

on Sunday



No nod for contempt case against advocate Prashant Bhushan

page 7



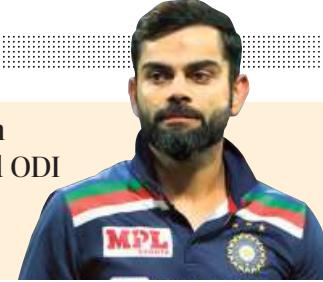
CBI raids 45 locations in 4 States in case of illegal mining and theft of coal

page 8



Iran's supreme leader Khamenei vows revenge for scientist's killing

page 9



India in a must-win situation in second ODI against Australia

page 14

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NEARBY



Delhi's air quality drops to 'poor' category

NEW DELHI
The air quality of Delhi, Gurugram and Noida deteriorated to the 'poor' category on Saturday, as per the Central Pollution Control Board data. The air quality of the Capital is expected to deteriorate to the 'very poor' category on Sunday. The AQI of Delhi was 231 on Saturday, as per CPCB's 4 p.m. bulletin.

CITY ▶ PAGE 2

Rajasthan slashes COVID test rate for private labs

JAIPUR
The Rajasthan government on Saturday fixed the rate for RT-PCR test for COVID-19 infection conducted by private laboratories at ₹800, slashing it by ₹400. Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot said the rate had been reduced from ₹1,200 following a drop in the prices of test kits.

NORTH & EAST ▶ PAGE 5

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CLASSIFIEDS ▶ PAGE 4
MAGAZINE ▶ 8 PAGES

We are prepared to stay at Delhi border for six months: farmers

We can persist if we are not heard and our demands are not met, they say

HEMANI BHANDARI
NEW DELHI

Thousands of farmers dug in their heels at the Singhu border between Delhi and Haryana on Saturday, deciding to stay put and not move to the Burari ground to ensure that their movement against the Centre's new farm laws does not die down.

"We are fully prepared to stay here for six months and can stay longer if we are not heard and our demands are not met," said Dilbag Singh, 25, a farmer from Karnal. He added that every truck standing by for the protest had rations and other necessary items for the period.

Sacks of flour, pulses and potatoes were stacked up inside a truck; a stove was placed outside along with huge utensils; piles of mattresses lay inside the vehicle and outside. There were also charging points and extra batteries available for mobile phones. Water tankers have been installed at regular intervals and *langar* provisions have also been made by the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee for the protesters.

"We will not go to the Niranjan border in Burari because once we go there, we'll just sit there for days and



Waiting to be heard: Farmers from Punjab and Haryana protesting against the new farm laws at the Singhu border on Saturday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

nothing will happen. Here, the border is locked and it's making an impact," Harvinder Singh, 24, said.

Pandemic vs livelihood

While COVID-19 precautionary measures, including wearing masks and maintaining distance, have taken a back seat, the farmers said they were not scared of the pandemic in the face of the threat to their livelihood.

"One, it didn't happen to us for the past two months when we were protesting in

Punjab, why would it happen to us now [COVID-19]? Second, our bodies are immune to all diseases because of the way we are brought up. Thirdly, if these laws are not revoked, we will anyway die because we will be exploited at the hands of corporates," said Raghuvir Singh, 50, from Moga Punjab, who is associated with the Bharti Kisan Krantikari Sangh.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 6
MORE REPORTS ON ▶ PAGES 2, 5 & 7

Ready for talks in Burari: Shah

The Centre is quite willing to hold talks with farmers' groups if they are prepared to shift to the designated protest site in Burari, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said late on Saturday. The farmers' groups said they would respond after internal consultations on Sunday morning. ■ PAGE 7

Power cuts leave Kashmir's COVID-19 patients gasping

Oxygen concentrators used in home treatment break down

PEERZADA ASHIQ
SRINAGAR

Kashmir is not new to winter woes, but this year's unprecedented and unscheduled electricity cuts have left hundreds of oxygen-dependent COVID-19 patients on edge.

Niyaz Khan, a shopkeeper from Srinagar's Lal Bazaar, has kept his ageing parents on a low-flow oxygen supply. "My parents had acute bilateral pneumonia. They were discharged from



Powerless at home: A patient in Srinagar. Disruption leaves the oxygen supply useless. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

oxygen cylinders and concentrators but they won't work without electricity," Mr. Qureshi said.

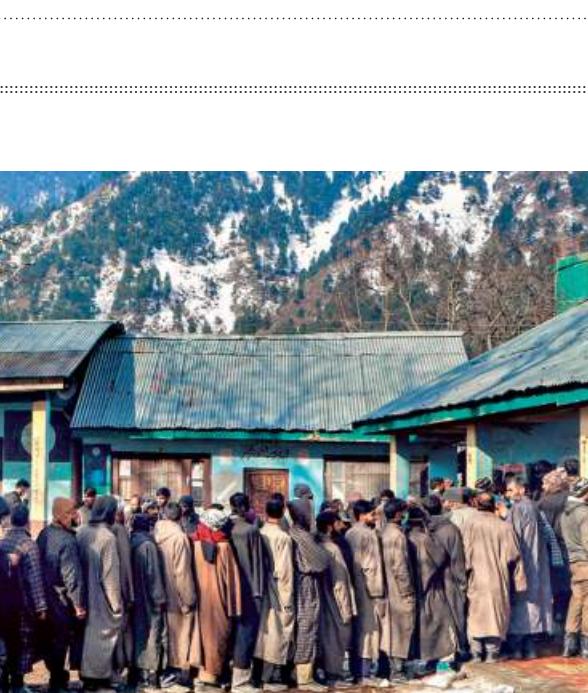
Doctors at Shri Maharaja Hari Singh hospital in Srinagar also pointed to a different COVID-19 case trend in the winter.

"Earlier, cluster cases would come from weddings and funerals, but they are now coming from large families forced to function from a single well-insulated room due to power cuts," a doctor said.

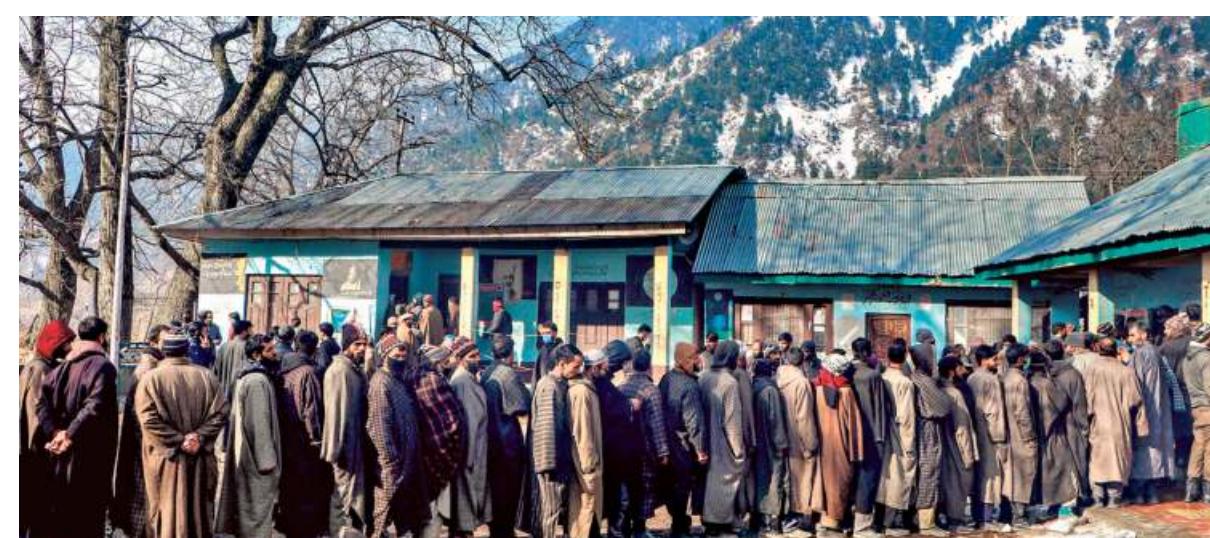
Official figures put the number of active cases at 5,236 on November 27.

Hundreds were being treated at home, but government hospitals are again staring at grim patient numbers.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 6



Making it count



Fresh start: People waiting to cast their votes in the first phase of the maiden District Development Council polls in Pahalgam, Kashmir, on Saturday. ■ NISSAR AHMAD (REPORT ON PAGE 7)

+ PM takes stock of vaccine development by 3 firms

He visits facilities in Ahmedabad, Hyderabad, Pune

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday visited the facilities of three biotechnology companies that are testing different COVID-19 vaccine candidates. The companies, two of which have begun Phase 3 trials in thousands of volunteers, are expected to manufacture millions of doses in the first half of 2021 if the candidates pass regulatory muster.

Mr. Modi began his tour by visiting Zydus Cadila's manufacturing facility near Ahmedabad. Wearing a PPE kit, he reviewed the vaccine



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with SII officials in Pune on Saturday. ■ PTI

development process at the company's research centre.

The company had commenced the Phase 2 clinical trials of its vaccine candidate, ZyCoV-D, in August.

Zydus Cadila chairman Pankaj Patel recently said the company was aiming to complete the vaccine trial by March 2021.

"Visited the Zydus Bio-

tech Park in Ahmedabad to know more about the indigenous DNA-based vaccine being developed by Zydus Cadila. I compliment the team behind this effort for their work. Government of India is actively working with them to support them in this journey," Mr. Modi tweeted.

He next visited Bharat Biotech's manufacturing facility in Genome Valley, Hyderabad, which is now testing 'Covaxin', a candidate developed based on an inactivated strain sourced from the Indian Council of Medical Research, which is being tested on 26,000 volunteers.

The company in a statement said the Prime Minister's visit "serves as a great inspiration to our team, and further reinforces our com-

mitment towards scientific discovery, solving public health issues and the fight against COVID-19".

In the final leg of his tour, Mr. Modi visited the facilities of the Serum Institute of India (SII) in Pune. SII, which has partnered with pharma major AstraZeneca and Oxford University, will be applying in the next two weeks for an emergency licence to permit the use of the 'Covishield' vaccine, CEO Adar Poonawalla said.

"SII's first priority for distributing 'Covishield' would be India and the COVAX countries (which includes several in Africa)," Mr. Poonawalla said at an online press briefing.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 6

Kejriwal draws hope from 'third wave' trends

Capital reports 69,051 tests, 4,998 cases

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The national capital reported 4,998 new COVID-19 cases and highest-ever number of test at 69,051 in the last 24 hours, according to a health bulletin released by the Delhi government on Saturday. Also, the death toll rose to 8,998 with 89 more deaths being reported in the past 24 hours.

Of the total 5,61,742 cases, 5,16,166 people have recovered and there are 36,578 active cases.

"Since 7 Nov, cases and positivity in Delhi are going down. Today, less than 5000 cases, 89 deaths and 7.24 positivity. Hope this trend continues. Delhites and Delhi govt together will win over this third wave also. Pl continue to observe all precautions (sic)," Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal tweeted while sharing the bulletin.

Delhi recorded 6,746 cases on Sunday, 4,454 on Monday, 6,224 on Tuesday,

CM YK

India to host SCO summit tomorrow

Modi, Imran Khan to skip virtual meeting that will be attended by six PMs

SUHASINI HAIDAR
NEW DELHI

India will host the Heads of Government Council meeting of the eight-nation Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) on Monday, but Prime Minister Narendra Modi will not attend the meeting, which will be chaired by Vice-President M. Venkaiah Naidu instead.

According to a statement by the Ministry of External Affairs, the Prime Ministers of China, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan will attend the virtual conference.

Delhi Health Minister Satyendar Jain said that the positivity rate of COVID-19 has reduced by 50% compared to November 7, when it was a little over 15%.

He also said that the whole of Delhi can be inoculated in "three to four weeks" once the vaccine is available. The Health minister said that Delhi should be given priority during the distribution of the vaccine as it is the national capital.



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation meeting at Tashkent in November 2019. ■ PTI

with the trade and economic agenda of the organisation," it added.

PM in Varanasi

Mr. Modi is expected to spend the day in Varanasi, his Parliamentary constituency instead.

Officials explained that while the SCO Heads of Government Council consists of Prime Ministers, Mr. Modi had been deputing others for the event in previous years as well, with the External Affairs Minister attending the SCO HoG meets in 2017

and 2018, and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh filling in for the PM in 2019. They also pointed out that Mr. Modi had already attended the SCO Heads of State meeting in November, which is normally held at the presidential-level. Mr. Khan, too, had attended the meeting, chaired by Russian President Vladimir Putin.

One of the reasons, sources cited, is that as parliamentary democracies, the presidential positions in India and Pakistan are "ceremonial" in nature, and the

Prime Minister's position is more equivalent to that of the President in the other SCO member countries.

India-Pakistan tensions

Moreover, tensions between India and Pakistan, which have played out in previous meetings, may have played a part in Mr. Khan's decision to decline the invitation from India.

During the SCO meeting of the National Security Advisers, NSA Ajit Doval had walked out of the videoconference over his Pakistani counterpart's decision to use a Pakistani map claiming Indian territories as his backdrop. Significantly, tensions between India and China have not spilled over into the SCO meetings thus far, and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh had even held bilateral meetings with their Chinese counterparts during visits to Moscow for the SCO Ministerial meetings in September.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 6

Governor okays U.P. conversion ordinance

Legislation provides for jail term

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Governor Anandiben Patel promulgated an ordinance on unlawful conversion days after it was passed by the Yogi Adityanath Cabinet, officials said on Saturday.

The Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Ordinance, 2020, was cleared by the State Cabinet earlier this week and promulgated on November 27.

The ordinance makes religious conversion a cognisable and non-bailable offence, inviting penalties of up to 10 years in prison if found to be effected for marriage or through misrepresentation, undue influence, coercion, allurement or other allegedly fraudulent means.

Violation of the law would invite a jail term of not less than one year, extendable to five years, with a fine of ₹15,000. However, if a minor, a woman or person belonging to Scheduled Castes



Anandiben Patel

or Scheduled Tribes is converted through the said unlawful means, the jail term would be a minimum of three years and could be extended to 10 years with a fine of ₹25,000.

Mass conversions would invite a jail term of not less than three years and up to 10 years and a fine of ₹50,000. The court shall also grant compensation payable by the accused to the victim of said conversion, which may extend to a maximum of ₹5 lakh, said the ordinance.

WILL OPPOSE THE BILL, SAYS AKHILESH ▶ PAGE 7

A.N.D.N.E

Burari ground remains largely empty

COVID-19 enquiry camp, other facilities are being set up

HEMANI BHANDARI
NEW DELHI

Nirankari ground in Burari, where Delhi Police has allowed farmers to protest, was largely empty on Saturday with only a few groups sitting at the site.

"We are here to support the farmers who have gathered from different States. We will go to the border from here if they do not come here," said Charanjeet Singh from Faridkot, who reached Delhi on Saturday with his group.

At the entrance of the ground, a poster reads: "Aam Admi Party desh ke kirisanon ka hardik swagat



Workers set up tents for farmers at Nirankari ground in Burari on Saturday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

karti hai (Aam Admi Party welcomes farmers"). Delhi Police drones fly overhead.

Facilities such as a medical camp, COVID-19 enquiry camp, langar provisions,

water, toilets, and more have been put in place. "In case of rain or wind, concrete tents are being put up and will be prepared by Saturday night," said a worker.

AAP govt. provoking farmers: BJP

'Anti-national and anti-Prime Minister slogans being raised'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The BJP on Saturday accused the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government and the Congress of provoking thousands of farmers from Punjab to travel to Delhi.

Delhi BJP chief Adesh Gupta said the Kejriwal-led government was engaged in "hospitality of farmers" at Nirankari ground but did not make any arrangements to test them for COVID-19.

The Kejriwal government has put the lives of farmers in danger of catch-

ing COVID just to serve their political interest," he said.

Delhi farmers

Leader of the Opposition in the Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri accused the city government of ensuring that Delhi's farmers were the most exploited of their lot in the country.

If a farmer buys a tractor, he is given a commercial vehicle licence and has to pay a road tax of ₹24,000. They are forced to pay separate charge for fitness, pollution, insurance etc. What

has the Kejriwal-led government actually done for Delhi's farmers?" he said.

Mr. Gupta claimed that "anti-national and anti-Prime Minister" slogans were being raised in Delhi, and alleged that this was being supported by the AAP government to spread an "atmosphere of fear".

Mr. Bidhuri said that contrary to Mr. Kejriwal's promise of paying 50% over minimum support price (MSP), Delhi's farmers were not even being given the equivalent amount of MSP.

Farmers camp under flyover at Ghaziabad-Delhi border

We are waiting for our farmer brothers from U.P. to join us, says BKU leader

ANUJ KUMAR
GHAZIABAD

Hundreds of farmers under the banner of Bhartiya Kisan Union occupied the space beneath the flyover at the Ghaziabad-Delhi border on Saturday. They were protesting against the three farm laws and demanded that minimum support price be made mandatory by law.

Prepared for the long haul

The farmers parked tractors, trolleys and cars beneath the flyover. Rugs were spread, speakers were put up, hoo-kahs were lit and preparation were being done to cook food at the site.

Earlier, they broke barriers at the Delhi-Ghaziabad border and entered Delhi on Saturday afternoon. Despite heavy security presence along the way, the Muzaffarnagar, Meerut and Ghaziabad Police allowed them to proceed towards Delhi.

Delhi Police had given



Farmers protesting at Ghaziabad on Saturday. ■ ANUJ KUMAR

them permission to go to the Burari ground but the farmers wanted to go to Jantar Mantar or Ramila Maidan.

Bhartiya Kisan Union leader Rakesh Tikait said the breaking of barriers was "symbolic".

He said there was no point going to Burari and that they would hold a sit-in dharna under the flyover and "wait for their farmer brothers from different districts of western Uttar Pradesh to join them to move further".

"I expect a call from the government on Sunday but we are ready for the long haul," he said. He also asked the administration to provide them mobile lavatories.

Wait and watch

"We told them that we would escort the farmers to the Burari ground but they refused. We also allowed them to take a couple of tractors with them but they decided to wait at the border. They broke the barrier inside the

Uttar Pradesh border," said Jasmeet Singh, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Eastern District), who was negotiating with farmers till late evening. "The situation is under control. We are in touch with our counterparts in Uttar Pradesh," he added.

As the farmers decided to stay beneath the flyover, he said, their presence did not affect the flow of traffic.

While the U.P. Police officials present on the ground said there was no permission to hold a protest beneath the flyover, they seemed in no mood to remove the protesting farmers.

Vijaypal Ghopla, a 74-year-old farmer from Meerut said this government felt that it was offering a mithai (farm laws). "We don't want it and wouldn't allow you to shove it down our throat.

The farm laws have been designed to help a few corporates control the agriculture sector," he argued.

Air quality in Delhi drops to 'poor' category

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The air quality of Delhi, Gurugram and Noida deteriorated to the 'poor' category on Saturday, as per Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) data.

The air quality of the national capital is expected to further deteriorate to the 'very poor' category on Sunday.

"The AQI is forecast to marginally deteriorate and will be in the 'poor' to 'very poor' category for the next two days. It is likely to further deteriorate and 'very poor' category is forecast for December 1," said government-run monitoring agency SAFAR.

The AQI of Delhi was 231 on Saturday, as per CPCB's 4 p.m. bulletin, which is an average of the past 24 hours. The values for Gurugram and Noida were 204 and 233, respectively.

Delhi had experienced the best AQI in months on Friday, when the air quality was in the 'moderate' category.

DCW rescues child marriage victim in Delhi

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi Commission for Women (DCW) on Saturday said that a 16-year-old girl, who was being forcibly married off by her family, had been rescued from Kalyanpur here.

DCW officials said that following an anonymous tip-off, the Commission constituted a team and reached the address shared by the complainant.

"The team found that a wedding function was being held with several guests in attendance. The family was initially hesitant to share her age proof when a Delhi police team arrived, and after they produced documents, it was found that she was a minor," a DCW official said.

The girl has been sent to a shelter home following legal proceedings and will be presented before the child welfare committee, officials said.

DCW chief Swati Malwal said, "It is very shameful that even in cities like Delhi, child marriages are taking place. Strongest action should be taken by Delhi Police in the matter."

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LAJPAT NAGAR, 49, Main Ring Road, Adj. Haldi Ram, Near Moolchand Crossing

Denied bidi, three men stab labourer to death

All accused have been arrested: police

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A 49-year-old labourer was allegedly stabbed to death by three men in south-east Delhi's Shaheen Bagh after he refused to give them a bidi (thin cigarette), the police said on Saturday.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (South-East) R.P. Meena said the deceased was identified as Siddique, who was from Malda in West Bengal, and the accused as Mohammad Faizan (20), Mohammad Usman (22) and Jaheer Mansoori (20).

The police said that the victim had been working as a labourer at one Nadeem's house in Shaheen Bagh and the two had become good friends. On Thursday even-

ing, when Nadeem and Siddique were sitting on the banks of the Yamuna and smoking, three men arrived and asked them for a bidi.

When the duo refused, the men started abusing and thrashing them. Siddique and Nadeem tried to run away but the men chased them down and thrashed them again. Some people then intervened and managed to save the victims.

The three accused, however, managed to catch the duo again, and took skewers from a nearby shop and stabbed Siddique.

He was declared brought dead at a nearby hospital.

CCTV footage helped police in identification and arrest of the accused.

Hindu College alumni to help needy students

Applicants must submit income proof

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

In view of financial constraints being faced by students due to the ongoing pandemic, the Hindu College alumni association said that members will provide annual study grants to needy meritorious students.

In a statement issued by the Old Students Association (OSA), the Hindu College said that students, whose annual family income is below ₹5 lakh, will be provided with a one-time study grant to cover their annual college fees, up to ₹20,000.

OSA president Ravi Burman said, "For long term we are planning on setting up an 'OSA-Principal P.C.

Students who wish to apply for the grant were asked to submit their application along with family income certificate to the college administration.

NGT seeks report on 'illegal' water extraction

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Following a plea alleging illegal extraction of water in Mangolpuri here, for commercial purposes, the National Green Tribunal directed the district administration to take immediate steps and furnish an action-taken re-

port on the same.

Noting that the Tribunal had earlier sought a report from the Delhi Jal Board and Deputy Commissioner, North-West district, Kanjhawala, a Bench headed by NGT chief Justice Adarsh Kumar Goel said, "While no re-

port has been received from

the Deputy Commissioner, a report has been received from DJB to the effect that SDM Kanjhawala has been asked to carry out inspection, but due to COVID-19 the same could not be done."

"We direct the SDM Kanjhawala to positively furnish a factual report," it said.

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2.	The NIT consisting of qualifying information, eligibility criteria, specifications, terms & conditions, Bill of Quantities etc. can be seen/downloaded from the J&K Govt. website www.jktenders.gov.in and departmental website www.jmcmccjamu.org				
3.	The pre-bid meeting will be held in the office chamber of Joint Commissioner (Adm.), Jammu Municipal Corporation, 3rd Floor, Town Hall Jammu on 04-12-2020 at 11:30 am.				
4.	The bids shall be deposited in electronic form only on the J&K Govt. website www.jktenders.gov.in .				
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FROM PAGE ONE

'We are prepared to stay at Delhi border for 6 months'



Lunch break: Farmers having lunch during a protest in Delhi on Saturday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHKAR

At the border, a group of young girls from different universities and student bodies in Punjab and Haryana have also joined the movement, and they sing revolutionary songs. Arpan, 29, member of a student body called Bekhauf Azadi, said their songs depicted the plight of the farmers. "These laws affect our families and indirectly affect us... our education," she said.

"My parents haven't come here and I have come with my group. My parents support me in coming here

for the cause because they are also farmers," said Jaspreer Kaur, 28, a Ph.D scholar from Punjab University.

At Singhu, one of the two border points where farmers have gathered (the other being the Tikri border), Hardev Singh Babbar, 40, a farmer from Mohali, ensured that no one crossed over or tried to create nuisance where the police had installed barricades. "They [the police] are there, we are here. Both sides don't interfere with each other. Everything is peaceful," he said.

Power cuts leave Kashmir's COVID-19 patients gasping

"As the domestic oxygen concentrators are not effective enough to maintain saturation of 90% and patients don't get domiciliary oxygen due to the power situation, they come to government hospitals with complications," Dr. Qazi Haroon, nodal officer for COVID-19 in the Kashmir Directorate of Health Services, said.

Official data say, against the demand of 1,800 megawatts (MW) J&K manages to procure less than 1,100 MW of power and the cuts are the worst in the past one decade.

NGOs losing battle
NGOs Ehsaas and Athrout Kashmir, at the forefront of supplying oxygen cylinders and concentrators to the needy, see themselves up against a wall.

"Due to voltage drop, five of our concentrators broke down. This winter, power cuts have sounded the death knell. An oxygen cylinder does not last for many hours. The situation is grim. We attend to dozens of calls asking for oxygen concentrators," Yasir Khan, general

secretary, Ehsaas, said. Our 'dial a doctor' initiative, where Kashmiri doctors living abroad help COVID-19 patients free, will also become ineffective without electricity, he said.

Bulk cylinders
"We are trying to give bulk cylinders to people in need but that won't suffice. We have seen patients' situation worsening without oxygen," Mr. Khan said, whose NGO managed 323 oxygen dependent patients over the past two months.

"I think people also need to avoid too many room-heaters. It will save lives," he added.

Athrout Kashmir has helped over 3,500 COVID-19 patients through tele-consultation and by providing oxygen concentrators.

Since the pandemic broke out in March, J&K has officially recorded 1,08 lakh patients, and 1,676 deaths. "Around 7,82,712 persons were enlisted for observation, which included 20,275 in home quarantine and 43,432 under home surveillance," an official said.

PM takes stock of vaccine development by 3 firms

"We are in the process of applying for emergency use licence in the next two weeks. While as of now, we don't have anything in writing with the Centre on how many doses they plan to purchase, the Health Ministry's indication is that they are looking at 300-400 million doses by July 2021."

Remarking on the efficacy of 'Covishield' trials globally, Mr. Poonawalla said that "zero hospitalisation" had been reported during

the process. "The trials have established Covishield's efficacy as it has shown to reduce the virus in a person's system by 60%. Furthermore, zero hospitalisations were reported during the trials. What we found in these trials globally is that even if a person gets infected, it will not be a severe attack as the sterilising immunity was 60%," he said.

(With inputs from Pune, Ahmedabad and Hyderabad)

India to host SCO summit tomorrow

Apart from the eight member states, the meeting will be attended by four observer states of the SCO. President of Afghanistan Ashraf Ghani will attend along with the First Vice-President of Iran, the Prime Minister of Belarus and the Deputy Prime Minister of Mongolia.

Turkmenistan has been invited as a special guest by India and will be represented by the Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers.

"By chairing the 19th

meeting of the SCO Council of Heads of Government on 30 November, India hopes to further strengthen greater trade, economic and cultural cooperation within SCO by putting human beings at the centre of SCO activities and to foster greater peace and prosperity in the region," the MEA statement said, adding that India will present initiatives for overcoming the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic as well.

Vigilance conducts searches at State-run KSFE, Minister fumes

Code-named Operation Budget, the drive primarily looked at chit fund scheme

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Kerala Finance Minister T.M. Thomas Isaac on Saturday slammed the Vigilance and Anti-Corruption Bureau (VACB) for executing a State-wide surprise search on Kerala State Financial Enterprises (KSFE) offices. The VACB anti-corruption drive, code-named Operation Budget, looked at the KSFE's chit fund (chitty) scheme primarily.

According to officials, the VACB reportedly found large-scale irregularities in the availing of cash advance and loans on recurring deposits by chit fund subscribers. It also detected manipulation in the bidding and draw of lots to favour some subscribers over others.

An official said the findings were preliminary. Only

No law says the KSFE should deposit recurring deposits in the treasury. The Vigilance and Anti-Corruption Bureau cannot set the law or arbitrate on what is right or wrong. The Law Department is there for such matters. The KSFE is not afraid of the VACB

T.M. THOMAS ISAAC,
KERALA FINANCE MINISTER

a detailed forensic audit would reveal the full extent of the violation of norms, including the value evaluation of title deeds as collateral for loans for subscribers who failed to get their chit funds prized but required loans. The VACB also found that some KSFE staff had enrolled themselves in 'chitties' and availed themselves of advances at the cost of other subscribers.

Dr. Isaac opposed the agency's debatable finding that the KSFE did not deposit its revenue in the government treasury. "No law says the KSFE should deposit recurring deposits in the treasury. The VACB cannot set the law or arbitrate on what is right or wrong. The Law Department is there for such matters. The KSFE is not afraid of the VACB. It welcomes inspec-

tions," he said.

Dr. Isaac also defended the conduct of 'Pravasi chitties' whose subscribers are predominantly non-resident Keralites and their families.

KSFE Chairman Philipose Thomas welcomed any anti-corruption probe and said the functioning of the KSFE was transparent and above board. It had nothing to hide from probe agencies. He denied the allegation that the KSFE was a repository for black money and illegitimately earned wealth. He said KSFE remittances and deposits were by default referred to the Income Tax Department. Moreover, the Comptroller and Auditor General and the Local Fund Department audited the KSFE independently. Furthermore, it had a robust internal audit mechanism.



Yediyurappa's political secretary recovering; case booked

N.R. Santosh allegedly attempted to end life; his wife links the incident to 'recent political disturbances'

STAFF REPORTER
BENGALURU

N.R. Santosh, Karnataka Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa's political secretary and grand nephew, who is being treated at MS Ramaiah Hospital after he allegedly attempted to end his life, is recovering and stable, a statement from the hospital said.

He was admitted after he consumed an excess amount of sleeping pills on Friday night.

"He may be discharged in a day or two," a statement from the hospital said.

Mr. Yediyurappa, who visited him at the hospital late

and "help him solve any issues," once discharged.

Mr. Santosh's attempt to end his life has triggered speculation as to what drove him to it. He had played a key role in toppling the JD(S)-Congress coalition government and bringing Mr. Yediyurappa to power, but had reportedly fallen out with the Chief Minister's son B.V. Vijayendra later.

However, he made a comeback and was appointed the Chief Minister's political

secretary in May. Things had gone sour again, and Mr. Santosh had been asked to relinquish his post, sources said.

Mr. Vijayendra, however, denied these reports, and said he had no differences with Mr. Santosh.

Sources in the Chief Minister's family pointed out that Mr. Santosh had marital differences and his wife, Jahnavi, had also approached the police earlier over domestic abuse.

However, speaking to presspersons on Saturday,

Nod awaited for probe against Chennithala

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Vigilance and Anti-Corruption Bureau (VACB) appears to have laid the ground for a preliminary anti-corruption inquiry against Leader of the Opposition Ramesh Chennithala. The Kerala Congress has slammed the move as an election-era political stunt and witch-hunt.

The VACB had conducted a 'confidential inquiry' into the allegation that the Kerala Bar Hotel Association (KBHA) had bribed Mr. Chennithala and two Congress Ministers in the previous Oommen Chandy government to roll back a proposed bar licence fee hike. Mr. Chennithala was the president of the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) at the time. The inquiry had also targeted former Excise Minister K. Babu and former Health Minister V.S. Sivakumar.



Ramesh Chennithala

Based on its findings, the VACB has sought the permission of the government to conduct a preliminary inquiry into the accusations. The government would have to seek the consent of Governor Arif Mohammed Khan and Speaker P. Seera-makrishnan to authorise such a move.

Mr. Chennithala said the Kerala Loka Ayukta and the court had thrown out 'baseless charges' against him and his party colleagues.

IN BRIEF



More pilgrims may be allowed to Sabarimala

PATHANAMTHITTA
The Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) on Saturday said it looked forward to accommodating a higher number of pilgrims to the Sabarimala Ayyappa temple from Monday. TDB president N. Vasu said the government's decision to increase the number of devotees was likely to come into force by Monday. A final decision, however, would be announced after due consultations with the health and police departments.

Yogi questions KCR's indifference to COVID-19

HYDERABAD
Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath launched a fiery attack questioning the stoic silence of Telangana counterpart K. Chandrasekhar Rao on issues pertaining to distressed flood victims in Hyderabad and also his inertia in monitoring the COVID-19 outbreak. Addressing a public meeting ahead of the civic polls at Shalibanda on Saturday, Mr. Adityanath asked why KCR could not even care to visit the facility where COVID-19 vaccine trials were going on in the city.

Andhra Pradesh police solve bank heist case

GUNTUR
The Guntur rural police claimed to have cracked the sensational bank heist at Nadikudi, where ₹77 lakh was stolen on the night of November 21. Kidari Prasad, 21, and Vinaya Prasad, 37, were arrested on charges of breaking the cash chest of SBI, Nadikudi branch, and making away with the cash. They reportedly confessed to the crime and told police that they got the idea to rob the bank by watching videos on websites. The police have recovered the cash stolen.

Infections, test positivity low in A.P.

With a positivity rate of 1.27%, State adds 625 cases; Karnataka's rate is 1.37%

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Kerala reported 6,250 new cases of COVID-19 on Saturday from 63,983 samples. The test positivity rate was 9.77% on Saturday, remaining in the 9-11% range seen over two weeks. The official COVID toll rose to 2,196 with 25 more deaths added by

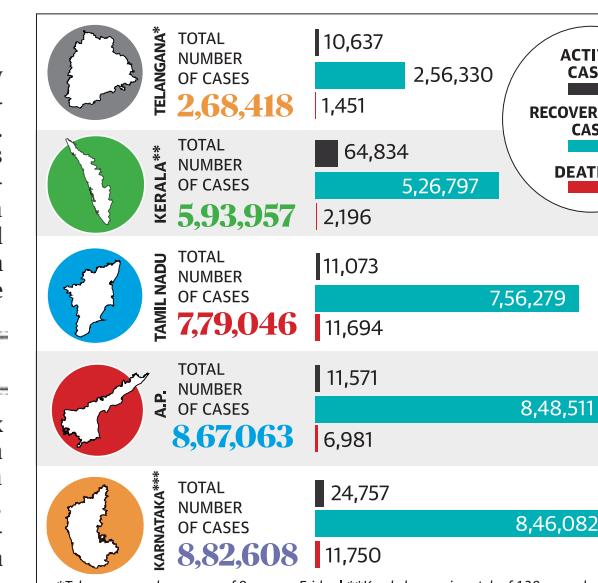
COVID-19

State Health department. Six deaths were reported from Alappuzha, five each from Ernakulam and Thrissur, four each from Thiruvananthapuram and Malappuram and one case from Kottayam.

Andhra Pradesh reported 625 new infections and five deaths on Saturday. It was the second lowest single-day tally in five months.

In the past day, 49,348 samples were tested with a positivity rate of 1.27%. The overall positivity rate stood at 8.70%.

Only three districts re-



ported fresh deaths. Krishna

and West Godavari reported two deaths each and Visakhapatnam, one death.

Krishna district again topped single-day incidence with 103 cases.

Telangana recorded 753 cases on Friday with the testing of 41,991 samples. Three more patients died.

The new cases included

133 from Greater Hyderabad,

78 from Medchal Malkajgiri, and 71 from Rangareddy.

The State recorded 10,637 active cases.

Karnataka on Saturday reported 1,522 new cases and 12 deaths.

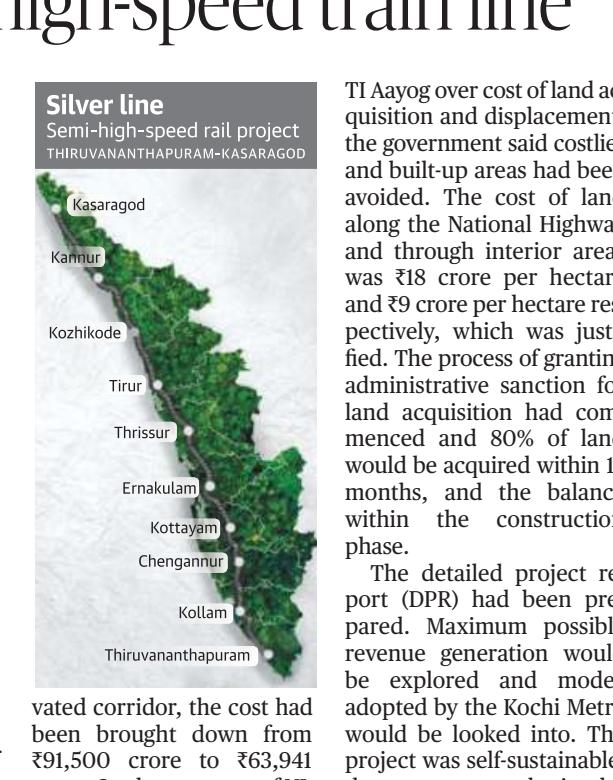
Of 24,757 active patients, 384 were being monitored in the ICU. While the positivity rate for the day stood at 1.37%, the Case Fatality Rate

TI Aayog over cost of land acquisition and displacement, the government said costlier and built-up areas had been avoided.

The cost of land along the National Highway and through interior areas was ₹18 crore per hectare and ₹9 crore per hectare respectively, which was justified. The process of granting administrative sanction for land acquisition had commenced and 80% of land would be acquired within 18 months, and the balance within the construction phase.

The detailed project report (DPR) had been prepared. Maximum possible revenue generation would be explored and modes adopted by the Kochi Metro would be looked into. The project was self-sustainable, the government submitted.

vated corridor, the cost had been brought down from ₹91,500 crore to ₹63,941 crore. On the concerns of NI-



ED likely to quiz Pinarayi's private secretary next week

Agency to serve him notice for 3rd time

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOCHE

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) is likely to question C.M. Raveendran, additional private secretary to Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, early next week as part of its probe into the diplomatic baggage gold smuggling case.

The agency is expected to serve a notice for the third time on Mr. Raveendran on Monday after he failed to turn up at its office here twice. A day after issuing the notice asking him to appear on November 6, Mr. Raveendran informed the investigating team that he was evading interrogation.

The agency wanted to quiz Mr. Raveendran following the arrest and subsequent interrogation of M. Sivasankar, former Principal Secretary to Mr. Vijayan.

Green light for semi-high-speed train line

Responding to NITI Aayog, Kerala lists measures to reduce cost

S. ANIL RADHAKRISHNAN
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Kerala government has informed the NITI Aayog that the 529.45 km semi-high-speed rail SilverLine from Kochuveli to Kasaragod, estimated to cost ₹63,941 crore, is "viable and feasible", and that the cost per kilometre of ₹10.77 crore for laying the corridor is "reasonable".

Political scene heats up in West Bengal

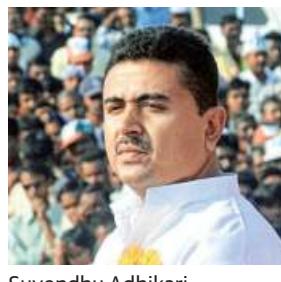
Suvendu may address rally today

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

West Bengal witnessed hectic political activity, along with a war of words among political parties on Saturday, a day after Trinamool Congress leader Suvendu Adhikari resigned from the State Cabinet.

At least six party offices of the Trinamool in Purba Medinipur district were attacked hours after Mr. Adhikari quit. Local party leaders said the supporters of Mr. Adhikari were behind the attacks. At some places, the flags at the party offices were replaced by BJP flags.

Mr. Adhikari, who hails from Purba Medinipur, is expected to hold a rally on Sunday at Mahisadal. Trinamool sources said Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee would visit Purba Medinipur and address a rally in the district in the first week of December. Senior Trinamool leader Saugata Ray, MP, said, "Doors are still open for talks with Suvendu. I am hopeful of a dialogue between him and the party leadership." The MP called up to seek details of Mr. Adhikari's ailing mother.



Suvendu Adhikari

Trinamool MLA Mihir Goswami, who joined the BJP on Friday, met Union Home Minister Amit Shah in New Delhi. Mr. Goswami, who represents the Coochbehar Dakshin Assembly seat, alleged that the Trinamool had become a party of "power-hungry people who are not keen about welfare of the people". BJP State president Dilip Ghosh said Trinamool MLAs and Ministers had lost faith in the Mamata Banerjee government.

"The government has failed in disaster management in the State and now the Chief Minister is busy with the disaster management of the party. Now, such meetings will be more frequent as many have lined up to join the BJP," Mr. Ghosh.

Amid snowfall, 52% turnout in J&K poll

Phase 1 of DDC election in 43 constituencies peaceful; Reasi district recorded highest polling of 74.62%

PEERZADA ASHIQ
SRINAGAR

The maiden election to the District Development Councils (DDC), the first electoral exercise in Jammu and Kashmir since the abrogation of its special status last year, recorded a peaceful 52% voting on Saturday, despite the cold weather and a snow cover in many constituencies.

"J&K recorded 51.76% polling in phase one. The polling was by and large peaceful in 43 constituencies. Around 3.62 lakh of the 7,00,842 voters – 1.93 lakh men and 1.69 lakh women – voted to choose their representatives," State Election Commissioner (SEC) K.K. Sharma said.

Budgam's record

In the Valley, Budgam district recorded the highest polling at 56.96%, followed by Kupwara at 50.74% and Ganderbal at 48.62%. Pulwama in the volatile south Kashmir recorded 6.7%, Shopian 42.58%, Kulgam 34.35% and Anantnag 43.32%. The capital, Srinagar, recorded 33.76%.

Despite the recent snowfall in many constituencies, Bandipora recorded 43.57%



Braving the cold: Voters waiting to exercise their franchise at a polling station in Raiyari Budgam district in central Kashmir on Saturday. ■ NISSAR AHMAD

and Baramulla 32.51% polling. In the Jammu division, Reasi district recorded the highest polling at 74.62% followed by Rajouri at 70.52% and Poonch at 68.69%.

Hundreds of Gurkhas and Valmiki voters, who became eligible for voting since the abrogation of the special status, exercised their franchise in Jammu.

Most voters in south Kashmir saw the DDC election as a new layer of easy interface with the administration,

while many described them as "decisive to put across people's sentiment on dilution of Article 35A and Article 370".

"I am voting to keep the BJP away. My vote is for those who promise to return J&K's special status and talk about a political resolution of Kashmir," Majed Khar, a voter at Keller in Shopian, said.

The election may be for the third tier of the Panchayati Raj, but ideological

issues dominated the campaign, instead of development planks.

All the star campaigners of the BJP, including Union Ministers Anurag Thakur and Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi, ruled out return of the Articles 370 and 35A, while the leaders associated with the Peoples Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD), including Farooq Abdullah, Mehbooba Mufti and Sajad Lone, promised the people to work towards the restora-

tion of the pre-August 5 position. This is also the first election where separatists did not campaign for any boycott. Militants also did not issue any threat to voters and candidates online or on the ground.

One voter was injured in a minor incident of stone throwing in south Kashmir.

The overall situation remained under control throughout the Kashmir division. There was a minor incident of stone throwing at polling location C.R. Pora in Kulgam district, in which one voter was injured. A First Information Report (FIR) has been registered," Inspector-General of Police Vijay Kumar told *The Hindu*.

Exit polls prohibited

The SEC has prohibited any exit polls till the hour fixed for conclusion.

"The election authority prohibits the conduct of any exit poll and publishing or publicising or displaying the results of exit polls by means of the print or electronic media or in any other manner in the ongoing DDC polls till the hour fixed for conclusion of poll in the last phase of these elections on December 19," an official said.

Will oppose conversion Bill, says Akhilesh

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
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Former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav on Saturday said his party will oppose the State government's Bill on religious conversions when placed in the Assembly for passage.

The State Cabinet earlier this week gave nod to the Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Ordinance, 2020 to curb forcible or dishonest religious conversions, including those for the sake of marriage.

U.P. Governor Anandiben Patel gave assent to the ordinance on Saturday. Now, it will be presented in the State Legislature. Commenting on it, Mr. Yadav said "The Samajwadi Party is not in favour of any such law. We will oppose it (when it comes to the Assembly)." He also sought to know its relevance when the State has schemes to encourage intercaste and interfaith marriages.

"The government does not want to debate on more important issues due to which it brought the ordinance," he said, alleging that it is creating hatred and chasm in society.

Govt. will talk to farmers in Burari: Home Minister

Amit Shah urges protesters to move from the highway

VIJAITA SINGH
PRISCILLA JEVARAJ
NEW DELHI

The Centre is quite willing to hold talks with farmers' groups if they are prepared move away from the highway and shift to the designated protest site in Burari, Home Minister Amit Shah said late on Saturday.

The farmers' groups which are demanding a repeal of three agricultural reform laws said they would respond after internal consultations on Sunday morning.

Mr. Shah's statement is the highest official response to the protesters so far, and the first to offer negotiations before the scheduled talks with Punjab unions on December 3. It came after protesters decided to remain parked at the Haryana-Delhi border crossings at Singhu and Tikri, demanding a more visible protest location rather than being shunted



Long haul: Farmers from Punjab and Haryana gather at GT Karnal Road Singhu Border in Delhi while another batch wait to cross the Delhi-Uttar Pradesh border at Ghazipur on Saturday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR, SANDEEP SAXENA



off to Burari, in the north-western corner of the city.

Mr. Shah said that the Centre had already offered to talk to the farmers on December 3, but some unions had demanded that the meeting should be held earlier. "I want to assure that Government of India will be ready to talk to you the very next day after you [farmers] shift to Burari ground," he said.

He noted that farmers from Punjab, Haryana and other parts of the country had been coming to the Delhi borders and have gathered on two major highways

Appealing to farmers to

since Friday. "Farmers have to suffer a lot because of the cold weather and other commuters are also facing trouble. So, I want to appeal to my farmer brothers that the government has made adequate arrangements for you at Burari where you can continue the protest," he said, in the official statement. "Food, toilets and medical facilities are available so that the farmers are not inconvenienced. They can protest in a democratic and peaceful manner with the permission of the Delhi Police," he added.

He noted that farmers from Punjab, Haryana and other parts of the country had been coming to the Delhi borders and have gathered on two major highways

end their protest, Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar said farmer unions' leaders should come for talks because solutions could be found only after discussion.

Internal talks

Farmers groups say there is need for further internal consultation. "There will be a meeting of the Punjab farm unions at 8 a.m., and then the five-member coordination committee [of the Samyukt Kisan Morcha] will meet," said K.V. Biju, a leader of the Rashtriya Kisan Mahasangh, one of the major

farmers alliances participating in the protest.

Earlier in the afternoon, the SKM had jointly decided not to shift to Burari on Saturday, and questioned the government's sincerity in offering talks.

Food Secretary Sudhan-shu Pandey, who is acting as Agriculture Secretary until the month-end, told *The Hindu* on Saturday evening that the ball was now in the farmers' court. "The government has now made it clear that we are open for talks. Where should these talks happen? Can they happen on the highway?" he said.

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Food Secretary Sudhan-shu Pandey, who is acting as Agriculture Secretary until the month-end, told *The Hindu* on Saturday evening that the ball was now in the farmers' court. "The government has now made it clear that we are open for talks. Where should these talks happen? Can they happen on the highway?" he said.

No nod for contempt case against Bhushan

A-G says lawyer expressed regret

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Attorney-General K.K. Venugopal has declined consent to a request to initiate contempt proceedings against advocate Prashant Bhushan for his "prima facie contumacious" tweets concerning a visit made by the Chief Justice of India to the Kanha National Park in Madhya Pradesh, saying the lawyer later expressed his regret for the error on Twitter.

Mr. Venugopal's letter was initially of the mind to grant consent to initiate contempt, but Mr. Bhushan, learning that a request has been made before the Attorney-General for consent and realising his mistake of connecting the facilities provided to the CJI to the "survival of the government", tweeted his regret on November 4. On the same day, the disqualification of certain members of the Legislative Assembly of the State was pending before him".

Mr. Venugopal, in his let-

ter to Mr. Singh on November 8, said the tweets were "wholly unwarranted, improper, devoid of legal basis and *prima facie* contumacious".

Mr. Venugopal said the CJI was one of the highest constitutional functionaries. The CJI was a State guest, and was entitled to receive protocol facilities and appropriate security.

Mr. Venugopal said he was "initially of the mind to grant consent to initiate contempt", but Mr. Bhushan, learning that a request has been made before the Attorney-General for consent and realising his mistake of connecting the facilities provided to the CJI to the "survival of the government", tweeted his regret on November 4. On the same day, the disqualification of certain members of the Legislative Assembly of the State was pending before him".

Mr. Venugopal, in his let-

Opposition wants PM to speak to farmers

Eight parties issue joint statement

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Opposition leaders from across the political spectrum on Saturday targeted the Narendra Modi government for its handling of the ongoing farmers' protests, with the Congress asking the Prime Minister to talk to the agitating farmers instead of "getting himself photographed at corporate offices".

In a joint statement, senior Opposition leaders of eight political parties, including Sharad Pawar (Nationalist Congress Party),

Pawan Bansal made Cong. interim treasurer

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Saturday appointed former union minister Pawan Bansal an interim treasurer of the All India Congress Committee (AICC) following the demise of Ahmed Patel. Mr. Bansal, who is now in charge of AICC administration, will assume responsibility with immediate effect.

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Estate Officer i/c DIPLR/4421/TENDER/2020

TANUVAS, Chennai.

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Date: 27/11/2020

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IN BRIEF



Security beefed up in Manipur for Shah's visit

IMPHAL
Ahead of the visit by Union Home Minister Amit Shah to Manipur, security has been beefed up in the State. The police said on Saturday that an Intelligence report had been received on movement of insurgents in parts of Imphal East district. A search team has arrested a suspected rebel, H. Ranjith, 45. He had joined the United National Liberation Front in 1997, the police said. In another incident, K. Nanao, 32, an active member of the outlawed Kanglei Yawol Kunna Lup, has been held. One pistol each has been seized from them.

Eight Rohingya arrested in Assam for illegal entry

GUWAHATI
The police in Assam's Hailakandi district arrested eight Myanmar-origin Rohingya people, five of them minors, who were said to have entered India illegally from Bangladesh. "The eight were arrested from the house of Md. Yusuf Ali Mazumdar in Mazarpur village on Saturday," Hailakandi's Superintendent of Police Pabindra Kumar Nath said. He added that Mr. Mazumdar was absconding. The police said cases under relevant sections of the Foreigners' Act and Passport (Entry to India) Act were registered against the Rohingya people.

Ph.D. study introduced in memory of Cho

THANJAVUR
SASTRA Deemed to be University, Thanjavur, has introduced a full-time Ph.D. programme in memory of the late journalist Cho S. Ramaswamy. The university said applications were invited for the programme on "The Evolution of Indian Media before and after Indian Independence". Candidates with a recognised post-graduate degree can apply. Attractive stipend and quality mentorship would be offered to the selected candidates. Interested candidates can send their resume at admissions@sasta.ac.in by December 12.

Journalist found dead in suspicious circumstances

LUCKNOW
A journalist working with a Hindi newspaper was charred to death in his house under suspicious circumstances in Balrampur district of Uttar Pradesh, the police said on Saturday. Rakesh Singh, a scribe with *Rashtriya Swaroop*, and his friend Pintu Sahu died in the fire. Balrampur SP Dev Ranjan Verma said Mr. Singh's bedroom in his house in Kalwari village in Kotwali Dehat area caught fire on Friday night. "The incident appears to be suspicious," said Mr. Verma. The police have detained three persons, including a former pradhan.

Maharashtra leads COVID-19 case tally

India registers 41,322 infections, 485 deaths in 24 hours

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Over 69 per cent of the 41,322 new COVID-19 cases reported in a span of 24 hours were from eight States and Union Territories, with Maharashtra recording the highest number of new infections followed by Delhi and Kerala, the Union Health Ministry said on Saturday.

With 11,57,605 tests conducted in a span of 24 hours, India's cumulative tests had surged to 13.82 crore, while the number of tests per million population had crossed the one-lakh mark and now stood at 1,00,159.7, the Ministry said. The active COVID-19 caseload of the country is 4,54,940.

The Ministry issued a statement saying "69.04 per cent of the daily new cases of COVID-19 are contributed by eight States/UTs i.e. Maharashtra, Delhi, Kerala, West Bengal, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, and Chhattisgarh." Maharashtra led the tally with 6,185 new COVID cases. Delhi recorded 5,482 cases, while Kerala saw 3,966 infections.



Reaching out: Health workers collecting samples at Manish Market in Mumbai on Saturday. • EMMANUEL YOGINI

Sustained and progressive expansion in testing infrastructure had played a crucial role in the steep rise in testing numbers. With 2,161 testing laboratories in the country, the daily testing capacity had got a substantial boost, the Ministry said.

Recoveries surge

Total recoveries had surged to 87,59,969 with 41,452 recoveries being registered in a day in the country, it said. Delhi reported the maximum number of single-day recoveries with 5,937 newly

discharged cases. A total of 4,544 people recovered in Kerala followed by 4,089 in Maharashtra.

The Ministry said 78.35 per cent of the 485 case fatalities reported in a span of 24 hours were concentrated in 10 States and UTs. With 98 deaths, Delhi reported the highest number of new fatalities. Maharashtra saw 85 followed by West Bengal with 46, the Ministry said. India's COVID-19 caseload stood at 93,51,109 and the death toll was 1,36,200, the data updated at 8 a.m. showed.

CBI searches 45 places in coal case

Illegal mining in two Bengal collieries

DEVESH K. PANDEY
NEW DELHI

The Central Bureau of Investigation on Saturday searched 45 locations in four States in connection with the illegal mining and theft of coal from Kunustoria and Majura collieries in West Bengal's West Burdwan. One of the accused persons suffered a heart attack and was declared dead at a hospital in Ansals.

"The searches were carried out in West Bengal, Jharkhand, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Electronic devices, records of financial transactions and about ₹41 lakh in cash were seized," said a CBI official.

Both the collieries come under the Eastern Coalfields Limited (ECL).

Massive network

Among those named in the FIR registered on Friday is alleged coal mafia leader Anup Maji aka Lala, who had been active for the past several years and had built a huge network with his associates. He is also said to have strong political links.

The other accused persons are two ECL general managers, Amit Kumar Dhar (then of Kunustoria area) and Jayesh Chandra

'SC-appointed panel expanding territory'

Govt. accuses monitoring committee for the Capital of overreaching itself

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Central government has accused the Supreme Court-appointed monitoring committee, set up in 2006 to identify unauthorised structures and check misuse of residential properties in Delhi, of "expanding its territory on its own".

Appearing before a Bench led by Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta said the "monitoring committee has on its own expanded its own territory and started sealing residential premises without prior notice".

Mr. Mehta faulted the committee for showing the "audacity" to criticise a Supreme Court judgment of August 14. The judgment had concluded that the monitor-



ing committee was acting in excess of its powers.

Aug. judgment

The 70-page judgment in August, pronounced by a three-judge Bench headed by Justice (now retired) Arun Misra, had found that the committee had no authorisation to seal private residential premises not used for commercial purposes in the national capital.

The Constitution mandates that a person can be deprived of property and right of residence only in the manner prescribed by law, the court had noted.

The judgment was based on a challenge to a report submitted by the committee on the sealing of residential buildings in Vasant Kunj and Rajokri. It had said the committee usurped statutory powers while directing the demolition of these buildings.

Mr. Mehta said the committee has consistently tried to convey to the court that none of the local bodies do any work and that they are "hand in glove" with builders.

However, Mr. Mehta said, the authorities have already set up a task force. He ar-

'Shiny stones in Nagaland may be quartz'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

The sparkling stones that triggered a 'diamond' rush in Nagaland's Mon district in the last few days could be quartz, a preliminary finding by a team of geologists has revealed.

A farmer in the district's Wanching village on November 25 stumbled upon a crystalline stone while digging a patch. It set off a digging frenzy as people from the village and beyond tried to lay their hands on what they thought were diamonds.

The team from the State's Geology and Mining Department reached the village, about 350 km from State capital Kohima, on Friday night. "According to their preliminary study, the stones are quartz," Mon's Deputy Commissioner Thavaseelan K. told *The Hindu*. "The team is taking samples for further analysis," he added.

Mr. Thavaseelan did not rule out the possibility of a large deposit of the crystals beneath Wanching and adjoining areas. "Almost everyone has a stone," he said.

Quartz is a hard, crystalline mineral composed of silicon and oxygen atoms. Some of the varieties are semi-precious stones.

Odisha forms SIT to probe killing of 5-year-old

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
BHUBANESWAR

Botha and four senior CID officers, a notification issued by the Home Department said.

The State government constituted the SIT as per Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik's announcement in the Assembly on Friday.

The team will probe into the case of the girl going missing from her home at Jadupur village in Nayagarh dis-

trict on July 23.

The incident came to light four months later when the girl's parents arrived in front of the Assembly gate on Tuesday. A case was registered at Nayagarh sadar police station.

The Opposition BJP and Congress MLAs disrupted the proceedings of the Odisha Assembly for the fourth consecutive day on Saturday

over the kidnapping and murder case. The issue was raised in the Assembly by Congress leader Narasingha Mishra as soon as the House assembled for the day.

The BJP members reiterated their demand for removal of Agriculture Minister Arun Kumar Sahoo from the Cabinet as his role in providing protection to the main accused in the case is not clear.

Doval, Gotabaya discuss investments

Regional security too figures at meeting

MEERA SRINIVASAN
COLOMBO

National Security Adviser Ajit Doval, who met Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa on Saturday, discussed key bilateral issues including Indian investments and regional security,

in a one-on-one discussion that comes amid a heightening geopolitical contest in the island nation.

Following the meeting, Mr. Rajapaksa tweeted: "Had a fruitful discussion with Shri @Ajitdovalkumar, NSA #India this evening. National Sec, Sec in the Indian Ocean, new Indian investments, continuation of infrastructure proj. & strengthening bilateral relations between #SriLanka & #India were the areas discussed at the meeting."

The meeting was held on the sidelines of the 4th National Security Adviser-level Maritime Security Cooper-

Neighbours agree on intel sharing

India, Sri Lanka, Maldives deliberate on common security threats at trilateral



Joint fight: NSA Ajit Doval, Sri Lankan Defence Secretary Kamal Gunaratne and Maldives Foreign Minister Mariya Didi at a trilateral meeting in Colombo on Saturday. • PTI

tually at the senior officials' level.

Revived after six years

In a joint statement following the meeting, Sri Lanka's Ministry of Defence said the 4th National Security Adviser-level trilateral Maritime Security Cooperation meeting – the practice has been revived after a six-year gap –

sought to promote meaningful cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region, with focus on common issues pertaining to maritime security.

The three countries also exchanged views on common security threats and agreed to broad-base cooperation by expanding the scope to improve intelligence sharing and include is-

sues like terrorism, radicalisation, extremism, drugs, arms and human trafficking, money laundering, cyber security and effect of climate change on maritime environment, according to the state-

ment.

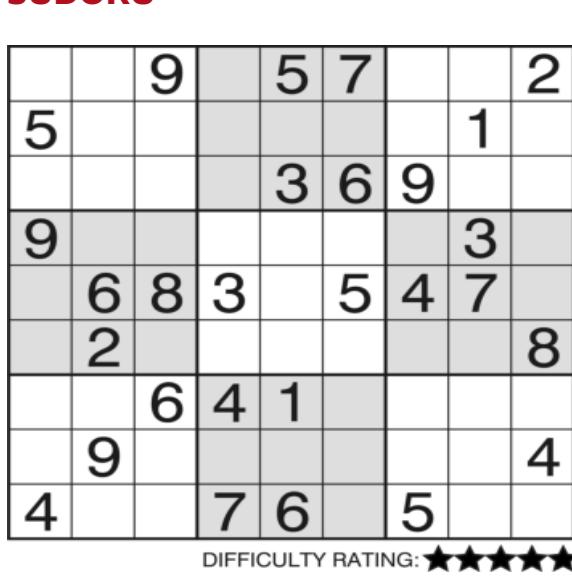
Mr. Doval also held bilateral discussions with Ms. Didi and with Sri Lankan officials.

tion discussion among India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives. Mr. Doval's meeting with President Rajapaksa spanned over an hour, official sources told *The Hindu*.

It assumes significance amid Colombo's heightened diplomatic engagement with Beijing, focussed on Sri Lanka's economic recovery since COVID-19 struck, including a request for \$1 billion in loans this year.

The discussion also comes amid persisting resistance, from some aligned to the Rajapaksa government and from port worker unions, to Indian involvement in developing the East Container Terminal at the Colombo Port that Sri Lanka, India and Japan had agreed to jointly develop, when the Sirisena administration was in power. India has been keen on getting the project – at the strategically located Colombo Port – going.

SUDOKU



Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

8	2	3	6	9	4	7	5	1
7	1	9	8	2	5	4	6	3
6	4	5	3	7	1	8	9	2
2	3	6	9	1	7	5	8	4
5	8	7	4	6	2	1	3	9
1	9	4	5	3	8	2	7	6
9	5	1	7	4	3	6	2	8
3	7	2	1	8	6	9	4	5
4	6	8	2	5	9	3	1	7

Iran's Supreme Leader, President vow revenge over slain scientist

Khamenei warns of 'definitive punishment'; Rouhani blames Israel for the attack

ASSOCIATED PRESS
TEHRAN

Iran's Supreme Leader on Saturday called for the "definitive punishment" of those behind the killing of a scientist linked to Tehran's disbanded military nuclear programme, a slaying the Islamic Republic has blamed on Israel.

Israel, long suspected of killing Iranian scientists a decade ago amid tensions over Tehran's nuclear programme, has yet to comment on the killing on Friday of Mohsen Fakhrizadeh. However, the attack bore the hallmarks of a carefully planned, military-style ambush. The slaying threatens to renew tensions between the U.S. and Iran in the waning days of President Donald Trump's term, just as President-elect Joe Biden has suggested his administration could return to Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers from which Mr. Trump ear-



Rising tensions: Students of Basij paramilitary force protesting in front of the Foreign Ministry in Tehran on Saturday. ■ AFP

lier withdrew.

In a statement, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei called Fakhrizadeh "the country's prominent and distinguished nuclear and defensive scientist".

'N-programme to go on'

Mr. Khamenei said Iran's first priority after the killing was the "definitive punishment of the perpetrators and those who ordered it". He did not elaborate.

Speaking to a meeting of

his government's coronavirus task force on Saturday, President Hassan Rouhani blamed Israel for the killing.

Mr. Rouhani said that Fakhrizadeh's death would not stop its nuclear programme, something Mr. Khamenei said as well. Iran's civilian nuclear programme has continued its experiments and now enriches uranium up to 4.5%, far below weapons-grade levels of 90%.

But analysts have compared Fakhrizadeh to being

on a par with Robert Oppenheimer, the scientist who led the U.S.' Manhattan Project in Second World War that created the atom bomb.

"We will respond to the assassination of Martyr Fakhrizadeh in a proper time," Mr. Rouhani said.

Targeted killings

Friday's attack happened in Absard, a village east of the capital that is a retreat for the Iranian elite. Iranian state television said an old truck with explosives blew up near a sedan carrying Fakhrizadeh.

The attack comes just days before the 10-year anniversary of the killing of Iranian nuclear scientist Majid Shahriari that Tehran also blamed on Israel. That and other targeted killings happened at the time that the so-called Stuxnet virus, believed to be an Israeli and American creation, destroyed Iranian centrifuges.

What does the killing mean for Iran?

Country faces a growing dilemma over its response to repeated attacks

STANLY JOHNY

The assassination of Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, a top Iranian nuclear scientist and a brigadier general in the elite Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, on the outskirts of Tehran on Friday has triggered a new crisis in West Asia.

It is the most high profile killing of an Iranian regime figure since the assassination of General Qassem Soleimani in January this year by the U.S. in Baghdad.

Fakhrizadeh, according to the U.S. and Israel, had overseen Iran's nuclear weapons programme in the 1990s and early 2000s, and remained a key figure in the country's nuclear programme and the Defence Ministry. Iranian media reported that gunmen opened fire at Fakhrizadeh's car while he was driving through Absard, a small town located some 65 km east of Tehran.

The killing comes at a crucial time for Iran. There are hopes that Joe Biden, the next American President, would return to talks, ending months of "maximum pressure", a policy adopted by the outgoing President Donald Trump, which took both countries to the brink of war after the killing of Soleimani.

Iran had also increased its stockpile of low-enriched uranium beyond the limits set by the 2015 nuclear deal in recent years. Iran started violating the terms of the nuclear deal after President Trump unilaterally pulled the U.S. out of the agreement in May 2018. The loss of Fakhrizadeh, at a time when



Mohsen Fakhrizadeh

Iran is taking steps to expand its nuclear programme, either as a strategy or as a bargaining chip, is a clear setback to its plans.

Who killed the scientist?

Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif has said there are "serious indications" that Israel was involved in the attack. American media have quoted U.S. intelligence sources as saying that the attack was carried out by Israel.

In the past 10 years, at least six Iranian scientists [Masoud Ali-Mohammadi, Majid Shahriari, Fereydon Abbasi-Davani, Dariush Rezai, Mostafa Ahmadi-Roshan and Fakhrizadeh] were killed in bombs and gun attacks in which Israeli hands were suspected.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had called out Fakhrizadeh in a press conference in 2018. "Remember that name, Fakhrizadeh," he said, when he presented a photograph of the nuclear physicist.

The attack comes weeks after President Trump reportedly sought options to bomb Iran before he leaves office on January 20. He was dis-

suaded by his aides, according to an NYT report. Later, Mike Pompeo, the U.S. Secretary of State, travelled to Israel and held talks with Mr. Netanyahu.

Mr. Pompeo and the Israeli Prime Minister then flew to Neom, the megacity being built in Saudi Arabia, and held talks with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, in the first direct talks between the top leaders of Israel and the Kingdom. It's hardly a secret that Israel, Saudi Arabia and the Trump administration would want to stop the Iran nuclear deal being revived, which could lead to the lifting of sanctions on Iran and leave the Islamic Republic stronger. When the leaders met in Neom, there were speculations that something was brewing in

NEWS ANALYSIS

West Asia. Then came the attack on Fakhrizadeh.

Limited options

Iran has threatened to "strike as thunder" in retaliation. But Iran's options against Israel appear to be limited, unless Hezbollah, the Lebanese Shi'ite militia-cum-political party, is ready to attack northern Israel from its bases in southern Lebanon.

What Iran can do, which it demonstrated in 2019 after Trump reimposed sanctions, is to target oil tankers in the Strait of Hormuz or oil installations in the Sunni monarchies across the Gulf.

But Iran did not opt for an all-out war even after Soleimani was killed. Its response was limited to targeting U.S. bases in Iraq and even that

came after enough warnings so that the U.S. could take precautionary measures to protect its soldiers.

Iran was under pressure

Now the question is what would Iran do if it wants to avenge the death of Fakhrizadeh. In recent months, Iran has come under great pressure as U.S. sanctions wrecked its already bleeding economy, Israeli covert and overt operations raised questions about the efficacy of its security apparatus and regional realignments posed new geopolitical risks. It lost a master strategist when Soleimani was killed. A mysterious explosion damaged a centrifuge assembly hall at its main nuclear site, Natanz, earlier this year.

In Syria, Iranian assets and militias came under repeated attacks from Israeli jets in recent months, when Vladimir Putin's Russia, an Iranian ally that practically controls Syria's airspace, looked away. And now, it has lost a top nuclear physicist.

Iran faces a growing dilemma. If it doesn't retaliate in the wake of repeated provocations, there would be questions, both inside and outside the country, about its ability to protect the regime's top leaders or take counter-measures against what it calls "terrorism".

If it takes any major retaliatory step, it could escalate the conflict, providing room for Israel and the Trump administration to take rapid military measures, which would cut off the diplomatic path for the Biden administration to take the U.S. back to the nuclear deal.

U.S. Navy deploys aircraft carrier to Gulf

REUTERS
DUBAI

after the carrier deployed on Wednesday.

Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, who is suspected of masterminding a secret nuclear bomb programme, was killed in an ambush near Tehran on Friday.

Commander Rebarich said the redeployment was related to U.S. drawdown in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"There were no specific threats that triggered the return of the Nimitz Carrier Strike Group," Commander Rebecca Rebarich, spokeswoman for the U.S. Navy's Bahrain-based Fifth Fleet, said in an emailed statement.

"This action ensures we have sufficient capability available to respond to any threat and to deter any adversary from acting against our troops," she said.

Operations in Tigray region complete: Abiy

REUTERS
ADDIS ABABA

Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed said that military operations in the northern Tigray region have been completed, shortly after he announced federal troops had seized full control of the regional capital of Tigray on Saturday evening.

"I am pleased to share that we have completed and ceased the military operations in the #Tigray region," Mr. Abiy tweeted.

Lockdowns, mass testing, contact tracing and mask use helped China tackle virus

to a grinding halt.

Crucially, it wasn't only about locking down. In parallel with the lockdown period was the implementation of the world's most expansive test and trace system that allowed authorities to stay ahead of the curve, with a suffocating approach that eventually helped bring cases through local transmission down to zero in most of China by the summer.

China by no means is COVID-19 free, but has been able to ensure low numbers

EXPLAINER

since the summer by sustaining a suffocating "zero infection" approach to small clusters that have been reported since, brought either through imported cases from overseas or, as in the case of Beijing in June, through contaminated imported seafood.

This approach, combining mass testing and contact tracing, was applied in Beijing in June, in Dalian the following month, in Qingdao in October, and more recently in Tianjin in November.

In Qingdao, the entire city was tested – 10.92 million in five days – after infections were reported at a local hospital, blamed on improper disinfection linked to an imported case. The city's daily testing capacity was around 2,000 in February. It has been ramped up to 2.6 lakh as of today. One common approach was pooled testing, that uses 10 samples for a single test. Chinese public health experts also hail the unheralded role of contact tracing – in part enabled by technology and mandatory health apps, but also made possible by the largely forgotten but equally crucial legwork of tens of thousands of healthcare workers and volunteers – in allowing China to stay ahead of the COVID-19 curve.

Cases in all of China outside Hubei would peak by late February because of tight restrictions that stopped all domestic travel and travel into China, essentially bringing all movement, and spread of the infection, to a standstill. China has also been strin-

gent on international travel, not only continuing to limit the number of flights, but among few countries mandating 14 days quarantine for every international traveller at government-designated hotels. China has also been very selective in organising repatriation flights and discouraged those overseas from returning, an approach that has been criticised by Chinese citizens and students stranded abroad, including many in India.

Masking up
Enforcing near-universal mask use has been another important measure, made possible not just in China but in much of East Asia by raised public awareness, helped by memories from the first SARS epidemic in 2002. Mandatory and universal mask use, Chinese experts say, has been crucial in containing the spread. Indeed, China's latest cluster in Tianjin was found to have been caused by a man not wearing a mask, who spread the virus to eight people.

Some of China's stringent "zero infection" – targeted strategies, such as enforced centralised quarantine even for asymptomatic cases, restrictions on international travellers, and the mass testing of entire cities, may be unpalatable measures that democratic governments may find difficult to enforce. They have, however, been broadly backed by the public in China, so much so that when a recent cluster emerged in Tianjin, there were calls online from elsewhere demanding Tianjin residents be barred from travelling. At the same time, other simple but effective measures such as getting people to mask up properly and spreading the right message on mask use right from early February, were critical and invaluable, even if those messages have yet to filter through in much of the rest of the world.

But authorities pointed the finger at the Sulawesi-based East Indonesia Mujahideen (MIT), one of dozens of radical groups across the Southeast Asian archipelago that have pledged allegiance to IS. No arrests had yet been made and the motive for the attack was not immediately clear.

Commencement of online application is on 2nd December 2020 @ 9.30 am onwards.

there are currently six other reactors under construction at home and abroad, state-owned plant operator CNNC said.

The Hualong One, deployed at a plant in east China's Fujian province, will be put into commercial use by the end of the year after undergoing tests.

China has 47 nuclear plants in operation with a total generation capacity of 48.75 million kilowatts – the world's third highest after the U.S. and France.

Beijing has invested billions of dollars in state subsidies have been given to Chinese companies to speed the process – a move that has angered China's trade partners and sparked a protracted trade row with Washington.

Work on the Hualong One reactor started in 2015 and

ELSEWHERE



Pope installs first African American cardinal

VATICAN CITY Pope Francis on Saturday installed 13 new cardinals, including the first African-American – Archbishop of Washington, Wilton Gregory – to hold the high rank, further expanding the pontiff's impact on the group that will one day elect his successor. REUTERS

ADB approves \$300 million loan to Pakistan

ISLAMABAD The Asian Development Bank has approved a \$300 million policy-based loan to Pakistan to help promote

macroeconomic stability in the cash-strapped country. The announcement came a week after Pakistan secured \$800 million worth of debt freeze deals from 14 members of the G20. PTI

IS militants kill 4 Christians in Indonesia

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
PALAU

Islamic State-linked extremists killed four people in a remote Christian community on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi, authorities said Saturday, with one victim beheaded and another burned to death.

The group of sword-and-gun-wielding attackers ambushed Lembantonga village in Central Sulawesi province on Friday morning, killing several residents and torching half a dozen homes, including one used for regular prayers and services, police said.

No arrests had yet been made and the motive for the attack was not immediately clear.

But authorities pointed the finger at the Sulawesi-based East Indonesia Mujahideen (MIT), one of dozens of radical groups across the Southeast Asian archipelago that have pledged allegiance to IS.

RECRUITMENT OF FACULTY POSITIONS

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Date: 29.11.2020

Indian Institute of Food Processing Technology (IIFPT) is a National Academic and Research institute under the Ministry of Food Processing Industries, Government of India, engaged in research and development in the areas of food processing and value addition and also offers B. Tech., M. Tech. and Ph.D. programmes in the area of Food Processing.

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1	Professor (Food Process/Agricultural Process Engineering)	05	Level 14	04-UR 01-OBC
2	Professor (Biochemistry)	01	Level 14	UR
3	Associate Professor (Food Process/Agricultural Process Engineering)	01	Level 13A	EWS
4	Assistant Professor (Food Process/Agricultural Process Engineering)	01	Level 10	UR
5	Assistant Professor (Agricultural Entomology)	01	Level 10	EWS

Last date for receipt of application for all the post is 45 days from the date of publication of the above employment notification in the "Employment News".

For further details, please visit our website: www.iifpt.edu.in.

DIRECTOR

Q2 manufacturing rebound puzzles economists

Conflicting signals from official sectoral IIP data that showed a contraction raise questions about accuracy of GVA estimate

VIKAS DHOOT
NEW DELHI

The turnaround in India's manufacturing sector, which rebounded from a 39.3% contraction in GVA (gross value added) in the April-June quarter to clock 0.6% growth in the second quarter, has left economists scrambling to reconcile conflicting official data and trying to square with the latest GDP estimates that suggest the economy fared better-than-expected.

India's GDP contracted by 7.5% over the July-September period, official data released on Friday show, beating most estimates, including a 'nowcast' in the RBI's November monthly bulletin that had projected an 8.6% decline in the last quarter.

While services continued to suffer from the COVID-19 pandemic's impact, the in-

dustrial sector's contraction narrowed to just 2.1% in the second quarter, after shrinking by a steep 38% in the preceding three-month period. Most of the gains were attributable to the improved performance in manufacturing.

"Though the whole press release [on GDP estimates] is full of surprising numbers, the most astonishing number is the positive growth in manufacturing," SBI group's chief economic advisor Soumya Kanti Ghosh observed in a research report titled "Q2 GDP shows surprising resilience: Is it good enough to last?". "Despite being the worst affected sector in Q1 due to the lockdown, it is quite puzzling how manufacturing turned itself around," he wrote.

The IIP manufacturing and manufacturing GVA



Pandemic impact: While services continued to suffer, the industrial sector's contraction narrowed to 2.1%. ■ AP

growth are highly correlated [almost 0.9] and this correlation collapsed in Q2 when IIP manufacturing declined by 6.7% [average of July, August and September] while manufacturing GVA grew by 0.6%," Mr. Ghosh wrote.

Additi Nayar, principal economist at ICRA, urged caution on reading too much into the manufacturing sector recovery. "While manufacturing volumes had continued to contract, the GVA of this sector posted a marginal

0.6% growth in Q2, on the back of aggressive cost-cutting measures, a pared down wage bill and benign raw material costs," she said.

Informal sector haze

"The extent of the recovery in the performance of the informal sectors in Q2 remains unclear, and we caution that trends in the same may not get fully reflected in the GDP data, given the lack of adequate proxies to evaluate the less formal sectors," Ms. Nayar added.

While Mr. Ghosh agreed cost cuts may have helped boost corporate GVA, SBI Research had found small firms were more aggressive with 10-12% cuts in employee costs. "This could turn a potential headwind in future in terms of a drag on consumption."

The manufacturing growth needed to be viewed in the context of the low year-earlier base, said India Ratings and Research principal economist Sunil Kumar Sinha. Manufacturing GVA had contracted by 0.6% in July-September 2019.

"From the supply side while most of the sectors have done as expected and continue to be in contractionary mode, the surprise of the pack is manufacturing," he said.

The National Statistical Office (NSO) stressed that its GDP estimates were affected by the lockdown curbs.

"Other data sources such as GST, interactions with professional bodies were also referred to for corroborative evidence and these were clearly limited," the NSO noted in its release.



Suresh Prabhu

is going to create more challenges in dealing with global issues – whether it's economy, healthcare or climate change. If you want to revive the economy, you cannot do so by turning inwards, but by integrating with the rest of the world with transparent and democratic rules-based mechanisms," Mr. Prabhu said, stressing the need to ensure that multilateral bodies such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the United Nations (UN) remain relevant.

Conceding that even the UN and WTO must be asked to change with the changing times, he said that outright denial of multilateralism, however, is 'not just a folly, but a definite recipe for more disasters to come'.

"We will have to work together proactively during the G20 leadership of Italy, Indonesia and India. The three 'I's will have to remind the rest of the world that you cannot develop the world by only saying 'I'. You have to say 'We'. The G20 has the responsibility and obligations not only to those who are present in the room, but also those that are not in the room," Mr. Prabhu concluded.

India will assume the presidency and host the G20 summit in 2023, while Italy and Indonesia will steer the presidency in 2021 and 2022, respectively.

Coimbatore start-up installs ATRS at 2 airports

Firm eyes Asian orders for its system

M. SOUNDARIYAR PREETHA
COIMBATORE

SJK Innovations, a Coimbatore-based start-up, has installed Automatic Tray Retrieval Systems (ATRS) at two airports in the country and is looking at similar projects in India and other Asian countries.

Managing Director Suraj Shantakumar said the company had installed the system at security checks in terminal 3 of Delhi airport for domestic departures.

At Coimbatore airport, the company commissioned the system recently on a proof-of-concept basis to showcase the solution, which is used at cabin baggage checking points. The entire system has

been designed, engineered, and assembled by the company. SJK supplies the hardware and software, installs, and maintains them.

"The investment is primarily for working capital as the ATRS are developed according to the layout at each airport. We will continue to invest in research and development of the solution," he said.

"Apart from catering to the Indian market, we will focus on Asian markets," he added.

The company is looking at developing and providing technology-driven material handling solutions in sectors such as agriculture, logistics and e-commerce, apart from aviation.

Royal Enfield's Make-it-Yours (MiY) software platform has helped generate between 80% and 90% of demand for all its products, said CEO Vinod Dasari.

"A buyer can use the MiY platform to choose, for example, from among 5,00,000 permutations and combinations, to order the Meteor model. So much so that, you can design your own motorcycle and we would put your name on it and ship it out to you," he added.

Normally, that promise would have been kept within 48 hours of such a booking, but unanticipated demand for the Meteor – introduced earlier this month – has meant customers go through a waiting period.

Mr. Dasari, who joined the motorcycle maker from Ashok Leyland in April 2019, has committed to introducing one new model every quarter over the next five years.

He said Royal Enfield would significantly enhance its products' and offer a range to meet different aspirations of customers within the mid-segment market,

pursue growth outside of India, and focus on the after-market business.

"Over the next few years, we plan to offer new variants, models and even new platforms on which new bikes would be built," he said. "Second, our network growth has been faster outside India; we built a plant in Argentina, we are building one in Thailand. Third, there is huge opportunity in accessories, spare parts, and after-sales service that we are tapping," the CEO added.

Lockdown impact

Local lockdowns driven by the COVID-19 pandemic had impacted the company's supply chain. To a query, he said less than 5% of Royal Enfield's supplies came from China. He pointed out that

'Make-it-Yours' keeps Royal Enfield on the go

80%-90% of demand for our products comes via MiY software platform: Dasari



Vinod Dasari

Mr. Dasari, who joined the motorcycle maker from Ashok Leyland in April 2019, has committed to introducing one new model every quarter over the next five years. He said Royal Enfield would significantly enhance its products' and offer a range to meet different aspirations of customers within the mid-segment market,

+ INTERVIEW | VISWANATH RAMASWAMY

India is key to IBM's pursuit of a \$1 trillion hybrid cloud opportunity'

Tech firm sees local partnerships growing as country accelerates its digital push

MINI TEJASWI

With India accelerating its 'digital' initiative, IBM is striving to put the country on the global innovation map by leveraging the power of technologies like artificial intelligence, cloud and cognitive computing says Viswanath Ramaswamy, VP - Cloud & Cognitive Software & Services, IBM India/South Asia. Edited excerpts:

What are the changes IBM India may go through to align itself with the company's newly accelerated global shift towards cloud computing and AI?

■ We are redefining our future as a hybrid cloud platform and AI company. Over the last few years, we have built a solid foundation for hybrid cloud. IBM's hybrid cloud platform generated more than \$24.4 billion of revenue over the last 12 months. In Q3, our cloud and data platforms grew by 20% led by Red Hat. So you will see our focus on hybrid cloud and AI intensify further.

As we look forward, the case for hybrid cloud is clear. Clients see two-and-a-half times more value in a hybrid cloud approach versus a public only. It is a tremendous opportunity valued at \$1 trillion, with most of the enterprise opportunity ahead of us. Our approach, platform-centric, is differentiated by Red Hat OpenShift, which is our market-leading open platform. It's a vast software portfolio modernised to run cloud-native, and our services expertise that drives platform adoption and meets clients "where they are" on their cloud journeys.

In August, IBM committed \$1 billion into a cloud ecosystem initiative for ov-

er the next three years. In the last six months, IBM has further strengthened its long-term relationships with the GSIs community in India and globally. In India/South Asia, we will continue to drive a razor-sharp focus on our strategy imperatives.

Why is computing increasingly being shifted to the cloud and how much of it will be hybrid?

■ In India, 17% of organisations' IT spend is allocated to cloud at present and they plan to increase the share of spend on hybrid from 42% to 49% by 2023, as per an IBM study.

The majority of their cloud budgets are being allocated to hybrid cloud platforms even as their public cloud spend is set to reduce from 50% share today to 43% by 2023.

Yet, today, only 20% of the workloads have moved to the cloud, while the other 80% are mission-critical workloads that are more difficult to move. This leaves us with a massive untapped opportunity wherein hybrid cloud is positioned to become a dominant force for driving digital transformation for

enterprises. Organisations are looking at moving to cloud beyond computing capabilities that it can offer. Enterprises want cloud that has industry expertise to cater to mission-critical processes, offers enterprise-grade security, compliance and governance, the ability to build and run anywhere with consistency, the ability to be able to automate, predict and modernise workflows and leverage the latest innovations.

For instance, Bharti Airtel is adopting an open cloud architecture for all network and containerised workloads.

Do you face serious competition from AWS, Microsoft and Google in India/South Asia as well, and what's your strategy to take them on?

■ IBM is the number one hybrid cloud platform and AI company. Our cloud business is much more expansive than competitors, because it includes capabilities others don't have and reflects the actual cloud buying patterns of enterprise clients. Our cloud business includes both: as a service – infrastructure, software, platform and process – and hardware, software and services that enable enterprise clients to design, build, operate and integrate private, public and hybrid clouds.

The point is that the overall enterprise cloud marketplace is not defined by what providers are trying to sell, but by what

Technology is playing an important role in India's journey to become an AatmaNirbhar Bharat and we are supporting the country's needs for state-of-the-art technology solutions. We are spearheading innovation through our labs: systems, software, services and client innovation centres in India.

IBM Research India is at the forefront of exploratory and applied research in AI, blockchain and hybrid cloud. IBM's cloud technology is supporting companies in India accelerate business growth and build resilience.



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Unilateralism is hurting global economy: Prabhu

Nations need to work together now

VIKAS DHOOT
NEW DELHI

India's Sherpa to the G7 and G20 Suresh Prabhu has said that the growing tendency among nations to frame inward-looking policies and spurn multilateralism is a recipe for a greater disaster for the global economy that is already hobbled by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. Prabhu said it was imperative that Italy, Indonesia and India, which will be assuming the G20 Presidency over the next three years, impress upon other G20 members, the need to revive multilateralism in order to boost prospects of meeting the world's immediate challenges of providing COVID-19 vaccines universally along with healthcare coverage, reviving the global economy and mitigating climate change.

"The global economy is under threat – now clearly because of the pandemic – but it was already slowing down before that. Denial of multilateralism is also one of the reasons economies slowed down more," Mr. Prabhu said at a conference hosted by RIS and the CII titled 'Future Roadmap for Global Economic Recovery: Reflections on G20 Riyad Summit and Beyond'.

"Our Studio Store concept, introduced 18 months ago, had found favour with its rural clientele.

"During the pandemic, demand pull-up from tier 3 towns was faster than from tier 2," Mr. Dasari said.

"Our Studio Store takes one-tenth the cost and space needed for our usual store format, but comes with the same retail identity as existing dealerships and with the entire portfolio of motorcycles, in addition to service and spares," he added.

In October, the company saw a 7% decline in total sales from a year earlier to 66,891 units. Of these, exports accounted for 4,033 units. In September, the motorcycle maker had shown marginal year-on-year growth of 1% in total sales.

"A lack of multilateralism

SNAPSHOTS



Finch songs

Just like humans can recognize the voices of familiar people, new research published in *Science advances* shows zebra finches have distinct songs or contact calls. A bird can rapidly memorise the signature calls of nearly fifty individuals. They can remember this for months.



Random biochemistry

In a study published in *Nature*, scientists from ETH Zurich have generated a huge random number using biochemical means for the first time. They used DNA synthesis with 64 building block positions, with one of the four bases randomly fitting into each, generating 12 megabytes of data.

Pilot study finds potential signal indicative of loss of tone in blood vessels after cardiac surgery

The researchers noted a weakening of possible repair mechanisms of blood vessels in patients who showed clinically significant vasoplegia

SHUBASHREE DESIKAN

Vasoplegia, where "vaso" refers to blood vessels and "plegia" stands for paralysis, is a condition where the patient exhibits a low blood pressure, even in the presence of normal or increased output of blood from the heart. When this occurs as a complication of cardiopulmonary bypass surgery, there is a chance that it can lead to multiple organ failure and even death. Now, a diverse group of researchers including clinicians, computational biologists and biotechnologists have come together to study how this may be predicted early on based on clinical observations, so that effective treatment may be given.

Progenitor cells

In a pilot study involving 19 patients who underwent elective cardiac surgery, the researchers measured the circulating counts of endothelial progenitor cells and hematopoietic stem cells at different points in time starting from when the patient was being anaesthetised until 24 hours after the surgery. They find that in a statistically significant number of people in the group that showed clinically significant vasoplegia, there was a blunting of the endothelial progenitor cell response. Also, in the group that did not show clinically significant vasoplegia, they observed that there was no such blunting.

"We can say there appears to be a pattern, which is well worth exploring in a larger cohort of patients and further delineating this particular response as a biomarker in predicting a potentially devastating complication following cardiac surgeries," says Dr. Paul Ramesh Thanagaraj, from the department of cardiothoracic surgery, Apollo Hospitals, Chennai, who is one of the PIs of the study. This research is pu-



Effect of insult: With a larger study, the team of researchers envisages developing a suitable risk score for predicting vasoplegia as a complication that can happen following surgery.

• GETTY IMAGES

blished in the journal *PLOS ONE*.

Hematopoietic and endothelial progenitor cells play an important role in repair of damaged tissues and inner lining of the blood ves-

sels called the endothelium, respectively. "Usually, these cells reside in the bone marrow; however, in response to injury to a tissue or a blood vessel, they come out into the circulation from the bone

marrow and home into the site of injury for tissue repair," says Madhulika Dixit from the Department of Biotechnology, Indian Institute of Technology Madras, in an email to *The Hindu*. Prof Dixit describes using flow cytometry to measure the counts during the surgery and afterwards. "The cells were identified by means of expression of specialised cell surface receptors. For this, at regular intervals the blood withdrawn from the patient was subjected to flow cytometry. We checked for time-dependent changes in circulating counts of progenitor cells during the course of cardiopulmonary bypass in patients."

Key challenge

One of the key challenges was to get significant patterns in this small dataset, according to Rahul Siddharthan, from The Institute of Mathematical Sciences, Chennai, who was one of the people involved in formal analysis. "In this case, we have two data sets, with two-valued outcomes [non-vasoplegic or vasoplegic], and the goal is to see how other measured parameters can

predict them," he says. There are very sophisticated machine-learning algorithms available these days for such tasks. "In this case the most basic algorithm, 'logistic regression', is good enough," says Prof. Siddharthan.

Striking trends

As he explains, in both cases, the idea is to look at a single value (change in circulating progenitor cells at two time-points) and in seeing its predictive power for the output. "The trend is clear, that for non-vasoplegic patients, the level of circulating progenitor cells increases, while for vasoplegic patients, it stays flat or decreases. There are exceptions but the finding is statistically significant even on this small study," says Prof. Siddharthan.

With a larger study, Dr. Paul Ramesh envisages even developing a risk score for predicting vasoplegia as a complication following surgery.

New species of gecko found in the Eastern Ghats

This is the twelfth species to be discovered outside the Western Ghats

SHUVABRATA GARAI

A new species of lizard, the smallest known Indian gekkonid, has been discovered in the Eastern Ghats. Studies show that the species belongs to the genus *Cnemaspis*. In India, 45 diverse species of *Cnemaspis* have been found, of which 34 are from the Western Ghats.

The newly discovered dwarf gecko - *Cnemaspis avasabinae* is the twelfth species to be discovered outside the Western Ghats and also the first species reported from the Velikonda Range in Andhra Pradesh. This discovery suggests that the genus may be even more widely distributed than previously thought.

"*Cnemaspis* is one of several groups of gecko that we now know are very diverse and widespread over much of peninsular India. Knowing this, we can survey in places that have not yet been studied, or have been understudied, and there is a good chance that new species can be found," explains Aaron M. Bauer from Villanova University, U.S. in an email to *The Hindu*. He is



Revealing find: This discovery suggests that the genus may be even more widely distributed than previously thought.

• ISHAN AGARWAL

one of the authors of the paper published in *Zootaxa*.

Many species likely

"In the past, it was thought that there were only a few species, many of them relatively widespread, but now we recognise that it is likely that each hill range or isolated forest patch may have its own species. While we long knew that the diversity in the Western Ghats was high, only more recently have we come to recognise that the Eastern Ghats are also tremendously biodiverse," he adds. The team gave it a common name -

Sabin's Nellore dwarf gecko. The new species was sighted in a dry evergreen forest among the rocks beneath small stream at a height of less than 200 metres above sea level and measured less than 2.9 cm (snout to vent length).

The dorsal colour of the head, body and tail of the reptile is grey-pink with six pairs of dark brown patches.

Femoral spores

The most interesting find was that the males of the species lacked femoral pores. Generally, most variants of lizards have femoral

pores in both the sexes, and the secretions from these pores play a role in communication.

Prof. Bauer explains: "Lacking femoral pores doesn't mean that a male gecko is not adequately supplied with chemical means of communication. It may also be possible that geckos are able to release pheromones to attract or communicate with possible mates, even if there are no pores. Pores may be especially useful for lizards that maintain a home range or territory and use them to mark this - to keep away other males even more than to attract females. *Cnemaspis* also have good vision, so visual signalling may play a part in mate attraction in these geckos."

More work needed

The team notes that more work is needed in the surrounding areas to determine how widespread it is. "But for now we would have to consider the species 'data deficient' until we know more and can meaningfully assess its conservation status," adds Prof. Bauer.

Ecosystems and traits

The team from MeaseyLab at the Centre for Invasion Biology in Stellenbosch University, South Africa has been studying these toads in different invasive populations. "My in-



Changing world: Adult female from Durban (A), compared with an adult male (yellow throat patch) and female from Mauritius (B). • JAMES BAXTER-GILBERT (A) AND JOHN MEASEY (B)

selection or a part of their repertoire which is just expressed in that environment. We need to study if there are some genetic changes, probably adaptive changes: organisms which are on islands have less need for dispersal, but can allocate that energy to more frequent reproduction or some other trait to survive better." Dr. Mohanty completed his postdoc from Stellenbosch University.

Garden experiment

He says that one way to find out is to do a common garden experiment where you bring a bunch of toads from the invasive and native populations, and breed them in their native ranges in South Africa and see if it is to do with the environment or it is indeed genetic.

"We have also begun to examine changes in behavioural traits, like boldness and exploration. There are anecdotes of the toads engaging in curiosity behaviour on the island, like climbing trees, and we are also looking into this for future research that might help us explain the reason for this shift in body size," adds Prof. Baxter-Gilbert.

ca) they effectively started with the same basic 'genetic blueprint' so any consistent change we see on both islands happening can help shed light on what traits are being repeated on both islands independently. This can provide a lot of insight into what challenges these invading populations faced and how natural selection (or phenotypic plasticity) allowed them to overcome them," adds Prof. Baxter-Gilbert.

Nitya Mohanty, one of the authors of the paper explains: "It is important to determine what mechanisms are at play, whether it is natu-

RT-LAMP: a new technology for detecting COVID-19

Speed, simplicity and cost-effectiveness make this an ideal method for diagnosis

D.M. VASUDEVAN

The novel coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2, causes the Coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) and this pandemic. It is highly infective, and every day thousands of people are newly infected. Since there is no vaccine or cure for the novel coronavirus infection till today, there is a strong need for rapid, specific and sensitive SARS-CoV-2 detection technology to control and contain the virus.

Current method

The current method for SARS-CoV-2 diagnosis is the real time reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) test which detects the presence of viral nucleic acids in nasopharyngeal swab samples. But it has certain shortcomings. The test requires complex and costly equipment. It requires extensive training for potential users. As the specificity and sensitivity of the test is about 95%, there is a possibility of false negative results. The turnaround time is about 10 hours, so that the result will be available only



Room for improvement: The current method for SARS-CoV-2 diagnosis, the RT-PCR test, does not have the capacity to keep pace with the increasing demand. • GETTY IMAGES

by the next day. In remote places, the turnaround time further increases depending on the distance the samples need to travel. In short, the RT-PCR does not have the capacity to keep pace with the increasing demand.

COVID-19 serology tests are also in use to detect antigens that are associated with the virus infection. These tests are easy to use with rapid results, as well as have minimal expenses. However, serology immunoassay lacks the necessary accuracy to be a reliable diagnostic test due to its low sensitivity and high false negative/positive rates.

Superior technique

With the above-mentioned status of COVID-19 detection ambiguity, there is an urgent need for a better technique for COVID-19 testing. This superior technique is now in India in the form of RT-LAMP (Reverse Transcriptase loop-mediated isothermal amplification) technology. This is a one-step nucleic acid amplification method to multiply specific sequences of RNA of the coronavirus. Here, the RNA is first made into cDNA

(copy DNA) by the usual reverse transcription. Then, the DNA is amplified by the LAMP technique. Although the LAMP technique has been used in western countries for the past five years or more, the technique is new to the Indian IVD industry.

The LAMP technology has many advantages over RT-PCR technology. The RT-PCR test needs different temperatures in one cycle. The temperature of the solution has to be changed from 92 degrees C to 56 degrees C and again to 72 degrees C every two minutes, and this cycle has to be repeated. Thus, the PCR test needs expensive thermal cycler as well as the

real time PCR machines. On the other hand, the new RT-LAMP technology is done at 65 degrees C, where the DNA amplification is done at a constant temperature (isothermal), so that expensive thermal cycler is not required.

Moreover, the quantity of DNA amplified in the LAMP technology is hundred thousand times more than that is taking place in PCR. Therefore the final assay is possible with a simple colour reaction, removing the need for very costly real time PCR machines.

An equally important advantage of the LAMP technology is that the assay is so fast

that results can be obtained within 30 minutes and positive samples are amplified as early as 10 minutes. This may be compared with the PCR technique which needs 8-10 hours for completion. This means that COVID-19 testing centres can report with accuracy in substantially lower turnover time.

Yet another advantage of LAMP is that the reagents are to be stored at 4 degree C (ordinary fridge), whereas the PCR-based reagents are to be stored and transported at -20 degrees C, which needs deep freezers that escalate the cost.

The LAMP technology does not need laborious preparation as in the case of RT-PCR. LAMP is cost effective and does not need complex expensive equipment. Assays can be performed with minimum skill and minimum infrastructure.

Recently validated The LAMP technology has been recently validated by the Indian Council of Medical Research with sensitivity 98.7% and specificity 100%. Thus the LAMP technology is superior to the PCR technology-based COVID-19 kits where specificity is around

95% only. Thus, in the case of LAMP-based kits, the Positive predictive value is 100% and Negative predictive value is 98.8% with accuracy of 99.38%.

User-friendly

A confirmatory, accurate, rapid, low-cost, and user-friendly molecular diagnostic method is the prerequisite to address COVID-19 pandemic. The RT-LAMP technology is ideal for Indian conditions.

There is an urgent need to build the national testing capacity above what is achievable with currently available test kits. This means that COVID-19 testing centres can report with accuracy in substantially lower turnover time.

Agape Diagnostics have recently developed the LAMP technology indigenously, and their kit has been validated and approved by the ICMR for marketing. It is named LUME Screen nCoV.

(The writer is Head of postgraduate programmes and research at Amrita Institute of Medical Sciences, Kochi.)



Question Corner

Changing frontiers

Is the tropical zone of Earth expanding?

The planet Earth is divided into three climate zones: Tropical, temperate and frigid. The tropical zone extends around the equator from 23.5 degrees north to 23.5 degrees south. Now researchers say that this warm temperature zone is expanding further and this may be the reason behind severe droughts and bushfires in Australia and parts of the U.S. What is causing this expansion? Studies have suggested that increasing greenhouse gases, aerosols, and decreasing ozone may be the factors behind this expansion. A new study recently published in the *Journal of Geophysical Research: Atmospheres* notes that warming oceans are the main reason. "Our

model calculations show that large-scale ocean currents in both the northern and southern hemispheres are the key drivers," says Hu Yang, lead author of the study in a release from Alfred Wegener Institute, Helmholtz Centre for Polar and Marine Research.

"Because the currents in this region bring the water masses together particularly strongly, the subtropical ocean surface accumulates heat more easily here than in other marine regions - just like with plastic," explains Gerrit Lohmann, one of the authors in the release. "So far, people have assumed complex changes in the atmosphere to be the cause. In truth, it is a relatively simple mechanism for ocean currents."

Readers may send their questions / answers to questioncorner@thehindu.co.in



Astronauts Victor Glover, Michael Hopkins, Shannon Walker and Soichi Noguchi. ■ AP

Scaling new heights

Why is NASA's SpaceX Crew-1 launch significant? What are the other trends in the commercial space sector?

SHUBASHREE DESIKAN

The story so far: Perhaps the most stunning instance of a collaboration between public enterprises and the private sector in recent times is that between NASA and SpaceX. It is stunning because of the sheer extent of the frontier it is trying to breach. With its reusable rockets, large capsules to carry payloads and crew and competitive pricing, SpaceX has revolutionised the space sector. The latest instances of this include the launch of the Crew Dragon spacecraft on November 15, which carried to the International Space Station four astronauts – Michael Hopkins, Victor Glover and Shannon Walker of NASA and Soichi Noguchi of the Japanese Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA). Another recent feat is the launch on November 24 of 60 more Starlink Internet relay satellites into the orbit. These, and thousands more like these, are designed for the purpose of providing broadband services to people anywhere on Earth.

What is the picture in India?

In India too, we have seen the yielding of governmental control over the space industry bit by bit, starting from hiring of vendors and active outsourcing of rocket components to the present idea of allowing external agencies to use ISRO facilities. There has also been a shift from a mandated focus on utilitarian projects to those focused on exploring space and our planetary neighbours, the Moon, the Sun and so on. It is not too much to expect that soon, India may also see the emergence of collaborations like that between SpaceX and NASA.

India, too, is seeing the gradual yielding of governmental control over the space industry, starting from hiring of vendors and active outsourcing of rocket components to the present idea of allowing external agencies to use ISRO facilities

International Space Station and back has prevented Americans from spending hugely on the mission, as they were doing earlier. This was possible only because of NASA's active collaboration with SpaceX. Thus, the opening up of the space sector could have many more such advancements in store.

With the November 24 launch of 60 Starlink satellites, the total number of such satellites sent up by the company equals 955. Thousands more will join these, and the aim of this exercise is to provide Internet services that link any point on Earth to any other point. Targeting coverage in northern U.S. and Canada this year, the aim is to have the globe covered by 2021. This will be the new telecom revolution then, in the context of India, reaching out to rural areas as never before.

Would curiosity-driven science survive in the era of privatisation?

The cargo version of Dragon-2 spacecraft is the upgraded version of Dragon. It is a reusable spacecraft capable of returning significant cargo to the Earth from the International Space Station. At least in the case of its launch, planned for December 5, it seems that curiosity-driven science would not only survive, but would rather be enhanced. This spacecraft is not just carrying payloads for scientific experiments, but is also sporting a new commercially owned and operated 'airlock'. An airlock is like a doorway, and the new Nanoracks Bishop Airlock Module, built by a Texas-based company, Nanoracks LLC, is an improvement over what was used earlier. This will allow larger payloads to move in and out of the spacecraft, considerably expanding the scope of experiment design and structure.

This mission also carries interesting experiments, one of which is a mixture of meteorite samples and microbes, aimed at seeing how the microbes can be used for biomining on asteroids. Another experiment aims at studying how changes in gravity can affect cardiovascular tissue. So, while there is room for curiosity-driven science, there is also the aspect of utility in the event of more humans travelling to space.

What is the future of space tourism?

Space tourism could become more common as space travel becomes less expensive. There are companies now, such as Virgin Galactic, Blue Origin and SpaceX, that will offer space flights, albeit for a very high fee. While the first two may allow the customer to experience a few minutes of only microgravity, the last company can, in principle, take space travellers to the International Space Station, where they could spend even weeks. Perhaps this is the stepping-stone to a future colony on the Moon, and should it come through, we will not be without Internet connections there.

Ayurvedic doctors and sanction for surgeries

What are the issues around allowing non-allopathic surgeons to receive training for various procedures?

ANANT BHAN

The story so far: On November 20, the Central Council of Indian Medicine, a statutory body set up under the AYUSH Ministry to regulate Indian systems of medicine, issued a gazette notification allowing postgraduate (PG) Ayurvedic practitioners to receive formal training for a variety of general surgery, ENT, ophthalmology and dental procedures. The decision follows the amendment to the Indian Medicine Central Council (Post Graduate Ayurveda Education) Regulations, 2016, to allow PG students of Ayurveda to practise general surgery.

Is allowing non-allopathic doctors to perform surgery legally and medically tenable?

The passing of the National Medical Commission Act in 2019 allowed for the formalisation of proposals to induct mid-level care providers – Community Health Providers – in primary healthcare in India, who would serve at health and wellness centres across the country, and focus on primary healthcare provision, with a limited range of medicines allowed for them to use for treatment of patients. This move had also attracted strong opposition from modern medicine practitioners, who branded this as a form of quackery through half-baked doctors. Several countries have been using mid-level care providers, such as nurse practitioners, to enhance the access to healthcare, though with strict safeguards around training, certification, and standards.

The current debate revolves around the Central Council of Indian Medicine issuing amendments to the Indian Medicine Central Council (Post Graduate Ayurveda Education) Regulations, 2016, to allow postgraduates students in Ayurveda undergoing 'Shalya' (general surgery) and 'Shalaka' (dealing with eye, ear, nose, throat, head and neck, oro-dentistry) to perform 58 specified surgical procedures. This was immediately opposed by many allopathic professionals, with the Indian Medical Association (IMA) decrying it as a mode of allowing mixing of systems of medicine by using terms from allopathy. The AYUSH Ministry subsequently clarified that the 'Shalya' and 'Shalaka' postgraduates were already learning these procedures in their (surgical) departments in Ayurvedic medical colleges as per their training curriculum, and the amendment merely added clarity and definitions to the 2016 regulations concerning post-graduate Ayurveda education.

Can short-term training equip them to conduct surgeries and will this dilute the medicine standards in India?

As such, the postgraduate Ayurvedic surgical training is not short-term but a formal three-year course. Whether the surgeries conducted in Ayurvedic medical colleges



Students of Karnataka Ayurvedic Medical College having a look at Sanskrit and Ayurveda books. ■ FILE PHOTO

There may be a limit to what Ayurvedic doctors are allowed to do in surgery. Any such experiment can put patient safety in peril, and will hence need oversight and evaluation

and hospitals have the same standards and outcomes as allopathic institutions requires explication and detailed formal enquiry, in the interest of patient safety.

Will non-allopathic doctors who have undergone training be restricted to practise in rural areas having poor doctor-patient ratios?

As of now, no such restriction exists that limits non-allopathic doctors, including those doing Ayurvedic surgical postgraduation, to rural areas. They have the same rights as allopathic graduates and postgraduates to practise in any setting of their choice.

With allopathic surgeons often unwilling to practise in rural areas, how can this problem be solved?

The shortage and unwillingness of allopathic doctors, including surgeons, to serve in rural areas is now a chronic issue. The government has tried to address this by mechanisms such as rural bonds, a quota for those who have served in rural service in postgraduate seats, as well as, more recently, a plan to work on increasing the number of medical colleges and postgraduate seats. However, we would probably still continue to fall short of enough trained specialists in rural areas. We need to explore creative ways of addressing this gap by evidence-based approaches, such as task-sharing, supported by efficient and quality referral mechanisms. The advent of mid-level healthcare providers, such as Community Health Providers in many States, is also an opportunity to shift some elements of healthcare (preventive,

promotive, and limited curative) to these providers, while ensuring clarity of role and career progression.

Is it sensible to allow Ayurvedic surgeons to only assist allopathic surgeons, rather than perform surgeries themselves?

The AYUSH streams are recognised systems of medicine, and as such are allowed to independently practise medicine. They have medical colleges with both undergraduate and postgraduate training, which include surgical disciplines for some systems, such as Ayurveda. There is, however, a difference in approach in the systems of medicine, and hence models, which allow for cross-pathy. An apprenticeship model for Ayurvedic surgeons working with allopathic surgeons might fall into a regulatory grey zone. It might require re-training Ayurvedic practitioners in the science of surgical approaches in modern medicine. Even then, there might be a limit to what they are allowed to do. Any such experiment can put patient safety in peril, and hence, will need careful oversight and evaluation.

Can this lead to substandard care?

Many patients prefer to receive treatment exclusively from AYUSH providers, while some approach this form of treatment as a complement to the existing allopathic treatment they are receiving. For invasive procedures, like surgery, the risk element can be high. Patients have a right to know and understand who their surgeon would be, what system of medicine they belong to, and their expertise and level of training. There should not be a difference in quality of care between urban and rural patients – everyone deserves a right to quality and evidence-based care from trained professionals.

Dr. Anant Bhan is a researcher in global health, bioethics and health policy

The complexities of cyclone forecasting

Why was the Nivar storm easier to track and how do meteorological warnings help in preparation?

JACOB KOSHY

The story so far: Cyclone Nivar, that barrelled through Tamil Nadu and brought copious rain in its wake, was the third major cyclone to land on India's coast this year, besides Amphan and Nisarga. The Nivar storm originated in the Bay of Bengal and whipped up winds speeds close to 125-145 kmph, blowing away roofs and felling standing crop. However, relatively fewer lives were lost compared to the havoc wreaked by Amphan in West Bengal in May. What aided relief operations in the anticipation of Nivar was that it largely conformed to forecasts issued by the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

How are cyclones forecast?

Over the years, India's ability to track the formation of cyclones has improved significantly. There is a network of 12 doppler weather radars (DWR) along India's coast if one were to begin counting from Kolkata and trawl up to Mumbai – there are 27 in all in the country. Depending on where a storm is forming, these radars send pulses of radio waves to gauge the size as well as the speed at which water droplets are moving. The earlier generation of radars was unable to track such progress in real time, but with DWRs, now the basic standard of weather radars, it is usually possible to detect a potential storm at least four-five days in advance. The IMD also collaborates with similar international networks, such as the Japan Meteorological Agency, the U.S. National Hurricane Center, and the U.S. Central Pacific Hurricane Center, and these bodies constantly send warnings and forecasts about changes in the ocean weather. The near ubiquity of ocean-buoys that track changes in ocean sea surface



temperatures as well as dedicated meteorological satellites improve the odds of early detection.

How difficult was it to track Nivar's progress?

Nivar was the second tropical cyclone that formed around India and made landfall this week. Cyclone Gati, which originated in the Arabian Sea and intensified into a 'very severe cyclonic storm', made its way towards Africa and made landfall in Somalia on November 22. However around then, another system emerged in the Bay of Bengal, that eventually morphed into a cyclonic storm by November 24. The IMD's initial forecasts said it would at most be a 'severe cyclonic storm', but it then upgraded it to the same league as Gati, i.e., a 'very severe cyclonic storm'. The IMD follows a five-stage classification for cyclones, with the lowest a 'cyclonic storm' generating wind speeds of 62-87 kmph, and the highest a 'super cyclonic storm', generating winds over 222 kmph.

April-June and October-December are India's cyclone seasons. The arriving monsoon, as well as its retreat, stir up the surrounding seas and generate cyclones. Though

the Bay of Bengal is three times more likely to generate cyclones, the ones that originate in the Arabian Sea are trickier, as the cyclone, while ostensibly moving away from India's western coast, can suddenly 'recurve' and move back in. There are also fewer radars along India's west coast than the eastern coast, and all these reasons make the Bay of Bengal cyclones more tractable. In this context, Nivar, because it conformed to a fairly predictable trajectory and was not super cyclonic in intensity, gave State administrations in Puducherry, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh time to prepare, and was far less damaging than Amphan. However, the cyclone season is not yet over and more systems are likely to form in the coming weeks, according to the IMD.

How has disaster warning changed?

Forecasts, on their own, are important, but they cannot override the importance of preparedness by State agencies. The formation of cyclones is preceded by 'depressions', and they are often the first warnings. Not all depressions become cyclones, but many coastal States – especially those with a history of being battered – begin organising shelters and evacuation of coastal residents. Sea pockets, where cyclones form, are also places that drive schools of fish and lure fisherfolk. While meteorological agencies give advisories on where fish-catches are likely, they suspend such advisories during storm formation to dissuade fishermen from venturing out. The ubiquity of mobile communication makes it much easier to quickly give warnings. The IMD also issues flood forecast maps, in collaboration with urban bodies that forecast which pockets in a city are likely to be flooded and where crop damage is likely to be maximum.

Implications of Trump pardoning Michael Flynn

Can an outgoing President take such a step? What is the former National Security Adviser guilty of?

NARAYAN LAKSHMAN

The story so far: Earlier this week, U.S. President Donald Trump tweeted that he had pardoned Michael Flynn, his former National Security Adviser, also a retired U.S. army Lieutenant-General, and a supporter of his 2016 election campaign. Mr. Flynn had twice pleaded guilty to lying to the FBI as well as to Vice-President Mike Pence, as part of a plea agreement with Robert Mueller, the special prosecutor investigating allegations of Russian interference in the 2016 election to favour Mr. Trump. As per his plea, Mr. Flynn admitted that he lied about conversations that he had with the erstwhile Russian Ambassador to the U.S., Sergey Kislyak, wherein he had requested Mr. Kislyak to ensure that Russia did not retaliate against Washington, over sanctions designed to punish Moscow for interfering in the 2016 election.

How is the President able to grant pardons?

Under Article Two of the U.S. Constitution, the President has the power to grant reprieves and pardons for offences against the country, except in the case of impeachment. Under this Article, the President has the right to grant pardons, commute sentences, permit the remission of fines and forfeitures, and allow respite and amnesties, as the case may require.

Who else has Mr. Trump pardoned?

On the list of those whom Mr. Trump has thus far pardoned are advocates of controversial right-wing ideologies, including former Maricopa (Arizona) County Sheriff Joe Arpaio, Fox News contributor and provocateur Dinesh D'Souza, and military personnel accused of war crimes in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

Why is the pardon of Mr. Flynn controversial?

However unpalatable the other pardons by Mr. Trump may have been to Democrats and others, his pardon of Mr. Flynn differs significantly from these, in that his perjury relates directly to the intention to shield Mr. Trump and his associates from exposure to potential culpability with regard to the Russian election disinformation plot. In fact, shortly after Mr. Flynn was fired as NSA in early 2017, Mr. Trump asked the FBI to end the investigation into allegations of wrongdoing by Mr. Flynn. Subsequently, Mr. Flynn sought to withdraw his guilty plea, on the basis that the prosecutors allegedly violated his rights and tricked him into entering a plea agreement. In May 2020, U.S. Attorney General William Barr

dropped a bombshell by ordering prosecutors to drop the case against Mr. Flynn, following Mr. Trump's complaints that Mr. Flynn was being treated "unfairly". Mr. Flynn's sentencing has been deferred several times.

What is the broader context of the Flynn saga?

Several of Mr. Trump's closest aides, including Mr. Flynn, Roger Stone and Paul Manafort, were found guilty of or pleaded guilty to concealing information from law enforcement in this context. This raises the question of whether Mr. Trump will pardon Mr. Manafort too. It also raises the spectre of the possibility that although the Mueller probe did not find a smoking gun, there was information about Mr. Trump's possible involvement with Russian agents that did not see the light of day.

What further denouement is possible in this case?

Now that Mr. Trump has lost the polls, he will no longer enjoy the constitutional protection from prosecution that has limited investigations into his dealings, not only regarding Russia, but also his financial and business dealings in the context of possible conflicts of interest, and the abuse of power and obstruction of justice allegations, over which he was impeached in the House of Representatives.



HAFIZ SAEED

The 'professor' who runs terrorist networks

The Mumbai attack mastermind has kept a low profile since his arrest last year but remains at the helm of the terror outfits he founded

SUHASINI HAIDAR

There are many facts about Hafiz Mohammad Saeed, the mastermind of the Mumbai 26/11 attacks, that set him apart from other terror chiefs in Pakistan. Unlike the battle worn, gun-toting terrorists wanted for attacks in Afghanistan and India, Mr. Saeed identifies himself as a "professor" of Islamic studies, with two Master's degrees from Lahore University, and a two-year specialisation at the King Saud University in Riyadh, where, he says, he was inspired by the Saudi Grand Mufti into setting up the now-banned Markaz Dawat wal Irsad (MDI) movement.

While most of Saeed's "colleagues" in the world of transnational jihad are either dead, missing or on the run, Saeed has managed to evade UNSC designations, American bounties and Indian convictions for more than a decade, addressing public rallies, giving interviews to international media, and threatening attacks.

While most of his 'colleagues' in the world of trans-national jihad are either dead, missing or on the run, Saeed managed to evade punishment for more than a decade

He has been arrested, charged and convicted and then released by Pakistani courts on various terror-related charges, but could always continue his work at the helm of the LeT, and its many offshoots, the Jamaatud-Dawa (JuD), Falah-i-Insani Foundation (FIF), Tehreek-e-Azadi Jammu and Kashmir (TAJK), and a political party, the Milli Muslim League, all of which have been banned internationally.

The evidence against Saeed for 26/11 is damning by any measure. Ajmal Kasab, the lone surviving Pakistani gunman in the attack, gave a lucid description during his trial, of how he was motivated by Saeed's speeches, indoctrinated by the LeT and trained for the attack at camps in Pakistan.

Identifying Saeed's photograph in court, Kasab spoke of how the "Amir" Hafiz Saeed had himself visited the training camps to give his blessings to the group for their attack on "Bambar", as he referred to India's finan-

main sceptical that he will be brought to justice eventually.

Dreams of destruction

"Some people don't evolve. They only ride the crest of passion hoping to realise their dreams of destruction," wrote Pakistani journalist Aamir Mir about Saeed, in his 2009 book *Talibanization of Pakistan: From 9/11 to 26/11*. Mr. Mir was speaking about the fact that despite being banned, and being placed on several terror lists between 1999 and 2008, Saeed continued to hold public meetings, threatening the dismemberment of India. What even Mr. Mir could not have known is that 12 years after the 2008 Mumbai attacks in which 166 people were killed, including six U.S. citizens, and nationals of at least 16 other countries, Saeed still retains a large amount of that immunity. He has never been charged in Pakistan for the 26/11 attacks, and continues to claim he is innocent of the conspiracy to send 10 armed and trained terrorists to wreak havoc on India's Maximum City.

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ILLUSTRATION: R.RAJESH

him directly for a number of terror attacks in India and Afghanistan, agencies had held him on "preventive detention" or charged him with minor "hate speech" misdemeanours. Over the years, Saeed was able to grow a considerable empire with his headquarters at Muridke, Punjab, and JuD/Fif offices around the country, raising millions of dollars for his work, despite UN strictures.

Head Qazi

National Security Advisory Board member Tilak Devasher, who was based in Pakistan for many years, writes in his book, *Pakistan: Courting the Abyss*, that the JuD/LeT was even allowed to set up seven "Sharia courts" in Lahore, Karachi, Islamabad and other cities to "dispense justice", with Saeed as the "Head Qazi", chief justice of the courts. In the wake of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) greylisting in 2018, Pakistani government agencies said they had confiscated all Saeed's properties, but officials quoted by local agencies said Saeed and other JuD leaders continued to use the premises and give sermons on Fridays.

He was able to do all this despite a \$10 million award announced by the U.S. for his arrest in 2012. Saeed's response to the bounty was to mockingly ask the U.S. government to give it to him directly in return for a "daily update on his location".

After his arrest in July 2019, Saeed has kept a low profile, and more so after an alleged assassination attempt on his son Talha Saeed in December last year. With long prison sentences announced against Saeed along with all his top aides like brother-in-law Abdul Rahman Makki and JuD spokesperson Yahya Mujahid, speculation is rife that Pakistan's military establishment is finally wearying off its favourite, and has decided to offload the LeT that has grown into the proverbial albatross around its neck. Or Saeed is being simply kept on hold, and if Pakistan evades a possible "blacklisting" at the dirty money watchdog FATF, which is due to make a final decision in February 2021, the terror-Professor may once again return to his diabolical business.

In Focus

■ Saeed traces his origins to a Gujjar family from Haryana which travelled to Pakistan's Punjab during Partition, and on the journey, '36 members of his family were killed'

■ He drew inspiration from the same Salafi groups in Saudi Arabia that spurred al-Qaeda, but, unlike other pan-Islamist groups, his networks never targeted Pakistan

■ He continued to enjoy impunity for his actions until recently when Pakistan came under international pressure from FATF and other organisations

NEOM

The city of the Prince

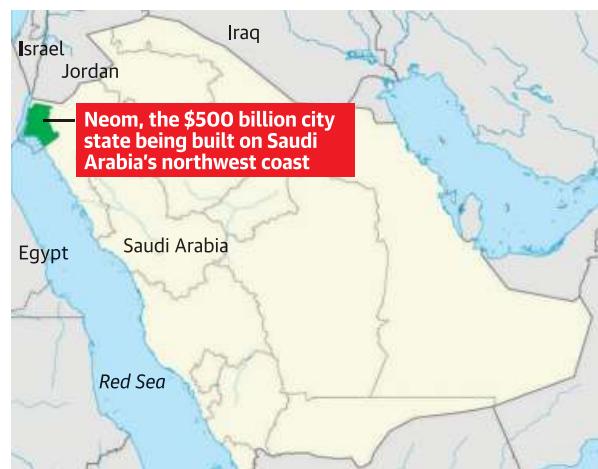
Despite controversies, the futuristic city state remains a top priority for MBS

STANLY JOHNY

When Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu flew to Saudi Arabia to meet Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman last week, the location chosen for the secret rendezvous was Neom, the futuristic megacity being built under the Prince's watch. Saudi authorities denied reports of the historic meeting, but unnamed officials in the Kingdom, Israel and the U.S., told the media that the leaders, in the presence of U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, discussed the possibility of normalising relations between the two countries and the challenges posed by Iran.

The planned city along the Red Sea coast is emerging as the new centre of power in the Kingdom as Crown Prince Mohammed, popularly known as MBS, is largely running the government from there. Since the COVID-19 outbreak, he has been chairing the Cabinet meetings from Neom, where a palace has been built, using video links. In September, he hosted Jared Kushner, U.S. President Donald Trump's son in law, in Neom.

MBS unveiled the plan of building a city state on the northwestern coast of the kingdom months after becoming the Crown Prince in 2017. As part of the Vision 2030 plan, which seeks to diversify the Kingdom's economy and reduce its dependency on oil, the \$500-billion



lion ambitious project plans to build a carbon-neutral, technologically advanced city state that can house up to 1 million people. The name Neom, a combination of Greek and Arabic words, means 'new future'. "The future has a new home," claims the Neom website.

Flying cars, fake moon
The Saudi government hired international consultancies such as Boston Consulting Group, McKinsey and Oliver Wyman to draw up plans for the city. According to the documents they prepared, which were leaked to the press, Neom, which is expected to be open for residents by 2025, will have flying cars, artificial rain generated through cloud seeding, a giant fake moon and robot dinosaurs once it is complete. The entire project, coming up on 26,500 square km of land in the Tabuk province (roughly the size of Belgium), is expected to be powered by clean

large-scale international investments for the project to be completed in the planned scale. But both Saudi Arabia's finances, which were already in trouble due to low oil prices, and its investment climate took a beating after the pandemic.

While construction activities began, Neom ran into another trouble. The region where the city is being built is home to some 20,000 people, mostly from the Huwaitat tribe. Members of the tribe have been living on the Red Sea Coast spread over northwestern Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Egypt's Sinai for generations. Saudi authorities faced resistance from the local population to taking over their land. Abdul Rahim al-Huwaiti, one of the outspoken critics of the project, had released several videos alleging the authorities were forcibly evicting the local people. In April this year, Abdul Rahim was killed by the police. Saudi authorities said he was killed in a shootout. Several others who were protesting against land acquisition were arrested.

Despite the economic woes and controversies, Saudi officials say, Neom remains a top priority of MBS and that they are hopeful of completing the project by 2030. "It's an attempt to do something that has never been done before," says the company. The city is being built as a "living laboratory - a place where entrepreneurship and innovation will chart the course for this New Future".

cial capital.

When Kasab was hanged in 2012, Saeed led thousands in prayer for him, even though the JuD/LeT had disclaimed any knowledge of him in the past. David Headley, the man convicted in the U.S. for the 26/11 conspiracy for his role in scouting locations for the terrorists to attack, also identified Saeed as his mentor since he met him at a terror camp in 2002 and the mastermind

of the Mumbai carnage.

After Saudi Arabia facilitated the arrest of 26/11 conspirator and LeT commander Abu Jundal (Zabiuddin Ansari) in 2012, Jundal too spoke in court of his meetings with Saeed to plan the Mumbai attacks. And even Pakistan's Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) chief confirmed details of the LeT plot, the guilt of Saeed's right hand and associate since 1986 Zaki Ur Rahman Lakhvi

in commanding the operation from a control room in Karachi, ostensibly under Saeed's guidance.

Saeed's impunity from both international scrutiny and Pakistani law is clearly no coincidence. Right from the 1990s, when Saeed himself confessed to training Mujahideen for Afghanistan with the help of "guns from the U.S.", Pakistan's military agencies have supported his ventures. Rather than charge

ANTONY BLINKEN

Biden's diplomat-in-chief

The next Secretary of State is an advocate of alliances and partnerships

SRIRAM LAKSHMAN

Last week, U.S. President-elect Joe Biden nominated long-time aide and adviser Antony Blinken to the post of Secretary of State. For the next four years, Mr. Blinken will, if confirmed by the Senate, lead the State Department and attempt to give shape to Mr. Biden's 'America is Back' vision.

Much can be learned about the worldview of this French speaking singer and guitarist (Mr. Blinken has two songs on Spotify and leads a band called 'Ablinken') by studying his roots. Several members of Mr. Blinken's family came to the U.S. as refugees and immigrants - Mr. Blinken has suggested that this has shaped his vision of America. There is also a family history of government service: Mr. Blinken's father, Donald, was Ambassador to Hungary in the Clinton administration, and his uncle was an envoy to Belgium. His step-father, Samuel Pisar, a Holocaust survivor, worked for the UN and the U.S. government.

U.S. leadership
It is not surprising then that Mr. Blinken believes that America should lead the world but in strong cooperation with other countries and with robust multilateral organisations. This resonates with Mr. Biden's own foreign policy view, which Mr. Blinken recently described in three words: "leadership, cooperation and



ILLUSTRATION: J.A. PREMKUMAR

democracy".

The world, according to Mr. Blinken, "doesn't just organise itself" and when America retreats, another country tries to take its place in a way that does not advance America's values or there is chaos. In terms of globalisation, Mr. Blinken said in a 2019 interview that a progressive era was needed on a global scale in order to address inequality. He spoke of a foreign policy that made sense to domestic constituents.

Having spent years of his childhood in Paris, following his family's move there, Mr. Blinken has ties to Europe that go beyond his ability to speak fluent French. He is expected to recommit America to NATO and has said the U.S. should turn to Europe as an ally of the first, not last, resort.

In terms of his views and experience, Mr. Blinken is very much part of the Washington establishment. His positions include leading

without India and the U.S. working together. He has also criticised President Donald Trump's transactional approach towards India. A few months ago, Mr. Blinken told the Hudson Institute, a think tank, that the Biden administration would engage "frankly and directly" with India on topics such as the government's actions in Kashmir (the dilution of Article 370 and associated restrictions) as well as legislation and policy related to citizenship. He has also identified China's growing aggression (including along the Line of Actual Control) as a common challenge faced by the U.S. and India.

In July, Mr. Blinken said China was "arguably the biggest challenge" America faces from another nation state, saying the relationship has adversarial, competitive but also cooperative aspects. He said Mr. Trump had helped China advance its own strategic goals by weakening international alliances and creating a leadership vacuum.

While Mr. Biden may seek to bring America back to the world, that world has changed significantly in the last few years. This is not lost on Mr. Blinken, who has said the Biden administration would engage with the world not as it was "but as it is and as we anticipate it will become" with "rising powers" and "new actors superempowered by technology and information, who we have to bring along if we're going to make progress".

TV PICKS

Australia vs India: Sony Ten 1, 3 & Six (SD & HD), 9 a.m.
ISL: Star Sports 2 & 3 (SD & HD), 4.45 p.m. & 7.15 p.m.
Premier League: SS Select 1 (SD & HD), 7.30 p.m., 10 p.m. & 12.45 a.m. (Monday)
Bahrain Grand Prix: SS Select 2 (SD & HD), 7.35 p.m.
Serie A: Sony Ten 2 (SD & HD), 5 p.m., 7.30 p.m., 10.30 p.m. & 1.15 a.m. (Monday)

IN BRIEF



Hamilton clinches 98th career pole

MANAMA Seven-time Formula One World champion Lewis Hamilton took his 98th career pole position at the Bahrain Grand Prix on Saturday, with Mercedes teammate Valtteri Bottas alongside on the front row. Red Bull's Max Verstappen qualified third. Hamilton's fastest lap of one minute 27.264 seconds was a track record time. REUTERS

Maiden F2 podium for Daruvala

MANAMA India's Jehan Daruvala clinched the third spot, his maiden FIA Formula 2 podium at the Bahrain GP Support Race on Saturday. The Red Bull Racing Junior is the first Indian to stand on the podium in an FIA Formula 2 race. Jehan made an excellent start for the feature race from eighth, and gained two places and stayed in sixth for a few laps before finishing third.



All Blacks pay tribute to Maradona

NEWCASTLE New Zealand captain Sam Cane laid an All Blacks No. 10 jersey emblazoned with Diego Maradona's name in the centre circle ahead of a match against Argentina in memory of the football legend, who was a big rugby fan, on Saturday. Both teams gathered in the middle of the ground before the team's traditional haka. AFP

BFI elections on December 18

NEW DELHI The Boxing Federation of India (BFI) will hold its elections on December 18, a process due for the past three months but delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In a statement, BFI secretary general Jay Kowli said a notification has been issued for the polls and the Annual General Meeting in Gurugram. The process of filing nominations will start after December 2, the day on which the electoral college will be finalised. PTI

RACING

Highly Acclaimed vs. Victory Parade

HYDERABAD: Highly Acclaimed and Victory Parade should fight out the finish of the Kinnerasani Plate (Cat. I), the chief event of Sturgis' (Nov. 29) races here.

1 BHONGIR PLATE (Div. I, 1,200m), rated 20 to 45 (Cat. III), 1.15 p.m.: 1. Green Turf (8) Surya Prakash 61.5, 2. Exclusive Art (6) B. R. Kumar 61, 3. Days Of Reckoning (12) A.A. Vikrant 59, 4. Afibak (Ex-Troubadour) (9) Gaurav Singh 58.5, 5. California Beauty (14) Irvan Singh 57.5, 6. Elmira (3) Akshay Kumar 57.5, 7. Kimberley Cruise (2) Deepak Singh 57, 8. Lifetime (16) Ajeept Kumar 56.5, 9. Forever Splendour (17) Suraj Narredu 55, 10. Golden Forza (4) Kiran Naidu 55, 11. India Gate (7) P. Sai Kumar 55, 12. Let It Be (10) G. Nares 55, 13. Thunder Road (13) Ajit Singh 55, 14. Look Of Love (11) Ashad Asbar 54.5, 15. N. R. I. Flame (1) Gaddam 54.5, 16. Hip Hop (18) C.P. Bopanna 53.5, 17. Big Day (15) Jitendra Singh 53 and 18. A Hunted Echoes (5) Afroz Khan 50, 1. FOREVER SPLENDOUR, 2. GREEN TURF, 3. LOOK OF LOVE

2 ELUSIVE HERO PLATE (1,200m), (Terms) Maiden, 2-yo only (Cat. II), 1.45: 1. Best Buddy (2) Nakhat Singh 56, 2. Bourbon (1) Ajeeth Kumar 56, 3. Chhota Chetan (3) P. Sai Kumar 56, 4. Greek's Ace (12) Gaurav Singh 56, 5. Gurbaz (11) G. Nares 56, 6. Indian Glory (4) Md. Ismail 56, 7. November Rain (6) Kuldeep Singh 55, 8. Allah Rakhi (10) Ajit Singh 54.5, 9. City Of Bliss (9) Afroz Asbar 54.5, 10. Golden Amaris (7) Akshay Kumar 54.5, 11. Hard To Toss (5) A.A. Vikrant 54.5 and 12. Total Darc (8)

No time to lose, India needs its A-game right away

May retain XI unless Chahal, Saini are unfit; Australia mulls ODI debut for Green

INDIA IN AUS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA SYDNEY

India's battered bowling unit will have little time to regroup and limited resources at its disposal in a desperate bid to perform a redemption act and save the ODI series against a turbo-charged Australia in the second game here on Sunday.

Points to ponder

It wasn't just about the margin of defeat – 66 runs – but the manner in which Australia exposed India's vacant cupboard of all-rounders that will give Virat Kohli and Ravi Shastri numerous

points to ponder. Hardik Pandya's 76-ball 90 was at best a good innings. Also, Pandya will not be bowling anytime soon. So with no back-up all-rounders or a Plan B in place, India will have to execute Plan A

That leaves Kohli with bowlers who can't bat and a top-order where none can bowl.

With Australia's top three – captain Aaron Finch, David Warner and Steve Smith – hitting the straps right away, Jasprit Bumrah and company will have to give a better account of themselves on a strip that promises to be a belter.

It is highly unlikely that India's combination will change unless both Yuzvendra Chahal and Navdeep Saini are declared unfit. The duo conceded 172 runs between them and the wiry wrist-spinner did leave the field after sustaining an injury.

Natarajan available

Saini, on the other hand, has back spasms and T. Natarajan has been inducted in the 50-over squad as cover.

In case they are ruled out, Shardul Thakur and Kuldeep Yadav are available.

For Australia, it is possible that highly-rated all-rounder Cameron Green will be re-

warded with an ODI cap as Marcus Stoinis picked up a side strain during the first game.

India fined for slow over-rate

DUBAI: Team India was fined 20 per cent of its match fee for a slow over-rate in the first ODI against Australia in Sydney on Friday. India took four hours and six minutes to complete its 50 overs.



Off day: Not much went right for India in the first ODI. ■ GETTY IMAGES

Jeet, Dhruv on pole

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI

Hyderabad's Jeet Jhabakh (FB Motorsport) took the pole in the premier Indian Touring Cars class in the third and final round of the MRF-MMSC FMSCI National car racing championships which commenced at the MMRT here on Saturday. Heavy showers in the afternoon forced curtailment of the day's schedule.

Jhabakh and teammate



Setting the pace: Jeet Jhabakh took the pole position in the ITC class. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Dhruv Mohite from Kolhapur occupied the front row ahead of Coimbatore veteran and championship leader Arjun Balu (Race Concepts) who, incidentally, had topped the practice sessions.

Raghul Rangasamy (Performance Racing) was the quickest in the Super Stock category while T.S. Diljith from Thrissur snatched pole position in MRF Saloon Car series (Toyota Etios).

Jhabakh and teammate

Carlsen ahead

RAKESH RAO
NEW DELHI

World champion Magnus Carlsen miraculously managed to keep Ian Nepomniachtchi at bay after escaping defeats in two successive games for a 2.5-1.5 victory in the first set of the \$100,000 Skilling Open online chess tournament on Friday.

In the other semifinal, Wesley So stayed in control and won 2.5-1.5.

Playing white, Carlsen won the first game, forcing the Russian to resign on the 26th move.

In the second, Nepomniachtchi was close to victory after 49 moves, but faltered on the 50th to let Carlsen force a draw three moves later.

The results:

Semifinals: Set One: Magnus Carlsen (Nor) bt Ian Nepomniachtchi (Rus) 2.5-1.5.

Wesley So (USA) bt Hikaru Nakamura (USA) 2.5-1.5.

Man City finds its scoring shoes

Liverpool frustrated by VAR as Brighton escapes with a draw

EURO LEAGUES

AGENCIES BRIGHTON

Manchester City found its shooting boots as Riyad Mahrez scored a hat-trick in a 5-0 thrashing of Burnley to bounce back to winning ways in the Premier League.

But for the fourth straight visit to the Etihad, Burnley conceded five times as City eased to within six points of league leader Liverpool with a game in hand.

A stoppage time penalty from Pascal Gross left Liverpool frustrated as it was forced to settle for a 1-1 draw at Brighton. Gross drilled home his spot kick after a pitchside monitor review saw Andy Robertson punished for kicking the foot of Danny Welbeck. Liverpool had earlier seen two goals ruled out by VAR.



The results: Premier League: Brighton 1 (Gross 90+pen) drew with Liverpool 1 (Jota 60); Manchester City 5 (Mahrez 6, 22, 69, Mendy 41, Torres 66) bt Burnley 0. **LaLiga:** Elche 1 (Boye 38) drew with Cadiz 1 (Gimenez 55); Valencia 0 lost to Atletico Madrid 1 (Lato 79+og). **Serie A:** Sassuolo 0 lost to Inter Milan 3 (Sanchez 4, Chiriches 14+og, Gagliardini 60). **Bundesliga:** Augsburg 1 (Vargas 80) drew with Freiburg 1 (Grifo 64); Dortmund 1 (Thorgan Hazard 74) lost to Cologne 2 (Skhiri 9, 60); Leipzig 2 (Angelino 29, Nkunku 47) bt Arminia 1 (Klos 75); Stuttgart 1 (Couliba 20) lost to Bayern Munich 3 (Coman 87, Lewandowski 45+1, Costa 87); Union Berlin 3 (Andrich 2, Kruse 6+pen, 82) drew with Eintracht Frankfurt 3 (Andre Silva 27, 36, Dost 79).

BFC, HFC fail to break deadlock

ISL 2020-21

SPORTS BUREAU

Bengaluru FC (BFC) and Hyderabad FC played out a 0-0 draw at the Fataora Stadium on Saturday.

The way BFC boss Carles Cuadrat walked off the ground, raging against the match officials, told the story; it was a second successive draw for the 2018-19 champion, while Manuel Marquez's HFC would be happy with a point to add to the win it secured over Odisha FC in the opener.

However, injuries to key players Joel Chianese and Lluis Sastre, both of whom had to be withdrawn by half time, are sure to keep Marquez worried. BFC and HFC passed the ball around in the opening 20 minutes but seldom threatened each other's goals. And it remained that way for most parts.

Bairstow stars for England

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE CAPE TOWN

Jonny Bairstow powered England to a five-wicket win over South Africa in the first T20I at Newlands on Friday.

Bairstow thrashed 86 not out off 48 balls as England chased down 180 with four balls to spare.

England was struggling at 34 for three before Bairstow and Ben Stokes (37) changed the momentum with a fourth-wicket stand of 85.

The next match is in Paarl on Sunday.

The scores: South Africa 179/6 in 20 overs (Quinton de Kock 30, Fa du Plessis 58, Rassie van der Dussen 37; Sam Curran 3/28) lost to England 183/5 in 19.2 overs (Jonny Bairstow 86 n.o., Ben Stokes 37; George Linde 2/20, Lungi Ngidi 2/31).

DELHI ROUND-UP

tournament.

The scores: Manthan Academy 212/7 in 40 overs (Yash Dabas 67, Kartikey Rana 60, Ashish Kumar 40; Ajay Kumar 3/36) lost to SKA 215/6 in 38.3 overs (Akash Yadav 57, Ajay Kumar 40, Karan 46; Sammy Kadian 3/32).

Brilliant bowling by Kartik, Vishal

Bowlers Kartik Kalra and Vishal Singh ran through City Academy's line-up to set up a 10-wicket win for Sporting Club in the Satish Sharma memorial under-16 tournament.

The scores: City Academy 56 in 20 overs (Kartik Kalra 3/05, Vishal Singh 3/06) lost to Sporting Club 57 for no loss in 8 overs (Kunal Sangwan 30 not out, Vansh Gupta 21 not out).

West Delhi triumphs

Rohan Kumar scored an

unbeaten 47 and Aryan Kumar picked up four wickets as West Delhi Academy beat Telefunken Club by six wickets to lift the Turf Youth Cup Under-13 tournament. Aryan was named man-of-the-match, Abhiraj best batsman, Gagan Singh best bowler, Naithil Mathur best wicketkeeper, Ekanash Molwani best fielder and Meenakshi Vashishth named man-of-the-tournament.

The scores: Sonnet Club 167/7 in 35 overs (Hitesh Boora 50) lost to Ravindra Academy 168/6 in 31 overs (Sohail Khan 40, Naithil Vij 36). **Sumit shines for SDZ**

Man-of-the-match Sumit Mathur top-scored with 89 runs as Sai Develop Zone beat Aarush Sports by four wickets in the 1st Tripathi Premier League.

The scores:

Telefunken Club 103 in 37.1 overs (Chinmay Vashishth 32; Aryan Kumar 4/25) lost to WDA 104/4 in 33.5 overs (Rohan Kumar 47 not out).

Ravindra Academy through to semifinals

Two wickets apiece for Rajneesh Dadar, Varun Bhati and Abhiraj Rana helped

unbeaten 47 and Aryan Kumar picked up four wickets as West Delhi Academy beat Telefunken Club by six wickets to lift the Turf Youth Cup Under-13 tournament. Aryan was named man-of-the-match, Abhiraj best batsman, Gagan Singh best bowler, Naithil Mathur best wicketkeeper, Ekanash Molwani best fielder and Meenakshi Vashishth named man-of-the-tournament.

The scores: Sonnet Club 167/7 in 35 overs (Hitesh Boora 50) lost to Ravindra Academy 168/6 in 31 overs (Sohail Khan 40, Naithil Vij 36).

Triumphant: Forest Flame (P. Trevor up), winner of The Bangalore 1000 Guineas, led by owner Mr. Chaduranga Kanthraj Urs, right, and trainer S.S. Attaollahi. ■ MURALI KUMAR

6 BANGALORE 1000 GUINEAS (1,600m), 3-y-o fillies, (Terms): FOREST FLAME (LEITIR MOR-MEMORY BAY) TREVOR 1, Antibus (Multidimensional-Fond Fantasy) S. John 2, Rani Jindal (Win Legend-Champions Peak) Neeraj 3 and All-abother (Win Legend-Something-abother) Zervan 4, 7, 7-3/4 and 1-3/4, Im 40.1s. \$10 (w), 10, 13 and 18 (p), SHP: 27, THP: 44, FP: 20, Q: 19, Trinella: 96 and 58, Exacta: 250 and 86. Favourite: Forest Flame. Owners: Poonawalla Racing & Breeding Pvt. Ltd. rep. by Mrs. Behroze Z. Poonawalla, Mrs. Simone Poonawalla Pandole & Mrs. Deina Z. Poonawalla. Mr. Mukul A. Sonawala, DT Racing & Breeding LLP rep. by Mr. D.R. Thacker & Mr. Chaduranga Kanthraj Urs. Trainer: S. Attaollahi.

7 MANDYA PLATE (1,200m), rated 20 to 50; GALVANICO (Akshay K) 1, The Response (Shreyas Singh) 2, Port Of Beauty (Jagadeesh) 3 and Anne Boley (Trevor) 4. Not run: Alexandre Dumas 5, 1-1/2 and 2. Im 14.77s. \$23 (w), 10, 35 and 63 (p), SHP: 189, THP: 94, FP: 1,727, Q: 660, Trinella: 2,698 and 6,297 (carried over). Favourite: Galvanico. Owner: Mr. Sujay Kumar Puttanna. Trainer: Prasanna Kumar.