The party is now reduced to third or fourth position while the BJP has moved up to the second position in West Bengal and has captured power in Assam. Also, the other parties are ahead in poll readiness.

The third reason is that Sonia is in a hurry to hand the party back to her son Rahul, as her health does not permit her long hours of work.

One section of the party is keen that Rahul Gandhi takes back the reins of the party soon. But before that,

she must ensure no dissident voices are allowed against the family.

Rahul seems to be happy about running the party without responsibility and the dissidents want somebody else to take charge if he is not keen.

With hardly a few months left,

the Congress has to sort out many things in poll-bound states.

It has firmed up an alliance with the DMK and its allies in Tamil Nadu. But in Kerala going by the recent civic body polls where the ruling combine LDF has done much better than the Con-

gress-led UDF, the party has to chalk out a new strategy. The UDF and the LDF alternate in power in Kerala and it is the turn of the UDF now. As for Assam, the position with alliances is still not clear. After the demise of former chief minister Tarun Gogoi recently, there is no tall Congress leader in Assam.

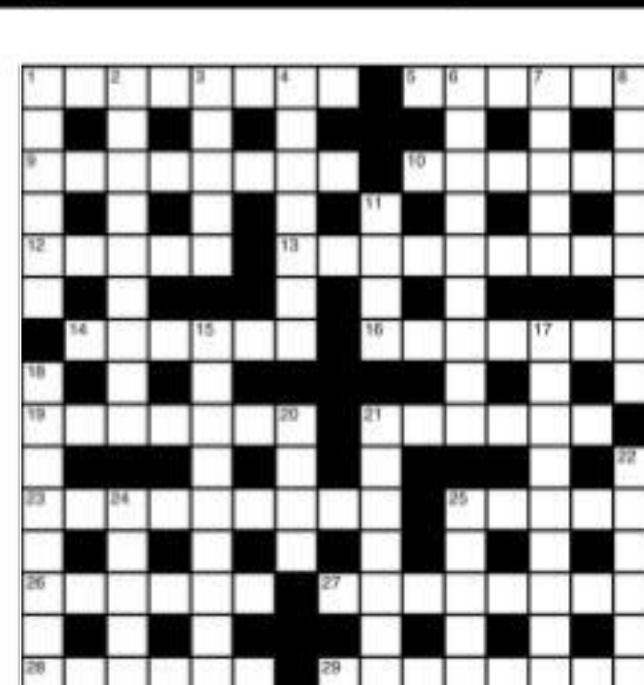
In West Bengal, the fight is between the ruling Trinamool Congress and the BJP. The Congress has tied up with the CPI-M but how effective the combine will be is not known. Both parties had earlier ruled the state but Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has finished them since 2011. The BJP has now become the main opposition party.

Sonia and Rahul have been declaring after every poll defeat that the party needs to be reorganized but so far there have been no results. The fight between the old guard loyal to Sonia Gandhi and the Young Turks loyal to Rahul Gandhi continues. The party has lost touch with the grass roots and is living on its past glory. Some leaders want the Gandhis to bow out.

Opposition parties where the regional satraps dominate are thinking of forming a federal front minus the Congress. So Congress is getting more and more isolated. The satraps are looking to Nationalist Congress Party chief Sharad Pawar for guidance.

With all these internal as well as external troubles, it is time Sonia consults senior party leaders and gets them on her side as it is time for action. The party needs to reflect and reform - with or without the Gandhis.

CROSSWORD



SOLUTION FOR 13 DECEMBER

ACROSS

- 1 Likable general speaking after pressure to confess (8)
- 5 Boss at satellite TV production company (6)
- 9 Native American back in factory showing peevish impatience (8)
- 10 Culmination of attempt to pursue secretary brought about by drugs (6)
- 12 Less widely known rule on poison copper ignored (5)
- 13 Strongly criticise erotica produced by former partner (9)
- 14 Two bodies of water both short of fish (6)

16 Tug at boot with wife cracking up (7)

- 19 Check company books with Rob endlessly (7)
- 21 Bronwen regularly invading my secret place (6)
- 23 A random charge on port (9)
- 25 Told to go in conversation with guide (5)
- 26 Exhaust horse during show (6)
- 27 Brilliant odds against Close wearing a hat (8)
- 28 Not as strict when that's accepted by Her Maj (6)
- 29 Extremely stylish suit (2,6)

DOWN

- 1 Lichtenstein espoused it as
- 3 Schoolboy possibly rejecting award from The Sun (5)
- 4 Grandma eager to find a hard-wearing fabric (7)
- 6 Kitty turned up with an artist on the highest standing (3-6)
- 7 Follow most of Chinese revolutionary's code of principles (5)
- 8 Cast to repeat light-hearted theatrical production (8)

an interest outside work (3,3)

- 2 Start with money to maintain Anglesey's principal harbour (9)
- 3 Schoolboy possibly rejecting award from The Sun (5)
- 4 Grandma eager to find a hard-wearing fabric (7)
- 6 Kitty turned up with an artist on the highest standing (3-6)
- 7 Follow most of Chinese revolutionary's code of principles (5)
- 8 Cast to repeat light-hearted theatrical production (8)

11 Second bed tax (4)

- 15 Managed to replace filter (9)
- 17 Began to admit part in allowing free expressions of opinion (4-5)
- 18 Scratch from game (8)
- 20 Helping to make Bale analogy unproductive (4)
- 21 Lower the reputation of revolutionary American writer (7)
- 22 On bad terms with Dorothy over splitting bills (2,4)
- 24 Imprisons Catholic girl heartlessly (5)
- 25 Difficult actress runs away (5)

NO 28170

NOTE: Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required. (By arrangement with The Independent, London)



India can achieve double-digit growth through a healthy dose of digital services and manufacturing base expansion

ANURAG SINGH THAKUR
UNION MINISTER

THUMBNAILS

Amazon SBD: E-commerce major Amazon India on Saturday said over 55,000 SMBs, artisans, weavers and women entrepreneurs in the country received an order during its Small Business Day (SBD) event. Held on 12 December, the Small Business Day event has seen the "highest ever participation and biggest ever opening" for its Small and Medium Business (SMBs) sellers, a statement said. "...over 55,000 SMBs, artisans, weavers and women entrepreneurs from over 4,000 pin codes across the country received an order. 63 per cent of these sellers were from non-metro cities like Kulu (Himachal Pradesh), Kamrup (Assam), Malappuram (Kerala), and Chandrapur (Maharashtra)," it added.

PTI

IIFL Fin-ICICI Bank pact: IIFL Finance on Saturday said its home loan subsidiary has tied up with ICICI Bank to provide affordable housing and MSME loans. "IIFL Home Finance Ltd...and ICICI Bank have entered into a sourcing and servicing arrangement to partner in extending credit to the affordable housing loans & MSME loans (loan against property)," IIFL Finance said in a regulatory filing. Under the tie-up, IIFL Home will originate and service customers through the entire loan life-cycle including sourcing, documentation, collection and loan servicing and in turn, ICICI Bank will provide funding to these customers, the company added.

PTI

MATR Tech IPO: MATR Technologies, a precision engineering solutions company, has filed preliminary papers with capital markets regulator Sebi to raise an estimated Rs 600-650 crore through an initial share-sale. The IPO comprises fresh issuance of up to 40 lakh shares and an offer for sale of up to 82,24,270 shares from promoter and other existing shareholders, according to draft herring prospectus. Proceeds from the fresh issue will be used to repay debt, fund long-term working capital requirements besides attending to general corporate purpose. According to market sources, the IPO is estimated to fetch Rs 600-650 crore.

PTI

IDBI Bank QIP: IDBI Bank has raised Rs 1,435 crore through an issue of equity shares to 44 qualified institutional investors, according to a regulatory filing. The bank had targeted to raise Rs 2,000 crore (base size Rs 1,000 crore and green-shoe option of Rs 1,000 crore) through the QIP issue at a floor price of up to 40 lakh shares and an offer for sale of up to 82,24,270 shares from promoter and other existing shareholders, according to draft herring prospectus. Proceeds from the fresh issue will be used to repay debt, fund long-term working capital requirements besides attending to general corporate purpose. According to market sources, the IPO is estimated to fetch Rs 600-650 crore.

PTI

iPhone maker Wistron admits mistake, removes India V-P

Apple puts Wistron on probation, it won't get new biz from Apple before corrective actions are taken

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 19 DECEMBER

Apple's contract manufacturer Wistron on Saturday removed its vice-president Vincent Lee, who was heading operations in India after finding fault in the process of wage payment during its internal investigation.

The Taiwanese electronics services major admitted the mistakes at its end and apologised to the workers.

"We are removing the vice-president who oversees our business in India. We are also enhancing our processes and restructuring our teams to ensure these issues cannot happen again," Wistron said in a statement.

Meanwhile, Apple said that it has placed Wistron on probation and it will not receive any new business from the US-based company before corrective actions are completed. "Apple employees and independent auditors hired by Apple have been working around the clock to investigate the issues which occurred at Wistron's Narasapura facility," Apple said in a statement.

It added that while these investigations are ongoing, preliminary findings indicate violations of its supplier code of conduct by failing to implement proper working hour management processes that led to payment delays for some workers in October and November.

"As always, our focus is on



on probation and it will not receive any new business from the US-based company before corrective actions are completed

making sure everyone in our supply chain is protected and treated with dignity and respect. We are very disappointed and taking immediate steps to address these issues," Apple said.

On Monday, Apple had said it was undertaking a detailed investigation following the violent incident at its supplier Wistron's Narasapura facility (in Kolar district) in Karnataka last week.

Workers at Wistron Corporation's manufacturing facility in Narasapura Industrial Area in Kolar district near Bengaluru went on rampage last week over non-payment of their wages.

Political parties in Karnataka have sought a thorough probe into the violence at Wistron's iPhone manufacturing plant in Kolar district as they expressed concerns about its possible impact on the investment friendly image of the state.

The safety and wellbeing of our team members is always our top priority and a core value for everyone at Wistron. Since the unfortunate events at our Narasapura facility, we have been investigating and have found that some workers were not paid correctly, or on time.

"We deeply regret this and apologise to all of our workers. This is a new facility and we recognise that we made mistakes as we expanded," the statement said.

Industry bodies India Cellular and Electronics Association and ELCINA backed

Wistron and called for those who went on rampage at the factory.

"Some of the processes we put in place to manage labour agencies and payments need to be strengthened and upgraded. We are taking immediate action to correct this, including disciplinary action," Wistron said. Wistron has increased its headcount from 2,000 in middle of this year to around 9,000 recently.

"Our top priority is to ensure all workers are fully compensated immediately and we are working hard to achieve that," Wistron said.

The company has established an employee assistance programme for workers at the facility. We also set up a 24-hour grievance hotline in Kannada, Telugu, Tamil, Hindi and English to ensure all workers can voice any concerns they may have anonymously.

"We are deeply committed to our business and employees in India. We are working diligently on corrective actions to ensure this does not happen again," Wistron said.

account was declared as fraud and reported to the RBI on 10 February 2020.

Canara Bank has made 100 percent provision for this account as per the prescribed prudential norms. The company has already been declared as wilful default on 26 December 2018 by our bank," it said.

Out of Rs 7,926 crore fraud amount appearing in the press note, the amount of lending made by all the 14 consortium members is Rs 4,765.70 crore, it added.

Remaining amount was lent under multiple banking arrangement, Canara Bank added. "Out of this, exposure of Canara Bank is Rs 678.28 crore only. The case was referred to NCLT and was admitted by NCLT, Hyderabad on 10 October 2018. The company is under the process of liquidation," it said further.

The company was engaged in building infrastructure across various sectors including ports, bridges, oil and gas, power and mining, as per its website that also informs about the ongoing liquidation process.

Canara Bank exposure to Transstroy India at ₹678 crore

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 19 DECEMBER

State-run Canara Bank today said its exposure to Transstroy India Ltd is over Rs 678 crore under a consortium lending arrangement and the borrower was declared as a wilful defaulter earlier in 2018. The company is under the process of liquidation, it said.

In a clarification, Canara Bank said the bank's exposure to the Transstroy India is of Rs 678.28 crore contrary to news claiming it to be an alleged fraud of Rs 7,926 crore.

"In this regard, it is clarified that the company was enjoying limits from various banks under multiple banking arrangement from 2001. Subsequently, a consortium with Canara Bank as leader with 13 other banks was formed in 2013 and the total limit sanctioned was Rs 4,765.70 crore and the share of Canara Bank is only Rs 678.28 crore," it said in a regulatory filing.

Fieo suggestions to boost outbound shipments

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 19 DECEMBER



the ministry of commerce is "very" small and there is a need to create an export development fund with a corpus of 0.5 per cent of the country's exports for helping the MSME.

He also said that Indian companies winning contracts under global tender may be accorded deemed exports status, since they substitute direct import which would have taken place if the contract had been won by a foreign supplier.

"Deemed export status would enhance the competitiveness of Indian industry vis-à-vis foreign suppliers as the former would enjoy certain tax-related benefits," Saraf said.

The government may consider introducing a scheme in line with Sabka Vishwas (Legacy Dispute Resolution) Scheme, 2019 to resolve all disputes relating to customs and DGFT (Directorate General of Foreign Trade).

Italian confectionery major Ferrero to buy Eat Natural

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 19 DECEMBER



Italy-based global confectionery major Ferrero Group has announced that it will acquire Eat Natural, the maker of high-quality cereal bars, toasted muesli and granola.

The value of the deal has not been disclosed.

Eat Natural, a British cereal bars maker was created 23 years ago by two friends of the Indian origin - Preet Grewal and Praveen Vijn. It has now grown considerably in the healthier snacking segment.

On 17 December, Ferrero Group announced that it will enter into a definitive agreement to acquire Eat Natural.

The deal is expected to close in the coming months, said a joint statement adding that the transaction is subject to customary closing conditions and regulatory approvals.

As part of the transaction, Ferrero Group will take over Eat Natural's production facilities in Halstead, UK, and plans to retain the management and the employees of the businesses.

"Eat Natural is an excellent strategic fit for the Ferrero Group as we continue to expand our overall footprint and product offerings into the healthier snacking market segment," Ferrero Group executive chairman Giovanni Ferrero said.

Eat Natural co-founder Praveen Vijn said "Ferrero is a fabulous company and we are proud that they would like us to be part of their family. We have many shared ethics, and both have a vision to make healthier snacking available for everyone."

Ferrero, with a consolidated turnover of over 11.4 billion euros, is amongst the market leaders of the sweet packaged foods market worldwide. It is the producer of many iconic brands, including Nutella, Ferrero Rocher, Tic Tac, Kinder and Raffaello, which are sold in over 170 countries.

Eat Natural employs over 300 people making both fruit & nut bars and cereals in their Makery' in Halstead, Essex. Eat Natural is a leading brand in the UK, where it is available in all major supermarkets, health stores, corner shops and petrol stations.

Honda stops production at Greater Noida

NEW DELHI, 19 DECEMBER

Honda Cars India Ltd (HCIL) has decided to pull the plug on production at its Greater Noida plant in Uttar Pradesh, sources said today.

The automaker, which is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Japanese Honda Motor Co, had set up the Greater Noida plant in 1997.

Industry sources said the plant would, however, continue to house the company's corporate head office, spare parts division and research and development (R&D) centre among other functions.

Meanwhile, the company declined to comment on the matter. The automaker would now rely only on its Tapukara facility in Rajasthan to roll out its entire product range in the country, sources added.

HCIL had earlier this year initiated a voluntary retirement scheme (VRS) for its manufacturing line associates at the plant.

PTI

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PTI

IndiGrid to acquire two projects from FRV Solar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 19 DECEMBER

Industry chamber PHDCCI suggested a 10-pronged strategy in pre-Budget consultations with finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman with focus on refuelling consumption and demand and encouraging private investments to attain higher economic growth.

"At this juncture, we suggest capping the personal income tax rates at 25 per cent with no exemptions. This will increase the level of compliance and willingly get more tax-payers in the tax base," PHDCCI president Sanjay Aggarwal said in a statement

of infrastructure investments, strengthening MSMEs, reducing the costs of doing business, ease of doing exports, increasing tax-to-GDP ratio, focus on agriculture & rural sector and effective reforms in social infrastructure.

Refuelling of consumption demand must be the theme of the Union Budget 2021-22 to have a multiplier effect on production possibilities, capex expansion, private investments and employment creation, said the industry body.

It argued that enhanced consumption expenditure will ramp up capital expenditure, attract private investments and create employment for the youth.

Economy has exhibited early signs of recovery in the recent months. However, to sustain the momentum, there

is a need to ensure a great support to demand creation with lower interest rates for consumers and businesses, lesser compliances for MSMEs vis-à-vis ease of doing business at the ground level and a lower tax regime to increase the personal disposable income, said Aggarwal.

To rejuvenate the aggregate demand in the economy, infrastructure investments will give a multiplier effect. The robust growth of infrastructure is the key ingredient to realise the vision to become Aatmanirbhar Bharat, he added.

The chamber has also suggested that government should consider raising investment funding for the National Infrastructure Pipeline through overseas market borrowings by issuance of overseas bonds through an SPV that could act as a mega development financial institution.

"The DFI could initially finance public sector infrastructure investments, and as the economy picks up steam, could also finance the private sector infrastructure projects," Aggarwal said.

He suggested that the govt

PHDCCI recipe for higher GDP growth

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 19 DECEMBER

of infrastructure investments, strengthening MSMEs, reducing the costs of doing business, ease of doing exports, increasing tax-to-GDP ratio, focus on agriculture & rural sector and effective reforms in social infrastructure.

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Companies pay 49% more advance tax in Q3

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI, 19 DECEMBER

base, which is paid in four installments of 15, 25, 25 and 35 per cent of the computed tax liability, respectively, in the four quarters.

The big boost in corporate tax collection has helped the gross tax collection improve to Rs 7,33,715 crore, down only 12.1 per cent from Rs 8,34,398 crore last year.

During the quarter, the income tax department has refunded Rs 1,46,109 crore, 8.1 per cent lower from Rs 1,58,988 crore in the same period last year.

Corporate and personal income tax are the biggest components of the advance tax

last year, the source said, adding the same cumulatively stood at Rs 60,491 crore, down 10.4 per cent from Rs 67,542 crore.

The higher tax payout reflects the rising profitability of companies that grew 21.9 per cent in the September quarter, according to analysts. In sharp contrast, in the first quarter, manufacturing companies saw their sales, shrinking 42 per cent and net profit plunging 62 per cent.

In the second quarter ending September, total tax collection, including advance tax collection, was 22.5 per cent lower at Rs 2,53,532.3 crore, down from Rs 3,27,320.2 crore.

Pari murder: NCPCR pulls up Odisha police

Seeks probe by central agency

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
BHUBANESWAR, 19 DECEMBER:

Finding loose ends in Special Investigation Team (SIT) investigation into the alleged abduction-murder of five-year-old girl Pari in Nayagarh district five months back, the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) has recommended for a probe by a central agency to unravel the mystery shrouding the tragic death of the minor.

The rights panel questioned the legitimacy of SIT led by IG-ranked Arun Bothra. It picked holes in the investigation by the local Nayagarh police.

"Many discrepancies and glaring gaps have been observed in the primary investigation by police, starting from the non-recording of the statements of the parents after the body of the girl was found and yet conduct-

ing their polygraph tests without probing into the correct facts in the matter".

The Commission has taken a serious view on such misleading facts and submissions being made before it. It is important to reiterate that the investigation by the SIT in this case based on the preliminary investigation of the police authorities would jeopardize the chances of probing into the true and correct facts in this case and seeking justice in this matter of the death of the minor girl", the rights panel wrote the Odisha Chief Sec-

"When such serious discrepancies are present in the preliminary investigation in this case, it becomes difficult to rely on the subsequent investigation that would be undertaken by SIT as well", the NCPCR stated.

Keeping in view these glaring loopholes, the state government needs to recom-

mend for investigation by a central agency for an "unbiased and objective investigation".

The rights panel also suggested initiation of disciplinary action against the investigating officers for "dereliction of duty" and for conducting a "poor and flawed investigation", which has led to delays and lapses in the investigation.

On July 14, 5-year-old Pari, daughter of auto rickshaw Ashok Sahu of Jagupur village, Nayagarh, was reported missing. Ten days later, the skeletal remains of the minor girl were retrieved. Four months later, distressed parents of the girl attempted self-immolation in front of Odisha Assembly on 24 November sparked a statewide uproar with the BJD demanding resignation of a Minister who, it alleged, was protecting the culprit and a CBI probe and the Congress calling for a HC monitored SIT probe.

SIT grills Saroj & family

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
BHUBANESWAR, 19 DECEMBER:

The SIT today picked up 18 year old Saroj Sethy, his sister and mother for questioning in connection with the Pari murder case.

They are neighbours of Pari and the girl had been to their house a day prior to being reported as missing.

Saroj had earlier alleged that the SIT had offered him Rs 5 lakh to confess to the crime. The charge had been refuted by the state police.

The boy had told media persons that the SIT officers had taken his clothes, bedsheet and blood samples while offering him inducements and also stating that they would present him as a minor to escape capital punishment.

It is pertinent to note that the SIT has already submitted an interim report to the Orissa High Court in a sealed cover. Speculations are that it has indicated the case to be that of rape and murder.

The BJD and BJP were together in government for

Congress rips apart Naveen's Odia pride & regional party card

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
BHUBANESWAR, 19 DECEMBER:

The state Congress launched a diatribe against Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik as well as the BJP saying both were experts in dishing out false promises on a daily basis and in demolishing democracy.

Ticking off the CM for his speech yesterday where he said national parties are 'remote controlled' by their bosses in Delhi, OPCC president Niranjan Patnaik charged 'everybody in Odisha knows that Naveen Patnaik is remote controlled by a few bureaucrats on the one hand and the BJP central leadership on the other.'

All this talk of regional party safeguarding the interest of the state, its language and culture etc is ludicrous when it comes from a person who is ignorant of Odia culture and has failed to learn Odia language over 21 years was the terse comment of the OPCC chief.

The BJD and BJP were

almost a decade, they continue to be so and indulge in mock battles before elections, he said.

The CM speaks of Mahanadi, but it was he who had kept silent in 2011 when the interstate water issue was raised, he talks of Lord Jagannath, but it is his government that sold land of the Lord to Vedanta and the Bagala dharmasala. He has raked up the special category state status issue, but he was a central minister when the then Deputy PM, L K Advani had rejected it and Naveen Patnaik had remained mum, listed out the OPCC chief as a point to point counter of the CM's speech yesterday.

The OPCC chief went on to note that late Biju Patnaik had constructed Portbait, Express highway etc when he was a Congress chief minister, not the head of any regional party. Biju babu in whose name the BJD has been formed had always been a major player in formation of national parties and governments, he pointed out.

AICC leader in charge of Odisha, Dr A Chellakumar drew parallels between the

undemocratic actions of PM Modi and CM Patnaik. Both are one and the same – they promise crores of jobs to the unemployed but forgot about it, he said.

CLP leader Narasingha Mishra dwelt on rising unemployment and the false promises made by the NDA as well as the BJD government. He referred to the promise of the Congress with regards to job creation and unemployment allowance.

The Congress leaders were addressing a massive rally organised to welcome the newly nominated NSUI state president Sayed Yashir Nawaz who pledged to raise issues of quality education and employment across campuses in the state.

In its reaction to the CM's charge of central neglect, the BJD dared the BJD to come out with figures of central assistance and funding.

Union Minister Pratap Sarangi said such statements of the CM are only aimed at deflecting public attention from the failures and scams in the state.

Workers clash at Paradip

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
PARADIP, 19 DECEMBER:

Contract workers clashed with trade union leaders here today over non-payment of wages and lack of safety measures.

The contract workers of Paradip Port Stevedores General Purpose Mazdoor Union have been demanding wages as they had worked for different stevedores over the last eight years.

The workers led by Sunil Sahoo, A KNayak and others staged a protest dharna in front of the union office at Paradip today. They also lodged a police complaint.

Soon, union leaders led by Balaram Sahoo reached the spot and tried to negotiate with the angry workers. Heated words were exchanged and a clash ensued.

Some of the workers sustained minor bruises. Police investigations are on.



Student Congress show of strength rally in Bhubaneswar. SNS

Minimum temperature to dip in Odisha

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
BHUBANESWAR, 19 DECEMBER:

The IMD forecast fall in minimum temperature in parts of Odisha in the next 24 hours as a cold wave continues to sweep across the state.

The minimum night temperature is very likely to fall by 1 to 2 degree Celsius during the next 24 hours.

Dense to very dense fog has occurred at one or two places over the districts of Angul &

Boudh and shallow to moderate fog has occurred at one or two places over the districts of Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar, Koraput, Kandhamal, Nayagarh and Malkangiri.

The lowest minimum temperature of 8.2 degree Celsius was recorded at Jharsuguda followed by Phulbani (9.5C), Angul (10 C), Keonjhar (11.7 C).

The capital city of Bhubaneswar recorded the minimum temperature of 16.5 degree Celsius,

Crocodile rescued from village pond

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
KENDRAPARA, 19 DECEMBER:

A 10-feet-long salt-water crocodile that had strayed into a community pond was caught alive by forest personnel much to the relief of residents of a village in Kendrapara district.

The croc had sneaked into the pond in Naladia village under Rajnagar block to eat fish and aquatic species. The crocodile was later

released in the wild, forest officials said.

Odisha registers six per cent rise in rape cases

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
BHUBANESWAR, 19 DECEMBER:

Odisha witnessed rise in rape cases in the first half of the current year in comparison to the corresponding period of the last year.

While 1,212 rape cases were reported in the period between January-August in the current year, 1,149 cases were registered during the corresponding period in 2019.

There was a rise of 5.94% of rape cases with 72 more cases registered in the first half of the current year, said the

State police headquarters sources.

The number of rape cases registered in the year 2017 was 2,221 against 2,144 cases in the previous year. In 2018, it climbed to 2,502 cases. A total of 2,950 rape cases were registered in 2019.

Delayed investigation is also resulting in a lower rate of conviction in such offences. Discrepancies in the charge sheet make the case weak during the trial leading to the acquittal of the accused persons. Besides, witnesses under pressure from various quar-

ters turn hostile, leading to the decline in conviction, said Orissa High Court lawyer, Bibhu Prasad Tripathy.

Delay in the trial process was an area of concern. The government has taken steps to do away with the trial delay with the setting up of more fast track courts, said a senior police official.

More than a dozen of courts to exclusively deal with the trial of Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act cases and crime against women including cases of rape have been set up in the

State. This is going to speed up the trial, he added.

Legal measures and punishment alone cannot stop rape cases.

The need of the hour is the launch of wee-orchestrated endeavour of all stakeholders that include police, civil society members, and educational institutions' heads to parents. The age-old mindset of gender inequality and women being treated as objects of sexual pleasure has to be pushed to the rear, observed Namrata Chaddha, former member, Odisha Women's Commission.

Odisha: Covid-19 grows at 2% in December

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
BHUBANESWAR, 19 DECEMBER:

Odisha on Saturday reported 356 fresh cases with the COVID-19 caseload mounting to 3,52,861 while three fresh fatalities pushed the state's coronavirus death toll to 1,832.

The rate of virus positivity climbed down to 1 to 2 per cent in December with today's rate standing at 1.07%.

The case fatality rate currently stands at 0.56% in Odisha while the recovery rate is 98.49 per cent.

Odisha currently has 3,029 active cases.

A total of 65,69,279 sample tests have been conducted in the state so far, including 33,067 on Friday.

A total of 6,758 positive cases have so far been added in the current month at a low growth rate of 2.07% growth rate.

As has been his style, it

Pandian reviews arrangements ahead of reopening of Jagannath Temple

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
PURI, 19 DECEMBER:

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Ahead of the re-opening of Puri Jagannath Temple on 23 December, VKartikayan Pandian, secretary to the CM, chief administrator of the temple administration Krishan Kumar reviewed the arrangements for the devotees and the heritage corridor today.

As has been his style, it

was during wee hours of the

day that Pandian reached here.

Development commission-

er Suresh Mohapatra, Puri,

Collector Bawant Singh and SP Kanwar Vishal Singh were present.

The local administra-

tion was directed to expedite the

cleaning of the four sides of the

temple as well as the heritage sites as well as the 20 metre outer ring road. The process of land acquisition has to be expedited for the heritage corridor and

a buffer zone, they said.

Dr Krishan Kumar informed that all arrangements for smooth darshan of the deities has been made. Very soon a Bhakta Nivas providing afford-

able accommodation at Rs 100 to 150 per bed will be set up.

It may be noted that the Jagannath Temple has

remained closed to devotees for nine months due to the pandemic.

Odisha's IPICOL 'Top Performer' among state IPAs

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
BHUBANESWAR, 19 DECEMBER:

India undertook a survey with 74 questions across 8 pillars. These pillars included Mandate and Organization, Strategy and Marketing, Targeting Investors, Winning Investment Projects, Facilitating Investments, After-care, Systems and Infrastructure structure.

The State IPAs were evaluated by the joint team from Invest India and World Bank Group. The states have been classified into four categories: Top Performers, Aspiring Leaders, Promising Developers and Emerging Potential.

"We congratulate IPICOL for taking remarkable mea-

sures that have resulted in it becoming one of the leading investment promotion agencies in India. We commend the far-sightedness of the State IPA and its leadership for taking the steps to prove its relevance in this competitive landscape," stated the report.

IPICOL over the past few years has worked extensively to make the business environment in Odisha conducive and hassle-free by bringing in institutional, systemic and technological reforms.

IPICOL has also played an active role in making Odisha one of the top destinations in India and helping it achieve top rank in terms

of attracting new investments during the period April to September in 2019, as per the report by CMIE.

The state was also recog-

nized as the number 1 state in the country, in terms of investment implementation rate by ASSOCHAM.

The report also appreciated IPICOL's vision for growth by mentioning that "The noteworthy initiative taken by the state to strategically decide its focus sectors and sub-sectors and curate its investment promotion & targeting approach accordingly will play a critical role in positioning Odisha as an attractive investment destination".

LEISURE

10 MINUTE CROSSWORD





The approval of the second Covid-19 vaccine is another milestone in the US' fight against the deadly pandemic

US PRESIDENT-ELECT JOE BIDEN

ANNOUNCING THAT HE WOULD RECEIVE THE JAB PUBLICLY ON MONDAY

WEATHER

CITY	MAX(°C)	MIN(°C)
SINGAPORE	30	24 H
HONG KONG	17	11 H
TOKYO	9	1 CL
LONDON	12	9 R
DUBAI	25	18 H
SAN FRANCISCO	14	7 S
NEW YORK	0	-8 H
MOSCOW	-3	-6 H

S=sunny, CL= clear, H=hazy, R=rainy...

THUMBNAILS



A boy plays on a mound of snow in front of the skyline of New York City in West New York. AP

Extradition case of Rana to continue: The case of extradition of Pakistani-origin Canadian businessman Tahawwur Rana, a key accused in the 2008 Mumbai terror attack, to India will continue till April 22, a federal US judge has determined. Rana, 59, has been declared a fugitive by India. PTI

Hospital fire kills 9 Covid-19 patients: A fire broke out Saturday at an intensive care unit treating Covid-19 patients in southern Turkey after an oxygen cylinder exploded, killing nine people, the health minister said. The state-run Anadolu news agency said the fire took place at the privately-run Sanko University Hospital unit in Gaziantep, southeast of Istanbul. AP

Nepal reports 710 new cases: Nepal has reported 710 new COVID-19 cases, taking the country's case-load to 253,184, the health ministry said on Saturday. The ministry said that 4,780 tests were conducted in the last 24 hours. The death toll has reached 1,777. PTI

Biden transition team criticises Pentagon cooperation lag

WILMINGTON, 19 DECEMBER

President-elect Joe Biden's transition team has expressed frustration with the level of cooperation they're getting from political appointees at the Department of Defense, saying there has been an abrupt halt in the already limited cooperation there.

Biden's transition team has been meeting with officials at various agencies to get detailed reviews of the programmes and challenges the new administration will inherit, a process that was delayed when the General Services Administration declined to issue an official ascertainment that Biden had won the election.

The delay occurred as President Donald Trump, whose appointed ran the GSA, refused to concede.

Johannes Abraham, executive director of the transition, told reporters that Biden agency review teams at DOD learned Thursday of meetings being pulled down" and immediately reported it. Abraham called for meetings and requests for information to resume immediately. A failure to work together can have consequences well beyond January," Abraham said.

Our key focus in the next two weeks is supporting essential requests for information on Operation Warp Speed and Covid-19 to guarantee a flawless transition, said acting Defense Secretary Christopher Miller.

Let me be clear: There was no mutually agreed upon holiday break, Abraham countered. In fact, we think it is important that briefings and other engagements continue during this period as there's no time to spare. AP

Moderna's Covid jab gets emergency use nod

Moderna expects to have between 100-125 mn doses available globally in the first quarter of 2021, with 85-100 mn of those available in the US

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

WASHINGTON, 19 DECEMBER

Moderna has become the second company to get emergency use authorisation for its anti-coronavirus vaccine from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), a week after the one developed by Pfizer received a similar approval.

According to an official statement, the FDA has determined that the Moderna Covid-19 vaccine has met the statutory criteria for issuance of an emergency use authorisation (EUA).

"Congratulations, the Moderna vaccine is now available!" President Donald Trump tweeted soon after.

The FDA based its recommendation on the totality of scientific evidence shared by Moderna, including a data

analysis from the pivotal phase three clinical study announced on November 30. The primary efficacy analysis conducted on 196 cases indicated a vaccine efficacy rate of 94.1 per cent.

This vaccine is for people aged 18 or older.

An immunisation drive using the vaccine developed by Pfizer has begun in the US earlier this week. Vice President Mike Pence took the shot publicly on Friday.

Health Secretary Alex Azar said, "To have two vaccines against a novel coronavirus authorised and distributed within a year is extraordinary, and to have one of these vaccines developed by scientists at the NIH (National Institutes of Health) should be a great source of pride for every member of the HHS family and every American."

National Institutes of Health



was a partner in the development of Moderna's vaccine.

"Authorisation of Moderna's vaccine means we can accelerate the vaccination of frontline healthcare workers and Americans in long-term-care facilities, and, ultimately, bring a faster end to this pandemic," Azar said.

Moderna said that its mRNA-1273 vaccine is now

authorized for distribution and use under an emergency use authorisation.

Delivery to the US government will begin immediately. Moderna will continue to gather additional data and plans to file a Biologics License Application (BLA) with the FDA requesting full licensure in 2021, it said.

"I am proud of what the Moderna team has achieved in collaboration with our partners. We were able to create and manufacture the Moderna Covid-19 Vaccine in 11 months from sequence to authorization, while advancing clinical development with a phase one, phase two and pivotal phase three study of 30,000 participants," said Chief Executive Officer of Moderna Stéphane Bancel.

Allocation and distribution of the vaccine will be prioritised according to pop-

ulations identified by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP).

Approximately 20 million doses will be delivered to the US government by the end of December 2020. The company expects to have between 100 million and 125 million doses available globally in the first quarter of 2021, with 85-100 million of those available in the US, Moderna said.

Under Operation Warp Speed, the Department of Defense, in partnership with the Department of Health and Human Services and the CDC, will manage allocation and distribution of the vaccine in the United States.

"With the availability of two vaccines now for the prevention of Covid-19, the FDA has taken another crucial step in the fight against this glob-

al pandemic that is causing vast numbers of hospitalizations and deaths in the United States each day," said FDA Commissioner Stephen M Hahn.

Congressman Michael Burgess, a member of the House Rules Committee and Republican Leader of the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health, said that having a second anti-coronavirus vaccine approved for emergency use in a span of one week, is a shining example of American resourcefulness and the successful work done through Operation Warp Speed.

"I want to thank President Trump for putting American innovation first, our scientists and medical community, and the countless volunteers who have stepped up during this pandemic to serve on the front lines," she said.

Pentagon okays top civilians, military for shots

WASHINGTON, 19 DECEMBER

The Pentagon has authorised 50 top civilian and military leaders to receive the vaccine in the coming weeks to prove the shots are safe and effective.

In a memo to senior leaders, Deputy Defense Secretary David Norquist laid out specific vaccine allowances for the heads of the military services and combatant commands around the world.

The memo said department leaders may receive "show of confidence" vaccines as a "strategic messaging tool" between now and January 15. AP

US Congress averts shutdown; fight continues over virus aid

ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON, 19 DECEMBER



Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R).

Congress swiftly passed a two-day stopgap spending bill on Friday night, averting a partial government shutdown and buying time for frustratingly slow endgame negotiations on an almost \$1 trillion Covid-19 economic relief package.

The virus aid talks remain on track, both sides said, but closing out final disagreements is proving difficult.

The House passed the temporary funding bill by a 320-60 vote as lawmakers headed for a Sunday session. The Senate approved the bill by voice vote almost immediately afterward, sending it to President Donald Trump.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said both sides remain intent on closing the deal, even as Democrats launched a concerted campaign to block an effort by Republicans to rein in emergency Federal Reserve lending powers. The Democrats said the GOP proposal would deprive President-elect Joe Biden of crucial tools to manage the economy. It appeared unlikely that there would be a deal reached Friday night, lawmakers and aides said.

Democrats came out swinging at a key obstacle: a provision by conservative Sen. Pat Toomey that would close down more than USD 400 billion in potential Federal Reserve lending powers established under a relief bill in March.

Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin is shutting down the programmes at the end of December, but Toomey's plan-

guage goes further, by barring the Fed from restarting the lending next year, and Democrats say the provision would tie Biden's hands and put the economy at risk. "As we navigate through an unprecedented economic crisis, it is in the interests of the American people to maintain the Fed's ability to respond quickly and forcefully," said Biden economic adviser Brian Deese.

"Undermining that authority could mean less lending to Main Street businesses, higher unemployment and greater economic pain across the nation." The key Fed programs at issue provided loans to small and mid-sized businesses and bought state and local government bonds, making it easier for those governments to borrow, at a time when their finances are under pressure from the pandemic.

The Fed would need the support of the Treasury Department to restart the programs, which Biden's Treasury secretary nominee, Janet Yellen, a former Fed chair, would likely provide. Treasury could also provide funds to backstop those programmes without congressional approval and could ease the lending requirements.

That could encourage more lending under the programs,

which have seen only limited use so far.

The battle obscured progress on other elements of the hoped-for agreement. After being bogged down for much of Thursday, negotiators turned more optimistic, though the complexity of finalising the remaining issues and drafting agreements in precise legislative form was proving daunting.

The central elements appeared in place: more than \$300 billion in aid to businesses; an \$300-per-week bonus for federal jobless benefit and renewal of soon-to-expire state benefits; \$600 direct payments to individuals; vaccine distribution funds and money for renters, schools, the Postal Service and people needing food aid.

House lawmakers were told they wouldn't have to report to work on Saturday but that a Sunday session was likely. The Senate will be voting on nominations on Saturday. The pending bill is the first significant legislative response to the pandemic since the landmark CARES Act passed virtually unanimously in March, delivering \$1.8 trillion in aid, more generous \$600 per week bonus jobless benefits and \$1,200 direct payments to individuals.

PREP UP



Medical tents for vaccinations are set up outside the Los Angeles Children's Hospital Friday. AP

UK confirms new coronavirus strain spreads more quickly

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE

LONDON, 19 DECEMBER

England's chief medical officer Chris Whitty confirmed Saturday that a new coronavirus strain which surfaced in the country could spread faster and called for greater public vigilance to reduce transmission.

Whitty said London had informed the World Health Organization of its findings.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock on Monday said scientists had identified a "new variant" in the south of England that could be causing infections to spread faster.

Britain has seen rising cases and hospital admissions this month and Prime

Minister Boris Johnson was set to give a press conference on the virus situation on Saturday afternoon.

The prime minister was reportedly to announce new travel restrictions for London and southeast England in the run-up to Christmas.

"As a result of the rapid spread of the new variant, preliminary modelling data and rapidly rising incidence rates in the South East (an expert body advising the government) now consider that the new strain can spread more quickly," Whitty said.

"We have alerted the World Health Organization," he said, but added: "There is no current evidence to suggest the new strain causes a high-

er mortality rate or that it affects vaccines and treatments although urgent work is underway to confirm this."

Whitty warned that the new evidence made it "more vital than ever" that the public did all they could to reduce transmission.

On Friday, 28,507 new daily positive tests were reported by the UK government. Cases last week grew 40.9 percent compared to a week earlier. More than 1.98 million people have tested positive in the UK.

Johnson has refused to rule out a new lockdown in England, saying Friday: "We're hoping very much that we will be able to avoid anything like that."

► Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine set to clearance by year-end: The Oxford University vaccine against Covid-19 being produced by AstraZeneca is likely to get regulatory approval from the UK's independent regulator by the end of this year for a rollout to begin in early 2021, according to a UK media report.

► Head of Pak's anti-coronavirus body tests positive: Pakistan's planning minister and the head of the nation's anti-coronavirus body, Asad Umar, has tested positive for Covid-19, the latest of several politicians in the country to contract the virus.

► China to inoculate frontline workers first: China will begin its Covid-19 inoculation programme by first vaccinating some key priority groups, including those involved in medical treatment and disease control, within the winter-spring period, before starting a mass roll out, the National Health Commission said.

► Virus outlier Sweden adopts more restrictions: Sweden is tightening nationwide coronavirus restrictions by requiring many people to work from home and reducing the number who can gather in restaurants, shops and gyms starting next week, but the government decided against ordering the country's first full lockdown to control a recent spike in virus cases

'Weekend last attempt to get Brexit trade deal'

ASSOCIATED PRESS

BUSSELS, 19 DECEMBER

Barnier called it "a very serious and somber situation" if a deal falls through, with the jobs of hundreds of thousands of people at stake

The European Union and the United Kingdom are heading into the weekend on a "last attempt" to clinch a post-Brexit trade deal, with EU fishing rights in British waters the most notable remaining obstacle to avoid a chaotic and costly changeover in the new year.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said Friday that the only way to get a deal is for the 27-nation bloc to compromise since "the UK has done a lot to try and help, and we hope that our EU friends will see sense and come to the table with something themselves."

"That's really where we are," Johnson said, adding "no sensible government" could agree to the EU demands as they stand.

EU chief negotiator Michel Barnier told the EU parliament both sides were in the "home straight of the negotiations," which have already come a long way in nine months of talks but are still short of a final compromise.

Barnier called it "a very serious and somber situation" if a deal falls through, with the jobs of hundreds of thousands of people at stake.

The European Parliament

WHO was warned lives were at risk over yanked Italy report

ASSOCIATED PRESS

ROME, 19 DECEMBER

An author of a withdrawn World Health Organisation report into Italy's coronavirus response warned his bosses in May that people could die and the UN agency could suffer "catastrophic" reputational damage if it allowed political concerns to suppress the document, according to emails seen by The Associated Press.

The comprehensive report examined how the Italian government and health system reacted after the country became the epicenter of the European outbreak in late February, with real-time data and case studies of what worked and what didn't. It was aimed at helping other countries prepare as the virus spread globally, but it hit a sensitive nerve among Italian officials because it noted that Italy went into the crisis with an out-of-date pandemic plan.

The agency took it down a day after it was posted on its website, prompting the official who coordinated the work to appeal directly to WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus on May 28 and warn that the report's disappearance was undermining

WHO's credibility. He cautioned that any further attempts at



Despite everything I caught this virus... perhaps, doubtless, a moment of negligence, a moment of bad luck, too

FRENCH PRESIDENT EMMANUEL MACRON
AFTER HE TESTED POSITIVE

'Russia behind cyberattack on US'

Pompeo is the first administration official to publicly tie the Kremlin to the widespread intrusion

ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON, 19 DECEMBER

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo says Russia was pretty clearly behind the gravest cyberattack against the United States on record, the first administration official to publicly tie the Kremlin to the widespread intrusion at a time when President Donald Trump has kept silent on the failure to protect government and private-sector computer networks.

It's not clear exactly what the hackers were seeking, but experts say it could include nuclear secrets, blueprints for advanced weaponry, Covid-19 vaccine-related research and information for dossiers on key government and industry leaders.

We're still unpacking precisely what it is, and I'm sure

some of it will remain classified, Pompeo said in an interview Friday with radio talk show host Mark Levin.

But suffice it to say there was a significant effort to use a piece of third-party software to essentially embed code inside US government systems and it now appears systems of private companies and governments across the world as well. This was a very significant effort, and I think it's the case that now we can say pretty clearly that it was the Russians that engaged in this activity. Russia has said it had nothing to do with the hacking.

Deputy White House press secretary Brian Morgenstern told reporters Friday that national security adviser Robert O'Brien has sometimes been leading multiple daily meetings with the FBI, the Department of Home-

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land Security and the intelligence agencies, looking for ways to mitigate the hack.

He would not provide details, but rest assured we have the best and brightest working hard on it each and every single day. The Democratic leaders of four House committees given classified briefings by the administra-

tion on the hack issued a statement complaining that they were left with more questions than answers. Administration officials were unwilling to share the full scope of the breach and identities of the victims, they said.

Pompeo, in the interview with Levin, said Russia was on the list of folks that want to

undermine our way of life, our republic, our basic democratic principles.... You see the news of the day with respect to their efforts in the cyberspace. We've seen this for an awfully long time, using asymmetric capabilities to try and put themselves in a place where they can impose costs on the United States.

What makes this hacking campaign so extraordinary is its scale: 18,000 organisations were infected from March to June by malicious code that piggybacked on popular network-management software from an Austin, Texas, company called SolarWinds.

It's going to take months to kick elite hackers out of the US government networks they have been quietly rifling through since as far back as March.

Experts say there simply are not enough skilled threat-hunting teams to duly identify all the government and private-sector systems that may have been hacked. FireEye, the cybersecurity company that discovered the intrusion into US agencies and was among the victims, has already tallied dozens of casualties. It's racing to identify more.

Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), a 11-party opposition alliance, has been holding massive rallies since its inception in September to seek Khan's ouster and press the military to stop interfering in politics. The PDM has been accusing the Pakistan Army of installing "puppet" Prime Minister Khan through a manipulated election in 2018.

The Army, which has ruled Pakistan for more than half of its 70 plus years of existence, has hitherto wielded considerable power in the matters of security and foreign policy. However, the military has denied meddling in the country's politics. Khan also denies that the army helped him win the election in 2018.

According to the 'Lahore Declaration' signed by the Opposition parties on Monday, the military establishment had stolen the people's mandate in the 2018 election and imposed a "hybrid and inefficient" government on the masses.

In an interview to SAMAA TV on Friday, 68-year-old Khan rebutted accusations that he does not have any real authority and said that the Pakistan Army is a state institution, which works under him.

On Opposition's claims that the government wouldn't hold if not for the support from the powerful establishment, the cricketer-turned-politician said he is the country's democratically elected prime minister and so the institutions back him.

The PDM has set a January 31 deadline for Khan to step down or face a long march to Islamabad. The coalition pledged that it will



Imran Khan: Pak Army is a state institution which works under me

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
ISLAMABAD, 19 DECEMBER

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan has asserted that the Army is a state institution which works under him, amidst Opposition's allegations of the powerful military establishment's interference in the country's politics and elections.

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make sure that there is no interference of the institutions of "the establishment and intelligence" in politics and at the same time it will make the security institutions stronger on the professional lines.

Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz supremo and three-time former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, 70, has been repeatedly blaming Army chief Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa and spy agency ISI chief Lt Gen Faiz Haider of meddling in Pakistan's political affairs.

Sharif was ousted in 2017 by the Supreme Court court on graft charges.

The PML-N chief, currently out on bail, has been living in London since November last year after he was allowed by the courts and the government to go there for a period of eight weeks for medical treatment. But he did not come back, while his lawyers told the court that he was still recovering.

Khan said the Opposition does not want to hold talks with the government and is instead pressuring the Army to send a democratic government packing. This can be called treason, he said.

The real reason, Khan said, is that the Opposition wants all cases against them to be withdrawn and they be given an NRO-like concession.

National Reconciliation Ordinance (NRO) was issued by former military dictator Pervez Musharraf to withdraw cases against Benazir Bhutto in 2007.

'Big victory for democracy': Bosnian city gets a vote

ASSOCIATED PRESS

SARAJEVO (BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA), 19 DECEMBER

Irma Baralija is looking forward to Sunday, when she intends to vote and hopes win her race in the first local election in 12 years held in her hometown the southern Bosnian city of Mostar.

To make that possible, the 36-year-old Baralija had to sue her country in the European Court of Human Rights for letting a stalemate between two major nationalist political parties in Bosnia prevent her, along about 100,000 other Mostar residents, from voting or running in a municipal election for over a decade.

By winning in court in October 2019, Baralija believes she has busted the myth (that nationalist parties) have been feeding to us, that an individual cannot move things forward, that we matter only as members of our ethnic groups. Parties representing only one ethnic group have dominated Bosnian politics since the end of the country's devastating 1992-95 war, which pitted its three main ethnic factions Serbs, Croats and Muslims against each other after the break-up of Yugoslavia.

I hope that my example will inspire citizens of Mostar, when they vote on Sunday, to be brave, to realize that as individuals we can bring positive change, said Baralija, who is running for a seat in the city council on the ticket of the small, multi-ethnic Our Party.

Mostar is divided in half by a river. During the war, Croats moved to the western side and Muslims to the east. Since the fighting stopped, the city has had two post offices, two electricity and water suppliers, two phone networks, two public hospitals and more one crumbling set for each ethnic group.

On Sunday, several small, multi-ethnic parties will be vying for seats in the city council after campaigning on broad-and-butter issues. But the nationalist HDZ and SDA parties hope that, among them, they will secure a two-thirds majority in the council and keep their grip on power. While acknowledging that the nationalists have armies of faithful voters whom they mobilise by stoking ethnic mistrust, non-nationalist election candidates in Mostar hope the past 12 years has shown that those two parties are too corrupt and incompetent.



PRIZED POSSESSION



A staff member covers the container of lunar samples with a veil during the Chang'e-5 Lunar Samples Handover Ceremony at China National Space Administration in Beijing on Saturday. China's Chang'e-5 probe, which successfully returned to earth this week, has retrieved about 1,731 grams of samples from the moon. ■ LANS

US shuttering last two consulates in Russia

ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON, 19 DECEMBER

The Trump administration has notified Congress that it intends to shutter the last two remaining US consulates in Russia.

The State Department told lawmakers last week that it would permanently close the consulate in the far eastern Russian city of Vladivostok and temporarily suspend operations at the consulate in Yekaterinburg just east of the Ural Mountains.

The notice was sent to Congress on December 10 but received little attention at the time. That timing predates by three days the public emergence of news about a major suspected Russian computer intrusion into US government and private computer systems that has raised grave cybersecurity fears.

The department's notification to Congress, a copy of which was obtained by The

Associated Press, said the closures are to ongoing staffing challenges of the US Mission in Russia in the wake of the 2017 Russian-imposed personnel cap on the US Mission and resultant impasse with Russia over diplomatic visas, it said.

The moves are to relocate the US Mission in Russia in the wake of the 2017 Russian-imposed personnel cap on the US Mission and resultant impasse with Russia over diplomatic visas, it said.

Following the closures, the only diplomatic facility the US will have in Russia will be the embassy in Moscow. Russia ordered the closure of the US consulate in St. Petersburg in 2018 after the US ordered the Russian consulate in Seattle closed in tit-for-tat actions over the poisoning of an ex-Russian spy in Britain.

The consulate in Vladivostok had been temporarily closed in March because of the coronavirus pandemic, and staffers there had already

begun removing sensitive equipment, documents and other items. The consulates in Vladivostok and Yekaterinburg employ a total of 10 American diplomats and 33 local staff.

The exact timing of the closures has yet to be determined. The American staff are to be relocated to the embassy in Moscow, while the locals will be laid off, according to the notice.

The department estimated the permanent closure of the Vladivostok consulate would save \$3.2 million per year.

The closures will leave the US without diplomatic representation in a massive swath of Russia everywhere east of Moscow and present a major inconvenience for American travellers in Russia's far east, as well as Russians in the region seeking visas to come to the United States, as all consular services will be handled out of the Moscow embassy.

No one has immediately claimed responsibility. In April, the Islamic State group claimed responsibility for five rocket attacks on the base. There were no casual-

Rockets hit US base in Afghanistan, no casualties

ASSOCIATED PRESS

KABUL, 19 DECEMBER

Five rockets were fired at a major US base in Afghanistan on Saturday, but there were no casualties, NATO and provincial officials said.

The rockets hit Bagram Airfield, said Wahida Shahkar, spokeswoman for the governor in northern Parwan province.

Shahkar said that 12 rockets were placed in a vehicle and five of them were fired while police were able to defend seven others.

She couldn't provide other details on any possible casualties or damage within the U.S. base. She said there are no casualties among civilians in the area.

A NATO official confirmed the attack and said initial reports indicated that the airfield was not damaged.

No one has immediately claimed responsibility. In April, the Islamic State group claimed responsibility for five rocket attacks on the base. There were no casual-



ties.

The IS also has claimed responsibility for multiple attacks in the capital Kabul in recent months, including on educational institutions that killed 50 people, most of them students.

Violence in Afghanistan has spiked even as the Taliban and Afghan government negotiators hold talks in Qatar, trying to hammer out a peace deal that could put an end to decades of war. At the same time, the Taliban have waged bitter battles against IS fighters, particularly in eastern Afghanistan, while continuing their insurgency against government forces.

12 killed, 6 injured as train hits bus in Bangladesh

The train dragged the bus on the railway tracks for about half a kilometre, Dhaka Tribune reported

DHAKA, 19 DECEMBER

At least 12 people were killed and six others injured when a train ploughed into a bus at a railway crossing in Bangladesh on Saturday, according to media reports.

The incident happened at Joypurhat district when the Rajshahi-bound Uttara Express train, en route from Parbatipur, hit the passenger bus at Puranpolo crossing, the Daily Star reported. The train dragged the bus on the railway tracks for about half a kilometre, the Dhaka Tribune reported. The bus was going to Panchbibi from Joypurhat.

Preliminary investigation found that the level crossing was open and the on-duty driver was absent, causing the accident, said AKM Alamgir Jahan, officer-in-charge of Joypurhat Sadar Police Station.

Joypurhat Deputy Commissioner Shariful Islam said bodies of 10 people were recovered from the spot. Eight people were rescued, of which two succumbed to their injuries at a government hospital in Bogura. Six of the injured have been admitted to Joypurhat Sadar Hospital.

All the victims were passengers of the bus, bdnews24.com reported.

Such accidents at railway crossings are common in Bangladesh, with poor safety standard, unmanned level crossings and negligence of staff at the manned level crossings being key factors, the Daily Star reported, quoting fire officials.

The Bangladesh Railway has formed a three-member committee to investigate the accident.

Iran, despite US sanctions, has routes to vaccines

ASSOCIATED PRESS

DUBAI, 19 DECEMBER

Although Iran faces crushing US sanctions, there are still ways for Tehran to obtain coronavirus vaccines as the country suffers the Mideast's worst outbreak of the pandemic.

After earlier downplaying the virus, Iran has since acknowledged the scope of the disaster it faces after 1.1 million reported cases and over 52,000 deaths. Getting vaccines into the arms of its people would be a major step in stemming the crisis.

But while Iran is able to obtain vaccines, challenges remain ranging from sanctions imposed under President Donald Trump to the logistics of making mass vaccinations

happen.

Iran has signed up for COVAX, an international program designed to distribute coronavirus vaccines to participating countries around the world. That program is run in part by Gavi, The Vaccine Alliance. Gavi says the US Treasury's Office of Foreign Asset Control has already issued a license for Iran to take part. The Treasury declined to comment.

For its part, Iran has alleged U.S. sanctions have affected its ability to purchase medicine and vaccines. President Hassan Rouhani has said Iranians should curse Trump a hundred times over the difficulties. US sanctions do have specific carve-outs for medicine and humanitarian aid to Iran. However, international

banks and financial institutions hesitate in dealing with Iran transactions for fear of being fined or locked out of the American market.

Those sanctions, however, would not stop Iran from flying a load of cash to Geneva to pay for its participation in COVAX. Gavi declined to offer any information about Iranian payments or orders, though Iran under its rules at a maximum could order vaccines for 50% of its 82 million people. Alireza Miryousefi, a spokesman at Iran's mission to the United Nations, criticized the US for its sanctions and banking restrictions, which he said "cruelly put many obstacles in the way of Iran receiving the Covid-19 vaccine."

Nonetheless, along with our own indigenous vaccine trials, we fully expect the international community and the relevant international drug companies to fulfill their humanitarian obligation and expedite all our orders, Miryousefi said.

Local efforts to produce a vaccine have not begun in earnest, meaning the Islamic Republic may need to rely on those abroad.

When it comes to childhood vaccinations, Iran has nearly 100% success in inoculations, according to World Health Organization data. People from surrounding countries often come to Iran for medical care as



TURNING POINT
Ole Gunnar Solskjær (in photo, left) believes Manchester United are ready to turn around their woeful league form at Old Trafford, starting with the visit of rivals Leeds on Sunday. United have won just one of their six home games this season, scoring only one goal from open play in the process.

For more updates

www.thestatesman.com

THUMBNAILS

Russian reaction: Russia's reaction to the ban from competing in international competitions, including the 2020 and 2022 Olympics, for the next two years is "negative" but the country is relieved that its athletes can now participate, a Kremlin spokesman said.

Coe's stand: World Athletics President Sebastian Coe on Friday said he wanted suspended Russia to return as an "accountable and responsible" member of the federation but he was not sure he could resolve its dope-related problems in the near future.

Positive tests: Two members of the South African team have returned positive Covid-19 results in the first round of testing ahead of the team's entry into the bio-secure environment for their Test series against Sri Lanka. Cricket South Africa said on Friday.

Australian Open: The Victorian state government has confirmed that all players at the Australian Open will be required to quarantine in Melbourne for 14 days before the delayed start of the 8 February-21 February first Grand Slam tennis tournament of the year.

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India rise: India moved two places to No 53 in the Fifa rankings for women, the sport's global governing body announced on Friday. India gained from Belarus's fall to 56 from 53. India are tied with South Africa for the spot ahead of Venezuela.

Kumar in final: Commonwealth Games silver medalist Satish Kumar (+91kg) advanced to the final of boxing's Cologne World Cup in Germany after beating France's Djamil Dini Moinzade in the semi-finals. Kumar, also a former Asian Games and Asian Championships bronze-winner, prevailed 4-1 against Moinzade to face Germany's Nelly Tiafack in the summit clash.

Chennaiyin FC win: Chennaiyin FC finally managed to register a win after five games, with 2-1 victory over FC Goa in the Hero Indian Super League at Fatorda Stadium, Goa, on Saturday.

Youth power shines: Younger riders shined through on track with their power packed performances in the MRF MMSC FMSCI Indian National Motocycle Racing Championship 2020. Displaying his magic on track, it was 15-year-old Chennai boy Kavin Quintal who outpaced competition and clocked the fastest lap time of the racing season of 2020 at 1:48:693. While veteran riders Rajiv Sethu and Mathana Kumar had difficulties with the bike and pulled out of the race for safety reasons.

Paliwal and Gemini put HCA in Sood Cricket final: Services Ranji player Rajat Paliwal 69 runs (3x6s, 3x4s, 67 balls) and deadly bowling by skipper Hitesh Gemini (80-36-4) enabled last year winners Haryana Cricket Academy beat Sahgal CC by 30 runs to enter the final of the 30th All India Om Nath Sood Memorial Cricket Tournament being played at RSKP ground here today. Hitesh Gemini was adjudged as the Sport Sun man of the match. Brief Score: Haryana Cricket Academy 232 For 9 in 40 overs (Rajat Paliwal 69, Digvijay Rangi 35, Akhil Kohar 31, Sumeet Verma 30, Ajay Dharia 4/29, Faizan Alam 2/46 and Vishal Chaudhary 2/50). Sahgal Cricket Club 202 all out in 38.4 overs (Himmat Singh 52, Surinder Dahiya 52, Sultan Ansari 35, Hitesh Gemini 4/36, Raunak Dabas 3/26 and Akhil Johar 2/53).

India crumble to record low as quick fire Australia win Test

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
ADELAIDE, 19 DECEMBER

The Indian cricket team under Virat Kohli faced its worst hour of embarrassment while lapsing to its lowest Test score of 36 as a rampaging Australia cruised to an emphatic eight-wicket victory inside two and half days in the opening Day/Night Test here on Saturday.

There were no demons in the pitch but Josh Hazlewood (5-3-8-5) and Patrick Cummins (10.2-4-21-4) displayed fast bowling of highest quality, the impact of which will be far-reaching with three more Tests to go.

India's earlier lowest score was 42 at the Lord's in 1974 against England, known in Indian cricket parlance as the "Summer of '42". Saturday's total was also the lowest score in the brief history of D/N Tests and the joint fifth lowest overall.

The easy target of 90 runs was achieved by the home side in only 21 overs without much fuss.

They only lost Matthew Wade (33) and Marnus Labuschagne (6) in pursuit of the easy goal and in the process, opener Joe Burns (51) got a confidence-boosting half-century.

The home team collected 30 World Test Championship points from the win, while its skipper Tim Paine was adjudged player of the match for his grittiness and the first innings knock of 73.

India have now lost three successive Tests well inside three days with two being in New Zealand earlier this year.

To make matters worse for the visitors, star pacer Mohammed Shami's series could well be over due to a wrist injury from a short ball from Pat Cummins, which could potentially be a fracture. Shami could not continue and the Indian



Pat Cummins took four for 21 in 10.2 overs while Josh Hazlewood took five for eight in five overs to share nine wickets as India innings ended at 36/9 for their lowest Test total in their 82-year Test cricket history.

innings was terminated at 36 for 9 in 21.2 overs.

The likes of Sunil Gavaskar and the late Ajit Wadekar had long carried the baggage of that English Summer, inarguably one of the worst in the annals of Indian cricket. It will now be replaced by the "Summer of '36".

Call it irony, but just like Gavaskar then, a modern day great like Virat Kohli will have this kind of avoidable history in his legacy, a day when one couthardly figure outwrote went wrong.

At one stage, India were reduced to 26 for 8 and looked like equaling the lowest ever Test score (26 by New Zealand vs England) but Hanuma Vihari's boundary helped them evade entry into the dark pages of cricketing history.

The Indian batting was completely exposed by the extra bounce generated by Australian pacers, who bowled every delivery on the off-middle channel after landing on the seam.

In an inexplicable collapse, India's much vaunted batsmen fell like nine pins with not a single one able to reach double figures. Once nightwatchman Jasprit Bumrah (2) was out in the first over, Hazlewood and Cummins (10.2-4-21-4), literally decimated the tourists and also caused lasting damage to their pride.

The likes of Mayank Agarwal (9), Cheteshwar Pujara (0) and Ajinkya Rahane (0) were all out in similar fashion.

All the deliveries were almost identical, angled in, which forced the batsmen to jab at them and just bounced a wee bit more. They deviated a shade taking outside edges to Tim Paine behind the stumps.

Kohli (4) was dismissed in the manner he used to get out in England back in 2014, trying to drive a delivery on the fifth stump and caught at gully.

To sum it up, the Indian batsmen failed to factor in the pitch suddenly becoming more five-tier with extra bounce.

The two Australian pacers bowled deliveries that the visiting batsmen had to play and the ultra-defensive mindset that they carried from the first innings didn't help their cause.

Never has a Test match changed so dramatically in an hour's play like it did at the Adelaide Oval on Saturday.

Worse, a collapse like this could effect the performance

SCOREBOARD

India 1st Innings: 244 all out	Total: (For 9 wickets in 21.2 overs) 36
Australia 1st Innings: 191 all out	Fall of Wickets: 7/1 15/2 15/3 15/4 15/5
India second innings:	19/6 26/7 26/8 31/9
Prithvi Shaw b Cummins 4	Bowling: Mitchell Starc 6-3-7-0, Pat Cummins 10.2-4-21-4, Josh Hazlewood 5-3-8-5
Mayank Agarwal c & b Hazlewood 9	
Jasprit Bumrah c & b Cummins 2	
Cheteshwar Pujara c Paine b Cummins 0	
Virat Kohli c Green b Cummins 4	
Ajinkya Rahane c Paine b Hazlewood 0	
Hanuma Vihari c Paine b Hazlewood 8	
Rishabh Pant c & b Labuschagne b	
Hazlewood 4	
Ravichandran Ashwin c Paine b	
Hazlewood 0	
Umesh Yadav not out 4	
Mohammed Shami retd hurt 1	
Extras: 0	

Australia 2nd Innings	Total: (For 2 wickets in 21 overs) 93
Matthew Wade run out 33	Fall of Wickets: 7/1 15/3 15/4 15/5
Joe Burns not out 51	Bowling: Mitchell Starc 6-3-7-0, Pat Cummins 10.2-4-21-4, Josh Hazlewood 5-3-8-5
M Labuschagne c Agarwal b Ashwin 6	
Steven Smith not out 1	
Jasprit Bumrah c Paine b Hazlewood 8	
Rishabh Pant c & b Labuschagne b	
Hazlewood 4	
Ravichandran Ashwin c Paine b	
Hazlewood 0	
Umesh Yadav not out 4	
Mohammed Shami retd hurt 1	
Extras: 0	

team has failed but the skipper could remember only six in 8-9 years.

"You have just spoken about

five or six batting collapses in 8 to 9 years if I am not wrong. There will definitely be collapses again and again and we have to accept our mistakes and what we need to work on."

"This is not club level cricket and obviously there is a lot of pressure involved at different stages and as batsmen, we take pride in doing our job for the team. We are not vulnerable to getting out cheaply or vulnerable to a collapse," the skipper asserted.

For Kohli, there is no point looking at the past and he only wants to think how plans can be re-laid.

"Rather than going into the past as to what has happened and let it linger on in future, I don't think that's productive at all. The team definitely doesn't think like that and you learn from your mistakes and move forward."

Our worst batting show but let's not make mountain out of molehill: Kohli

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
ADELAIDE, 19 DECEMBER

India captain Virat Kohli can't remember a "worse batting performance" by his team than the lowest ever Test score of 36 against Australia here but at the same time, he has urged people not to "make mountain out of a molehill".

He did speak about batsmen "lacking intent" to take forward the lead and although he didn't take names, Mayank Agarwal's approach (9 off 40 balls) in the morning was hard to explain when the team had a 62-run overnight advantage.

"I don't think we have ever had a worse batting performance than this. So we can only go upwards from here and you will see guys stepping up and realising their true characters," Kohli said in the post-match press conference after his team lost the first Test to Australia by eight wickets.

The Indian captain desperately tried but looked at



pains to defend the indefensible—another inept overseas batting show with six successive scores of less than 250 just this year.

"It's a strange one to be honest in my opinion. The ball didn't do much but we didn't have too much intent of going out there and taking the game forward," he lamented.

"Everything happened so quickly that no one could make any sense of it," Kohli was unable to fathom what hit his team.

Under Kohli, save the 2018

series in Australia, the Indian team has had way too many batting collapses including six on the trot, starting with New Zealand early this year, but strangely the skipper felt there isn't anything alarming about it. "I don't think it's alarming and we can very well sit here and make a mountain out of a molehill, it's basically looking at things in the right perspective," he reasoned.

In fact, there has been close to 15 innings in SENA countries (South Africa, England, New Zealand and Australia) where

Ashwin not in agreement with Warne

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE
ADELAIDE, 19 DECEMBER

India off-spinner R Ashwin (in photo) yesterday disagreed with Shane Warne's view that all Test cricket should be played with a pink ball, saying that while Australia might have worked out the conditions, Indians were still not ready. He, however, felt there is a place for the pink ball in Test cricket.

"I still think the pink ball is at a very nascent stage of where Test cricket should head forward. But I am sure it is very exciting for a lot of people watching the game. I feel the ball that we played with at the Eden Gardens was a different sort of pink ball from the one we played with today, i.e. the kookaburra.

That one was SG (Sanspareils Greenlands)," said

Ashwin. "Adelaide has hosted the maximum number of pink-ball Tests and they are five years into it. They have got lots of

things going in their favour in terms of how the ball works, how the lights are. I would say that it is at a very nascent stage (for us and others). To be trying way too many things, pushing players, I am not really sure, but there is a place for pink-ball Tests," he said.

"We repeated a bowling performance which was a notch better than the last time. The last Test match was also pretty similar," said Ashwin, while speaking to the reporters. Ashwin's four for 55 is his best performance in countries outside Asia and the West Indies, as Australia were skittled out for 191. The off-spinner added that the Covid-19 break helped him get back to playing cricket.

"I want to play cricket from inside and somewhere I feel I might not have had the joy walking out there and playing it for a while. It is quite natural; it does happen to people. For me, to bring about that joy, I thought it is not the greatest of times. But my reflection of time is sitting out there and enjoying watching cricket which I had lost," said Ashwin.

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