

THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI THURSDAY 10 DECEMBER 2020



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Gitanjali Rao, *Time's* 'Kid of the Year', says her parents instilled in her love for tech



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WINDOWS



Britain's Queen Elizabeth II stands in the quadrangle at Windsor Castle, Windsor, England, on Tuesday to meet and thank members of the Salvation Army and local volunteers in Berkshire. — AP

Ground-breaking of new Parliament House by PM today

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will lay the foundation stone of a new Parliament building on Thursday at an event that will be attended by leaders from various political parties, cabinet ministers and ambassadors of various countries. Mr Modi will also perform the ground-breaking ceremony for the building, which is expected to be completed by 2022 at an estimated cost of ₹971 crore.

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Cabinet gives nod to public WiFi networks

New Delhi: The Union Cabinet headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday approved the setting up of public WiFi networks across the country in a bid to strengthen the public WiFi service. This would be done by Public Data Office Aggregators.

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New French law to fight Islamists

Paris: A draft law aimed at arming France against Islamist radicalism was unveiled Wednesday, a measure promoted by President Emmanuel Macron to rout out what he calls separatists undermining the nation. Parliament is expected to open what is likely to be a lively debate on the draft law in the months ahead.

COUNTERPOINT



Too much of rajneeti!

WEATHER

Max: 27°C
Min: 13°C
RH: 60%
Rain: 10%

Forecast: Foggy

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Dakshinayana
Tithi: Kartika Bahula Dasami till 12.48 pm
Star: Hasta till 10.48 am
Variyam: 6.07 pm to 7.35 pm
Durmuhurtam: 10.19 am to 11.03 am; 2.42 pm to 3.26 pm
Rahukalam: 1.30 pm to 3 pm

SUNSET TODAY 5.24 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 7.03 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 3.03 PM
MOONSET TODAY 2.13 AM

■ Nationwide stir on Monday: Dharna at toll plazas, gherao of district HQs

Farmers reject govt's offer, plan to intensify stir, block highways

SANJAY KAW
NEW DELHI, DEC. 9

Within hours of receiving the Centre's draft proposals to amend the new agriculture laws, the farmers' unions categorically rejected it Wednesday and threatened to intensify their agitation by blocking all entry points to the national capital if their demands were not immediately met. They also threatened to capture all toll plazas and hold "sit-in" protests across the country.

Terming the proposal as "vague" and an insult to farmers, Krantikari Kisan Union president Darshan Pal said: "We will block the Delhi-Jaipur highway and Delhi-Agra expressway and sit on dharna at all toll plazas on December 12... No tax to be paid on that day at any toll plaza... We will also gherao all district headquarters during our nationwide protest on December 14. We have asked the people to protest against every MP and MLA of the BJP."

The farmers' organisations have also threatened



Madhya Pradesh-based farmer leader Shiv Kumar Kakkaji, Bharatiya Kisan Union spokesperson Rakesh Tikait and other farmer leaders address media after a meeting near Singhu border in New Delhi on Wednesday. — PTI

they will boycott all Jio products and Reliance malls across the country.

As the farmers' agitation against the Centre's three contentious laws completed a fortnight, the Centre on Wednesday proposed to give a "written assurance"

that the existing Minimum Support Price (MSP) regime for procurement will continue. In a draft proposal sent to the 13 agitating farmers' unions, the Centre also assured the registration of all private mandis to strengthen Agricultural Produce

Market Committees. With the farmers camped out at Delhi's busy border points, three of the Delhi-Haryana border points — Tikri, Jharoda and Dhansa — are closed for traffic. Besides the border areas of the capital, demonstrations

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Opp. leaders meet Prez, seek laws' repeal

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 9

Opposition parties, led by the Congress and NCP, met President Ram Nath Kovind on Wednesday and sought repeal of the three farm laws against which thousands of farmers have been protesting on various borders of the national capital.

The five-member delegation included former Congress President Rahul Gandhi, NCP chief Sharad Pawar, CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury, CPI's D Raja and DMK leader T.K.S. Elangovan.

The Opposition's memo-

randum to the President said, "We urge upon you, as the custodian of the Indian Constitution, to persuade your government not to be obdurate and accept the demands raised by India's annadatas."

"The new agri-laws, passed in Parliament in an anti-democratic manner preventing a structured discussion and voting, threaten India's food security, destroy Indian agriculture and our farmers, lay the basis for the abolishment of the Minimum Support Price (MSP) and mortgage Indian agriculture and our markets to the

caprices of multinational agri-business corporates and domestic corporates," it said.

"We met the President and informed him of our view regarding the three farm laws. We have asked for their repeal. We informed the President that it is critical that they are taken back," Mr Gandhi told the media after the meeting.

He said the way the farm laws were passed in Parliament, "we feel it was an insult to farmers and that is why they are protesting in the cold weather against them."

He claimed that using

the new laws, the government wants to hand over the farming sector to the "friends of the Prime Minister," but the farmers are fearless and will not back off and will continue with their peaceful agitation. "The kisan (farmer) has lost faith in the government. The kisan does not believe that the government is acting in their interest and that is why lakhs of them are on the streets, non-violently, compassionately on the streets," Mr Gandhi said, adding, "The farmers will not relent and will continue their protests till the

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AAP alleges CM's movement still 'under restriction'

New Delhi: The AAP on Wednesday alleged that Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal's movement is still "restricted" and the main gate of his residence remains closed by the Delhi Police, which denied the charge. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), which had on Tuesday alleged that the Delhi Police put Kejriwal under house arrest after he met farmers protesting against the Centre's agriculture reform laws at the city's Singhu border, again claimed that it was being done at the behest of Union Minister Amit Shah. The Delhi Police had rejected AAP's charge against it as "totally baseless".

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Russia FM: West undermining our close ties to India

'US is playing anti-China games'

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI
NEW DELHI, DEC. 9

The West, led by the United States, is trying to engage India in "anti-China games" through its Indo-Pacific strategies and is also trying to undermine Russia's close and privileged ties with India, Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov has said, in unprecedented remarks that have highlighted both Moscow's proximity with Beijing and a growing unease over the India-US strategic partnership.

Addressing the Russian International Affairs Council, Mr Lavrov said: "It (the West) is trying to restore the unipolar model of world order. 'Poles' like Russia and China are unlikely to be subordinate to it. However, India is currently an object of the Western countries' persistent, aggressive and devious policy as they are trying to engage it in anti-China games by promoting Indo-Pacific strategies, the so-called 'Quad', while at the same time



Sergey Lavrov

the West is attempting to undermine our close partnership and privileged relations with India. This is the goal of the US' very tough pressure on New Delhi."

The Russian foreign minister added: "Rejecting the objective trends towards the formation of a multipolar world, the US-led West has launched a 'game'. It has postponed Russia and China for later and is trying to draw all others into a unipolar world by any means possible. For our part, we will promote a unifying agenda... Intellectually, the West justifies its policies by the notorious concept of a 'rules-based order'. These rules are invented on the spot."

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3 militants gunned down by security forces in Pulwama

YUSUF JAMEEL
SRINAGAR, DEC. 9

A gunfight that broke out in a remote village of Jammu and Kashmir's southern Pulwama district overnight ended around noon on Wednesday after the security forces gunned down all the three militants who had been holed up in a private house. The house owner was injured in the clash. The Army and J&K police said that the slain men- all locals- belonged to Al-Badr, a pro-

Pakistan militant outfit. Inspector General of Police (Kashmir range), Vijay Kumar, said that the civilian who was caught in crossfire was immediately shifted to a nearby hospital for treatment and is said to be stable. He said that the operation in Pulwama's Tiken village had been launched jointly by J&K police's counterinsurgency Special Operations Group, the Army's 55 Rashtriya Rifles and Central Reserve Police Force's 182 and 183 battalions.

Nadda in Bengal, targets TMC over 'dynasty politics'

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, DEC. 9

BJP president J.P. Nadda on Wednesday attacked the ruling Trinamul Congress in West Bengal as a family-run party after embarking on a two-day visit to the state to set "dynasty politics" on the agenda in next year's Assembly elections.

He also led a rally of Aar Noy Onnyay (No More Injustice) campaign, a door-to-door outreach initiative of the BJP, on Girish Mukherjee Road in Bhowanipore, the home turf and Assembly constituency of chief minister Mamata Banerjee, to make the saffron party's presence felt there.

On Thursday, the BJP chief is likely to visit Diamond Harbour, the base and Lok Sabha constituency of the CM's nephew, Abhishek Banerjee, in South 24 Parganas. Inaugurating the state BJP election office in Hastings and nine district party offices, Mr Nadda, in an oblique reference to Ms Banerjee's residence at Harish Chatterjee Street in Kalighat, which is also the heart of the TMC, said: "Karyalay is the



J.P. Nadda

centre of culture and tradition. Interestingly, BJP is run from the Karyalay. But for other parties, home is their Karyalay from where they are run."

He said: "To other parties, party means one particular parivar (family) and is restricted only within the parivar, which is spread like a net from top to bottom. And the TMC is no exception to it. It has also become a party of parivar. But the BJP is a party which itself is a parivar. We are part of a big parivar. This is evident for us because Karyalay is not run from any leader's home."

Contrasting the Trinamul Congress supremo with Asahishnuta, Mr Nadda argued: "On December 7, 1935, Jan Sangh founder Syama Prasad Mookerjee said in front of Scottish

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Insufficient data, no 'emergency use' of Covid vaccines

Hyderabad: In a setback to two major pharmaceutical companies in the race for the vaccine for Coronavirus, the Drug Controller General of India has not granted permission for "emergency use" to Bharat Biotech and the Serum Institute of India for their respective vaccines, Covaxin and Covishield. The data submitted by both companies was found to be "insufficient" by the Central Drugs Standard Organisation (CDSCO) of the DCGI.

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An injured bison, suspectedly attacked by dogs, spotted in the premises of Mahatma Society at Kothrud in Pune on Wednesday. — PTI

Aliens exist, Trump knows: Israeli ex-Gen.

Washington, Dec. 9: A former Israeli space security chief has sent eyebrows shooting heavenward by saying that aliens are real, earthlings have been in contact with extraterrestrials and US President Donald Trump knows about it. He also stressed that the aliens are keeping their existence a secret as "humanity is not ready for them".

Haim Eshed, 87, in an interview to Israel's *Yediot Aharonot* newspaper, spoke extensively about extraterrestrial life, and also elaborated about "an agreement" between the US government and a "Galactic Federation" of



aliens.

"The Unidentified Flying Objects have asked not to publish that they are here, humanity is not ready yet," Gen. (Retd.) Eshed, former head of Israel's defense ministry's space directorate, said. The interview in Hebrew ran on Friday, and gained traction after parts were published in English by the Jerusalem

There is an agreement between the US government and the aliens. They signed a contract with us to do experiments here... The Unidentified Flying Objects have asked not to publish that they are here, humanity is not ready yet

— Haim Eshed

Post on Tuesday. A respected professor and retired general, Eshed said the aliens were equally curi-

ous about humanity and were seeking to understand "the fabric of the universe." He added that cooperation agreements had been signed between species, including an "underground base in the depths of Mars" where there are American astronauts and alien representatives. "There is an agreement between the US government and the aliens. They signed a contract with us to do experiments here," he said. He added that President Trump was aware of the extraterrestrials' existence and had been "on the verge of revealing" information but was asked not to in order to prevent "mass hysteria."

— Agencies

Raj panchayat polls: Jolt to Congress, boost to BJP

Jaipur/New Delhi, Dec. 9: The ruling Congress in Rajasthan suffered a jolt with the BJP beating it in panchayat elections, an outcome which the winning party on Wednesday called a farmers' mandate amid protests against the Centre's new agri-marketing laws.

The BJP bagged 1,989 of the 4,371 panchayat samiti seats while the Congress won 1,852 with almost all results of the four-phase local government polls being declared.

The CPI(M) bagged 26 seats, the RLP six and the Bahujan Samaj Party five. Independent candidates won 439 panchayat samiti seats.

At the zila parishad level, BJP candidates won 353 of the 635 seats for which results were declared and the Congress got 252.

Only one zila parishad seat result is yet to be announced in the election held across 21 of the state's 33 districts.

The BJP candidates are now in majority in 13 of these district boards and the party is set to head one more with the help of ally Rashtriya Loktantrik Party (RLP). The Congress has won five of the remaining zila parishads.

— PTI
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SHORT TAKES

NIGERIAN, INDIAN WOMAN HELD WITH ₹10CR DRUGS

New Delhi: A 40-year-old Nigerian national along with an Indian woman was arrested at the New Delhi Railway Station for allegedly carrying drug worth over Rs 10 crore in international market, police said on Wednesday. The accused have been identified as Chima Vitalis, a native of Nigeria, and Srimathi (25) from Tamil Nadu, they said. The drug amphetamine, weighing 10.5 kg, was seized from their possession. The drug was to be supplied in rave parties at Bengaluru in Karnataka on the eve of New Year, police said. "On Tuesday, police were patrolling platform number 4 and 5 of the New Delhi Railway Station when they noticed an African national and a woman boarding the Bangalore Rajdhani Express," Deputy Commissioner of Police (Railways) Harendra Kumar Singh said. Due to their suspicious movement, police checked their bags. The bags were found to have small polythene bags containing a white crystal material. Later, the material was checked and found to be amphetamine, a psychotropic substance, the officer said. During interrogation, it was revealed that the Nigerian national came to India eight years ago, police said. He visited Erode in Tamil Nadu in 2016 where he befriended the other accused, the DCP added. — PTI

Lok adalat to settle power theft cases

New Delhi: In view of the Covid-19 pandemic, power discom BSES Rajdhani Power Limited will organise a virtual Special Lok Adalat here to settle electricity theft cases, an official said. The online hearing will be organised on December 12-13 in association with the Delhi State Legal Services Authority (DSLSA) at the Permanent Lok Adalat 3 at Vikaspuri for on-the-spot settlement of cases, a BSES spokesperson said. "I the participants, including judges, court and discoms officials and consumers will connect virtually. It will be held between 10 am to 3 PM on December 12-13, at Permanent Lok Adalat (PLA) 3 at Vikaspuri for settlement of south and West Delhi cases, he said. This is the first online Lok Adalat for the resolution of power-theft cases in the national capital, said the spokesperson. All the judges of the PLA court, the court staff, consumers and BSES officials will simultaneously participate in the Lok Adalat from the safety of their homes in view of the pandemic, he said. The cases of direct power theft or meter tampering that are either pending or yet to be filed in a court can be taken up by the Lok Adalat. Even if a person does not have access to the internet, he can still participate in the Lok Adalat by reaching the PLA 3, Vikaspuri, and availing the virtual hearing facility being organised at the venue," he said. The consumers need to register prior to the Lok Adalat at the PLA 3, Vikaspuri, by sending an email to brpl.Epla@reliance-da.com or by calling 49209419, he said. They require to submit their photo identity proof and a copy of their theft bill. — PTI

4 cattle thieves held after gunfight

Noida: Four suspected cattle thieves of a gang active in western Uttar Pradesh and Haryana were held in Greater Noida after they got injured in a gunfight with police, officials said on Wednesday. The encounter took place late Tuesday night in Dadri area when the accused men, who were in a pick-up truck, were intercepted by the local police for checking, the officials said. "The men opened fire on the police party and tried to escape from the spot. However, they got injured in retaliatory firing," a police spokesperson said. They were taken to a hospital for treatment and later arrested, the spokesperson said. Six illegal firearms along with some ammunition, seven ropes, 48,500, and some stolen jewellery were seized from the accused, who belong to a gang of cattle thieves active in western UP and parts of Haryana, the official said. Those held have been identified as Rahees, Nasem, Harpal and Sonu, all natives of adjoining Bulandshahr district, police said. — PTI

Kejri's movement still restricted: AAP

Delhi Police denies claim

New Delhi, Dec. 9: The AAP on Wednesday alleged Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal's movement is still "restricted" and the principal gate of his residence stays closed on the behest of Union Home Minister Amit Shah, a claim denied by town police. Police sources stated the chief minister left his residence round 11 am to attend a programme.

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) had on Tuesday alleged the Delhi Police put Kejriwal beneath home arrest after he met farmers protesting towards the Centre's agriculture reform legal guidelines on the metropolis's Singhu border. However, a senior Delhi Police officer dismissed the claim as "totally baseless".

Addressing a press convention on Wednesday, AAP spokesperson Raghav Chadha stated there may be an environment of "undeclared emergency" across the chief minister's residence. "I am telling you with full responsibility that the movement of chief minister Arvind Kejriwal is still restricted at the behest of the (Union) home minister. The main gate of the chief minister's residence is still closed," Chadha stated.

"In a way, there is an atmosphere of undeclared emergency. All this, just because we did not allow the stadiums to be converted into prisons for farmers," he stated. A senior

police officer stated there isn't any restriction on any type of movement of the chief minister.

"The police deployment outside the chief minister's residence is part of security protocol," he stated. According to police sources, Kejriwal left his residence round 11 am to attend a programme.

On Tuesday, Kejriwal got here out of his residence after hours of drama exterior.

Addressing occasion employees, he stated the Centre tried its greatest to make sure that he didn't step out.

He stated if he was not stopped, he would have gone and supported farmers of their Bharat Bandh movement.

Kejriwal claimed the Centre was "very angry" as his authorities didn't enable Delhi stadiums for use as prisons for farmers. "We faced a lot of pressure to allow the use of stadiums as temporary prisons, but we did not give permission and I feel this helped the movement. But since then the Centre has been very angry," the chief minister stated.

Thousands of farmers, principally from Punjab and Haryana, are protesting at varied border factors of Delhi towards the brand new farm legal guidelines. The Centre's supply to amend the contentious legal guidelines has failed to chop ice with the protesting farmers who've caught to their demand for a repeal of the legislations



Arvind Kejriwal

Truck-mounted anti-smog gun to combat Delhi air pollution

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 9

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal Wednesday inaugurated a truck-mounted anti-smog gun to combat the worsening dust pollution in the national capital, where the air quality has been in the unhealthy category all through the winter.

The anti-smog gun is fed by a 5,000-litre water tank and can work for 3-4 hours continuously. It is mounted on a BS-VI emission standards engine truck which causes lesser vehicular pollution, said a government statement.

Under the Delhi government's 'Yuddh, Pradushan ke Viruddh (war on the pollution)' campaign, the Public Works Department (PWD) has installed 23 anti-smog guns at key intersections and construction sites across Delhi, it said.

The PWD has also taken the responsibility of sprinkling water on trees, roads, and construction sites to combat dust pollution.

Lowest Covid deaths in Delhi since Nov. 1: Jain

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 9

Delhi on Wednesday recorded 50 Covid-19 deaths, the lowest since November 1, Health Minister Satyendar Jain said and asserted that the national capital is "emerging victorious" in the battle against the coronavirus.

In a series of tweets, he also said that for the first time in Delhi, "more than 2,500 ICU beds" are vacant for Covid-19 patients.

Minor held for creating fake social media profile of woman

New Delhi, Dec. 9: A 17-year-old boy was apprehended from Rajasthan for allegedly creating a fake profile of a woman on a social media platform and sharing obscene posts about her, police said Wednesday.

The woman, a resident of Greater Kailash, lodged a complaint that someone had created her fake Instagram account using her pictures and was sharing obscene comments and posts about her. The accused was also threatening the complainant, the police said. During investigation, it



Delhi BJP president Adesh Gupta sitting on dharna along with MPs Manoj Tiwari and Gautam Gambhirat CM Arvind Kejriwal's residence at Civil Lines in New Delhi on Wednesday.

— G.N. JHA

Mayors' protest enters 3rd day, Tiwari, Gambhir join dharna

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 9

The indefinite dharna of mayors and leaders of BJP ruled municipal corporations outside Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal entered third day on Wednesday, with party MPs Manoj Tiwari and Gautam Gambhir joining the protest.

The mayors of North, South and East Delhi Municipal Corporations, Jai Prakash, Anamika and Nirmal Jain, accompanied by many women councilors, were sitting outside Mr Kejriwal's Flagstaff Road residence since Monday.

They are demanding payment of unpaid dues of ₹13,000 crore from Delhi government. Delhi BJP president Adesh

Gupta also joined the protest.

"Although Mr Kejriwal calls himself an Aam Aadmi, he is basically against the common man. That's why his government has not paid dues of ₹13,000 crore to municipal corporations which would help payment of salaries to sanitation workers, doctors, nurses and other employees," said Mr Tiwari.

East Delhi MP, Mr Gambhir said: "The Delhi chief minister is showing hypocrisy of the first order. He has built his political career around protests but now in power, Mr Kejriwal is unwilling to come out and meet with mayors and other senior leaders of MCD who are raising legitimate demands."

Mr Gambhir alleged that Mr Kejriwal staged the drama of house arrest only to blame the Central Government and so that he does not have to come out to face MCD leaders.

"This also shows that his support for farmers is also a hogwash. He is only interested in expanding his party in Punjab. In the last few days, AAP and Arvind Kejriwal have been exposed completely," Mr Gambhir added.

BJP MLA Ajay Mahawar lodged a police complaint against AAP leader at Civil Line police station for allegedly instigating crowds to attack protesting mayors demanding strictest action under relevant sections of law.

DELHI RECORDED 2,463 fresh Covid-19 cases on Wednesday with over 72,000 tests being conducted, even as the positivity rate dropped to 3.42 per cent, authorities said.

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Interim bail to N-E Delhi riot accused for sister's wedding

New Delhi, Dec. 9: An accused in two cases of recent north east Delhi riots was on Wednesday granted interim bail by a court here on "humanitarian grounds" to attend his sister's wedding.

The judge said the fact that Shubham was the "sole brother" of four sisters and one of them was getting married was weighing heavily on his mind. Additional sessions judge Vinod Yadav granted interim bail to him from December 10 to December 12 on furnishing a bond of

Rs 50,000 with one surety of like amount each in both the cases.

Shubham was arrested in the cases related to the murder of two local persons during the communal violence in Dayalpur area in February.

The court granted the interim relief after his counsel gave an undertaking that the accused would not seek extension of his interim bail on any ground whatsoever and would surrender before the jail authorities on December 12. "The fact that applicant

PM Modi to lay new Parliament building foundation today

New Delhi, Dec. 9: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will lay the foundation stone of a new Parliament building on Thursday at an event that will be attended by leaders from various political parties, Cabinet ministers and ambassadors of different countries.

Modi will also perform the ground-breaking ceremony for the building, which is expected to be completed by 2022 at an estimated cost of ₹971 crore. Some chief ministers and governors will also attend the event virtually.

The event will begin at 12:55 pm and the foundation stone will be laid at 1 pm, officials said, adding that a 'sarva dharma prarthana' (inter-faith prayer) will be held at 1.30 pm. The Prime Minister will deliver his address on the occasion at 2.15 pm, they said.

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla had earlier said: "The existing temple of democracy is completing 100 years... It is a matter of pride for our countrymen that the new one will be built by our own people as a prime example of Aatmanirbhar Bharat."

"The new building will showcase the cultural diversity of the country. Hopefully, in the 75th year of Independence (2022), Parliament session will be held in the new building," he said.

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

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

The foundation stone of the existing Parliament House was laid on February 12, 1921 and the construction took six years and cost Rs 83 lakh at that time. The opening

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

The new building will have an area of 64,500 square metres.

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

In the new building, the Lok Sabha chamber will have a seating capacity for 888 members, while Rajya Sabha will have 384 seats for members. The Lok Sabha chamber will have an option to increase its sitting capacity to 1,224 members during joint sessions.

This has been done keeping in mind the future increase in the number of members for the two houses.

At present, Lok Sabha has a sanctioned strength of 543 members and Rajya Sabha 245.

In September this year, Tata Projects Limited won the bid to construct the new Parliament building. The new building will be constructed close to the existing one under the Central Vista redevelopment project.

The existing Parliament House building will be suitably retro-fitted to provide more functional spaces for parliamentary events, to ensure its usage along with the new building. The existing building is a massive circular edifice of 560 feet in diameter. The Parliament House Estate is enclosed by an ornamental red sandstone wall or iron grills with iron gates that can be closed when occasions demand. The building has 12 gates. — PTI

Noida Covid tally 23,731; recovery rate almost 96%

Noida, Dec. 9: Uttar Pradesh's Gautam Buddha Nagar recorded 75 new Covid-19 cases which pushed the district's infection tally to 23,731 on Wednesday, official data showed.

Active cases in the district came down further to 918 from 965 the previous day, according to the data released by the UP health department for a 24-hour period. The number of active cases in Gautam Buddha Nagar is the fifth highest in the state.

On the bright side, 123 more patients got discharged during the period, with the overall recoveries reaching 22,728, the fifth highest in the state.

Gautam Buddha Nagar has a death toll of 85 and a mortality rate of 0.35 per cent. The recovery rate of patients reached 95.77 per cent, the statistics showed.

Meanwhile, the number of active Covid-19 cases in the state came down to 20,658 from 21,374 on Tuesday. — PTI

Khadi silk sarees for women cops on front desk

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 9

Khadi's acceptance in various government offices is quickly catching pace. The latest government agency to have adopted Khadi is the Delhi Police which is purchasing elegant Khadi silk sarees for its women front desk executives at its establishments.

The Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) has received a purchase order for 836 Khadi Silk sarees worth Rs 25 lakh from Delhi Police. Order of Delhi Police will be supplied in less than two months.

The dual-tone sarees will be made of high quality Tasar-Katia Silk. The

THE DUAL-TONE sarees will be made of high quality Tasar-Katia Silk. The sample of the saree was provided by Delhi Police which was accordingly developed by KVIC and approved by Delhi Police. The sarees will have a mix of natural color Tasar Silk and Katia Silk in pink color.

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"Over the years Khadi has become a trendsetter. Khadi is handcrafted and so it is the most comfortable fabric. Not only common people particularly youngsters but various government bodies too have adopted Khadi. This is a big boost to our artisans spinning and weaving Khadi in remotest parts of the country," said KVIC chairman Vinai Kumar Saxena.

The Tasar-Katia Silk sarees for Delhi Police are being prepared by traditional artisans in West Bengal. Tasar-Katia Silk is a dual-tone fabric made with a blend of Tussar and Katia silk. It is mostly woven by traditional artisans and is identified by its thick and heavy texture created by using two different threads of Tasar and Katia. Its rugged and rustic appearance but porous weave makes this fabric perfect to wear in all weather.

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SHORT TAKES

TAMIL TV ACTOR
CHITRA FOUND
DEAD IN HOTEL

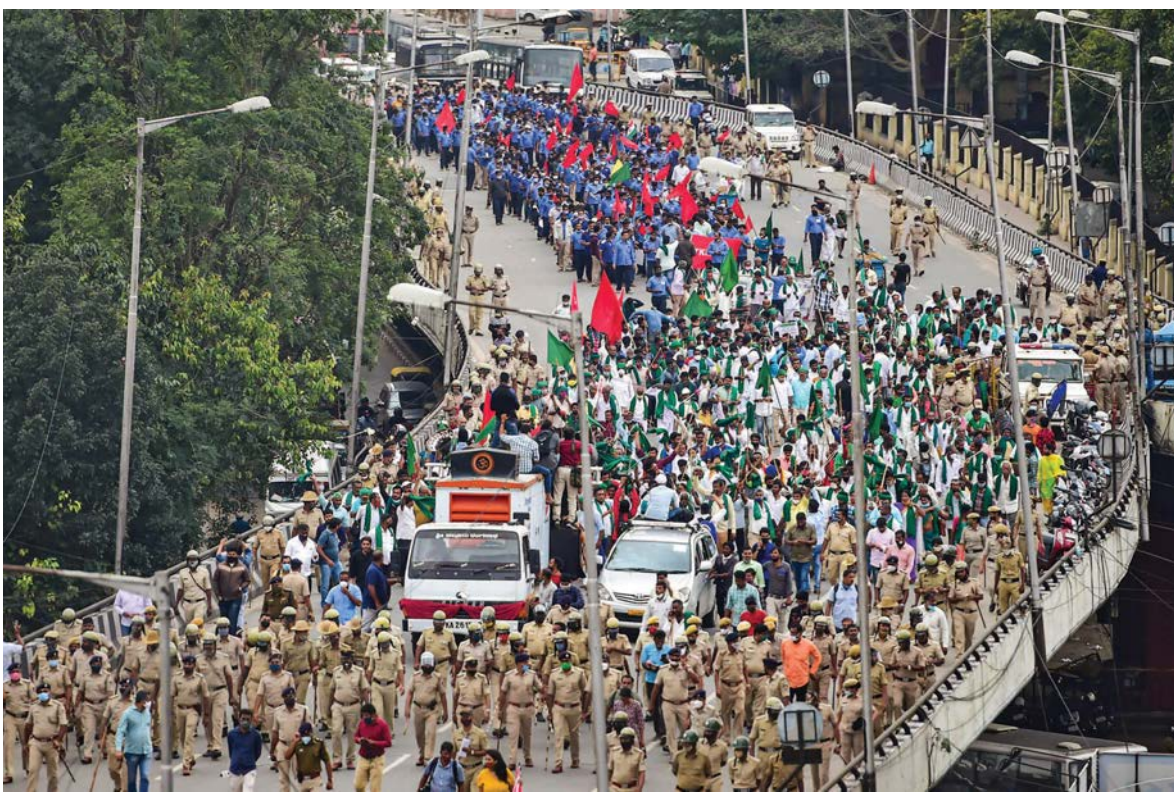
Chennai, Dec. 9: Popular Tamil television actress, Chitra was found dead at a hotel room here early on Wednesday and she is suspected to have died by suicide, the police said. The 29-year old actress, well known among television audience in Tamil Nadu was seen hanging from a fan at the hotel room — using her saree like a rope — in suburban Nazarethpet when they reached the spot, the police said. When examined, she was already dead, an official said adding her fiancé, who was with her before her death was being questioned. After a shoot at a nearby location, K. Chitra arrived at the hotel on the Bengaluru bypass and had told the man that she would be back after a bath and requested him to wait outside, the police said quoting him. “He says he knocked on the door since she did not come out for long. He says, he then informed the hotel personnel and police was informed at 3.30 am. He is being questioned. A probe is on,” the official said. The 32-year old man was recently engaged to her and he was staying with her in the hotel room. Chitra became more popular among lovers of soap opera after she donned the role of Mullai, in the ongoing television serial *Pandian Stores*. The body has been sent for an autopsy. — PTI

MUFTI DETAINED
AGAIN, TAKES JIBE
AT NITI CEO KANTYUSUF JAMEEL
SRINAGAR, DEC. 9

Former CM and PDP leader Mehbooba Mufti on Wednesday said that she has again been placed under house arrest, the third time in less than a fortnight. Taking a jibe at Niti Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant, she said “too much democracy indeed.” Mr Kant had on Tuesday said, “Tough reforms are very difficult in the Indian context. We are too much of a democracy. For the first time, the government has had the courage and determination to carry out hard-headed reforms across sectors.” The PDP chief tweeted, “illegally detained today for the third time in less than a fortnight. Too much democracy indeed.” She also said, “If my movements are curbed due to ‘security concerns’ then why are BJP ministers allowed to campaign freely in Kashmir while I’ve been asked to wait until the culmination of DDC elections?” On Tuesday, Ms Mufti was barred from visiting the families, mainly nomad Gujjars, evicted from their dwellings in the government’s ongoing anti-encroachment drive in J&K’s central district of Budgam. She uploaded a video on Twitter in which she stands by the locked entrance of her residence in Srinagar.

MAHA TO START
SCHEME NAMED
AFTER PAWARBHAGWAN PARAB
MUMBAI, DEC. 9

The Uddhav Thackeray-led Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government of Maharashtra will present NCP supremo Sharad Pawar, the chief architect of the regime, a gift on his 80th birthday by kickstarting a rural development scheme by his name. The scheme aims to improve the rural economy of the state. Named as “Sharad Pawar Gramin Samruddhi Yojana”, the scheme received the nod in the state Cabinet meeting headed by Mr Thackeray on Wednesday. It will be a combination of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act and the Maharashtra State Employee Guarantee Scheme. The scheme will be inaugurated on December 12, on which Mr Pawar will turn 80. According to the state officials, the scheme’s aim will be to double the income of farmers by providing collective and individual amenities through various works and develop the villages in the state. The employment guarantee department will be the nodal department for the implementation of the proposed ambitious scheme. An expenditure of ₹1 lakh crore is proposed in the next three years on the scheme.



Police personnel keep vigil as Karnataka farmers participate in a protest rally in Bengaluru on Wednesday to press for repeal of the Centre’s farm laws. — PTI

■ Minister alleges Muslims were earlier misled over CAA, NRC

China, Pak behind protests, claims Union mantri Danve

Aurangabad, Dec. 9: Union minister Raosaheb Danve on Wednesday claimed that China and Pakistan were behind the ongoing protests by farmers, who are seeking repeal of three new farm laws. He also alleged that Muslims were earlier misled over the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC), but as those efforts did not succeed, now farmers were being told that they will face losses due to the new laws.

Mr Danve was speaking at the inauguration of a health centre at Kolte Takli in Badnapur taluka of Maharashtra’s Jalna district. “The agitation that is going on is not that of farmers. China and Pakistan have a hand behind this. Muslims in this country were incited first. What was said (to them)? That NRC is coming, CAA is coming and Muslims will have to leave this country in six months. Did a single Muslim leave?”

“Those efforts didn’t succeed and now farmers are being told that they will face losses. This is the conspiracy of other countries,” Mr Danve said. The minister, however, did not elaborate on what basis he claimed that the two neighbouring countries are behind the farmers’ protests.

“The government is buying wheat at ₹24 and rice at ₹34 per kg and giving it to people at ₹2 and ₹3 per kg respectively. The government is spending ₹1.75 lakh crore on the subsidy for this. The government is spending money for the welfare of farmers,” the minister of state for consumer affairs said.

“These initiatives by the central government show that it is ready to spend money for farmers, but others don’t like it,” the BJP leader claimed.

Mr Danve said Prime Minister Narendra Modi is the prime minister of farmers and none of his decisions would be against farmers. — PTI

No divide among us: Union leader Kakka

New Delhi, Dec. 9: “We take decisions unanimously. It is about consensus and not majority,” farmer leader Shiv Kumar Kakka said on Wednesday, explaining why the unions “completely” rejected the government proposal to amend the new agri laws. He also said that there were no differences among farmer unions as was being reported by a section of the media.

At the meeting of farmers’ representatives on Wednesday afternoon, everybody agreed that the three new laws be scrapped and a specific law be enacted on the MSP, he said.

“We take decisions unanimously. It is about consensus and not majority... It cannot be that some people are agreeing to it and others are not. If all unions say the laws should be scrapped, that’s our decision... There is no question of having a personal opinion,” Mr Kakka said.

“In all five meetings with the farmer unions, the government held marathon discussions on the same points. Finally, we asked them (Centre) to answer in ‘yes or no’ whether they want to repeal the three new laws and guarantee MSP or not?” Mr Kakka said. — PTI

Elders determined to keep up the fight

New Delhi, Dec. 9: “Come home only after we win this fight”. His son’s words to him as he left his village in Punjab for Delhi ring in Gurdev Singh’s ears and give the 71-year-old the strength to carry on with the protest against the new farm laws — so what if he is still recovering from a knee replacement surgery.

The doughty sardar from Narpur village in Punjab’s Jalandhar district is just one of the several elderly people camping at the Singur border for the last 13 days, determined to keep up the fight for a repeal of the Centre’s three new farm laws.

It is getting colder by the day and they are hundreds of miles from home but the band of old men, among the many thousands of protesting farmers, mostly from Punjab and Haryana, are not giving up any time soon.

“As far as I can remember, all generations in my family have depended on agriculture for their livelihood. My sons, too, are farmers. I came to fight for the honour of our forefathers and the rights of my children,” Gurdev Singh said, pumping his fists in the air.

He had both his knees replaced just four months ago and can’t walk without support but isn’t complaining. “This trouble is nothing compared to the issue we are protesting about.

My elder son told me, ‘Come home only after we win this fight’, and that is what I plan to do,” the farmer said as two men help him climb down from a trolley.

Gurdev Singh’s two friends from Narpur, Sajjan Singh and Pritam Singh, both in their late 60s, echo his bravura spirit. — PTI

‘WE’RE TOO BUSY FIGHTING FOR OUR RIGHTS TO BE AFRAID OF COVID’

New Delhi, Dec. 9: Caught between the Covid-19 pandemic and the agitation for their rights, farmers protesting against the Centre’s new farm laws said the fear of contracting the disease is “not enough” to detract them from their fight.

Thousands of farmers camping at the Tikri borders are largely seen without the basic preventive measure against Covid-19 protective masks.

“The government has already tied a noose around our necks with these laws... we cannot afford to be afraid of coronavirus,” Gagandeep Singh, a farmer from Bhatinda in Punjab, said.

He has been protesting at the Delhi-Haryana border for the last 10 days.

Demonstrating for 12 straight days, the farmers have been demanding that the three laws be revoked.

Sporting a long white beard, Gurusaran Singh said he was not afraid of the disease that has already killed over 1.4 lakh people in the country.

“We are losing our rights. We do not have time to worry about coronavirus,” he said.

According to Sachin Kumar from Delhi’s Uttam Nagar, the government’s refusal to hear the farmers’ demands proved that it was creating the fear of the virus to shut down the protest.

Mr Kumar, whose family has land in UP, mocked, “It seems that the virus will infect us exclusively.”

The Centre has cancelled its crucial 60th round of talks with 40 protesting farmers’ unions that was scheduled on Wednesday as farm leaders declined to participate, after a meeting with home minister Amit Shah failed to break the deadlock. — PTI

Won’t allow NRC, NPR in Bengal, says Mamata

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, DEC. 9

Desperate to get back the sizeable votebank of the Matuas, a community of Hindu migrants in West Bengal, from the BJP, chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday asserted that the refugees would not need the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) to stay as legal citizens here.

Accusing the BJP of cheating the refugees in the name of the CAA in the poll-bound state, the Trinamul Congress supremo once again ruled out of allowing the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and National Population Register (NPR) also here.

Her announcement came in wake of the BJP national general secretary Kailash Vijayvargiya’s announcement that the CAA implementation for the migrants would get



There are lot of refugees who live here after coming from Bangladesh. It is your home like ours. There is no need to get a fresh certificate because all of you are citizens...

— Mamata Banerjee, West Bengal CM

underway from either January or February.

Ms Banerjee told a TMC rally at the domain of the Matuas in Bongaon of North 24 Parganas, “There are lot of refugees

who live here after coming from Bangladesh. It is your home like ours. There is no need to get a fresh certificate because all of you are citizens. You are being cheated in the name of the CAA. If it gets underway, your grandparents’ age proof will be sought. Can you arrange it now?”

She informed that all the 94 refugee colonies, under the state government, were legalised already to give its residents citizenship “in exchange of nothing”.

“There were 250 more such colonies which existed privately on Central government premises. We have legalised them also to give citizenship to its residents. Remember, the state government, not the Central government, holds the main power. Work of the two governments is different,” Ms Banerjee claimed.

Jolt to Congress as BJP wins Raj local body polls

Jaipur/New Delhi, Dec. 9: The ruling Congress in Rajasthan suffered a jolt in the BJP beating it in panchayat elections, an outcome which the winning party on Wednesday called a farmers’ mandate amid protests against the Centre’s new agri-marketing laws.

The BJP bagged 1,989 of the 4,371 panchayat samiti seats while the Congress won 1852 with almost all results of the four-phase local government polls being declared.

The CPI (M) bagged 26 seats, the RLP six and the Bahujan Samaj Party five. Independent candidates won 439 panchayat samiti seats.

At the zila parishad level, BJP candidates won 353 of the 635 seats for which results were declared and the Congress got 252.

Only one zila parishad seat result is yet to be announced in the election held across 21 of the state’s 33 districts.

The BJP candidates are now in majority in 13 of these district boards and the party is set to head one more with the help of ally Rashtriya Loktantrik Party (RLP). The Congress has won five of the remaining zila parishads.

The results come as a boost for the Bharatiya Janata Party when its government at the Centre is facing protests mainly from farmers in Punjab and Haryana — over the three new laws to deregulate the sale of crops.

Polling for the panchayat elections was held on November 23 and 27, and December 1 and 5.

The results come just



Election officials count votes for zila parishad and panchayat samiti polls at a counting centre in Bikaner on Tuesday. — PTI

BJP: Results farmers’ mandate for farm laws

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 9

Hailing the Rajasthan local body polls results as “phenomenal,” the BJP on Thursday claimed that the results are farmers’ mandate for Modi government’s farm reforms and also people’s support for the party across the country. The party also cited its performance in the recently held local bodies polls in Hyderabad, Arunachal Pradesh and the Bihar Assembly polls to assert that the party and the Modi-led Central government has support in every region of the country.

BJP president J.P. Nadda

said the saffron party’s win in Rajasthan symbolises the trust the poor, farmers and labourers have in Mr Modi’s leadership, while senior party leader and Union minister Prakash Javadekar stressed that people, especially farmers, have given it a “decisive” victory. He said all these polls were held after Parliament enacted three farm sector reform laws, which have drawn protest from a section of farmers, especially from Punjab.

Mr Javadekar said by opting for the BJP, voters reversed the trend of the state’s ruling party winning most seats in the local polls in Rajasthan.

days before the Ashok Gehlot government completes two years in Rajasthan, and only months after it tackled a

revolt among the Congress MLAs led by sacked deputy chief minister Sachin Pilot.

— PTI

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 E-Tender are invited from firms/contractors registered with UPLC Lucknow for the following jobs against which bids can be uploaded and same shall be opened/downloaded as per schedule mentioned. The details and conditions of all tenders are available on Noida Authority’s official website: www.noidaauthorityonline.com & <https://etender.up.nic.in>. Please ensure to use these websites for any changes/amendments and corrigendum etc.
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Ex-Bengal CM Buddhadeb is critical, put on ventilator

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, DEC. 9

Former West Bengal chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee was admitted to a private hospital in Alipore on Wednesday afternoon in a critical condition after his respiratory distress aggravated at home suddenly. He is on ventilator now.

At around 2 pm the 76-year-old CPI(M) veteran, a patient of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, was rushed to Woodlands Hospital from his Palm Avenue residence in Karaya. He has been admitted to critical care unit and he has been put on non-invasive ventilation, said the hospital’s CEO Dr Rupali Basu.



Mr Bhattacharjee, who tested negative to Covid-19, maintains an oxygen saturation of 95 per cent which was around 70 per cent when he was brought, added Dr Basu. She, however, informed that the ex-CM is responding to treatment though his condition remains “critical.”

Mr Bhattacharjee’s successor and Trinamul

Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee visited the hospital in the evening and spoke to his family members and hospital officials. “We respect him a lot,” she said.

“Concerned to hear that former chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee has been hospitalised with breathing problems. Praying for his speedy recovery and wishing him well,” Ms Banerjee tweeted earlier. Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar also visited the hospital.

“Getting update from hospital authorities. Interacted with doctors attending on Former West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya #WoodlandsHospital...,” he tweeted.

Tigress ‘Sundari’ to relocate to MP

RABINDRA NATH CHOUHDURY
BHOPAL, DEC. 9

MP CM Shivraj Singh on Wednesday gave his nod for relocation of tigress “Sundari”, translocated to Satkosia tiger reserve in Odisha in a re-introduction programme in 2018, in Kanha National Park in MP.

Mr Chouhan’s decision to restore Sundari to her original home in Kanha tiger reserve has ended almost a year-long impasse over relocation of the wild animal with MP forest department hitherto unwilling to take back her contending that she was not fit to be

released in the wild.

In a letter to his Odisha counterpart Naveen Patnaik, Mr Chouhan said MP would take back Sundari. He however indicated that it would take some time for relocation of Sundari in Kanha tiger reserve.

“It has been decided to relocate Sundari in the Ghorla Centre in the Kanha tiger reserve to make her fit to be released in the wild. But, an orphan cub is currently being trained in the centre to restore its wild character. Sundari could be relocated to the Centre only after the tiger cub was released in the wild”, the letter written in Hindi said.

RESTORATION OF TRAIN SERVICE
 It is notified for the information of all concerned that the service of train no. 02422 Jammu Tawi - Delhi Jn. - Ajmer Special will be restored w.e.f. 11.12.2020 & its return service, the 02421 Ajmer - Delhi Jn. - Jammu Tawi Special will be restored w.e.f. 12.12.2020.

Note: All norms of the State and Central Government regarding COVID-19 including Social distancing, sanitization etc., may be followed in the trains and at the Railway stations. All other precautions associated with COVID-19 should also be ensured

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

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SHORT TAKES

CJI'S MOTHER
DUPED OF ₹2.5CR,
ACCUSED HELD

Nagpur, Dec. 9: Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sharad Arvind Bobde's mother was allegedly duped to the tune of ₹2.5 crore by the caretaker of a family property here, the police said.

The accused, Tapas Ghosh (49), was arrested on Tuesday night. A special investigation team (SIT) is looking into the matter under the supervision of DCP Vinita Sahu, said Nagpur commissioner of police (CP) Amitesh Kumar.

Mukta Bobde, CJI Bobde's mother, is the owner of Seadon Lawn near Akashwani Square which is rented out for marriages and other functions, he said. The Bobde family had appointed Ghosh as caretaker of the property in 2007.

He was paid salary and also a commission on bookings. Taking advantage of Mukta Bobde's advanced age and frail health, Ghosh and his wife allegedly kept her in the dark about transactions, and did not deposit the entire rent amount which they collected, the CP said.

The fraud came to light when several bookings were canceled during lockdown for Coronavirus but the customers could not get refund of the booking amount from Ghosh, he said. After Mukta Bobde lodged a complaint of cheating in August, an SIT consisting of economic offences wing officials was formed. — PTI

SONIA TURNS 74;
PM AMONG FIRST
TO SEND WISHES

New Delhi, Dec. 9: Congress president Sonia Gandhi turned 74 on Wednesday and preferred to spend time with her family in view of the Covid-19 situation and the farmers agitation.

Political leaders cutting across party lines wished her. Gandhi had returned three days ago from Goa, where she had stayed for a few days to avoid the pollution in Delhi, after the advice of doctors.

She had said she won't celebrate her birthday but spent time with her family members at her 10 Janpath residence here. She did not meet people but received birthday wishes over telephone from a host of Congress and other leaders.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi was among the first to send her birthday wishes on Twitter. "Birthday greetings to Smt. Sonia Gandhi Ji. May God bless her with a long and healthy life," he tweeted.

Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh telephoned and wished her. He also sent her a letter with his birthday wishes to the Congress president. Chief ministers of West Bengal, Punjab, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Puducherry sent their best wishes on Twitter. "My best wishes on your birthday Sonia Gandhi Ji. I pray for your long life and happiness," wrote West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee. — PTI

KRITI SANON
TESTS POSITIVE
FOR COVID-19

Mumbai, Dec. 9: Actor Kriti Sanon on Wednesday said she has tested positive for coronavirus and is currently under home quarantine.

The 30-year-old actor had recently returned to Mumbai after wrapping up the shoot for her upcoming film with her *Bareilly Ki Barfi* co-star Rajkumar Rao in Chandigarh, following which there were reports she had contracted the disease.

In a statement on Twitter, Sanon said she is following the advice of doctors and officials from the BMC.

"I'd like to inform everyone that I have tested positive for Covid-19. There's absolutely nothing to worry as I'm feeling fine and have quarantined myself as per BMC and my doctor's advice," the actor said.

Sanon said she will get back to work as soon as she tests negative and thanked her fans for their wishes.

"I'm gonna ride this tide, rest it out and resume work soon. Till then, I'm reading all the warm wishes and they seem to be working. Be safe guys, the pandemic hasn't gone yet," she added.

Earlier, the cast of Karan Johar-backed *Jug Jugg Jeeyo*, including Varun Dhawan, Neetu Kapoor, Manish Paul and director Raj Mehta also tested positive for Covid-19 while shooting for the film in Chandigarh. — PTI

Employment plan
gets Cabinet nod

'Scheme to benefit around 58.5L employees'

**AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 9**

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved an employment generation scheme. Atmanirbhar Bharat Rozgar Yojana at an expenditure of ₹1,584 crores for the current financial year and ₹22,810 crores for the entire scheme period, i.e. 2020-2023.

The Atmanirbhar Bharat Rozgar Yojana scheme, which aims to create more formal jobs, to benefit around 58.5 lakh employees, said Union Minister Santosh Kumar Gangwar while briefing media after Cabinet meeting.

The registration for the scheme will be effective from October 1, 2020, to June 30, 2021, the labour minister said, adding that the ministry will soon notify rules for the scheme.

Though the government

claims that there are around 10 crore labourers formally registered with it, even as there are more than 40 crore labourers in the country, his department has no data on the number of people who have lost jobs since Corona virus-induced lockdown was imposed on March 24 this year.

Under the programme, the Centre will reimburse 24 per cent, 12 per cent each for employees and employers, for two years for all new formal jobs created in enterprises having up to 1,000 employees between October 1 and till June 30 next year, Mr Gangwar said at the cabinet briefing.

In an organisation where employee strength is more than 1,000 workers, the reimbursement will be restricted to 12 per cent of the employees contribution, he said.

An employee drawing monthly wage of less than

₹15,000 who was not working in any establishment registered with the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) before October 1, 2020 and did not have a Universal Account Number or EPF Member account number prior to October 1, 2020 will be eligible for the benefit.

The EPFO will credit the contribution in Aadhaar seeded account of members in an electronic manner and is also planning to develop a software for the scheme and also develop a procedure which is transparent and accountable at their end.

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman had on November 12 announced ₹2.65 lakh crore worth economic stimulus package, termed as Atmanirbhar Bharat 3.0, comprising 12 big measures to revive the economy marred by coronavirus pandemic.

KARNATAKA GOVT
PUTS BANS COWS
SLAUGHTER, SALE

Bengaluru, Dec. 9: Amid bedlam, the controversial anti-cow slaughter bill was passed in the Karnataka Assembly on Wednesday, with the Congress and JDS members staging a walkout in protest.

The bill, known as the Karnataka Prevention of Slaughter and Preservation of Cattle Bill-2020, seeks a total ban on the slaughter of cows in the state and stringent punishment to those who indulge in smuggling, illegal transportation, atrocities on cows and slaughtering them, BJP sources said.

As animal husbandry minister Prabhu Chavan tabled the bill, Congress MLAs led by Opposition leader Siddaramaiah trooped into the Well of the House. They alleged the bill was not discussed for tabling in the Business Advisory Committee meeting.

"We had discussed yesterday that new bills will not be tabled. We had agreed that only the ordinances will be passed. Now he (Prabhu Chavan) has all-of-a-sudden introduced this anti-cow slaughter bill," he said.

However, Speaker Vishweshwar Hegde Kageri said he had clearly said in the meeting that important bills will be tabled on Wednesday and Thursday. — PTI



Ravi Shankar Prasad

through these public WiFi networks, the government said in its statement.

The proliferation of public Wi-Fi will not only create employment but also enhance disposable incomes in the hands of small and medium entrepreneurs and boost the GDP of the country, the statement added.

Further, official sources said that the proliferation of public Wi-Fi will not only create employment but also enhance disposable incomes in the hands of small and medium entrepreneurs and boost the GDP of the country.

The proliferation of Broadband Services through public Wi-Fi is a step towards digital India, Mr Prasad said, adding that this will have consequential benefits thereon.

Nadda in Bengal

■ Continued from Page 1

Church College —Cultivate the habit of discipline and toleration. Surrender not to the convictions you hold dear but learn to appreciate the points of view of your opponents. This is very much relevant to Bengal even today. If we look at Mamataji, intolerance thy name is Mamata. Intolerance is growing so fast here!"

He also criticised Ms Banerjee over the killings of BJP workers in the state while training guns at her misrule. The BJP chief, however, faced an angry demonstration by TMC workers who showed him black flags from a distance at Hastings and Bhowanipore in protest against the Centre's three new farm laws.

Russia FM...

■ Continued from Page 1

go, at various get-togethers."

Observers point out that the remarks highlight Russia's unease with India's growing proximity and strong strategic ties with the United States, with whom Russia has had a sharply deteriorating relationship. It also highlights India's challenge in continuing to maintain excellent ties with both Russia and the US. India is also a member of the four-nation Quad, that also comprises Japan and Australia, apart from the US, a factor that Russia does not seem

too comfortable with. Russia's adverse references to the phrase "rules-based order" that India uses regularly in its official statements are also being viewed by observers as a concern for New Delhi, since use of the phrase by New Delhi is usually seen as a veiled reference to China.

The remarks also highlight the strong ties between Russia and China at a time when India continues to be locked in a military face-off with China in the Ladakh sector, though the two Asian giants continue to be in talks to resolve the issue.

Farmers reject govt's offer, to intensify stir

■ Continued from Page 1

are also being held at a ground allocated for the farmers' protests in Delhi's outskirts. At least five deaths were reported since the protests began.

After deliberating over the Centre's proposal, the farmers' leaders made it clear they will continue their agitation until all the three new farm laws are rolled back.

The All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee (AIKSCC) said the Narendra Modi government was "insincere and arrogant" about resolving their demands.

In a statement, the AIKSCC said: "All farmers' organisations reiterate their demand to repeal three farm acts... Our protest will continue, and more farmers will join in... Our district level dharnas will start in all states."

The rejection of the Centre's proposal by the farmers' leaders came a day after their meeting with Union home minister Amit Shah failed to break the deadlock. Soon after the farmers rejected the proposal, agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar and commerce

minister Piyush Goyal had a two-and-a-half hour meeting at Mr Shah's Delhi residence.

In its proposal, the Centre promised a written assurance for minimum support prices, allowing farmers to go to a court to resolve disputes instead of to a subdivisional magistrate and scrapping of the Electricity Amendment Bill.

The government also offered to make amendments in the laws to address the concerns of farmers in several areas. To allay their fears that big corporate groups will



A flock of Seagulls at Mahim Beach in Mumbai on Wednesday.

— PTI

Serum, Bharat Biotech vaccines
emergency use not cleared yet

'Expert panel seeks more data on efficiency and safety'

**KANIZA GARARI
with agency inputs
HYDERABAD, DEC. 9**

In a setback to two major pharma companies in the race for the vaccine for Coronavirus, the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) has not granted the Emergency Use Authorisation permission (EAU) to city-based Bharat Biotech and the Serum Institute of India (SII) for their respective vaccines, Covaxin and Covishield.

The data submitted by both companies was found to be "insufficient" by the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) of the DCGI in terms of data on the trials of Indian patients, according to sources. The panel sought additional data on the safety and efficacy of their proposed shots.

Due to lack of data on Indian patients, the CDSCO subject expert committee, which met on Wednesday, found that the "data submitted of phase 1 and phase 2 trials was not sufficient".

The DCGI said that Covid-19 vaccine candidates should have "at least 50 per cent efficacy in phase III clinical trials" for it to be widely deployed. The DCGI rules of 2019 state that there must be at least 3,000 patients on whom the vaccine has to be tested before approval.

Dr Kiran M, senior anaesthesiologist, Government Hospital, Nizamabad, said, "Phase III trials are still not complete. They are currently ongoing. Without data of these trials, the EUA cannot be given. There is no



Envoys of various countries arrive at Shamshabad Airport to visit Bharat Biotech and Biological E. Limited in Hyderabad on Wednesday.

— PTI

concept of EUA in India. This is for the first time vaccines are being taken up under this given the emergency of the pandemic. For this reason, scientists and drug controllers are very cautious."

According to sources aware of the proceedings, "the data submitted by a company to CDSCO in order to get a EUA pertained to data of overseas patients by a company for phase III human clinical trials".

In case of another company, recruitment of all 26,000 volunteers is still not complete, sources said. Given these lapses it will take time for the EUA to be given to these companies.

Experts argue that vaccine development takes time and evaluation of data requires time.

Dr Sanjay Reddy, senior pharmacist, said, "The data generation will be based on the dosage regime, time after doses and adverse effects, if any. These phases have to be completed. Till it is completed, it will not be

known where this vaccine can be administered to people safely."

Experts believe that the waiting period for EUA will take at least another month, if not more. There are three committees which have to evaluate the request from these two companies, including the vaccine subject expert committee, the technical panel and the apex committee. The first committee, SEC, has asked for more data from the companies, which means that the wait for the vaccine from these two firms reaching people has gotten much longer.

The application by the Indian arm of US pharmaceutical firm Pfizer was not taken up for deliberation on Wednesday as the company sought more time for making a presentation before the committee, they said.

The recommendations by the SEC have been approved by the DCGI, an official source was quoted by a news agency to have said.

Foreign
envoys visit
key pharma
firm in Hyd

**AGE CORRESPONDENT
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, DEC. 9**

Over 60 foreign envoys on Wednesday visited Hyderabad-based leading biotech companies Bharat Biotech and Biological E Limited, and were briefed about India's indigenous efforts to develop Covid-19 vaccines, including ongoing clinical trials as well as manufacturing capacity.

Australian high commissioner Barry O'Farrell, who was part of the visiting delegation, called the pharmaceutical research and manufacturing as "impressive".

India's "R&D facilities, manufacturing capacity, foreign collaborations, etc. in the fields of pharmaceuticals, including vaccine production, were highlighted" during the visit, the ministry of external affairs said.

It said as the world's largest vaccine manufacturer, India will contribute significantly to global efforts for producing Covid-19 vaccines.

Sources said Dr Krishna Ella, CMD of Bharat Biotech, made a presentation to foreign heads of mission. Sources said the diplomats were told that "33 per cent of global vaccines are produced in genome valley" in Hyderabad.

Opp. leaders meet Prez

■ Continued from Page 1

laws are taken back."

Later, Mr Gandhi tweeted, "The farmers of the country have realised that they have been cheated by the Modi government and they are not going to relent because they know that if they compromise today they will have no future. The farmers are India. We are all with farmers. Stay put."

Mr Pawar said that various political parties have requested Mr Kovind that these farm laws should be repealed as they were not discussed with either stakeholders nor were they vetted by the Select Committee of

Parliament.

CPI(M) general secretary Mr Yechury said: "We told the President that the three farm laws were passed undemocratically in Parliament and have sought the repeal of these laws".

The Opposition delegation was limited to five because of the Covid-19 situation. However, more than 20 political parties in the country have extended their support to the ongoing historic farmers' struggle and asked for a repeal of the retrograde agri-laws and the Electricity Amendment Bill, the three Left Parties said in a statement.

Drug dealer with
celeb links held

**SAURABH JOSHI
MUMBAI, DEC. 9**

The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) arrested a known bigtime drug peddler from Mumbai and seized a contraband to the tune of ₹2.5 crore from him in connection with the Sushant Singh Rajput suicide probe. The NCB officials said that the accused was the supplier to one of the arrested peddlers, who later passed on the drugs to Rajput's girlfriend.

Rhea Chakraborty's brother Showik for consumption. The seized contraband is premium quality cannabis with market name "Malana Cream".

The arrested accused was identified as Jinendra Jain alias Rigel Mahakal alias Jeet who was arrested from Andheri's Lokhandwala area from where the NCB officials also seized the contraband. The officials said that Jain was named in the statement by arrested peddler Anuj Keshwani, who was arrested for supplying Charas / Hashish. The charas seized in this case is 'Malana Cream' which is the most desirable charas in the world. The said charas is grown only in Malana Region of Himachal Pradesh. The

International market price of Malana Cream ranges from ₹40-50 lakhs per kg.

"Preliminary probe revealed that Jain was involved in trafficking of Hashish in Mumbai area. Another accused

Mohammad Azam Jumman Shaikh was also apprehended and 5 kg Charas was recovered from him along with small quantities of opium and ecstasy and cash Rs 13.51 from his house in Millat Nagar, Oshiwara," said an officer.

The officials said that the seizure is a part of follow up of Rhea Chakraborty Case and this is the biggest haul of drugs seized in this case. Shaikh is the main supplier of Charas linked to this case.

Jain was produced before a magistrate's court on Wednesday and he was remanded to NCB's custody till December 11. The officials sought his custody stating the probe is still underway and that they need to question him to find the further link in the case.

The NCB had earlier questioned several actors, including Deepika Padukone, Shradha Kapoor, Sara Ali Khan and Rakul Preet Singh in the case.

THE ASIAN AGE

10 DECEMBER 2020

Democracy and reforms: How much is too much?

Is there a connection between democracy and Niti Aayog? Or, not to put too fine a point on it, between India's democracy and the government's think tank on economic affairs that was created as the National Institute for Transforming India (Niti) by dismantling the Planning Commission, which had planned to achieve balanced development of the various regions to remove poverty. Probably not, if putative observations of the Niti Ayog CEO, Amitabh Kant, made recently, are to be taken at face value.

The transformation of India in the conception of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who is the chairman of the think tank he created in January 2015 through a mere cabinet decision and not the constitutional route, is to be achieved, fundamentally through de-regulation in all fields of economic activity. This means taking away any role for the government through "hard reforms" that Mr Kant spoke of while addressing an event virtually on Tuesday.

The country's major news platforms quoted the Niti Aayog operational chief as saying that "tough reforms" were very difficult in the Indian context because there

The agri-laws were rammed through Parliament virtually without discussion — in an example of the 'political will' shown by the regime

was "too much democracy" in the country. He also noted that the Modi government had shown the "political will" to drive hard reforms. He reeled off examples such as mining, agriculture and labour.

The political meaning of this is obvious — that the rules, regulations and the culture of debate, dissent and protest in a democracy will not yield "tough reforms" needed to deliver economic prosperity. This is a discredited notion and Mr Kant evidently ran for cover when the implication of his remarks was revealed to him. He flatly denied saying

ing the words attributed to him though it is highly unlikely that all reputed media outlets would misquote him. The videos of his only underscore that his clarification and denials are to be regarded with a stiff dose of skepticism.

Mr Kant went to the extent of saying that India can compete with China only through "hard reforms" and not through holding seminars. Seminars imply discussion and debate. This China reference would also suggest that in the Niti Aayog CEO's scheme, debates are not the way to push "tough reforms", implying a failure of the well-known basis of democracy. Presumably, then, hard reforms can only be achieved through bulldozing, the way it is done in China, a totalitarian state where a single leader is all knowing and all-powerful.

Examples of so-called "hard reform" (even when they undervalue public welfare by privileging the market principle on an exclusive basis), pushed through the methods of democracy, have evidently eluded Mr Modi's most powerful economic bureaucrat. He could have recalled, for instance, that former Britain PM Margaret Thatcher battled and debated in Parliament and the media to get her way in scuttling welfare measures of an earlier era to set her country on a new path.

In fact, to make economic reforms non-sliding, acceptance by the widest sections of the people is a necessity, not a luxury, and the political principle of democracy provides for the most thorough means to install a new idea or practice. The present regime has failed to do just that, the most recent egregious example being the contentious agri-laws against which a storm is brewing. These were rammed through Parliament virtually without discussion — in an example of the "political will" shown by the regime.

The rise of Everest

Measured in 2005 by a Beijing survey to be 8,844 m, Mt Chomolungma (meaning mother goddess) was a harder climb from the Chinese side, but also shorter by a good four metres. It prompted mountaineers to rush over to Nepal to summit Sagarmatha (literally, top of the world) whose height was generally acknowledged to be 8,848 metres. It cost the Communist country no small amount of Everest tourism.

Following the 2015 earthquake in Nepal which left 9,000 dead, including some climbers, the country's survey department experts, fearing that the mountain had become shorter, called for a fresh taking of measurement. So far, Nepal had been following the findings of the 1954 Survey of India, which had put out the second figure. An American survey in 1999, however, had calculated Everest to be higher, at 8,850 metres. It added grist to speculations as to whether the young-fold mountain was still growing.

The speculators were correct. The two newest satellite aided surveys — Nepal's in 2019 and the one completed by China earlier this year — finally agree — the height of Everest is 8,848.86 metres — the mountain having grown by three feet or 86 centimetres. It is 164 years after Radhanath Sikdar used trigonometry and machines called theodolites to first calculate it on behalf of Sir George Everest to be 8,839 metres, making it the highest peak of the world.

It wasn't easy measuring the earth's tallest mountain this time either. Surveyors had to climb the mountain with a GPS receiver. A Nepali surveyor who stayed at the summit for two hours lost a toe to frostbite.

Now comes the key question — can this increase be attributed to rock, or is it merely icecap, as China once claimed? Yes and no, says Sridevi Jade, plate tectonics expert. The Himalayas stand on the boundary between the Indian and Eurasian plates. Jade calculates that the Indian plate is slipping under the Eurasian plate by about five centimetres a year. After accounting for erosion on the top, Everest is gaining about one centimetre every 10 years. So while the quake may have taken off centimetres, replicating Hillary and Norgay's feat just got harder.

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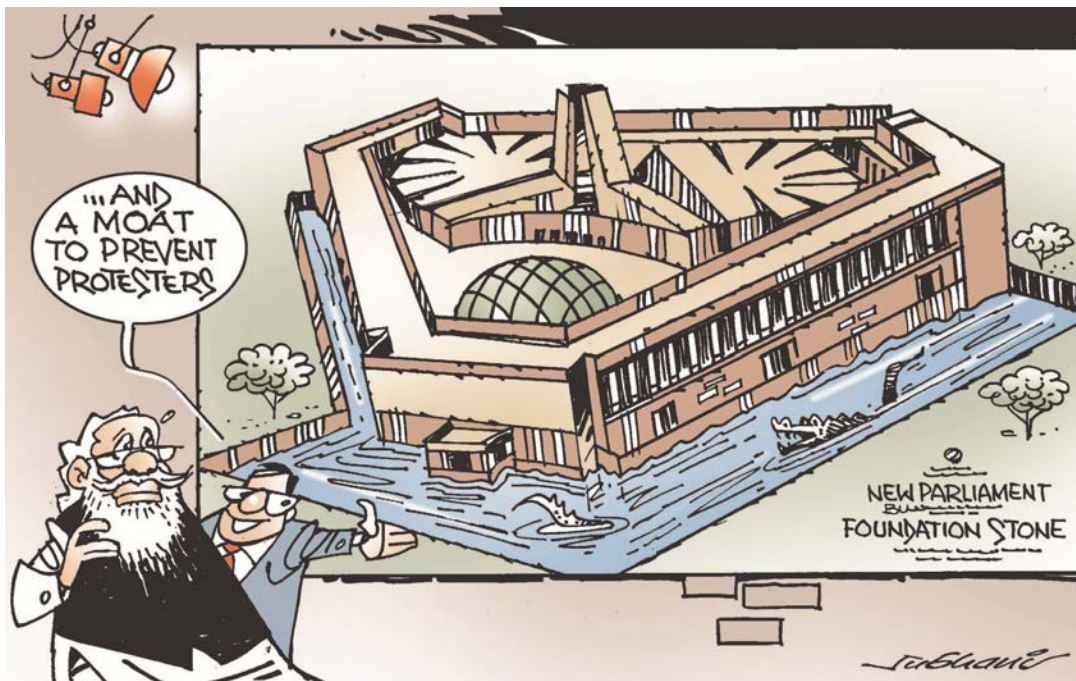
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Subhani



Boris' fumbling holds lessons for the world



Sunanda K. Datta-Ray
Reflections

An important lesson for the pandemic-stricken world to remember as challenge after challenge casts its shadow on Prime Minister Boris Johnson's beleaguered government in London is that no opinion — not even that of a suspected adversary — should be dismissed or derided at a time of grave international danger.

More of that later. Immediate attention focuses on another aspect of the coronavirus crisis which inspired Britain's Agri-born business minister, Alok Sharma, to exult grandiloquently: "In years to come, we will remember this moment as the day the United Kingdom led humanity's charge against this disease." He meant — as every British spokesman repeats ad nauseam — that the UK is the first country to agree to use the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine against Covid-19.

Not everyone is equally boastful. While the German ambassador reminded listeners that the vaccine represents collective European enterprise, the tiny oil-rich island kingdom of Bahrain quickly muscled into the limelight to share Britain's glory with its own agreement with Pfizer/BioNTech. Another critic with little stomach for bombast that might resound to applause in Mr Sharma's ancestral Uttar Pradesh sharply reminded him that this moment might also be remembered for "the UK having one of the worst death rates and the worst economic impact due to poor governance".

Going beyond the United Kingdom's 1.71 million Covid-19 cases and 61,014 deaths, he might have been speaking of the frantic last-minute parleys in Britain's pro-

tracted divorce negotiations with the European Union which suggest that the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, did not think things through when he played up to domestic separatists with his aggressive Brexit agenda. With time running out for the December 31 deadline, this week's last throw of the dice (as it's called) in the negotiations may be heading for a breakdown rather than a breakthrough. If so, it would be catastrophic for both parties who cannot escape their interdependence. While British waters are much richer in fish than the seas surrounding Europe, British trawlers make their money selling to the European nations.

As Mr Johnson continues to pander to the insular lobby by accusing the EU of riding roughshod over British sovereignty, Rachel Reeves, a senior member of the Labour Party's shadow cabinet, has warned that he "needs to deliver the deal he promised the British people". He can't ignore her for Brexit has exposed his reliance on Labour votes in the House of Commons. Neither can he ignore the new Cold War against China and Russia that US President Donald Trump had launched with vehement diatribes against the so-called "Wuhan virus" to woo American voters ahead of the presidential election.

With talk of Washington invoking the 1977 International Emergency Economic Powers Act to blacklist the popular Chinese video app TikTok as "an unusual and extraordinary threat", Mr Johnson has taken up the cudgels for the United States like another British leader, Tony Blair, who kowtowed to George W. Bush and joined the American invasions of Iraq and

Afghanistan. That probably explains the sudden £16 billion increase in Britain's defence budget over the next four years, despite the pandemic's calamitous damage to the economy. Such gestures appease the Americans, as do accusations of the Kremlin trying to penetrate Britain's secret scientific research programmes and promises to reveal Russia's alleged covert interference in British politics.

Initially, Mr Johnson rejected pressure, American as well as from the rightists among his own Conservatives, to ban the Chinese technology company, Huawei, from any role in building the UK's 5G infrastructure. He has since done a volte face and now cites "sound technical reasons" for giving Huawei marching orders. But although Huawei is said to threaten British security and is excluded from the 5G network, Mr Johnson cannot be seriously concerned since the eviction will become effective only over seven years.

Neither this anomaly nor the ban itself seems to have attracted much public attention in Britain. The reason may be that people are genuinely horrified by China's oppression of the Uighurs, its tightening grip on Hong Kong, the military assertiveness in the South China Sea and muscle-flexing in Ladakh. But the Brexit controversy makes Britain vulnerable, and succumbing to American pressure at this juncture may compound London's depen-

Dr Hans Kluge, who heads the WHO's European operations, says that lockdowns are unnecessary if 95 per cent of the population wears masks. Sadly, many European and American leaders dismissed masks then as politically unacceptable.

dency on Washington. Instead of taking back control of his country's destiny — the publicly reiterated reason for leaving the EU in the first place — Mr Johnson might end up by moving closer to the old joke of Britain as the 51st state of the United States of America.

Obviously, the pandemic aggravates the impact of all other crises. Covid-19 might also have caused less suffering and spread less terror if a sane approach had been followed from the beginning. Dr Hans Kluge, who heads the World Health Organisation's European operations, says that lockdowns are unnecessary if 95 per cent of the population wears masks. This should have been far more widely and forcefully propagated when the pandemic was exploding across the world. Sadly, many European and American leaders dismissed masks then as politically unacceptable.

As Britain and the EU nations were going into lockdown, Dr George Fu Gao, director-general of the Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, China's main public health body, corroborated Dr Kluge's view. Asked about the mistakes being made by other countries trying to control coronavirus, he replied that "the big mistake in the US and Europe, in my opinion, is that people aren't wearing masks".

That opinion should have been taken seriously even though China had already been cast as the adversary. According to independent observers, China's return to normality was largely the result of old-fashioned public health measures, with a heavy emphasis on test-and-trace and travel bans, vigorously enforced by mobilising the country's vast resources and, of course, invoking the state's coercive authority.

There's a lesson there for the rest of the suffering world.

The writer is a senior journalist, columnist and author

LETTERS

BLOW TO FARMERS

The Yediyurappa government has cleared the decks for non-agriculturalists to buy agricultural land in Karnataka, passing the controversial Karnataka Land Reforms Bill through the Legislative Council. The JD(S) Council members, who stood by farmers in the morning as Bharat Bandh began, sprang a surprise and supported the Bill much to the chagrin of the Congress. But the condition that the purchaser can use the land only for irrigation could put off many a prospective buyer.

N.J. Ravi Chander
Bengaluru

90-YR-OLD HEROINE

A 90-YEAR-OLD woman from Northern Ireland has become the first person in the world to receive the Pfizer/BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine, marking the start of the UK's mass vaccination programme. Margaret Keenan, from Enniskillen, stated that she felt "so privileged" to receive the jab at University Hospital, Coventry. Keenan became the first person in the world to receive the Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine outside trial conditions. With this, the Covid-19 vaccine project in the UK has started even as the world closely watches its progress and outcome.

Bhagwan Thadani
Mumbai

NATARAJAN'S DAY

T. NATARAJAN was originally not part of the Indian T-20 side. He was taken as a net bowler. Tamil Nadu bowlers specialise in bowling cutters and yorkers and soon he made his presence felt. An injury to Indian mystery spinner Varun Chakravarthi resulted in his debut. Natarajan certainly did justice to his selection, having finished as the leading wicket-taker in the three-T20I series with six scalps. His economy rate reads 6.91.

C.K. Ramani
Coimbatore

Every Monday the best letter of the week wins ₹500. Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

Leher Sethi



Is pollution a greater pandemic than Covid?

As a parent, I dread Delhi winters, not just because of the cold, but because of the terrible pollution in the air. We live in the city with the worst air quality in the world. Air quality index is generally Moderate (101-200) between January and September, and then it drastically deteriorates to Very Poor (301-400), Severe (401-500) or Hazardous (500+) between October and December.

It amazes me how year after year, as the winter approaches, there is a huge outcry over pollution in the city and then it dies down its own natural death as the summer returns. There is no urgency to tackle this pandemic!

Although some of us are still getting used to wearing masks, to many of us with little children, this is nothing new because our kids have been wearing masks for the past couple of winters. In my son's Montessori preschool, it was made compulsory for the little babies to wear masks to school. Back then, it felt like I was entering a science fiction film set every time I would go to school. Little did I know that it would become the new normal soon!

As per the current data, as on

November 28, 2020, there have been 1,35,906 deaths due to the coronavirus in India. Globally, there have been 1.45 million deaths. Now, compare this to the deaths caused due to pollution. In 2019, exposures to outdoor high average levels of PM 2.5 caused 9,80,000 deaths in India — nearly 60 per cent of all air pollution — attributable deaths. Globally, there were 4.14 million such deaths in 2019. Even if we were to double the coronavirus-related deaths, they would still amount to just about 27 per cent of the deaths caused due to air pollution in India. Then, why is this pandemic being ignored?

What will it take for the authorities and the government to wake up to its reality? Is it that the awareness of this epidemic is only with the educated and urbane few, that it will only become important once the vote bank of the poor make it an issue?

As per the State of Global Air 2020 report (SoGA 2020) released on October 21, a report published by the US-based think-tank, Health Effects Institute, there were at least 1,16,000 infant deaths due to air pollution recorded in India last year.

For the youngest infants, most deaths were related to complications

from low birth weight and premature birth — direct outcomes of mothers' exposure to air pollution during pregnancy. More than half of the infant deaths were due to PM2.5 in outdoor air and the rest were linked to household air pollution due to use of solid fuels such as charcoal, wood and animal dung for cooking, as per the study that claims to be the first-ever comprehensive analysis of air pollution's global impact on newborns. There is a growing body of evidence about the link between infant death and air pollution and several Indian and international studies have tried to explain it.

In 2019, India's population-weighted annual average concentration of PM 2.5 was recorded at 83.2 micrograms per cubic metre — seven times higher than the WHO's safe standards of 10 µg/m3 - and remained highest in the world. (The "population-weighted annual average concentration" is the average level of air pollution to which a country's population is exposed.)

As per the American Lung Association, children face special risks from air pollution because their lungs are growing and because they are so active and breathe in a great deal of air. Children's exposure to air

pollution is a special concern because their immune system is not fully developed when exposure begins.

Just like the arms and legs, the largest portion of a child's lungs will grow long after he or she is born. Eighty percent of alveoli develop after birth. Children have more respiratory infections than adults, which also seems to increase their susceptibility to air pollution.

Furthermore, children don't behave like adults, and their behaviour also affects their vulnerability. They are outside for longer periods and are usually more active when outdoors. Consequently, they inhale more polluted outdoor air. They are also closer to the earth, where the pollutants are higher.

As per a study titled "State of Global Air 2019", the average life of a South Asian child growing up in the current high levels of air pollution will be shortened by two-and-a-half years. This means that a child born today will die 2.5 years sooner, on average. That is a really scary prospect, and one that makes me want to leave this city, and country, along with my child. Doing a little bit of research on my own, here's what I found:

■Children are more at risk from the effects of pollution since they have faster breathing rates, and their lungs are still developing.

■Children exposed to high pollution are more likely to have reduced lung function as adults.

■Long term exposure to air pollution may cause asthma and other health risks, including cancer, in children.

■Air pollution is one of the leading threats to child health, accounting for almost one in 10 deaths in children under five years of age.

■Pregnant women exposed to air pollution can hinder the development of the brain and lead to cognitive problems later in the children.

As per the World Health Organisation, in Delhi, poor air quality irreversibly damages the lungs of 2.2 million or 50 per cent of all children. My child and your child could be part of that number! There is no way of sugarcoating this; as a parent, I am afraid for my child.

If this is not a national emergency, then what is? Our children are the future, and the future is at stake here!

Leher Sethi is an entrepreneur and social activist

SHORT TAKES

CHOPPER CRASH
IN FRENCH ALPS
KILLS 5, 1 HURT

Paris, Dec. 9: Five members of a mountain rescue team were killed and a sixth was seriously injured when their helicopter crashed in the French Alps, authorities said. The helicopter was carrying the team on a training mission in the Savoie region on Tuesday evening. The helicopter came down at an altitude of 1,800 meters (5,905 feet), the prefecture of Savoie said in a statement. The surviving crew member was able to give the alert.

He has been transported to a hospital in the city of Grenoble, the prefecture said. Weather conditions were particularly bad, local authorities said. French President Emmanuel Macron paid tribute in a tweet overnight to rescuers who “to save lives, are taking all the risks.”

GERMAN POLLS
TO BE HELD ON
SEPT. 26, 2021

Berlin, Dec. 9: Germany's next parliamentary election, which will determine the country's new leader after Chancellor Angela Merkel's long rule, will be held on September 26, 2021.

President Frank-Walter Steinmeier's office said Wednesday that the head of state set the date in line with a recommendation from the government. It will be post-World War II Germany's 20th parliamentary election. Germany holds elections every four years.

The lower house of parliament, or Bundestag, elects the chancellor. That may not happen until well after the election, because the process of putting together a governing coalition can be lengthy. After the 2017 election, it was nearly six months before Merkel was sworn in for her fourth term — a record.

ETHIOPIA DENIES
PROBES INTO
TIGRAY CONFLICT

Nairobi, Dec. 9: Ethiopia's government is rejecting calls for independent investigations into the deadly conflict in its Tigray region, saying it “doesn't need a baby-sitter.”

The declaration comes amid international calls for more transparency into the month-long fighting between Ethiopian forces and those of the fugitive Tigray regional government that is thought to have killed thousands, including civilians.

At least one large-scale massacre has been documented, and others are feared. Senior government official Redwan Hussein told reporters on Tuesday evening that Ethiopia will invite others for assistance only if it feels that “it failed to investigate.”

To assume the government can't carry out such probes “is belittling the government,” he said.

Frustration is growing as the northern Tigray region remains largely cut off from the outside world, with food and medicines desperately needed by the population of 6 million — some 1 million of them now thought to be displaced.

INDIA'S WEAPONS
PURCHASE FROM
US AT \$3.4 BILLION

Washington, Dec. 9: India's weapons procurement from the United States jumped from a meagre \$6.2 million to a whopping \$3.4 billion in the final year of the Donald Trump's administration, according to official data.

As per the data released by the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA), the jump in the sale of American weapons to India comes at a time when sale of weapons from the US to other countries has dipped to \$50.8 billion in 2020 from \$55.7 billion in 2019.

In 2019, the sale of US weapons to foreign countries was \$55.7 billion. In 2017, it was \$41.9 billion, it said. Major buyers of American weapons in 2020 were India (\$3.4 billion up from \$6.2 billion in fiscal year 2019), Morocco (\$4.5 billion up from \$12.4 million), Poland (\$4.7 billion up from \$673 million), Singapore (\$1.3 billion up from \$137 million), Taiwan (\$11.8 billion up from \$876 million), and the United Arab Emirates (\$3.6 billion up from \$1.1 billion), the data showed.

Several countries reported a drop in purchase of weapons from the US.



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu attends a ceremony to mark the arrival of a plane of the international courier company DHL, carrying over 1,00,000 of doses of the first batch of Pfizer vaccines which landed at Ben Gurion Airport near Tel Aviv, on Wednesday. — AFP

UK body issues allergy
warning for Pfizer jab

Caution was given after 2 NHS workers suffered allergic reactions

London, Dec. 9: Britain's medicines regulator on Wednesday issued a warning for people with “significant” history of allergic reactions to medicines, food or vaccines to not have the Pfizer/BioNTech jab, a day after the first set of patients were administered their first of two doses of the vaccine against Covid-19.

The warning comes after two National Health Service (NHS) workers experienced “anaphylactoid reaction” symptoms shortly after being injected, but are now said to be recovering well. NHS England said all its trusts involved with the mass vaccination programme have been informed and from Wednesday, all patients scheduled to receive the vaccine will be asked if they have a history of allergic reactions.

“As is common with new vaccines, the MHRA have advised on a precautionary basis that people with a significant history of allergic reactions do not receive this vaccination after two people with a history of significant allergic reactions responded adversely,” said Professor Stephen Powis, medical director for the NHS in England.

An anaphylactoid reaction tends to involve a skin rash, breathlessness and sometimes a drop in blood pressure and both the NHS workers who experienced this are said to have a history of serious allergies and carry adrenaline pens around with them.

“We have been advised by MHRA [Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency] of two yellow card reports that may be associated with allergic reaction due to administration of the Covid-19 BNT162b2 vaccine,” Pfizer UK said in a statement. “As a precautionary measure, the MHRA has issued temporary guidance to the NHS while it conducts an investigation in order to fully understand each case and its causes,” it said.

Dr June Raine, the head of the MHRA, told a joint select committee hearing on Tuesday that “real-time vigilance” will continue throughout the vaccine rollout process. — PTI

Biden promises 100 mn
vaccine shots in 100 days

Washington, Dec. 9: US President-elect Joe Biden has said that in the first 100 days of his administration, he would mandate everyone to wear a mask, ensure 100 million Covid-19 vaccinations and reopen the majority of schools as he assured Americans that his “crisis-tested” team of experts will deliver better healthcare and revive the economy.

The US is in the midst of a deadly pandemic that has infected almost 15 million Americans and killed 2,86,000. Globally, there are 68.2 million Covid-19 cases and the pandemic

has claimed more than 1.5 million lives.

Announcing his national health team, Biden asked the Trump administration to act now to purchase the doses it has negotiated with Pfizer and Moderna and to work swiftly to scale manufacturing for the US population and the world.

“This can be fixed. If it does, my team will be able to get at least 100 million vaccinations done in my first 100 days. Third, it should be a national priority to get our kids back into school and keep them in school,” he said. — PTI

Don orders vaccine
priority for America

Washington, Dec. 9: US President Donald Trump has signed an executive order that prioritises Americans' access to Covid-19 vaccines before the US potentially begins helping other nations.

If necessary, Trump said, he is ready to invoke the Defence Production Act to ensure that Covid-19 vaccines first get to the Americans.

The Defence Production Act allows a president to force private manufacturers to ramp up production and give the federal government priority on any orders it places.

American companies, he said, were the first to produce a verifiably safe and effective vaccine.

“Together, we will defeat the virus, and we will soon end the pandemic, and we will save millions and millions of lives, both in our country and all over the world. And we've already started,” Trump said during signing the executive order on Tuesday at a White House event celebrating “Operation Warp Speed”, his administration's effort to produce and distribute safe and effective vaccines for Covid-19.

Trump told reporters

● **THE DEFENCE** Production Act allows a president to force private manufacturers to ramp up production and give the federal government priority on any orders it places. American companies, he said, were the first to produce a verifiably safe and effective vaccine.

that his administration provided a total of \$14 billion to accelerate Coronavirus vaccine development and to manufacture all of the top candidates long in advance.

As a result of this “unprecedented investment”, both Pfizer and Moderna have announced that their vaccines are approximately 95 per cent effective, he said.

Pfizer has developed its vaccine outside of ‘Operation Warp Speed’, but is collaborating with the US government on manufacturing and distribution. The UK on Tuesday began its vaccinations with the first set of people injected with their first of two doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech jab. — PTI

MERKEL BACKS
TOUGHER VIRUS
RESTRICTIONS

Berlin, Dec. 9: German Chancellor Angela Merkel advocated tougher restrictions on public life and pleaded with her compatriots to cut down on socializing as the country reported its highest single-day death toll of the Coronavirus pandemic on Wednesday.

Germany is gradually moving toward a tighter lockdown, at least for a limited period after Christmas, as new virus cases remain stubbornly high — and are even beginning to creep higher — despite a partial shutdown that started on November 2. — AP

U.S. SANCTIONS
HINDERING ACCESS
TO VACCINE: IRAN

Tehran, Dec. 9: Iran's President Hassan Rouhani said on Wednesday that US sanctions are making it difficult for Iran to purchase medicine and health supplies from abroad, including Covid-19 vaccines needed to contain the worst outbreak in the Middle East.

President Donald Trump's administration has imposed crippling sanctions on Iran's banking sector and its vital oil and gas industry since unilaterally withdrawing the US from Iran's nuclear deal with world powers in 2018. While the United States insists that medicines and humanitarian goods are exempt from sanctions, restrictions on trade have made many banks and companies across the world hesitant to do business with Iran, fearing punitive measures from Washington.

The country is also cut off from the international banking system, making it difficult to transfer payments. — AP

Biden picks retired Army
general to lead Pentagon

Washington, Dec. 9: US President-elect Joe Biden has announced retired Army general Lloyd J. Austin as his nomination for Defence Secretary. If confirmed by the Senate, 67-year-old Austin would be the first African-American to lead the Pentagon.

The nominee for the 28th Secretary of Defence comes with a distinguished record of military service spanning four decades. “General Austin shares my profound belief that our nation is at its strongest when we lead not only by the example of our power, but by the power of our example.

Throughout his lifetime of dedicated service — and in the many hours we've spent together in the White House Situation Room and with our troops overseas — General Austin has demonstrated exemplary leadership, character and command,” Biden said while making the announcement on Tuesday.

“He is uniquely qualified to take on the challenges and crises we face in the current moment, and I look forward to once again working closely with him as a trusted partner to lead our military with dignity and resolve, revitalise our alliances in the face of global threats, and ensure the safety and security of the American people,” the Democratic leader said. An accomplished, respected and trailblazing figure in the US military history, Austin retired from the Army in 2016 after over 40 years of service.

The first African-American to serve as Commander of US Central Command, Austin is a trusted and crisis-tested leader who has overseen some of the most complex and impactful operations in the history of the armed services — including serving as the chief

Trump: Hopeful of
continuing as Prez

Washington, Dec. 9: Days before the official certification of the November 3 US presidential elections in favour of his Democratic opponent Joe Biden, President Donald Trump claimed that he would continue to hold the position as he has won the elections.

Trump has been making unsubstantiated claims about widespread voter fraud and electoral malpractice in the presidential polls. State election officials and the media

have denied any such fraud.

Election officials have declared Biden as the President-elect as he received more than the required 270 of the 538 electoral college votes. The elections are officially scheduled to be certified next week. However, Trump is continuing his legal efforts to upend Biden's victory. He has allowed the official start of Biden's transition to power but has not yet conceded defeat. — PTI

U.S. TOP COURT REJECTS GoP BID TO
HALT BIDEN'S PENNSYLVANIA WIN

Washington, Dec. 9 (AP) The Supreme Court has rejected Republicans' last-gasp bid to reverse Pennsylvania's certification of President-elect Joe Biden's victory in the electoral battleground.

The court without comment on Tuesday refused to call into question the the certification process in Pennsylvania.

Governor Tom Wolf already has certified Biden's victory and the state's 20 electors are to meet on December 14 to cast their votes for Biden.

Biden won 306 electoral votes, so even if Pennsylvania's results had been in doubt, he still would have more than the 270 electoral votes needed to become president. — AP

Pak lawmakers to resign to
paralyse govt: PDM chiefPAKISTAN TO BUY RAJ KAPOOR'S
ANCESTRAL HOUSES IN PESHAWAR

Peshawar, Dec. 9: Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has determined the price of the ancestral houses of legendary Bollywood actors Dilip Kumar and Raj Kapoor in the heart of this city at ₹80,56,000 and ₹1,50,00,000 respectively.

The provincial government in September decided to purchase their ancestral houses to conserve the historic buildings which are in dilapidated condition and facing demolition threat.

The two buildings, located in the heart of this northern Pakistani city, have been declared as national heritage. Deputy Commissioner of Peshawar Muhammad Ali

Asghar, following a report of the Communication and Works Department, fixed the price of Dilip Kumar's four Marla house for ₹80,56,000 while that of Raj Kapoor's six Marla house for ₹1,50,00,000. Marla, a traditional unit of area used in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, is considered as equal to 272.25 square feet or 25,292.9 square metres.

The archaeology department has sent a formal request to the provincial government for releasing over ₹2 crore for purchasing both the historic buildings, where the two greats of the Indian cinema were born and raised in their early days before the Partition. — PTI

believed that en masse resignation is the only way to bring the government on its knees and force it to call early elections.

The PPP government in the Sindh province was considered as a hurdle as it was not sure if that it would sacrifice its government to help the Opposition alliance.

The leaders also agreed to go ahead with a rally in Lahore on December 13 as a show of power to the government. It will be the sixth rally after similar

gatherings held in Gujranwala, Karachi, Quetta, Peshawar and Multan.

The Opposition parties succeeded in attracting a huge number of people despite hurdles created by the government. Prime Minister Imran Khan rejected the demand to step down or call early elections and consistently advocated that Opposition was protesting to put pressure to stop probes in corruption cases against their leaders. — PTI

MISSION | MARS

Automatic engine abort occurred with just 1.3 secs remaining in countdown, no word on next flight

SpaceX aborts test Starship flight in last second

Cape Canaveral (US), Dec. 9: The first high-altitude test flight of SpaceX's futuristic Starship was aborted at the last second in Texas on Tuesday.

SpaceX came close to launching a prototype of the rocketship that company chief Elon Musk is designing to carry people to Mars.

The goal was to shoot Starship to an altitude of

eight miles (12.5 kilometres) — the highest yet — and then bring it back to a vertical landing. But an automatic engine abort occurred with just 1.3 seconds remaining in the countdown.

SpaceX announced on its web broadcast it was done for the day, and there was no word on when it might try again. SpaceX already has conducted five Starship test

● **THE GOAL** was to shoot Starship to an altitude of eight miles (12.5 kilometres) — the highest yet — and then bring it back to a vertical landing. But an automatic engine abort

flights, but these earlier, simpler models have gone no higher than 490 feet (150 metres.) The stain-

less steel version on the launch pad on Tuesday was the first to feature a nose cone, body flaps and

● **THE STAINLESS** steel version on the launch pad on Tuesday was the first to feature a nose cone.

three Raptor engines. SpaceX has taken over Boca Chica in the far southeastern corner of Texas, near the Mexican border, to build and test its Starships. The company intends to use Starships — the upper stage atop Super Heavy boosters — to deliver massive satellites into orbit around Earth, and send people and cargo to the moon and Mars. — AP



This image shows SpaceX full-size Starship SN8 rocket prototype before its launch. — AFP

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	46,103.50	1.09
Nifty 50	13,392.95	0.28
S&P 500*	3,694.24	-0.22
Dollar (₹)	73.56	-0.04
Pound Sterling (₹)	98.73	-0.57
Euro (₹)	89.24	-0.04
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	49,221.118	0.23
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	48.75	-0.09
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.917	-0.022
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.944	0.031

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Facebook India FY20 revenue up 43% at ₹1,277 cr

Facebook India's revenues grew 43 per cent year-on-year to about Rs 1,277.3 crore in 2019-20, while its net profit more than doubled to Rs 135.7 crore, as per regulatory documents. Its total income was Rs 893.4 crore in FY19. Net profit rose 107 per cent to Rs 135.7 crore in FY20 versus Rs 65.3 crore. In November, Google had made a similar filing that showed its revenues from India grew 34.8 per cent to about Rs 5,593.8 crore.

Honda suspends UK production amid ship delays



Carmaker Honda has temporarily halted production at its plant in England after shipping delays linked to the pandemic and preparations for Brexit left it with a shortage of parts. The company said it was forced to make the decision because transport-related delays left it short of parts. The factory relies on a just in time delivery system, in which parts arrive as they are needed for assembly and not stored locally.

RTGS to be available 24x7 from Dec. 14

The RBI announced that the Real Time Gross Settlement System (RTGS), one of the methods used to transfer funds online, will be available round-the-clock on all days from December 14. The RBI's decision to operationalise the service 24x7 was announced recently. "India will become one of the few countries in the world to operate its RTGS system round the clock throughout the year," the RBI said.

Japan inspection of Black Tiger shrimps relaxed

In a relief to seafood exporters, Japan has completely eased inspection of Indian Black Tiger shrimps after export consignments of this delectable prawn variety were found totally free from any residue of synthetic anti-bacterial drug furazolidone. The decision was conveyed by Food Inspection and Safety Division of Japan's Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare to the Indian Embassy in Japan, MPEDA and EIC.

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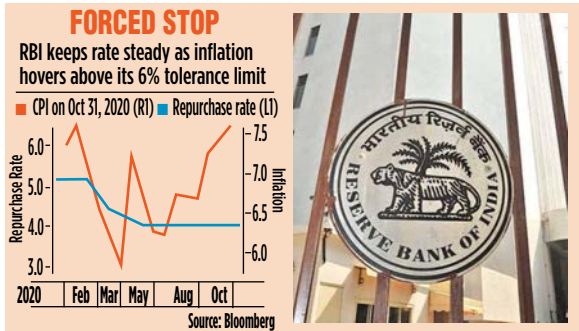
Centre for more focus on economic growth Govt may prod RBI for looser inflation target

SIDDHARTHA SINGH NOV. 9

The government is considering recommending a looser inflation target for the central bank, allowing it to focus more on economic growth despite price pressures, according to people familiar with the matter.

A consumer-price inflation band tracked by the Reserve Bank of India may be relaxed further from the current 2 per cent to 6 per cent range, said the people, who asked not to be identified citing rules. The government still needs to hold consultations with the central bank before finalising a new framework sometime next year.

The current mandate, set in 2016, requires the RBI to keep headline inflation at the 4 per cent midpoint of



its target range. The band—a broad range of 400 basis points within which the central bank has sanction to operate—is the widest in Asia, and only matched by Turkey and surpassed by Argentina.

The finance ministry is of the view that the RBI can't be saddled with a rigid inflation targeting framework, especially in situa-

tions when growth needs to be pushed, the people said.

A spokesperson for the finance ministry declined to comment, while the RBI didn't respond to an email seeking comment.

Economists like Bloomberg Economics' Abhishek Gupta have argued in the past that the headline inflation measure used now is too volatile and

the central bank should rather target core prices, which strips out oil and food costs. Food carries nearly 50 per cent weight in the CPI basket.

RBI governor Shaktikanta Das said Friday that a final call on what measure to target rests with the government and Parliament, although he doesn't see a situation where they will move away from tracking the CPI.

The RBI has previously faced criticism for largely overstating inflation, forecasts that were then used to underpin the MPC's hawkish policy stance in 2018. Currently, a spike in inflation has forced the central bank to pause interest-rate cuts despite the economy needing more stimulus after entering an unprecedented recession.

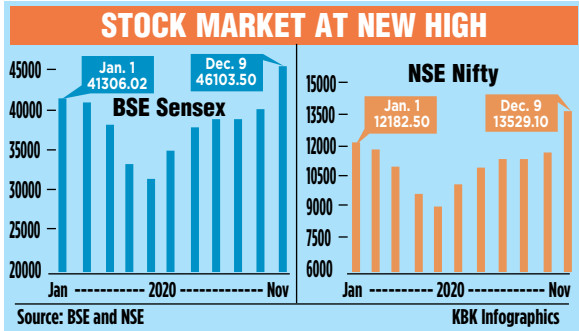
—Bloomberg

Brokerages cautious as Sensex tops 46000-mark

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, DEC. 9

As the market is scaling new highs everyday, top brokerages have cautioned investors to tread carefully as the market has reached an extreme zone.

The Sensex crossed the 46000-mark for the first time on Wednesday and closed at a new record high of 46,103.50, gaining 494.99 points. The Nifty-50 also closed at a new all-time high of 13,529.10, gaining



135.15 points. The rally was powered by

Rs 3,564.23 crore net buying by FPIs.

Guarav Garg, head of research, Capital Research Global said, "One has to notice that it is a narrow rally. As markets hit record high, investors may book some profits in long positions."

"Since we are in an uncharted territory, sky's the limit for our market; but in our sense, we have now reached the extreme zone, at least for the current vertical move," said Sameet Chavan, a chief analyst at Angel Broking.

India's small investors flock to Tesla stock

ABHIRUP ROY MUMBAI, DEC. 9

Indian small investors increasingly buying US stocks have been drawn to a company that has no presence in India so far: electric carmaker Tesla Inc.

Indians are placing bigger-than-ever bets on US stocks this year as the American stock market has recovered faster than markets in India and other emerging nations following a crash sparked by the coronavirus pandemic.

While firms such as Apple, Amazon and Facebook—which have a significant presence in India—are popular among Indian investors venturing into US stocks, data from brokerages shows Tesla has emerged as a new favourite.

Indian brokerage Vested Finance said its accounts held \$2.5 million worth of Tesla stock in November; up from just \$76,000 at March-end. Another brokerage firm, Stockal, said its clients' Tesla holdings have quadrupled to \$10 million during the period.

Tesla shares surged around 450 per cent during that time. "Some investors have

KOTAK ARM TO OFFER US STOCKS

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, DEC. 9

Kotak Securities has tied up with US based Interactive Brokers to offer a global investment platform for Indian investors and NRIs to invest in stocks of US-listed companies.

Interactive Brokers provides automated trade execution and custody of securities, commodities and forex round-the-clock in over 135 markets.

The shares bought by clients are held by Interactive Brokers, a global custodian in multiple jurisdictions. Jaideep Hansraj, MD & CEO, Kotak Securities said, there is no minimum ticket size for buying and selling of shares in the US markets for investors.

The frenzy around the stock comes as Tesla CEO Elon Musk has signalled an India launch is impending. Musk in October tweeted the electric carmaker will foray into India "next year for sure", and had earlier tweeted about a 2020 launch.

Tesla's plans of a possible launch come when India is becoming focused on promoting the use of

electric vehicles, even though Musk has previously flagged concerns around high Indian import duties.

Gaurav Jhunjhunwala, 33, became a Musk fan after reading his biography and has even paid \$1,000 in booking fees to get Tesla's Model 3 electric sedan whenever it launches in India. While that wait has been long, he invested \$100,000 in Tesla shares in May, and buys 30 shares every other week.

"I just like the way the guy (Musk) thinks," Jhunjhunwala said. "He is trying to make the world a better place."

—Reuters

Pharma sales flat in Nov.

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, DEC. 9

Pharma sales growth remained flat in November, as volumes declined year-on-year.

The pharma market saw total sales of Rs 12,830 crore for November, clocking a growth of just 1 per cent. In October, sales had grown by 9.6 per cent and by 4.5 per cent in September.

The tepid growth during November was led by a volume decline, while growth in price growth and new product remained healthy. Pharma prices grew by 4.7 per cent and product launches by 3.2 per cent. However, sales volumes

declined by 6.9 per cent in November. In October, volumes were 0.9 per cent higher year-on-year.

According to India Ratings and Research, lower sales of acute therapy products from a higher base in November 2019 and rising Covid-19 cases, which led to lower visits of patients to doctors, resulted in a decline in volumes.

Sales of respiratory drugs were down 6.9 per cent, analgesics 5.2 per cent and gynaecological products, 4.3 per cent. Performance of anti-infectives, which was just 0.2 per cent up, was impacted by a 17 per cent decline in the sales of cephalosporin category products.

Revenue in acute therapies declined 1 per cent while that of chronic and sub-chronic therapies rose 4 per cent and 1 per cent. Acute therapies such as vitamins and gastro witnessed growth of 6.6 per cent and 3.1 per cent respectively in November.

As per the data of AIOCD-AWACS, growth in vitamins slowed down to 6.6 per cent in November from 22.6 per cent in October. Respiratory medicines sales slumped at a steeper 6.9 per cent.

Cardiac drugs grew 8.7 per cent compared to 19.5 per cent in October, while anti-diabetics recorded 1.9 per cent growth against 9.7 per cent in October.

Mumbai housing sales up 135% since stamp duty cut

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, DEC. 9

After the stamp duty cut, residential sales in Mumbai have more than doubled compared to last year.

The megapolis witnessed cumulative residential sales of 22,827 units after the stamp duty cut from September. The monthly run rate during September-November is approximately 135 per cent higher than the monthly average of 2019, as per the estimates of Knight Frank India.

The Maharashtra government had cut stamp duty on property registrations by 3 per cent for a period between September 1 and December 31, 2020. Additionally, most developers offered to absorb the remaining 2 per cent.

Mumbai started seeing month-on-month growth in residential sales since September. Sales grew 112 per cent in September compared to August, 42 per cent in October and 17 per cent in November over the previous month.

In November, residential sales also grew 67 per cent over the year-ago period. Mumbai recorded sales of 9,301 residential units and this was the highest ever registrations in November over the last nine years.

Even after the stamp duty cut, the state government's revenue collections from stamp duty have increased to Rs 232 crore in October and Rs 288 crore in November



November sales in last nine years (Mumbai)

Month	Number of sale documents registered
Nov. 2012	4,247
Nov. 2013	3,859
Nov. 2014	5,001
Nov. 2015	4,221
Nov. 2016	3,838
Nov. 2017	6,230
Nov. 2018	5,190
Nov. 2019	5,574
Nov. 2020	9,301

Sales in units (Mumbai) in 2020

Month (2020)	Units
November	9,301
October	7,929
September	5,597
August	2,642
July	2,662
June	1,839
May	207
April	-
March	3,798
February	5,927
January	6,150
TOTAL	46,052

Source: Department of registrations and stamps, Government of Maharashtra, Knight Frank Research

against Rs 176 crore in August. This shows that the boost to housing sales

has more than compensated for lower duty.

"The demand momentum in this market is likely to continue till end of the year buoyed by the low stamp duty regime. As income streams are coming back to normal, we believe that more buyers will come to the market before the end of the financial year to make most of this opportune time to buy their dream homes," said Shishir Baijal, chairman and managing director, Knight Frank India.

Apart from stamp duty, sales in November were also augmented by the auspicious period of Diwali and reduction of home loan rate. Other measures by developers such as deferred payment plans, indirect discounts and offers to negotiate on the final price of the apartment have helped entice home-buyers.

"Reduced stamp duty for a limited period till December 31, 2020 has played the role of a catalyst. Many fence-sitters are taking the plunge as home loan rates too are at very low levels, making this a great time to buy a home in a metro like Mumbai," said Ram Raheja, director, S Raheja Realty.

MARUTI LAUNCHES ONLINE FINANCING

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, DEC. 9

Maruti Suzuki, India's biggest car maker, on Wednesday launched its multi-financier, online car financing platform Smart Finance to boost vehicle sales.

The firm would initially launch the Smart Finance platform in 30 cities through its premium car retail chain Nexa.

The platform offers a bouquet of financing options to a customer.

"Under the Smart Finance platform, currently hosted on the Nexa website, we have partnered with several popular financiers to provide custom curated personalised loan offers for our customers," said Kenichi Ayukawa, MD & CEO at Maruti Suzuki India.

The digital service offers easy financing options and is totally transparent at each stage of the loan process, he said. A buyer can customise the EMI by choosing the loan tenure and interest rate.

Forbes World's Most Powerful Women 2020

Top 10

Angela Merkel Germany 1 Chancellor, Germany	Christine Lagarde France 2 President, European Central Bank	Kamala Harris USA 3 Vice President-elect, USA	Ursula von der Leyen Germany 4 President, European Commission	Melinda Gates USA 5 Co-Chair, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
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Mary Barra USA 6 CEO, General Motors	Nancy Pelosi USA 7 Speaker, US House of Representatives	Ana Patricia Botín Spain 8 Executive Chairman, Santander	Abigail Johnson USA 9 CEO, Fidelity Investments	Gail Boudreaux USA 10 President & CEO, Anthem
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Indians in Top 100	Nirmala Sitharaman 41 Finance Minister, India	Roshni Nadar Malhotra 55 CEO and ED, HCL Enterprise	Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw 68 Founder & CMD, Biocon
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DR REDDY'S ADR LISTS ON NSE IFSC

New Delhi, Dec. 9: NSE International Exchange (NSE IFSC) has become the first international bourse in Gift City to list American Depositary Receipts (ADR), with the listing of ADRs of Dr Reddy's Laboratories.

The secondary listing of Dr Reddy's American Depositary Receipts at NSE IFSC would provide global investors an additional venue to transact in their ADRs, the NSE said on Wednesday.

Participants holding depository accounts with either the International Central Securities Depository (Euroclear Bank, Clearstream) or Depository Trust Company (DTC) will be able to transact on these ADRs.

"We invite all Indian issuers of GDRs/ADRs to list their depository receipts at NSE IFSC," NSE's CEO said. —PTI

Books on Hero, Flipkart, HDFC in race for honours

New Delhi, Dec. 9: Books on HDFC Bank's digital revolution and the journeys of Flipkart, BigBasket and Hero group are among the six works shortlisted for the Gaja Capital Business Book Prize 2020.

Instituted by equity firm Gaja Capital last year, the Rs 15-lakh prize is awarded annually to celebrate the best non-fiction books on contemporary Indian business.

The shortlisted books are *HDFC Bank 2.0* by Tamal Bandyopadhyay; *Big Billion Startup: The Untold Flipkart Story* by Mihir Dalal; *Katherine Eban's Bottle of Lies: Ranbaxy and the Dark Side of Indian Pharma; The Making of Hero: Four Brothers, Two Wheels, and a Revolution that Shaped India* by Sunil Munjan; T.N. Hari and M S Subramanian's *Saying No to Jagan: The Making of*

BigBasket and *The Moonshot Game: Adventures of an Indian Venture Capitalist* by Rahul Chandra.

"The last two decades demonstrate that Indian business is telling new stories and finding new paths. The chroniclers of Indian business stories endure painstaking efforts to capture the romance, struggle and joys of entrepreneurship. The Gaja Capital Business Book Prize is created to honour these travellers, their journeys and their chroniclers," the presenters said.

According to jury chairman Manish Sabharwal, "The shortlist this year has multiple stories of triumph and tragedy yet mostly reflects a new breed of confident, ambitious and rising corporate India."

The winner will be announced in January.

The jury comprised investors, entrepreneurs, CEOs and policy makers.

The inaugural prize was won in 2019 by Girish Kuber for his book *The Tatas: How a Family Built a Business and a Nation*.

Gopal Jain, managing partner at Gaja Capital, said business bookshelves are dominated by western stories of business and entrepreneurship.

"As the Indian economy scales and the Indian entrepreneurial and investor ecosystem matures, we will have many more stories and lessons for the world, from India. As investors and entrepreneurs in the Indian market, we have witnessed several such journeys first-hand," he said.

"We would like to make a small contribution in encouraging Indian writers, journalists and entrepreneurs to tell our stories...for the world." —PTI

SHORT TAKES

Ex Argentina coach
Sabella no more

Buenos Aires: Former coach Alejandro Sabella, who led the 2014 World Cup runner-up Argentina team, died on Tuesday at a clinic in Buenos Aires suffering from heart disease.

He was 66 years old. The former boss of Estudiantes de La Plata died at the Cardiovascular Institute of Buenos Aires, where he had been admitted on November 25 - the day soccer legend Diego Maradona died - after suffering an arrhythmia. The medical center said in a statement that Sabella was the victim of "secondary dilated heart disease and long-standing cardiotoxicity."

— AP

Ben Stokes' father
passes away at 65

Christchurch: England all-rounder Ben Stokes lost his father Ged, who died here on Tuesday after a year-long battle with brain cancer.

He was 65. Stokes is currently with the England team in South Africa for the limited over series. He had played all three T20Is and was rested for ODIs, which was cancelled on Monday after multiple cases of Covid-19 were detected in the bio-bubble. Ged, a former rugby player and coach, had been suffering from brain cancer for some time and Stokes was there in Christchurch for more than a month taking care of his ailing father. Stokes' famous "bent middle finger" gesture during the 2019 South Africa series was a tribute to his father's amputated finger. Ged had to remove a part of his finger in order to continue playing.

— PTI

Champ Momota
returns to court

Tokyo: Japan's badminton world number one Kento Momota on Wednesday announced his long-awaited return to competition as he begins his bid for home glory at the Tokyo Olympics nearly a year after suffering serious injuries in a car crash. Momota will compete at the All-Japan national championships in Tokyo later this month before playing in the Thailand Open in January following a difficult year in which he feared his career might be over after fracturing an eye socket in the accident.

"I'm nervous but I'm really looking forward to it," said Momota. "I'm really looking forward to playing against the best international players after such a long time," he added. Momota admitted his "spirit was almost broken" after undergoing surgery on his eye socket in February. — AFP

English return to
SL for Test tour

London: England will return to Sri Lanka for a rearranged two-Test cricket tour in January, 10 months after leaving the Asian country as the Coronavirus pandemic began to take hold. England's players will isolate for three days in Hambantota after arriving in Sri Lanka on Jan. 2, with the first Test starting Jan. 14 in Galle. The second Test starts on Jan. 22. The travelling squad will undergo full Coronavirus testing every two days throughout the trip and players are expected to be offered mental health screening ahead of the tour, following concerns about their well-being in a bio-secure bubble during the recent tour of South Africa that was cut short.

— AP

Live on TV

FOOTBALL

Indian Super League: East Bengal vs Jamshedpur from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

Europa League: CSKA Sofia vs Roma from 11.25 pm on Sony Ten 3; Dundalk vs Arsenal from 11.25 pm on Sony Ten 2; Napoli vs Real Sociedad from 11.25 pm on Sony Ten 1; Sparta Prague vs AC Milan from 1.30 am (Friday) on Sony Ten 1; Tottenham Hotspur vs Antwerp from 1.30 am (Friday) on Sony Ten 2; Wolfsburg vs Feyenoord from 1.30 am (Friday) on Sony Six; Leicester City vs AEK Athens from 1.30 am (Friday) on Sony Ten 3

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Ronaldo bests Messi

Cristiano nets brace as Juve crush Barcelona 3-0

Barcelona, Dec. 9: Cristiano Ronaldo struck twice from the penalty spot to win his battle with rival Lionel Messi and guide Juventus to a 3-0 win over Barcelona on Tuesday, earning the Italians top spot in Champions League Group G.

The former Real Madrid striker and his Argentina counterpart traded Ballon d'Or wins for a decade between 2008-2017 and were figureheads for the duelling Spanish giants, but there was only one winner at the Camp Nou as they met for the first time since Ronaldo's departure for Juve in 2018. Juventus lost 2-0 at home against Barcelona in October without Ronaldo, sidelined with Covid-19, but were greatly improved and earned the first Champions League away win against Barcelona since Bayern Munich triumphed in 2013.

Both sides, tied on 15 points, were assured of qualification before kick-off, but Juve's three-goal victory handed them a superior head-to-head record.

Ronald Koeman, reeling from Barcelona's 2-1 defeat by promoted minnows Cadiz on Saturday in La Liga, reacted by making four changes but the hosts started badly.

It only took 13 minutes for Ronaldo to break the deadlock, slotting home from the penalty spot after the referee deemed Ronald Araujo's challenge on him a foul. Juve's did not relent and their pressure led to a second goal, Weston McKennie volleying home. Juan Cuadrado's sweetly clipped cross in the 20th minute.

— AFP

THE RESULTS

Juventus 3

(Ronaldo 13-pen, 52-pen, McKennie 20)

Barcelona 0

RB Leipzig 3

(Angelino 2, Haidara 13, Kluijvert 69)

Manchester United 2

(Fernandes 80-pen, Pogba 82)

Chelsea 1

(Jorginho 28-pen)

Krasnodar 1

(Cabella 24)

Borussia Dortmund 1

(Piszczek 68, Witsel 78)

Zenit Saint Petersburg 1

(Driussi 16)



Cristiano Ronaldo (right) of Juventus lines up a shot to score his team's third goal against Barcelona during their UEFA Champions League Group 'G' football match at the Camp Nou stadium in Barcelona on Tuesday. — AFP

Racist slur halts PSG game

Paris, Dec. 9: Manchester United were knocked out of the Champions League after a 3-2 defeat by RB Leipzig on Tuesday, while Paris Saint-Germain's qualification for the last 16 was overshadowed by a racism row involving a match official that caused their game against Istanbul Basaksehir to be suspended for 24 hours.

Requiring just a point to advance, Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's side fell behind to an Angelino goal inside two minutes in Germany. Amadou Haidara soon added a second and United and were trailing 3-0 heading into the final quarter after a Justin Kluivert strike. Bruno Fernandes' penalty and a deflected Paul Pogba header gave United a lifeline but Leipzig, who reached the semifinals last term, held on to move top of Group 'H' on 12 points.

Leipzig must wait until Wednesday to find out whether they finish first or second in the section, after the contest between last season's runners-up PSG and Turkish champions Basaksehir was interrupted with the score 0-0 in the 14th minute. Players walked off in



Kylian Mbappe (third from right) of PSG looks on after the game was suspended amid allegations of racism by one of the match officials during the UEFA Champions League Group 'H' football match against Istanbul Basaksehir at the Parc des Princes stadium in Paris on Tuesday. — AFP

Paris amid allegations of racism by the fourth official, in an unprecedented incident in European football's elite club competition. The row erupted after Basaksehir assistant coach Pierre Webo, the former Cameroon inter-

national, was shown a red card during a fierce row on the touchline with staff from the Turkish club appearing to accuse the official of using a racist term. Television microphones picked up a furious Webo repeatedly asking why a

racist term had been used to describe him.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said he "strongly" condemned the incident, while UEFA announced it would open a "thorough investigation". — AFP

Injured Warner
now out of Test

Sydney, Dec. 9: Australia's star opening batsman David Warner has been ruled out of the first Test against India, but will try to return for the blockbuster second instalment on Boxing Day. Cricket Australia said Wednesday. Warner is recovering from a strained adductor muscle that forced him to limp out of Australia's second one-day international against India last month, after a knock of 83.

"I feel I have made great progress in a short amount of time and it's best for me to stay here in Sydney to continue working on getting back to full fitness," Warner said.

"The injury feels a lot better, but I need to be able to satisfy in my own mind and to my team-mates that it is 100 percent ready for Test match conditions.

"That includes running between the wickets and being agile in the field. Right now I feel I am short of being able to play at peak fitness and another 10 days will make a difference," he added.

The day-night first Test will begin in Adelaide on December 17, kicking off a four-match series.

It is not yet clear who will take Warner's place in Adelaide, but Cameron Green's century this week for Australia 'A' against a strong India 'A' attack — featuring Ravichandran Ashwin, Umesh Yadav and Mohammed Siraj — has put him in the running.

In contrast, Will Pucovski and Joe Burns, in line to form Australia's top order, both flopped in the warm-up match and Pucovski also had to leave the field with concussion symptoms after a delivery struck his helmet.

Burns was offered a



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— DAVID WARNER
Australian star cricketer

chance at redemption Wednesday when he was one of four members of the Test squad named to play the day/night warm-up against India 'A' in Sydney from Friday.

"Joe Burns, Cameron Green, Sean Abbott and Mitchell Swepson will derive great benefit from playing high quality opposition against the pink ball in the final tour match," Australia selector Trevor Hohns said.

Coach Justin Langer expressed confidence Warner would be back for the second Test.

"He has done an incredible job to get to where he is today and we hope to have a fully fit David Warner at his absolute best in Melbourne."

When they last visited two years ago — when Warner and Steve Smith were serving a ban for ball-tampering — India triumphed 2-1 for their first Test series win in Australia. — AFP

RAHUL CRUISES INTO
TOP 3 IN T20 RANKINGS

Dubai, Dec. 9: India captain Virat Kohli moved up a place to eighth while K. L. Rahul broke into the top three in the latest ICC rankings for T20 batsmen, after their impressive performances in the three-match series against Australia.

The series against Australia ended on Tuesday with India winning it 2-1.

Taking the third spot in the chart, Rahul has bagged 816 rating points and is 55 points behind second-placed Babar Azam in the current standings.

England batsman Dawid Malan (915 points) retained the top spot, while Australian limited-overs skipper Aaron Finch slipped to the fourth spot.

Rahul, who scored a half-century (51) in the first T20I at Canberra and 30 in the second game in Sydney, rose to the No.3 spot, beating Finch.

Kohli, who struck a brilliant 85 in the third and final T20I against Australia at SCG, gained one spot to be at No.8.

Among the bowlers, Australia leg-spinner Adam Zampa jumped two places to be placed at number five.

England's Chris Jordan also broke into the top 10, while Afghanistan's spin duo of Rashid Khan and Mujeeb-Ur-Rahman were placed at the first and second positions respectively in the list. — PTI

Mumbai hammer Chennaiyin 2-1

Bambolim, Dec. 9: Mumbai City FC rallied to eke out a 2-1 win over Chennaiyin FC and record their fourth victory on the trot in the Indian Super League here on Wednesday.

Adam Le Fondre smashed in a 75th-minute winner after Hernan Santana (45th) had cancelled Jakub Sylvestr's first goal.

The Sergio Lobera's team maintained the top spot in the ISL table.

Chennaiyin FC had a perfect start and would

have been ahead in the second minute if it was not for Sylvestr missing a sitter. Rafael Crivellaro delivered a perfect corner which was flicked in by Enes Sipovic and found Sylvestr, who missed the target.

Mumbai were not at their best and took time to settle. But they did have their moments. The home side's best chance came in the 25th minute when Adam Le Fondre had a clear sight on goal, but his powerful drive from inside the box, was

straight at keeper Vishal Kaith. The rebound fell to Bipin Singh, but he couldn't utilise the opportunity.

Chennaiyin were clearly the better side in the opening quarter creating numerous chances through Lallianzuala Chhangte, Sipovic and Crivellaro. The Chennai-based side took the lead in the 40th minute. Sylvestr scored probably the easiest goal of the season.

Chhangte deserved credit for his initial

spadework on the right before he played a low cross from the byline to find Sylvestr, who slotted it in.

Just when it looked like Chennaiyin would walk into the breather with a goal advantage, Mumbai's Santana had different plans. The Spaniard, who was unmarked at the far post, nodded in a Hugo Boumous' corner to restore parity post which they doubled the lead in the 75th minute through another set-piece. — PTI

KASHMIR INTO
SEMIFINALS

Kolkata, Dec. 9: Real Kashmir and United SC secured their second successive wins to seal semi final berths from their respective groups in the 123rd IFA Shield here on Wednesday.

Fresh from a 2-1 win over Peerless SC, the Snow Leopards were caught unawares by the aggressive brand of football by Aryan SC before they finally broke the deadlock with a Mason Robertson strike in the 72nd minute. — PTI

Parthiv announces his retirement

New Delhi, Dec. 9: Parthiv Patel, one of the youngest to have played Test cricket for India at the age of 17, on Wednesday announced his retirement from all forms of the game, three month's short of his 36th birthday.

The baby-faced Parthiv, who made his Test debut under Sourav Ganguly, aged 17 years and 153 days, played 65 international games for the country, which included 25 Tests, 38 ODIs and two T20 Internationals.

"Today, I announce retirement from all forms of cricket and as I bring down curtains on this 18 year-old cricketing journey, I feel heavier with

gratitude for many," the 35-year-old Parthiv said in a statement on his official twitter and instagram account.

The left-handed batsman scored nearly 1,700 runs (1,696) across formats with 934 runs (6 half centuries) coming in the longest format.

In ODIs, he scored 736 runs with four half-centuries and a highest score of 95. He effected 72 dismissals in Tests, which include 62 catches and 10 stumpings.

Parthiv burst onto the scene in early 2002, when he was sent to England after having played for India A in South Africa and even before he made



Parthiv Patel

his Ranji Trophy debut.

"The BCCI showed generous amount of confidence and faith in a 17-year-old boy to play for India. I have enormous gratitude towards them for guiding me and hand

holding me in the formative years of my young career," Parthiv further stated.

In fact, he played his first Ranji Trophy after he was dropped from the India squad in 2004 due to below-par glove work on tours of Australia and Pakistan.

He was thankful to all his captains and "especially Dada", referring to BCCI president Sourav Ganguly.

Parthiv Patel called his first Test captain Sourav Ganguly a "leader in true sense" along with the legendary Anil Kumble and said their influence in his life went beyond the crick-eting arena.

"I would always hold Sourav Ganguly as a leader in true sense with his man management skills. Sourav and Anil Kumble were great leaders and they made me the kind of person I am," Parthiv said.

"I still have the Test cap with my name wrongly printed 'Partiv' that Dada gave me. The victories at Headingley (2002) and Adelaide (2003-04) and the half-century opening the innings at Rawalpindi will be my favourite memories."

He said that retirement was on his mind for the last one year and that the timing couldn't have been better. — PTI

Kohli rues DRS
miss in last tie

Sydney, Dec. 9: Captain Virat Kohli wasn't happy that his team lost out on a perfect DRS call just because replay of the delivery bowled to Matthew Wade was shown on giant screen before the permissible limit of 15 seconds.

India lost the third T20 International by 12 runs and one of the reasons could be attributed to the fact that Wade, who could have been adjudged leg before off T Natarajan at a score of 50, got a lucky reprieve and added 30 more runs.

"That lbw was a strange one because we were still discussing whether the ball was going down and within the 15-second time, they showed the replay on the screen," Kohli said.

"We decided to go for the review but the umpire said they have already shown the replay on the screen," he said.

In fact had the review been taken, TV replays showed that the umpire would have been forced to reverse his decision.

"I had a chat with Rod (Tucker, the umpire) and said: 'what do we do in this situation' and he said 'nothing can be done. It's a mistake from TV'," Kohli narrated the incident.

He made it clear that the Indian team management had made its displeasure



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— VIRAT KOHLI
Indian cricket captain

clear with the authorities, saying a mistake of this magnitude in an international game is unacceptable.

"I thought from the management perspective, a message has to be passed that this can't be done at the highest level because in a very important game, it can be very costly.

"It was a little bit of a miss from the TV guys upstairs and I am sure it won't be repeated," he further added. — PTI