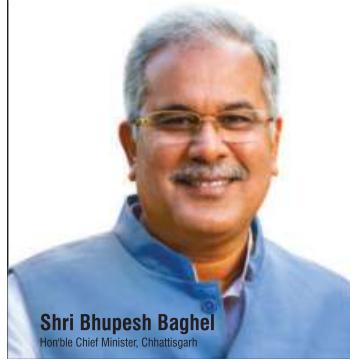




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CHHATTISGARH: REDEFINING 'NYAY'



Shri Bhupesh Baghel
Hon'ble Chief Minister, Chhattisgarh

Debt Free Farmers

Waived off
9000 cr agriculture loan
and 244 cr irrigation tax



Empowered Tribals

4200 acres of land returned
to tribal farmers, forest rights
on 51.6 lakh acres of land



Employed Labourers

Daily Jobs to
Average 25 lakh labourers
under MGNREGA



NEARBY



Owaisi in U.P. to stitch alliances for election

LUCKNOW
After winning five Assembly seats in Bihar, the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimine (AIMIM) has set its sights on stitching alliances in Uttar Pradesh as its president Asaduddin Owaisi on Wednesday held talks with OBC leader Om Prakash Rajbhar here and praised Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav's estranged uncle Shivpal Yadav.

NORTH & EAST ▶ PAGE 5

Over 50 held for duping foreigners of ₹100 crore

NEW DELHI

Fifty-four people were arrested for allegedly running a fake call centre in west Delhi's Moti Nagar and duping foreign nationals by impersonating as officers of law enforcement agencies, police said on Wednesday. The accused duped more than 4,500 people to the tune of ₹100 crore. They illegally induced foreigners to transfer money through Bitcoins and gift cards.

CITY ▶ PAGE 4

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SC mints panel for farmer-govt. talks

Bench observes that the current negotiations have broken no ground and are bound to fail

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

Talks between the Union government and farmer leaders on the three controversial agriculture laws had broken no ground and were bound to fail, the Supreme Court said on Wednesday.

A Bench, led by Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sharad A. Bobde, proposed the setting up of a committee of farmer leaders from across the country, including the Bharatiya Kisan Union that has been at the forefront of the protests, and government representatives to resolve the issue.

"The committee can talk and resolve this issue. Secure the names of some farmers'



Tough lessons: A girl attending online classes at a makeshift living space at the Singhu border. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

unions who want to join... It should include the BKU and other farmer leaders. They should be drawn from across the country. It affects all and this will soon become a na-

tional issue," the CJI said.

The court has impleaded BKU (Rakesh Tikait), BKU-Sidhpur (Jagjeet S. Dallewal), BKU-Rajewal (Balbeer Singh Rajewal), BKU-Lakho-

Moral victory, say farmers

Farmer leaders welcomed the SC's observations as a "moral victory", but said that setting up a new panel as proposed by the top court would not resolve their concerns. They also sent an official rejection of the Centre's proposals. ▶ PAGE 9

eral Tushar Mehta said the farmers had turned their back on the government's efforts to talk.

"The government is ready and was ready. But they [farmers] say 'either you repeal or not repeal'. They came to talk with placards saying 'yes or no'. Ministers tried to talk, but they turned their chairs and sat with their backs turned to the Ministers... It is my duty to tell this court some other interests have taken over... We want a positive, constructive talk on a clause-to-clause basis," he submitted.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8
MORE REPORTS ON ▶ PAGE 2, 5 & 9

JEE (Main) to be held four times in 2021

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Joint Entrance Examination (Main) will be held in February, March, April and May of 2021.

With school syllabi having been reduced due to the pandemic, the question paper pattern has also been changed. The dates are: February 23-26, March 15-18, April 27-30, and May 24-28.

"This will give multiple opportunities to the candidates to improve their scores in the examination if

they are not able to give their best in one attempt," Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank said on Wednesday evening. The candidate's highest score would be used for the entrance rankings.

According to the National Testing Agency, which conducts the exam, online applications can be submitted till January 16, with the application portal reopening after each session.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved the auction of 2,251.25 megahertz of spectrum with a reserve price of ₹3.92 lakh crore, a move that should help boost the quality of 4G telecom services in the country.

Spectrum in the frequency bands of 700MHz, 800MHz, 900MHz, 1,800MHz, 2,100MHz, 2,300MHz and 2,500MHz would be offered for 20 years, said Communications

Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad. He said the notice inviting applications would be issued this month and the auction conducted by March 2021.

Network boost

"By winning right to use spectrum through the auction, incumbent telecom service providers will be able to augment their network capacity, whereas new players will be able to start services," the government said.

Mr. Prasad said the conditions for the auction would be the same as those during the last round in 2016.

Bidders will have to comply with conditions, including block size, in which bidders will be able to submit their bids, spectrum cap or the maximum amount of spectrum that can be held by a bidder after completion of auction, roll-out obligations and payment terms.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8
TELECOM GEAR ▶ PAGE 9

No major face-off in the east, says GoC

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

Lt. Gen. Anil Chauhan, General Officer Commanding, Eastern Command, on Wednesday said there had been no intrusion or a major face-off in the area under the Command since the Ladakh incident involving the Indian Army and the People's Liberation Army.

"The Eastern Command is responsible for defending the LAC [Line of Actual Control] in the Sikkim and Arunachal sectors. There has been no intrusion in this part," he said.

DETAILS ON ▶ PAGE 9

57% turnout in 7th phase of DDC poll in J&K

PEERZADA ASHIQ
SRINAGAR

Voters continued to turn up in large numbers for the Dis-

trict Development Council (DDC) election in Jammu and Kashmir with the seventh phase on Wednesday

DETAILS ON ▶ PAGE 10

Beating the chill



Biting cold: A tourist riding a snow scooter in Sonmarg on Wednesday as the Kashmir Valley recorded this season's lowest temperature of minus-4.8 degrees Celsius. ■ NISSAR AHMAD

DJB, power dept. workers in first phase vaccine list

'Delhi in safe zone as per WHO norms'

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI
Delhi Health Minister Satyendar Jain on Wednesday said that orders have been issued to add workers of the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) and Electricity Department to the list of front-line workers who will be vaccinated in the first phase of the COVID-19 vaccination drive.

"Yesterday, the Delhi government issued orders that DJB and electricity department workers should be included in the list of the front-line workers the first phase of vaccine will be rolled out to. During the lockdown, all these workers were on duty and working 24x7. Hence, they too have been duly included in the list of front-line workers along with police, civil defence and sanitation

workers," said Mr. Jain.

1,547 new cases
Delhi reported 1,547 new COVID-19 cases in the past 24 hours, taking the total to 6,11,994, stated a health bulletin released by the Delhi government. Also, 32 more deaths were reported in the past 24 hours, pushing the toll to 10,147.

Mr. Jain said according to WHO parameters, Delhi is in a safe zone. "For the first time since May, the positivity rate is 1.9%. A positivity of 5% is supposed to be good and being at 2%, we are at an ideal condition. As per WHO parameters, Delhi is in a safe zone," Mr. Jain said.

Of the total COVID-19 cases, 5,88,586 people have recovered and there are 13,261 active cases.

Now, get salon sewa at Singhu border

Haryana youth brings team to protest site to offer services

HEMANI BHANDARI
NEW DELHI

A 'salon sewa' was added on Wednesday by a Haryana-based youth to the long list of services being offered at the Singhu border protest site.

On the right side of the road, where thousands of protesters are agitating against the new farm laws, it is hard to miss three salon chairs, put up next to a banner reading 'Crazy Beauty Salon'. The protesters can be seen waiting for their turn to get a haircut or shave done by salon staffers brought by Sunny Vartiya, 26, a resident of Kurukshetra and the owner of the salon.

Mr. Vartiya, who reached the Singhu border with his workers in the morning, said he is here to stay. "These people are our brothers and we are because they are. Also, this is possibly the only sewa



Protesters availing of the free salon service at Singhu border. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

which has not been offered here yet. People are also in need of this service," he said.

Mr. Vartiya said he has come with five of his employees and there are more on their way. When the three workers take rest, the others would work, he said, adding that they started the sewa at 9 a.m. and would continue till 9 p.m. "We have come

equipped with our scissors, hair gels, creams and cleaning material. We offer most services which an open salon can offer – haircuts, hairstyles, beard trimming, shaving, facials etc.," he said. People are mostly coming for beard trimming and haircuts. "I haven't sat since morning," said Mr. Vartiya while cutting the hair of a protester.

Rahul, one of the employees, said he is here because he believes in the protesters' cause. "They are asking for their rights and the government should listen to them," he said.

A protester who identified himself as Sukhdev Singh (23), a resident of Moga, said he was glad he could get his beard trimmed by the workers. "It's [salon service] not a necessity here. But because this man is offering the service, we are getting it done."

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Supply line: A farmer burns stubble near Kundli; protesters cut vegetables in preparation for dinner at the pit stop between Kundli and Singhu border on Wednesday. ■ R.V. MOORTHY



Farmers set up pit stop in middle of NH-1 between Kundli, Singhu

The area provides space for farmers to recuperate, park and clean vehicles; it also has strategic advantage as the Delhi-Haryana route can be blocked within minutes

JATIN ANAND SONIPAT

Nestled between Ashoka University and a popular roadside motel, farmers from Punjab and Haryana – participating in the protest at Delhi's Singhu border – have created a kilometres-long pit stop in the middle of National Highway 1.

With the agitation for the repeal of three controversial agriculture laws gathering momentum and more farm-

ers joining in every day since November 26, the biggest issue the pit stop solves for the protesting farmers is providing a space for the simultaneous parking and cleaning of an estimated 300 tractors and stocked trolleys.

Strategic location

The pit stop came up around the relatively large road divider around three weeks ago. It occupies several kilometres between the Kundli

and Singhu border toll booths.

Space to freshen up before each trip to the protest site at Singhu border, access to bathrooms, and a massive motel that has several food stalls are the other draws in addition to a strategic advantage: choking another pivotal access point to the National Capital Region at short notice, if required.

"We came from Ludhiana, a trip of over 300 km, but

GURPREET SINGH
farmer from Punjab

The pit stop is a sort of relay point for farmers substituting for each other at the Singhu border protest site, 13 km away, as well as for picking up supplies

could not find space for our tractor. There are many like us who reached a little late and could not reach the

(Singhu) border with vehicles, so we set up camp here. We sleep on separate mattresses but have to share multiple blankets because it is so cold and there is traffic on both sides," said Chanraj Singh as vehicles whizzed past on either side of him.

"There are three langars operating - two by *Punjabis* and one by *Haryanvis* - but sometimes we feel like having dhaba food and go across the road where there are ma-

ny restaurants. The owner of *Golden Hut Punjabi Dhaba* has opened the bathrooms there for us to bathe whenever we ask," he added.

Chanraj's elder brother Gurpreet, who also came to the site on his tractor, explaining the merits of the

spot: "It is a relay point for farmers substituting for each other as well as for receiving supplies from home."

"Those who come with the supplies either rest here

for a bit before taking part in the protest and heading back or substituting for someone who has already taken part in the protest. Under no circumstances can the number of tractors and protesters at the agitation be allowed to dip," he said.

Their friend, also named Gurpreet Singh, travelled to the Delhi border from Bhatainda. "The pit stop is located around 13 km from the spot where protesting farmers

have erected a stage adjacent to the toll booth, heralding the territorial jurisdiction of the Capital. The pit stop can be utilised to enhance the blockade further," he said.

"If our leaders ask us to, it will take us just a few minutes to block this route between Delhi and Haryana - mainly the Kundli area - with our tractors. We are used to climbing bigger obstacles than concrete road dividers while driving them," he said.

Farmers still protesting in the chill as Centre cannot let go of ego: Rai

AAP Minister visits Singhu border to take stock of facilities

STAFF REPORTER NEW DELHI

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) Delhi convener Gopal Rai visited protesting farmers at the Singhu border on Wednesday and took stock of the facilities that are being provided by the Delhi government.

"These farmers have been protesting here for the last 20 days. The AAP demands that the BJP-ruled Centre roll back the anti-farmer laws and resolve the issues. The BJP is dealing with the issue with an ego and that is why

in this winter, the farmers had to sit on the streets," said Mr. Rai, who is also the Environment Minister.

It is unfortunate that PM Narendra Modi has accused the Opposition of misleading the farmers, he said, adding: "I want to ask the PM: Are the Opposition parties only here to support the government? The work of the Opposition is to criticise the government whenever necessary. AAP was born from a mass movement and we will protest whenever the

government does anything wrong," Mr. Rai said.

He said that the Delhi government has been running kitchens for the protesting farmers and has also set up mobile toilets and drinking water facilities.

"Punjab CM Captain Amarinder Singh came to Delhi, met the Home Minister, and returned. He did not meet the farmers. But now he is speaking the language of the BJP and accusing AAP. This is a deliberate attempt to divert attention," Mr. Rai added.

Delhi police instal nine layers of barricades at borders

Around 8,000 security personnel have been deployed to stop protesters from entering national capital

SAURABH TRIVEDI NEW DELHI

After farm unions intensified their ongoing agitation at the Delhi borders, the police have installed nine layers of barricades at key points to prevent the entry of protesters into the national capital.

A senior police officer said this is the first time in the history of any protest in Delhi that such massive security arrangements have been made. Around 8,000 security personnel have been deployed at the borders.

At Singhu, Tikri and Ghazipur borders, the police have installed nine layers of barricades - three layers of iron barricades with barbed wires on top, three layers of concrete jersey barriers locked with iron chain, one layer of iron containers filled



Sand-laden dumpers, iron barricades and concrete barriers block the road at Singhu border. ■ PTI

with sand and two layers of sand-laden dumpers.

The officer added that they have got intelligence inputs that after December 15, the protest will be intensified as more people from Punjab and Haryana will be joining

the agitation.

"We have also deployed more security personnel at the borders. Apart from Delhi Police, personnel from the paramilitary force have also been deployed. We have been making all possible ef-

orts to maintain peace. There have been no attempts at forceful entry into the national capital by the farmers," said the officer.

He added that the Rapid Action Force, armed with anti-riot gear and water ca-

nons, is at the forefront of the security line.

The policemen from Haryana and Delhi are meeting every day to share intelligence inputs as they have to keep a watch on anti-social elements.

As per an intelligence report, there are around 10,000 protesters at the Tikri border, 25,000 at Singhu and 2,000 at Ghazipur.

At Singhu and Tikri borders, more security personnel are being deployed under the supervision of Joint CP-rank officer.

The police personnel have been deployed with three DCP-rank officers and one Joint CP-rank officer. At Niranjan ground in Burari, there are around 120 police personnel along with one DCP-rank police officer.

Delhiites to get relief from cold by end of week: IMD

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

Cold wave conditions prevailed in the national capital on Wednesday with the minimum temperature settling three degrees below normal at 5.8 degrees Celsius. The maximum was four notches below normal at 18.6 degrees Celsius.

Lowest maximum temperature

The weather station at Palam recorded a maximum of 16.2 degrees Celsius, which was the coldest part of the city during the day, while the Lodhi Road station, at 4.8 degrees Celsius, recorded the lowest minimum. On Tuesday, the minimum

was 4.1 degrees Celsius and maximum 18.5 degrees Celsius - both the lowest recorded this season so far.

The India Meteorological Department has forecast that cold wave conditions are likely to persist for around 24-48 hours with relief likely only after Friday. Dense fog was also reported in the city on Wednesday morning, with the visibility falling to below 100 metres at Palam.

Cold wave and cold day conditions are being experienced in the Capital as cold winds are blowing towards the plains from the Himalayas that received fresh snow due to the influence of a Western Disturbance, said the weatherman.

Improvement in Delhi's air quality likely today: SAFAR

STAFF REPORTER NEW DELHI

The air quality of Delhi, Gurugram, and Noida deteriorated slightly but remained in the 'poor' category on Wednesday, as per Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) data.

The Air Quality Index (AQI) of Delhi was 262 on Wednesday, up from 230 on Tuesday, as per CPCB's 4 p.m. bulletin.

The effect of stubble burning on Delhi's air quality was low on Wednesday. The city's air quality is likely to improve on Thursday.

"The AQI is forecast to improve on Thursday to 'moderate' category but it will not last long. AQI is fo-

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Chief Engineer, Uttarakhand Rural Roads Development Agency
First Floor, Directorate of Panchayatiraj, Opp-IT Park, Sahasthara Road, Dehradun
Ref.No. 1910/11-02(xix)/ITCO/URRDA/20
PRAJDH MANTRI GRAM SADAK YOJANA (PMGSY)
e-Procurement Notice - 12 (Rebid)/2020-21

The Government of India has received a loan/credit instrument number "LN 8864 IN" from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/International Development Association towards the cost of Rural Roads Project (Pradhani Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana) and intends to apply a part of the funds to cover eligible payments under the contracts for construction of works as detailed in NIT. Bidding is open to all bidders from eligible source countries as defined in the bidding document.

The Chief Engineer, URRDA on behalf of Governor of Uttarakhand invites the item rate bids in electronic tendering system for construction of Roads under Pradhani Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana in the districts of Almora for 01 number of Package with estimated cost totaling to Rs. 1.79 Crore including their maintenance for two years from the eligible contractors registered with PWD/CPWD or equivalent.*

Date of Release of Invitation for Bids through e-procurement : 14.12.2020

Availability of Bid Documents and mode of Submission : The bid documents are available online and should be submitted online in www.pmgstendersuk.gov.in. The bidder would be required to register in the web-site which is free of cost. For submission of the bids, the bidder is required to have Digital Signature Certificate (DSC) from one of the authorized Certifying Authorities. The bidders are required to submit (a) original demand draft towards the cost of bid document and (b) original bid security in approved form and (c) original affidavit regarding correctness of information furnished with bid document as per provisions of Clause 4.4 B (ii) of T&B with CONCERNED/RESPECTIVE CIRCLE OFFICES, only up to or before the time and date of submission of the Bids (for World Bank funded works) and on a date not later than three working days after the opening of technical qualification part of the bid (for Regular PMGSY Works), either by registered post or by hand, failing which the bids shall be declared non-responsive. No physical documents will be accepted after the closing date and time of submission of bids.

Last Date/Time for receipt of bids through e-procurement : 21.12.2020 01:00 PM

For Further details please log on to www.pmgstendersuk.gov.in

**Chief Engineer,
URRDA, Dehradun.**

*Non Registered bidders may submit bids, however, the successful bidders must get registered in appropriate class with appropriate authorities before signing the contract.

Note : For e-Procurement for any sort of queries 0135-2608125 number may be contacted 10:00 AM to 05:00 PM.

OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER
JAL SHAKTI (M.I.D.), DIVISION DHARMARI
Email: xenmidharmari@jk.gov.in, xenphedharmari@jk.gov.in
Notice inviting e-Tender
E-NIT No.: 49 of 2020-21 Dated: 11/12/2020
For and on behalf of the Lt. Governor of UT of J&K e-tenders (Two cover System) on Item Rate Basis are invited from reputed and resourceful contractors/Firms/companies/joint venture of reputed, which should be uploaded on the e-Procurement web portal <http://www.ktenders.gov.in> up to last bidding date: 18/12/2020 up to 06:00 PM for the subject work referred below to be received in the office of the Executive Engineer JalShakti [Mahore Irrigation] Division Dharmari and as per the details mentioned in this e-tender notification and to whom all the terms and conditions of detailed NIT / Tender Documents/ PWD Form No:- 25 double are acceptable. The detailed tender document and Specifications etc. can be downloaded on the e-Procurement web portal <http://www.ktenders.gov.in>. The cost of tender documents (Non-refundable/ Non-Transferable) should be in the shape of e-Challan or Treasury Challan/ Receipt/In favour of the Executive Engineer JalShakti [Mahore Irrigation] Division Dharmari :-

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Executive Engineer
Mahore Irrigation Division
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CIN No.: U40300JK2013SGC003898
e-NIT No: SE/O&M/JPDCL/C/KCapex 20-21/01 of 2020, Dated 09.12.2020
INVITATION:-
For and on behalf of the Lieutenant Governor of the UT of Jammu and Kashmir, the Superintending Engineer, O & M Circle Kishtwar - JPDCL, hereinafter referred as 'Employer', invites online e-bids from reputed Companies or Class 'A' registered contractors for "SUPPLY, INSTALLATION, TESTING AND COMMISSIONING 05 Kms of new 33 KV line for realignment of existing 33 KV Khelliani-Bhadarwah line and Stabilization of 33 KV Khelliani-Bhadarwah line in district Doda by way of replacement of damaged poles, conductor and stay sets, including job of cement bottoming of 11 Meters STP, installation of isolator and set right of all the existing line." under the jurisdiction of Executive Engineer, STD Doda, JPDCL Jammu.

1. Bidders are advised to study the Bidding Document carefully. Submission of e-Bid against this SBD should be deemed to have been done after careful/conscious study and examination of the procedures, terms and conditions of the Standard Bidding Document with full understanding of its implications.

2. The tender document is available at website <http://iktenders.gov.in>. Interested Bidders may view, download the e-Bid document, seek clarification and submit their e-Bid online up to the date and time mentioned in the table below:

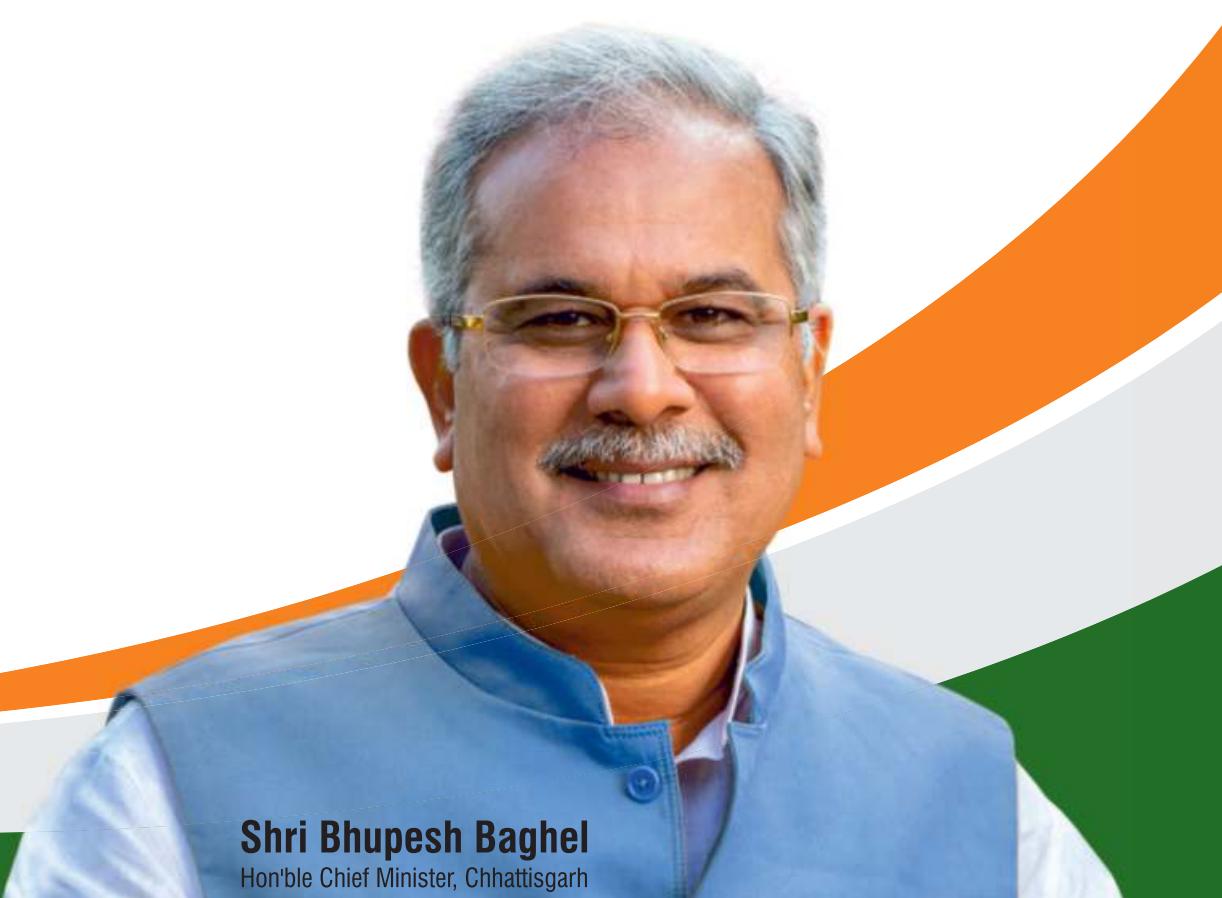
A	Tender Document Sale/Download Start Date	12.12.2020;
B	Tender Document Sale/Download End Date	24.12.2020: 04:00 PM
C	e-Bid submission (start) date & time	12.12.2020: 10:00 AM
D	e-Bid submission (end) date & time	26.12.2020: 04:00 PM
E	Submission of Hard Copy of Tender Fee & EMD Instrument (End) date & time	26.12.2020 up to 04:00 PM
F	Commercial and Technical Bid opening date & time	29.12.2020: 02:00 PM
G	Online financial e-Bid opening date & time (Only of the technically qualified Bidders)	Will be communicated to the Technically Qualifying Bidders.
H	Venue of opening of techno-commercial Bids	Soft Copy Electronically & Hard copy in the Office of the Superintending Engineer, O&M Circle- JPDCL Kishtwar
I	Tender Value	Rs. 172.06 Lakhs
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REDEFINING NYAY



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- ❖ Forest Rights Certificate holders covered under **MSP**
- ❖ Procurement of minor forest produce at MSP raised from **7 to 52**
- ❖ Daily jobs to average **25 lakh** labourers under MGNREGA



Shri Bhupesh Baghel
Hon'ble Chief Minister, Chhattisgarh

HC directs civic bodies to release doctors' salary

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday directed the North and East Delhi Municipal Corporations to release within two weeks the salary arrears of doctors employed in the nine hospitals run and managed by them, for the month

of October.

A Bench of Justice Hima Kohli and Justice Subramonium Prasad gave the direction on an application moved by the Indian Medical Association (IMA). The court is already seized of a PIL initiated by it with regard to payment of stipend/emoluments to resi-

dent doctors of the six hospitals run and managed by the North body.

IMA, in its plea to be made a party in the pending case, stated that doctors of three hospitals – Swami Dayanand Hospital, Chandwara Maternal Home and Shahdara Poly Clinic – managed by East body

be also included in the list of hospitals considered for relief by the High Court.

The High Court had initiated the petition based on news reports that doctors of Kasturba Gandhi Hospital have threatened to resign as they have not been paid salaries since March this year.

Over 50 held for duping foreigners of ₹100 crore

They ran a fake call centre, posed as law enforcement officers

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

accused disclosed that they contacted foreign nationals, including U.S. citizens, posing as officers of law enforcement and other government agencies such as the U.S. Social Security Administration, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration and the U.S. Marshals Service, the senior officer said.

The accused have duped more than 4,500 people to the tune of ₹100 crore, they said.

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The mastermind of the call centre was managing the operations from Dubai.

IN BRIEF



DJB launches rainwater harvesting campaign

NEW DELHI Raghav Chadha, Vice Chairman of Delhi Jal Board, on Wednesday launched a rainwater harvesting campaign. Under the campaign, the DJB aims to build 200 rainwater harvesting structures in 30 days. Mr. Chadha also issued direction to the zonal-level officers on the campaign.

Court tells govt. to keep releasing college salaries

NEW DELHI The High Court told the Delhi government to continue releasing salaries of the last quarters of the financial year 2020-21 to the colleges affiliated to Delhi University and fully funded by it. An HC Bench gave the direction on a petition filed by Assistant Professor Udaibir Singh and other staffers of colleges seeking direction to pay them their salary dues.

Cong. seeks forensic audit of civic bodies

NEW DELHI The Delhi Congress on Wednesday demanded a forensic audit of the three Municipal Corporations of Delhi by a sitting Delhi HC judge to look into why they are perennially short of funds despite having several sources of income. The party hit out not only at the three BJP-ruled civic bodies but also at the AAP-led Delhi govt.

Free transformation programme introduced

NEW DELHI Maitreyi Dashadreeji, founder of MaitriBodh Parivaar, has introduced the 'Worldwide Transformation Program' for those wanting to work towards creating a better world for themselves and humanity. With 25 life changing tools over a span of two years, the free-of-cost programme is reflective, meditative and experiential and a step-by-step progression that helps one connect with their inner power. To register, visit <https://www.maitribodh.org/> transform

Services back to normal at AIIMS

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

The services at AIIMS were back to normal on Wednesday, after the AIIMS Nurses' Union called off indefinite strike late on Tuesday, according to hospital authorities.

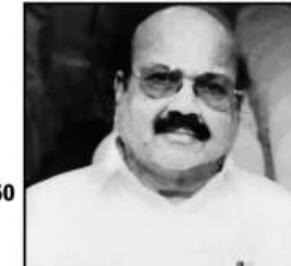
On Tuesday, the Delhi High Court restrained the union from continuing their agitation, following which the union ended it. The union had gone on a sudden strike from Monday afternoon against the hospital's alleged decision to hire nursing officers on contractual basis.

"Services are back to normal and nurses are back to duty," an AIIMS spokesperson said on Wednesday.

OBITUARY & REMEMBRANCE

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SAD DEMISE



06.12.2020

Janab. Haji. S.A. Ameenudeen

AIADMK Minorities Welfare Wing Dist. Secretary, North Chennai, North (W)

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His son S.A. Syed Saifudeen

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DONATE EYES-GIFT SIGHT

of October.

A Bench of Justice Hima Kohli and Justice Subramonium Prasad gave the direction on an application moved by the Indian Medical Association (IMA). The court is already seized of a PIL initiated by it with regard to payment of stipend/emoluments to resi-

dent doctors of the six hospitals run and managed by the North body.

IMA, in its plea to be made a party in the pending case, stated that doctors of three hospitals – Swami Dayanand Hospital, Chandwara Maternal Home and Shahdara Poly Clinic – managed by East body

be also included in the list of hospitals considered for relief by the High Court.

The High Court had initiated the petition based on news reports that doctors of Kasturba Gandhi Hospital have threatened to resign as they have not been paid salaries since March this year.

They ran a fake call centre, posed as law enforcement officers

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

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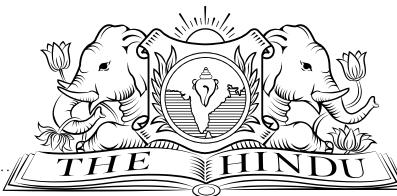
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Excellence in diversity

Equal opportunity and universal education can make affirmative action meaningful

The significant expansion of the IIT system since 2008, after reservation was extended to student candidates belonging to Other Backward Classes, has resulted in a vexed situation in which these institutions are unable to find enough qualified faculty members, whose recruitment must also meet quota norms. Bound by the Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in Teachers' Cadre) Act, 2019, the IITs must fulfil the important goal of affirmative action while making appointments. While the law is enabling, the benefit cannot be extended to many due to a severe mismatch between the demand and availability of technology research graduates. Last year, IIT Delhi had a staggering deficit of 30% in its teacher ranks, and there are 23 such institutes in India now, highlighting the scale of the crisis. It is in this context of large-scale vacancies that the Education Ministry tasked a committee to suggest effective implementation of reservation in central institutions such as the IITs, for both student enrolment and faculty recruitment. The panel headed by IIT Delhi's director has come up with two options: to exempt IITs from quotas by including them in the schedule to the 2019 law, which is applicable to institutions of excellence, research institutions and institutions of national and strategic importance; and to provide reservation to specified grades of assistant professors, taking the institution as a whole. Where candidates are not available in the latter case, the posts can be de-reserved in the subsequent year. An early decision must now be taken by the government without sacrificing equity principles.

Diversity achieved through affirmative action such as compensatory discrimination in favour of some classes of citizens corrects historical distortions. For it to be fully realised, however, the concomitant is massive investments in the education system at all levels, which can raise the capability of students. It is now widely recognised that substituting traditional privilege with opportunity and the right facilities dispels the myth of innate merit. Such an approach ensures justice for those who were deprived. The Ministry's committee echoes this, when it recommends a government-sponsored preparatory programme at the IITs which can help candidates eligible for reservation to get acquainted with high quality academic work, and optionally prepare for a PhD if they aspire to be teachers. This is the imperative, considering that such graduates will help fill not just vacancies in the IITs, but also aid the large number of other technical education institutions that aspire to research excellence. Governments must aim for progressive redistribution, for which policy should actively expand equal opportunity, starting with a strong, liberal public school system. This will strengthen diversity, and lay the foundation for the kind of scholarship that institutions of excellence need.

Discouraging numbers

Early data from NFHS-5 show decline in key anthropometric and nutrition indicators

With a debilitating death toll and an economic recession, India has had among the worst effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. There is anecdotal evidence that the pandemic and lockdown measures have led to new complications related to food consumption and food security for impoverished Indians. But an express indication of the possible scale of the crisis can be gleaned from the data from the newly released National Family Health Survey 2019-20 which was conducted before the pandemic and its impact. The partially released early data from NFHS-5 for 22 States/Union Territories – data for U.P., M.P. Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, Punjab, Jharkhand and Odisha are not yet out – shows a disappointing record on metrics such as child nutrition and adult anthropometric measurements, suggesting the exacerbation now of an already fraught situation. NFHS-5 shows that four key metrics for the nutritional status of children declined in 2019-20 compared to levels in 2015-16 (NFHS-4) in many of the surveyed States. Gujarat, Maharashtra and West Bengal recorded an increase in the percentage of anaemic and wasted (low weight for height) children compared to even the 2005-06 survey. In the key indicator of childhood stunting, there has been an increase in 13 of the 22 States/UTs in comparison to NFHS-4, with a noticeable improvement only in Bihar and Assam. Even here, the reduction in stunting numbers is lower than the government's targets. Bihar has shown a promising decline of 5.4% points in stunting, but still retains the highest percentage of stunted children (42.9%) among big States.

On the flip side, NFHS-5 also flags improvements in other factors that contribute to malnutrition and poor health outcomes – in access to sanitation and clean cooking fuels. In indicators related to women's well-being (with variance across States), spousal violence declined in 17 of 22 States/UTs, child marriage declined in 18, and access to bank accounts rose in all of them, compared to NFHS-4. But the persistence of poor anthropometric measures related to hunger and nutrition suggests that existing programmes to address them, such as POSHAN Abhiyaan, will need a push and focus to meet targets such as the 2% point decrease in childhood stunting every year. More importantly, the complications arising out of the pandemic should make the Centre and States refocus on welfare delivery as a concerted strategy to eradicate hunger and extreme poverty. This is an imperative that would not just meet the UN's Sustainable Development Goal targets but will also ensure the well-being of citizens in a country that showed significant promise in combining economic growth and general welfare in the last couple of decades before encountering major reversals lately.

A protocol of deference that is plainly injurious

From alleged judicial over-reach, India seems to be settling for a spell of judicial self-abnegation *vis-à-vis* the executive



HARISH KHARE

Last week Prime Minister Narendra Modi performed an elaborate *bhoomi pooja* rite for a new parliament building in New Delhi, but only after the Supreme Court was pleased to give its assent for the foundation stone laying ceremony. While allowing the Prime Minister to have his date with the pandits and history, the top court permitted itself to enunciate what seems like an innovative jurisprudence of deference. A Bench, led by Justice A.M. Khanwilkar, expressed its displeasure with the government for unheeding the Court's directions. According to a report in *The Hindu* on December 8, "SC nod for Central Vista inauguration", the Bench said: "We thought we were dealing with a prudent litigant and deference will be shown... We have shown deference to you and expected that you will act in a prudent manner. The same deference should be shown to the court and there should be no demolition or construction."

This was a remarkable – and a revealing – formulation from the Justice Khanwilkar-led Bench and the honourable judges must be thanked for spelling out publicly what seems to be a new working proposition. Suddenly, so many judicial verdicts, as also many non-verdicts, of recent years have become somewhat decipherable in the light of this protocol of deference.

This full disclosure from the Bench should also invite more than a few questions. To begin with: to whom does the apex court undertake to offer deference? An individual? A Prime Minister or a Law Minister? An incumbent political regime? The executive as an institutional entity? The other side of the equation would be: who is offering deference? This or that individual judge? Or the current gaggle of judicial leadership? Or, the entire judiciary, presided over by the Supreme Court, as a constitutional institution? There are no easy answers.

The U.S., in comparison

Juxtapose this protocol of deference with the bracing rectitude at display in the U.S. Supreme Court. A Court that was supposed to have been "packed" only a few months ago by U.S. President Donald Trump now has simply refused to countenance his electoral *goondagiri*. The majority of judges in the U.S. Supreme Court may owe their appointment to Republican Presidents but they do not feel it is their institutional remit to remain at the beck and call of the Republican White House. Their judicial exertions are informed, becomingly, by their constitutional insights and moral convictions, not by the partisanship needs of politicians in power. It would be patently unwise for any American President to think that the Supreme Court would owe him any deference and it is unthinkable that a U.S. Supreme Court judge will allow herself to even entertain the thought that the White House was entitled to any kind of deference. One institution respects another institution; but, deference, my Lords?

This protocol of deference be-



comes baffling and inexplicable. After all, judges are not in the business of soothing and smoothing. The very idea of deference carries with it a suggestion of acquiescence and perhaps even an absence of any kind of constitutional compass. And, pray, what can possibly be the terms of this protocol of deference?

Of course, an institution can sustain its edge only as long as men and women of strength preside over it. So it is with the judiciary. And it can be easily conceded that not all judges necessarily constitute a superior breed of individuals. A judge can only perform within the limits of her/his intellectual depth, moral core, personal quirks, political preferences, and judicial temperament. Not all judges are munificently endowed with qualities and traits for them to develop their own judicial fortitude.

Checks and balances

Yet, these Lordships are armoured with a constitutional design and institutional arrangements, precisely to overcome their personal limitations and to help them perform their *dharma* with élan and integrity and honour. And, that is precisely what the founding

fathers of our Republic had ordained.

In fact in the very early days of our Republic, there was an occasion for the redoubtable Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel to remind an impetuous Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru about the limits of power: "we are now faced with a Constitution... that means that for every executive action there must be legal sanction and judicial justification."

In practical terms, the political class in its role as the Executive was joyfully undertaking to surrender its power and privilege to resort to arbitrary authority, however pressing may be the claims of national security or of any other urgency.

It was a historic commitment, anchored in the finest sentiment of democratic nobility and it was an undertaking on the part of national political leadership to cheerfully submit itself, its conduct and its policies, to scrutiny and, if warranted, risk a 'nyet' from the judiciary. The bottomline was that the moral health and the democratic robustness of the Republic had to be institutionally safe-guarded, and not just left to the benign indulgence of this or that demagogue masquerading as a national saviour.

At variance with traditions

Thanks to the new jurisprudence of deference, the spirit of an accountable executive authority seems to have dissipated. Worse, the higher judiciary seems to have comfortably gone along with the executive's assertion that once a law has been duly passed by Parliament it was beyond democratic contestation. The High Courts, for example, have been plainly unsympathetic to those who have

had reason to critique and protest the Citizenship (Amendment) Act.

This protocol of deference is at variance with the glorious traditions of independence and self-assertion, vigorously re-discovered after the Emergency and proudly re-asserted – till now.

Now, a penny has dropped. Because of this peep into the protocol of deference, we can perhaps make sense of a Chief Justice of India accommodating a Prime Minister's wish to see for himself the Court Number One, the very seat of action. Perhaps we can see the emerging pattern – a Rajya Sabha seat for a recently retired Chief Justice.

And, it is no surprise that without anybody noticing it – leave alone, mourning – the very notion of judicial activism, as a practical axiom and as an institutional tool, has simply disappeared from our constitutional repertoire. From the days of an alleged judicial overreach we seem to have settled for a spell of self-abnegation on the Bench.

This newly delineated protocol of deference is plainly injurious to the health of our Republic. It has produced an unhealthy lopsidedness in our democratic arrangements. We seem to be forgetting that elections only confer an office – and, not any kind of canonisation. Without any countervailing judicial constraints, errant megalomaniac is getting emboldened; arrogance has already embedded itself in the ruling clique, and a moral callousness appears to have seeped into the system. Hence, the *kisans* manning barricades at the Sindhu border.

Harish Khare is a senior journalist based in Delhi

Privacy, a fundamental right the state must protect

An open and transparent government that also respects every citizen's right to privacy is not a contradiction



PRASANNA S. & MAANSI VERMA

In an article in *The Hindu*, "Is a person's address public information?" (OpEd page, December 1, 2020), the writers, Shailesh Gandhi and Prashant Reddy T., raised a few issues over a recent Bombay High Court order directing the government to take down the address of a Right to Information (RTI) applicant from its website.

The writers had argued that no 'law or principle of law prevents the state from disclosing such information about the addresses of citizens' and placed the onus on keeping the address private on RTI Applicants by specifying a P.O. box. Our article attempts to point out why the framing of the initial question is misleading and looks at the problems in the December 1 article.

Not judicially tested

First, the writers cite the example of public telephone directories and voter lists to point out how addresses are not always treated as private information. They further point to how disclosure of beneficiary addresses helps with transparency and accountability of social welfare programmes and

serves public interest. The first example is a paraphrased version of the tired rhetoric on India's privacy culture, i.e., 'Indians don't care about their privacy.' A similar argument made by the state was repelled by a unanimous nine-judge Bench of the Supreme Court of India in *Justice K.S. Puttaswamy (Retd.) ... vs Union Of India And Ors.* (9J, 2017). Further, none of these examples has been judicially tested, especially in the context of such information being available digitally, where the unforeseeability of extent of harms is aggravated: something which the nine-judge Bench decision also acknowledged.

But, more importantly, an assertion that addresses are sometimes published information or that disclosure of addresses may serve public interest in some cases is of little use to decide the question in any given case, such as disclosure of the addresses of RTI applicants.

Second, the writers may be correct in stating that the High Court decisions do not expose their reasoning from first principles of transparency or privacy. However, they fail to see the line of reasoning that justifies the decision – from the recognition of citizens having an interest in guarding their addresses as private/personal information; unauthorised or mandatory disclosure of such personal information constituting an infringement; privacy being a fundamental right that the state must

respect and protect; and any state action has to be justified based on the four-pronged test articulated in the nine-judge Bench decision of *Puttaswamy*. The requirements of the backing of law; the law being in pursuance of a legitimate state purpose; the proposed action having a rational nexus to such purpose; and the extent of infringement being necessary and proportionate to purpose constitute that test.

High Court ruling

A useful framework for first-principles reasoning that the writers search for may come from a ruling of the Allahabad High Court earlier this year. Questions that relate to the publication of personal information, such as addresses, came up in a *suo motu* action against the Uttar Pradesh government for putting up posters with the personal details of people accused of allegedly destroying public property during the widespread protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act.

These personal details included their photographs, names, and addresses. Following *Puttaswamy*, the Court found the action of State 'nothing but an unwarranted interference in the privacy of people'. The High Court observed that neither was there a law which empowered the state to put up such posters with personal details nor was there any legitimate aim that a democratic state could pursue for which such action could be deemed necessary and proportionate. Therefore, the pertinent question is whether the state has lawful power to publish information that a citizen may consider private and not merely the somewhat self-fulfilling question that the writers pose.

Third, the writers refer to Section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act to assert that there is an obligation to disclose personal information where such 'information bears a nexus to public activity'. It is not immediately apparent the basis for the writers' assertion that an RTI applicant's address has any nexus to public activity. Perhaps, more significantly, the writers overlook the other limb of that Section that disallows disclosure that would cause an unwarranted invasion of privacy – which is a consequentialist test – the kind that the writers criticise the High Court decisions for. Section 8(1)(j) still allows disclosure subject to the public information officer making a case by case judgment on whether the larger public interest is served by disclos-

ing such personal information. It is not clear what the writer's idea of the larger public interest is in disclosing the addresses of RTI applicants.

On the other hand, there is significant public interest in not disclosing the personal information of RTI applicants. In this case, it was not a mere publication of his address as part of some broader list containing addresses of all citizens of his area. The disclosure also easily brought out the association of his address with his application that made him the target of violence and retaliation.

Waiver as barrier

Protection of privacy for individual citizens and transparency of public authorities are two sides of the same coin. An open and transparent government that also guarantees, respects, protects, promotes, and fulfills every citizen's right to privacy is not a contradiction in terms. To insist that applicants must waive or make compromises on their right to privacy to exercise their rights under the transparency law is an unreasonable barrier that causes a chilling effect in exercise of those rights, quite significantly harming the very cause that is sought to be championed.

Prasanna S. and Maansi Verma are Delhi-based independent lawyers and founding trustees of the Article 21 Trust, which works on issues at the intersection of digital rights and welfare

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

No winter session

The decision of the government not to have the winter session of Parliament citing the COVID-19 pandemic is shocking (Inside pages, "Jairam Ramesh refutes govt. claim on winter session", December 16). When there are public gatherings and political events of high visibility taking place all across India in spite of the pandemic why single out the winter session? There are several issues that need the attention of our MPs in view of the monsoon session also having been cut short. Is the government scared to face Parliament in order to avoid embarrassment and tough questions?

V. PADMANABHAN,
Bengaluru

■ The scrapping of the winter session citing COVID-19 and

without building political consensus bears testimony to the present government's utter contempt for our Parliament. It also reinforces a strongly-held belief about this government increasingly becoming more authoritarian by the day. At a time when farmers' groups have launched a peaceful agitation to protest the Farm Bills, one would have expected a democratically elected government to advance the session for a full-fledged debate on these laws. When all other activities are near normal, including political rallies, the reason for not having the winter session lacks conviction.

S.K. CHOURHURY,
Bengaluru

The nursing sector

In the article, "A sector that needs to be nursed back to health" (Editorial page,

December 14), even though the writer has looked at some of the problems that nurses face, she has mainly focused on the problems in the educational system in the country. The curriculum as far as nursing in India is concerned is exemplary because the training provided in various institutions in the country can be compared with the best in the world. This is the key reason why foreign nations have kept their doors open for Indian nurses. The respect given to an Indian nurse abroad is very visible, unlike in India.

Second, if there is to be a legal framework, it needs to be initiated from the ground level. Let us not forget that the workload on nurses is immense and the hospital system within the country is doctor-centric.

Health systems function on the basis of team work. So,

inclusion of nurses in the line of treatment is very important. It is easy to blame the nursing profession because there isn't any strong body to protect the rights of nurses. In looking at the problems in the nursing sector, there is also a need to focus on the entire system in the medical field.

DEVI PADMA SUBIN,
Chennai

■ Though 2020 is the "International Year of the Nurse and the Midwife", the prevailing and disabling environment in this most prominent and essential health sector has led to the low status of nurses in the hierarchy of health-care professionals. Florence Nightingale would not have imagined that such an ill fate will befall these angels in health care.

Health systems function on the basis of team work. So, the work situation that hospital nurses face is

overwhelmingly stressful; stress that seems to arise from the overall complexity of nurses' work. Stressors are uniform across clinical areas, especially with regard to perceived work pressure. Among the most frequently cited stressors for nurses are: "keeping track of many things at a time", "it is hard to predict what will happen each day" and "simple mistakes could have dire consequences".

Apart from this, the financial disparity these professionals face is another serious factor that leaves them discontented; there is a mismatch between their role description and remuneration. Let us hope that in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, the role of nurses will be given the due recognition it deserves in the health scenario.

RAMMOHANDAS K.,
Malappuram, Kerala

Beaches reopened
The Tamil Nadu government's green signal to throw open beaches again especially in Chennai, from December 14, needs to be reviewed since the spread of the novel coronavirus has still not abated. Beaches are generally sought out by a sea of citizens. Increasing the number of machines utilised in cleaning the beach or pruning the number of hawkers on the beach will not help. As seen in the case of IIT Madras, despite being a serene and sylvan campus, all it takes is for one person to infect a community. An uncontrollable surge of people thronging the seashore for different reasons could erase all efforts taken so far in containment.

MANI NATARAJAN,
Chennai

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A million reasons to march

The farmers' movement is now a battle not just for the peasantry, but also for justice and dignity



NAVSHARAN SINGH

"The people of Punjab not only know how to farm, they also know how to protect their fields," said farm leader Joginder Singh Ugrahan from the Tikkri border, Delhi, where farmers are camping in protest against the Centre's new farm laws. Punjab farmers' unions are at the forefront in the fight, which have, for over two months, inspired protests in large parts of the country. The convoy of tractor trolleys and trucks – thousands of them – made its way into Delhi on November 25-26, equipped with food, blankets, stoves, utensils and all essentials, to last the farmers for months. "We are here to stay," they said.

The government introduced three farm Bills – the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill, 2020, the Farmers' (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill, 2020 and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill, 2020 – in the monsoon session of Parliament. Together, these Bills proposed to relax restrictions on the purchase and sale of farm produce and on stocking under the Essential Commodities Act, 1955, and outlined a framework on contract farming. They were introduced on September 14, passed in the Lok Sabha on September 17, and in the Rajya Sabha on September 20. The President gave his assent on September 24, and the Gazette notification was published on September 27. In a matter of less than two weeks, without democratic process and discussion, the farm Bills bulldozed their way into becoming laws.

Dissent and debate

Agriculture sector reforms had been on the government's agenda for the last few decades, with policy experts stressing the need to shift people from agricultural work to provide cheap labour in manufacturing and services sectors. But decent jobs were simply not there to allow a large-scale shift of the rural work-



Farmers on a sit-in near Ghazipur border in New Delhi. • PTI

force. The only option was to get reduced to a perennial, casual labour force in unwelcoming cities. Several attempts, through reform commissions and committees to hasten this process, remained unsuccessful. But if the Centre could not accomplish that earlier, the government used the opportunity of COVID-19 to push the laws through. It was not only the farm Acts, but also the Industrial Relations Code, 2020, which changed the laws relating to trade unions, conditions of employment in industrial establishments, and investigation and settlement of industrial disputes. Parallelly, the disturbing suppression of basic rights and freedom through the use of the preventive detention laws and special legislations was further entrenched. The hubris that this process displayed was not lost on anyone.

Surjit Patar, the celebrated Punjabi poet who returned his Padma Shri in support of the agitating farmers, in his recent poem, 'Eh Gal Niri Enhi Hi Nahi' (It's Not Only About...), wrote, "Hard labour never hurts, it's the indifference; from neglect and apathy springs this mighty indignation"; "Change has to happen, but it is also the responsibility of those who are entrusted with policymaking to ensure that it does not happen at the cost of the most marginalised."

When farmers from Punjab and Haryana reached the border in Delhi in a peaceful convoy, they were met with barricades. At the Delhi barricade, a senior police officer was seen addressing the farmers through a

handheld speaker. "Why are you here? Don't you know that Delhi is facing the pandemic?" A farmer was heard replying, "Didn't the government know when they passed these three ordinances without any consultation in the middle of the pandemic?". The police official again said, "There are 101 ways of getting your point across to the government. Why did you come to Delhi?" The astonished farmer replied, "You tell us just two ways of getting our point across and you can keep the remaining 99 to yourself."

When the state has no other way to understand dissent but to criminalise it, what do the aggrieved people do? The farmers, it seems, have come to Delhi to ask precisely this.

Bitter experiences

In the several rounds of talks with the government in Delhi, when the farmers are insisting on a total roll-back, and not deliberation or amendments, they know what they are saying. Their decision is based on experience and extensive discussions around the laws.

The Union Agriculture Minister and other government functionaries claim that these reforms free the farmers from the clutches of middlemen and more than double farmers' incomes. But farmers, as well as several experts, have the PepsiCo contract farming experience in Punjab to convince them that contract farming benefits are not for the small and marginal farmer. In Punjab, based on 2015-16 data, more than one-third of

holdings are marginal and small i.e., two or less than two hectares, another third is between two and four hectares, 28% between four and ten hectares, and only 5% holdings are large, i.e., ten hectares or more. The farmers also know that for small and marginal farmers, the option of transporting farm produce to lucrative markets is not an option – they do not have the means to go. They will have to sell it near their own villages to whoever is willing to buy it and at whatever price they are offered. They cite the Bihar experience, where the APMC system was abolished for farmers in 2006, to argue that when it comes to open market operations, all odds are stacked against marginal and small farmers.

The demand charter of the farmers includes demands of the peasantry, but it also relates to the interests of the urban and rural poor. All the farmers' unions are calling for the unconditional repeal of the three agricultural Acts and the Electricity (Amendment) Bill, 2020. But many large unions are also seeking implementation of the Universal Public Distribution System (PDS) across the country. They are pressing for state regulation to end farmers' exploitation by big traders and multinational companies in government-regulated agriculture produce markets. They also call for the release of intellectuals, activists and anti-CAA protesters all over the country and withdrawal of the false cases registered against them. On their platforms, they have raised these demands most eloquently – they say when intellectuals, student activists and human rights defenders are put behind bars, ordinary farm labour also goes

for her right to hold to account the state which has reneged on land reforms. When food becomes a commodity to be traded only under market conditions, the urban and rural poor who need food rations lose their right to food.

These most significant issues the farmers have raised with ingenuity. Their movement has forged unity and has now strongly converged with other people's rights. It is a fight not just for farm produce prices now, but also for justice and democracy, and above all, for dignity.

Navsharan Singh is an independent researcher

The many challenges for WTO

The next Director-General of the organisation will have to navigate through a slew of thorny issues



DAMMU RAVI

For the first time in its 25-year history, the World Trade Organization (WTO) will be led by a woman, as both the contending candidates for the Director-General (D-G) post are women, from Nigeria and South Korea respectively. The prestige aside, the D-G's job will require perseverance and outstanding negotiating skills for balancing the diverse and varied interests of the 164 member countries, and especially, for reconciling competing multilateral and national visions, for the organisation to work efficiently. The next D-G will have to grapple with the global economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic and work towards carrying out reforms of the multilateral trading system for reviving the world economy. On all these issues, her non-partisan role will be watched carefully.

The current impasse in the WTO negotiations has led member countries to believe in the necessity of carrying out urgent reforms, even as the debate is likely to throw up some difficult choices for developing countries like India. At the core of the divide within the WTO is the Doha Development Agenda, which the developed countries sought to jettison in favour of a new agenda that includes, amongst others, e-commerce, investment facilitation, MSMEs and gender. Salvaging the 'development'-centric agenda is critical for a large number of developing countries as they essentially see trade as a catalyst of development. Restoring the WTO dispute settlement mechanism, especially the revival of its Appellate body, is also crucial for the organisation's efficient functioning.

The push for a change in the definition of "developing country" under the principle of special and differential treatment (S&DT), aimed at upgrading certain developing countries, will deeply impinge on the status of emerging economies such as India, China, South Africa, Turkey, Egypt, et cetera. The assumption that some countries have benefited immensely from the WTO rules since its formation in 1995 is flawed, at least in the case of India. And even if there may be no consensus of views on measuring 'development', India will remain a developing country no matter which parameter is used. The way out for India could be to negotiate a longer phase-out period, or an acceptable formula based on development indices, etc.

Among the current negotiations at the

WTO, nothing commands more attention than the fisheries subsidies negotiations. India can lead the way in finding a landing zone by urging others to settle for the lowest common denominator, while seeking permanent protection for traditional and artisanal farmers who are at the subsistence level of survival. The danger lies in seeking larger carve-outs, which, if universally applicable to all, could result in developed countries ploughing precious fisheries resources in international waters.

The consensus-based decision-making in the WTO, which makes dissension by even one member stop the process in its track, gives developing countries some heft and influence at par with developed countries. The D-G would need to tread cautiously on this front, as some will allude to the successful implementation of the Trade Facilitation Agreement in 2017, that allowed member countries to take commitments in a phased manner in accordance with their domestic preparedness.

Lessons from COVID-19

The COVID-19 crisis has revealed the urgent and enduring need for international cooperation and collaboration, as no country can fight the pandemic alone. The D-G can help mitigate the effects of the pandemic by giving clear directions on ensuring that supply chains remain free and open, recommending a standard harmonised system with classification for vaccines, and by the removal of import/export restrictions.

Voluntary sharing and pooling of Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) is required for any global effort to tackle the pandemic, but with the fear of vaccine nationalism looming large, several countries are seeking to secure future supply of leading COVID-19 vaccines. Our Prime Minister's reiteration that India's vaccine production and delivery capacity will help the whole of humanity will require the D-G to play a responsible role in removing barriers to intellectual property and securing a legal framework within the WTO TRIPS Agreement, by lending salience to the effective interpretation of Articles 8 and 31 of the Agreement, that allow compulsory licensing and agreement of a patent without the authorisation of its owner under certain conditions.

Most immediately, the next D-G will need to build trust among its members that the WTO needs greater engagement by all countries, to stitch fair rules in the larger interest of all nations and thwart unfair trade practices of a few.

Dammu Ravi is Additional Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs

The long road to food security

Despite being self-sufficient in agricultural production, India's hunger levels are alarming

RAJMOHAN UNNITHAN

India's malnutrition levels are almost twice the level of many African countries. The Global Hunger Index 2020 report has given India the 94th rank among 107 countries, much behind Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Nepal. As per a UN-FAO report, 194 million people go hungry every day in India, comprising about 23% of the world's undernourished population. This flies in the face of the landmark Right to Food case, in which the Supreme Court declared Right to Food as part of Article 21 of the Constitution, that is, the Right to Life.

It is a grim failure that 73 years after Independence, India continues to be gripped by a paradox of plenty in the realm of food security. The country reached self-sufficiency in agricultural production some time ago, and yet, mass hunger is rampant across States. India produces more than the estimated amount required to feed the entire population (in 2018-19, India produced 283.37 million tons of food grains). The country ranks first in millets and second in rice and wheat production in the world. India's horticultural crops, such as fruits and vegetables, are also in surplus (over 313 million tons in 2018-19).

Struggling ecosystem

However, according to data released by the Department of Consumer Affairs, almost 62,000 tons of food grains were damaged in Food Corporation of India warehouses between 2011 and 2017. In 2016-17 alone, over 8,600 tons of food grains were lost. A study conducted by the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations found that while there is a proliferation of millions of ineligible and bogus ration cards, there are also, simultaneously, a multitude of genuinely poor families that do not even possess ration cards. These data expose the poor management of the food ecosystem in India.

To ensure India's food security, a two-pronged policy is needed. Firstly, the government must ensure remunerative prices for farm produce. For this, the Minimum Support Price (MSP) should be made available to

the maximum range of farm products. This will enhance the purchasing power of farmers so that they can purchase essential food items. Secondly, it is crucial that India improves the Public Distribution System and Public Procurement.

The Annapurna scheme

The situation could be further improved by revamping the Annapurna Yojana. Under this scheme, ten kilograms of food grains are distributed per month free of cost to destitute persons above 65 years of age, with no or meagre subsistence. The Centre has fixed the target of 20% of the number of persons who are eligible for National Old Age Pension, but who are not receiving such pension. It may be noted that as far as Kerala is concerned, social security pension covers almost all the sections of people in the community. Thus, almost all eligible people are excluded from the Annapurna Yojana. This problem demands immediate attention and resolution.

Further, according to the Global Pulse Confederation, pulses are part of a healthy, balanced diet and have been shown to have an important role in preventing illnesses such as cancer, diabetes, and heart disease. The World Food Programme (WFP) includes 60 grams of pulses in its typical food basket, alongside cereals, oils and sugar and salt. The Background Note for the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Food, Consumer Affairs and Public Distribution titled Price Rise of Essential Commodities - Causes and Effects (2020), says, "With dietary shift in favour of proteins, in an otherwise vegetarian society, the consumption of pulses is growing but the production has not kept pace ... However, production of pulses has increased during the last two years which has resulted partly from continuous increase in MSP, increased procurement, and creation of buffer stock of pulses." Hence, this is an ideal time to include pulses too in our Public Distribution System.

Rajmohan Unnithan is an MP and member of the Department Related Standing Committee on Food, Consumer Affairs and Public Distribution

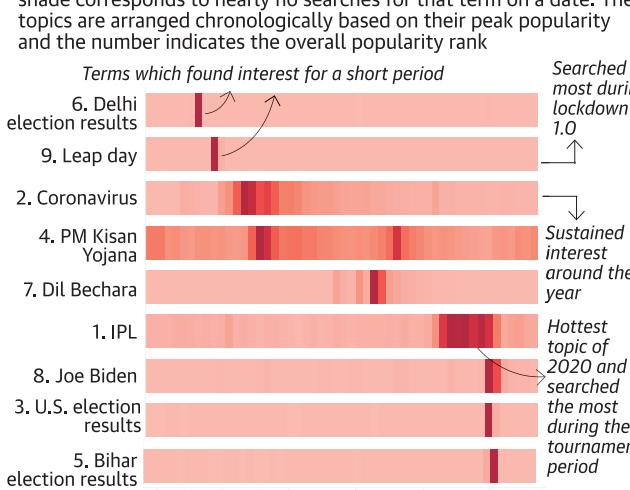


DATA POINT

What Indians searched for in 2020

The most googled term globally in 2020, understandably, was *Coronavirus*. However, in India, it was pushed to the second spot, with the cricket-crazy country searching more about the *Indian Premier League*, making it the hottest topic of the year. However, the term *Coronavirus* continued to garner sustained interest throughout the year, unlike terms such as *Dil Bechara* and *Money Heist* whose popularity waned once the related events ended. *Dil Bechara* and *Money Heist* were the most looked up movie and tv/web show, respectively. By Naresh Singaravelu, Sumanth Sen & Vignesh Radhakrishnan

MOST GOOGLED | The chart shows the most searched terms by Indians in 2020. The darker the shade, the higher the popularity of the topic/trend at that specific time. The darkest shade represents the peak popularity recorded for a search term this year. The lightest shade corresponds to nearly no searches for that term on a date. The topics are arranged chronologically based on their peak popularity and the number indicates the overall popularity rank.



Source: Google trends. Read about how Google arrives at these terms here : shorturl.at/geKLN

SEARCH CATEGORY | The table lists the ten most searched topics under a category. For instance, under the search category "how to," the topic that found the most interest was "how to make Paneer"

NEAR ME | 1. Food shelters near me | 2. COVID test near me | 3. Crackers shop near me | 4. Liquor shops near me | 5. Night shelter near me | 6. Grocery stores near me | 7. Gym equipment near me | 8. Broadband connection near me | 9. Laptop shop near me | 10. Furniture store near me

HOW TO... | 1. How to make paneer | 2. How to increase immunity | 3. How to make dalgona coffee | 4. How to link PAN card with Aadhaar card | 5. How to make sanitizer at home | 6. How to recharge FASTag | 7. How to prevent coronavirus | 8. How to apply [for] e-pass | 9. How to make jalebi | 10. How to make cake at home

MOVIES | 1. Dil Bechara | 2. Soorarai Pottru | 3. Tanhaji | 4. Shakuntala Devi | 5. Gunjan Saxena | 6. Laxmi | 7. Sadak 2 | 8. Baaghi 3 | 9. Extraction | 10. Gulabo Sitabo

NEWS EVENTS | 1. Indian Premier League | 2. Coronavirus | 3. U.S. Presidential elections | 4. Nirbhaya case | 5. Beirut explosion | 6. Lockdown | 7. China-India skirmishes | 8. Bushfires in Australia | 9. Locust swarm attack | 10. Ram Mandir

PERSONALITIES | 1. Joe Biden | 2. Arnab Goswami | 3. Kanika Kapoor | 4. Kim Jong-un | 5. Amitabh Bachchan | 6. Rashid Khan | 7. Rhea Chakraborty | 8. Kamala Harris | 9. Ankita Lokhande | 10. Kangana Ranaut

TV/WEB SERIES | 1. Money Heist | 2. Scam 1992: The Harshad Mehta Story | 3. Bigg Boss 14 | 4. Mirzapur | 5. Paatal Lok | 6. Sex Education | 7. Breathe: Into the Shadows | 8. Dark | 9. Bandish Bandits | 10. Special Ops

WHAT IS... | 1. What is coronavirus | 2. What is binod | 3. What is plasma therapy | 4. What is COVID-19 | 5. What is CAA | 6. What is colon infection | 7. What is solar eclipse | 8. What is NRC | 9. What is hantavirus | 10. What is nepotism

The Hindu

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO DECEMBER 17, 1970

Court's Verdict on Princes No Defeat for Govt., Says PM

The Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi today strongly refuted the Opposition contention that the judgment of the Supreme Court constituted "a defeat" or created any "predicament" to the Government.

In forthright replies to queries during a calling attention motion in the Rajya Sabha to-day, Mrs. Gandhi said she had herself said in her speech introducing the Privy Purse Abolition Bill that the Government "expected obstacles in every step in our march towards progress and in bringing better life for our people."

Mrs. Gandhi told an excited House that they had to look into all aspects of the judgment which would take some time.

The Prime Minister and the Minister of State, Mr. R.N. Mirdha, were not prepared to be drawn into a discussion on what exactly the Government proposed to do. But Mrs. Gandhi indicated that the Constitution was very clear on the issue and "I think we can proceed according to the constitution." The constitution, she said, was not a static thing. It had been changed in other countries and in our country too, "If it is considered necessary to change it, certainly we will do it."

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO DECEMBER 17, 1920

The Punjab Situation

Banquet to L.G.

(Associated Press of India.)

Nabha, December 15.:— Speaking at the State Banquet given to Sir Edward and Lady Maclagan His Highness the Maharaja of Nabha referred to the great conciliation work undertaken last year in order to bring the Punjab to a normal state by means of sympathy and tact as a result of which the public had baptised him as merciful Maclagan. His Highness

FROM PAGE ONE

SC moots panel for farmer-govt. talks

Chief Justice Bobde responded, "Farmers perceive that it [the legislation] is against them... Your negotiations have not worked, they are bound to fail. If you [government] are willing to negotiate, have some farmer leaders before us who want to negotiate..."

"The government has not blocked the road," Mr. Mehta replied.

"Then who has prevented the farmers from coming..." Chief Justice Bobde asked the law officer.

Advocate Rahul Mehra, for the Delhi government, submitted that the farmers were suffering largely in the interest of the country. A severe winter was setting in, he pointed out. Mr. Mehta interjected to say that Mr. Mehra was submitting as if he was appearing for the protesting farmers.

Chief Justice Bobde asked the lawyers to take their exchange outside the court while noting that the Delhi government had "nothing to do with the resolution of the dispute [on the farm laws]."

However, the court ex-

Covaxin Phase-1 trials show promising results

It added that the secondary outcomes were immunogenicity based on the anti-IgG SI response (detected with an enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay or ELISA), and wild-type virus neutralisation or microneutralisation and plaque reduction neutralisation assays. Cell-mediated responses were also evaluated. The virus strain (NIV-2020-770) was isolated from a COVID-19 patient and sequenced at the ICMR-National Institute of Virology (NIV). Bio-Safety Level-3 manufacturing facilities and a well-established Vero cell manufacturing platform, with proven safety in other licensed live and inactivated

vaccines, aided in the rapid development of BBV152.

One serious adverse event was reported. The participant was vaccinated on July 30. Five days later, the participant reported symptoms of COVID-19 and was found to be positive for SARS-CoV-2, according to the findings. The symptoms were mild in nature, but the patient was admitted to hospital on August 15. The participant was discharged on August 22 following a negative nucleic acid result. The event was not causally associated with the vaccine, the findings showed.

Bharat Biotech is currently conducting Phase-3 trials.

JEE (Main) to be held four times in 2021

There would be several changes in the question paper pattern. "Keeping in mind various decisions taken by various boards across the country regarding amendments to the syllabus, the NTA has decided that the question paper will contain 90 questions, in which the candidate will have to attempt a total of 75 questions," the testing agency said. Every subject would

have two sections. One would have multiple choice questions, while the second would require students to fill in a numerical value. The choice would be given in this second section, which would also not have any negative marking. It would be a computer-based test, except for the drawing test for B.Arch entrance. The examination would be held in 13 languages for the first time.

Cabinet clears auction of telecom spectrum

Successful bidders would have the option of paying the entire amount upfront or a certain amount in 16 equal annual instalments after a two-year moratorium, it said. They would also have to pay 3% of the adjusted gross revenue, excluding wireless services, as the spectrum usage charge.

The auction would help boost spectrum availability with telecom operators enabling improvements in 4G services, said V. Sridhar, Professor at the Centre for IT and Public Policy at IIIT-Bangalore.

"Spectrum holding per operator in a service area in our country is well below the international average," observed Mr. Sridhar. "So any further auctioning of spectrum is welcome," he added.

Panel to discuss Vista project

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI
The Central Public Works Department's proposal for constructing a new common central secretariat and redeveloping Rajpath was considered by the Central Vista Committee on Wednesday, however, no decision was taken, according to a source familiar with the matter. The source added the members

LDF gets upper hand in local body polls in Kerala

It wins a majority in three of the six Corporations

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The CPI(M)-led Left Democratic Front (LDF) has managed to gain a clear upper hand in the local body elections in Kerala, even as the State gears up for the crucial Assembly election next year.

"The government has not blocked the road," Mr. Mehta replied.

"Then who has prevented the farmers from coming..." Chief Justice Bobde asked the law officer.

Advocate Rahul Mehra, for the Delhi government, submitted that the farmers were suffering largely in the interest of the country. A severe winter was setting in, he pointed out. Mr. Mehta interjected to say that Mr. Mehra was submitting as if he was appearing for the protesting farmers.

Chief Justice Bobde asked the lawyers to take their exchange outside the court while noting that the Delhi government had "nothing to do with the resolution of the dispute [on the farm laws]."

However, the court ex-



Celebration time: LDF activists celebrating in Kochi on Wednesday. ■ VIBHU H.

nur Corporation, winning 34 seats. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) failed in its bid to seize the Thiruvananthapuram Corporation, having been pushed to second place.

The LDF also won 35 of the municipalities and 10 district panchayats, in addition to wresting 108 of the 152

blocks and 514 of the 941 grama panchayats. The UDF was able to put in a decent performance in the municipalities, winning 45 against the LDF's tally of 35.

Lost ground

The UDF has lost significant ground in the State, compared to the 2015 elections.

In the Thiruvananthapuram Corporation, for instance, the UDF's seat tally has slipped from 21 to 10.

The BJP retained the Palakkad municipality and seized the Pandalam municipality by winning 18 of the 33 wards.

BJP candidates also won in 23 grama panchayats.

Mani proves his worth

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOTTAYAM

Three months before the local body elections in the State, the least likely scenario that the United Democratic Front (UDF) would have foreseen was the Kerala Congress (M), led by Jose K. Mani, breaking away from its fold to join the rival coalition.

The outfit has evidently demonstrated its might once again by winning the

majority of the seats where it contested. More importantly, the KC(M) helped the Left Democratic Front (LDF) breach many a UDF bastion, including the Kottayam district panchayat and the Pala municipality, in the process.

The faction also wrested a couple of seats from the UDF in the Thodupuzha municipality – a bastion of the rival KC(M) group led by P.J. Joseph.

could not be counted due to defective EVMs. The votes will be counted on the same day.

All newly-elected members will be sworn in on December 21, the Commission said. On Wednesday, it also issued guidelines for the swearing-in of the elected members.

AIIMS scientists find lead in milk samples in Eluru

Pesticides harmful to humans found in tomato, brinjal'

RAJULAPUDI SRINIVAS
ELURU

Scientists of the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) have revealed that lead was noticed in milk samples collected in Eluru town and its neighbouring villages in West Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh.

With the outbreak of the undiagnosed illness in Eluru and its adjoining areas on December 4, experts and doctors from various organisations rushed to the district and collected food, water, milk, blood and other samples.

The AIIMS, New Delhi, officials, who tested the samples, reportedly found the presence of lead in milk. The experts recommended geo-tagging of the samples collected from the affected areas.

Officials of the National Institute of Nutrition (NIN),



Long wait: People waiting for details about their relatives at the Eluru Government General Hospital. ■ GIRI K.V.S.

who tested samples of food items like meat, chicken, fish, shrimp and vegetables, found the presence of pesticides in some vegetables.

"Pesticides which are harmful to human beings were found in tomatoes and brinjal. We suspect that the patients suffered epileptic attack, seizures, convulsions, vomiting, fever, dizziness and other symptoms

due to the pesticides," the NIN authorities said.

Experts revealed their findings during a virtual review meeting with Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, Health Minister Alla Kali Krishna Srinivas, Collector Revu Mutyala Raju, Joint Collector Himmanshu Shukla and other officials in Eluru on Wednesday.

The number of polling stations required is 34,320 and 1,35,000 respectively, according to an additional affidavit filed in the High Court by Principal Secretary (Panchayat Raj and Rural Development) Gopal Krishna Dwivedi in the matter arising from the proposed conduct of the elections in February 2021.

The government, strongly opposed to the February

schedule, said global trends indicate a likely resurgence of the virus and the danger posed by a "second wave" between December and March 2021 to the lives of the election duty staff and the general public.

Proceedings issued

The government's basic argument is that holding the elections in February, for which State Election Commissioner N. Ramesh Kumar had already issued proceedings last month, may clash with the COVID-19 vaccination drive that is said to be around the corner.

The government has informed the court that it is contemplating putting in place strict COVID-19 control measures in view of the possibility of the pandemic staging a comeback. Conducting elections in February is therefore not advisable, Mr. Dwivedi said in the affidavit.

IN BRIEF



Increase number of Sabarimala pilgrims: HC KOCHI

A Division Bench of the Kerala High Court on Wednesday ordered that the number of pilgrims allowed to have darshan at Sabarimala be enhanced to 5,000 from 2,000 a day from December 20. The Bench issued the directive on a batch of writ petitions by the Ayappa Seva Sangham and others seeking to raise the limit of pilgrims being allowed to visit Sabarimala by the State government in view of the COVID-19 situation.

CCB busts gang hoarding ₹1 crore worth of drugs

BENGALURU
The Central Crime Branch (CCB) police busted another inter-State drug racket and arrested four dealers. The accused were allegedly hoarding a stash of drugs worth ₹1 crore in a rented house for New Year revellers. The police seized 5.6 kg of hashish oil and 3.3 kg of marijuana during the raid. Acting on a tip-off, a CCB team on Tuesday raided the house at Venkategowda Layout in Kempapura near Hebbal, Bengaluru.

SC notice to Centre, States on constructions

NEW DELHI
The Supreme Court on Wednesday asked the Centre and States to respond to a plea alleging that regularisation of unauthorised constructions is resulting in massive corruption and damage to natural resources. A Bench issued notice to the Ministries of Environment and Forests and Housing and Urban Affairs, the CBI, the National Disaster Management Authority and the Telangana, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh governments.

A detailed probe should be ordered into the horrific incident, including the allegations of the previous instances of immoral behaviour and misuse of smartphones by the accused and also into the attempts by some of his associates to hush up the heinous offence, said a student union leader in Kothagudem.

'Sexual abuse' by headmaster triggers outrage

The 40-year-old, who is accused of sexually abusing five minor girls, was arrested on Wednesday

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BHADRADRI-KOTHAGUDEM

The horrific incident of the "sexual abuse" of five girl students of a State-run school in Laxmidipavalli mandal in Telangana, allegedly by the headmaster, has sparked outrage and exposed the inadequacies in supervisory mechanism for monitoring the administration of such schools.

The alleged sexual abuse of the five girl students by the 40-year-old headmaster on the pretext of "online instruction assistance" in the last couple of days triggered

anger among various student unions and women's organisations.

Accused booked

The accused was booked under the provisions of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POSCO) Act based on a complaint lodged by the parents of a Class 2 student on Tuesday. He was arrested on Wednesday.

The headmaster was allegedly beaten up by the aggrieved parents of a Class 2 student on the school premises on Tuesday. The accused allegedly

took advantage of the poor financial condition of the parents of the five students.

He asked them to send their children to the school on alternate days for online classes as they did not own smartphones, sources said. He is said to have repeatedly subjected the children, all under the age of 12, to sexual abuse.

One of the girls, who suffered the intimidating tactics of the accused in silence, fell seriously ill on Tuesday. That was when the brutality came

to light, sources said.

The incident exposed serious lapses, such as the acute shortage of supervisory officials in the School Education Department, SFI district convenor Bhupendra said.

Not single mandal in the tribal-dominated district had a full-time Mandal Education Officer (MEO), he said. Key district-level posts have remained vacant for a long time, he pointed out.

"The accused responsible for the cruel act against chil-

dren of the State-run school should be dismissed from service as he has no right to continue in the noble profession of teaching," said AIDWA district president M. Renuka.

A detailed probe should be ordered into the horrific incident, including the allegations of the previous instances of immoral behaviour and misuse of smartphones by the accused and also into the attempts by some of his associates to hush up the heinous offence, said a student union leader in Kothagudem.

Communications satellite to be launched today

ISRO will launch CMS-01 at 3.41 p.m.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) will launch a communications satellite, CMS-01, on board the PSLV-C50 from the second launch pad of the Satish Dhawan Space Centre, SHAR on Thursday.

The launch is scheduled to take place at 3.41 p.m. and the 25-hour countdown for the launch began at 2.21 p.m. on Wednesday.

Frequency spectrum

CMS-01 is a communications satellite envisaged for providing services in extended C Band of the frequency spectrum and its coverage will include the Indian

mainland, and the Andaman & Nicobar and Lakshadweep islands, ISRO said. The satellite is expected to have a life of more than seven years.

'XL' mode

CMS-01 is the 42nd communication satellite of India and the PSLV, on its 52nd mission, has been configured in its 'XL' mode with six strap-on motors.

The satellite is expected to be placed into the orbit around 20 minutes after lift-off.

On November 7, ISRO had placed into orbit India's Earth Observation Satellite, EOS-01, and nine other customer satellites.

Reports cite violations of labour laws at Wistron factory in Kolar

Violation of contract labour, minimum wages laws found

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BENGALURU

Inspection reports, separately prepared by the Labour Department and the Factories and Boilers Departments, after violence broke out at the Wistron Infocomm Manufacturing Ltd. facility at Narasapuram in Kolar district recently, point to serious violations of the provisions of various labour laws in force.

While the Labour Department inspected the factory that manufactures iPhones on December 12, the day when the violence broke out, the Factories Department points to manpower in the factory increasing from the licenced

capacity of 5,000 to 10,500 in a short span. "The change in working hours from 8 to 12 hours shift on continuous basis has not been brought to the notice of the department, and necessary exemptions under the Factories Act have not been taken to carry out overtime work from the workers," the report noted.

Restart in a fortnight

The plant could restart in a fortnight, government sources said. "The focus is to get it restarted as 10,000 workers are on the streets, anxiously waiting to see if they will be able to save their jobs," the sources said.

out, the Factories Department prepared a separate inspection report on December 13.

The Labour Department's report submitted by officials at Kolar points to a host of violations of the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970, the Minimum Wages Act, 1948, and Rules 1958, the Equal Wages Act, 1976, and Rules 1976 and the Industrial Employment (Standing Order) Act, 1946.

The report from the Factories Department points to manpower in the factory increasing from the licenced

SC move a moral victory: farmer unions

'Setting up new panel will not resolve concerns'

PRISCILLA JEBARAJ
NEW DELHI

Farmer leaders welcomed the Supreme Court's observations on Wednesday as a "moral victory", but said that setting up new committee as proposed by the top court would not resolve their concerns. They also sent an official rejection of the Centre's proposals to amend the three farm Acts, vowing to continue their agitation until the laws are repealed.

"The Supreme Court advice to the government is a moral victory for farmers," said a statement from the All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee, one of the protesting farmer groups. "Committee forma-



Standing firm: Farmers and their families at the Singhu border on Wednesday. • SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

tion will be fruitful only after the laws are withdrawn and the representatives of all national and regional farmers' organisations are represented in a decisive manner and should therefore be done only after repeal of the Acts," it said. Several farm leaders refused to comment until they had seen a copy of the SC proposal, but others seemed

to reject the proposal. In private, they expressed fear that the petition in the court had been stage-managed by the government to end the protests.

"The SC can and must decide on the constitutionality of the three farm Acts. But it is not for the judiciary to decide on the feasibility and desirability of these laws.

'Govt. trying to divide farmers'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH

Punjab Congress chief Sunil Jakhar said when the country is faced with the farmers' protest, the BJP government is trying to create divisions within the ranks of the farmers, particularly among those from Punjab and Haryana.

That's between the farmers and their elected leaders. SC-monitored negotiation would be a wrong path," Swaraj India president Yogendra Yadav said in a tweet.

"Setting up a new committee by the court is not a solution," said Abhimanyu Kohar, spokesperson for the Rashtriya Kisan Mahasangh, adding that a committee of

farm unions have been engaged in several rounds of talks with the government.

Earlier in the morning, the Samyukt Kisan Morcha officially rejected the Centre's written proposal for amendments.

"We want the government to stop maligning the movement and stop parallel negotiations with other farmer organisations," said the email.

Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar, addressing a farmers' gathering organised by the BJP in Gwalior, said the farmers of Punjab were being misled, and confusion was being created among them. However, millions of farmers are supporting the agrarian reforms. Farmers are eager to use these laws, so the Congress and some other Opposition parties are creating a deadlock," he stated.

"We [U.K. government] respect the fact that the reforms going through [the Indian] system here are domestic reforms," he said in response to a question from *The Hindu* on whether the protests had come up in bilateral talks in Delhi.

"Your [Indian] politics is in some sense, because of the Indian diaspora in Britain, our [U.K.] politics," Mr. Raab emphasised in an interaction with journalists. India had a "vibrant heritage of peaceful protests and vigorous debate", which the U.K. has "watched...with interest", he observed.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) did not refer to the issue in its press statement on the meeting between the Indian and U.K. Foreign Ministers on Tuesday. Nor did it respond to a request for a comment on Mr. Raab's remarks.

'Internal issue'

Earlier in the month, the MEA spokesperson said that remarks by foreign leaders, including Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and other foreign politicians, on the farmers protests were

'Farmer protests part of U.K. politics because of diaspora'

British Foreign Secretary says stir is being closely watched

SUHASINI HAIDAR
NEW DELHI

Agricultural reforms are India's internal matter but the protests here are part of British politics too, said the visiting British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab, who "discussed" the ongoing farmers protests at Delhi's borders during talks with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar.

Mr. Raab, who met Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday, said the U.K. respected India's "heritage" of protests and debates, and was watching the situation closely.

"We [U.K. government]



Warm welcome: Prime Minister Narendra Modi greeting U.K. Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab on Wednesday. • REUTERS/PIB

"ill-informed" and "unwarranted", and the matter was an "internal" issue for India. However, Mr. Raab said that given that members of the Indian diaspora had joined protests in the U.K. over the farm Bills, this was now an issue in British politics as well. Over the past two weeks, 36 British Members of Parliament, mostly from the Opposition Labour Party had written to Mr. Raab, asking him to raise the agricultural laws, which they called a "death warrant" for farmers, while the leader of the Liberal Democratic party Ed Davey reportedly criticised the handling of the protests by Indian "militarised police" and the need to respect "human rights".

The latest position in cases against Indian fugitives currently in the U.K., including former Kingfisher group owner Vijay Mallya, whose extradition to India has been held up by the British government for more than six months now, had also been discussed during the British Foreign Secretary's two-day visit to Delhi, he said.

"There's still some legal issues outstanding. Obviously, they are independent from politics or political intervention. But we would like to see those expedited as swiftly as possible," Mr. Raab told journalists.

Mr. Raab is in Delhi to prepare for the visit of Prime Minister Boris Johnson to India as the chief guest of the Republic Day parade next month. He said that the U.K.-India ties on trade, maritime cooperation in the Indo-Pacific as a "force for good" and climate change cooperation, were all set to grow, and welcomed the India-U.K. collaboration on vaccines for COVID-19.

Vaccine collaboration

During his visit, Mr. Raab announced an expert-level India-U.K. "vaccine hub", and visited a Delhi health clinic where the Oxford University-AstraZeneca vaccines would be administered once they are made available by the Pune-based Serum Institute. Mr. Raab said the Serum Institute and Oxford University partnership demonstrates the UK-India relationship at its best.

5-year-old 'farmer' wields the mike

Prabh Vir Singh Dhillon and his brother join their father at the Singhu border

HEMANI BHANDARI
NEW DELHI

Among the youngest protesters at the Singhu border is five-year-old Prabh Vir Singh Dhillon, who has come with his family of 10 to join the farmers' agitation. On a small speaker given to him, he demands his rights.

"Saddha haq, aithe rakh (it's our right, keep it here)," he shouts on the speaker, while sitting inside a tractor with his 11-year-old brother Uday Pratap Singh Dhillon and father Jasbir Singh, 35, residents of Roop Nagar.

Prabh does not understand much of what is happening or why he is here but he knows, "We are here against black laws", and he is very excited to be part of the protest, his father said. "We



Every bite counts: Five-year-old Prabh Bir Singh Dhillon with his family at the Singhu border. • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

keep coming and going. This is my third time here. These two were crying to come here since the first round but I brought them only now, a week ago," Mr. Singh said.

Uday, on the other hand, understands a little, and said

that he had wanted to be part of the struggle his father and elders of the village were going through. "I know what my father and grandfather are here for. They are against Prime Minister Narendra Modi's laws for farming," he said.

said hesitantly. The family of 10, which includes Mr. Singh's brothers, uncles and cousins, have come equipped with items the children could need, including a laptop that the older child uses for his online classes.

"My younger cousin sets up the laptop using phone Internet. He [Uday] has classes for two hours in the morning and then the teacher gives homework also, which he tries to do in the evening," Mr. Singh said.

Talking about little Prabh's online classes for pre-nursery, Mr. Singh laughed and said that all he was doing these days was shouting into the speaker. "I also eat kadhi chawal and poori," Prabh chimed in.

Gurdwara leader dies near Singhu

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GURUGRAM

A 65-year-old director of a gurdwara in Karnal allegedly died by suicide at the Singhu border here on Wednesday. He was reportedly perturbed over the plight of the farmers agitating against the new laws.

Baba Ram Singh, a Sikh religious leader, is said to have shot himself around 3 p.m. and was declared dead at a hospital in Panihat, said Sant Gurmeet Singh, who took him to the hospital. "He left behind a note which we handed over to the police," he said.

Suicide prevention helpline: Sanjivini, Society for Mental Health, 011-4076 9002, Monday-Saturday, 10 am-7.30 pm

Banks haven't shown apathy, says RBI

IN BRIEF



Congress slams hike in price of LPG cylinders

NEW DELHI
The Congress on Wednesday alleged that the Narendra Modi government has not only launched an all-out attack on *annadatas* (farmers) but also on *annaprasas* (homemakers) with a ₹100 increase in the price cooking gas within a span of 15 days.

Trinamool's Suvendu Adhikari resigns as MILA KOLKATA

Suvendu Adhikari of the Trinamool Congress on Wednesday submitted his resignation as an MLA. He had earlier resigned from the Mamata Banerjee Cabinet in West Bengal.

Bihar Cong. leader urges scrapping of prohibition

PATNA
State Congress Legislature Party leader Ajit Sharma on Wednesday wrote a letter to Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar asking for prohibition laws to be scrapped as they were a "tool" to mint money.

No major face-off in the east, says GoC

Precautionary deployment' done

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

Lt. Gen. Anil Chauhan, General Officer Commanding, Eastern Command, on Wednesday said there had been no intrusion or a major face-off in the area under the Command since the Ladakh incident involving the Indian Army and the People's Liberation Army (PLA).

"The Eastern Command is responsible for defending the LAC [Line of Actual Control] in the Sikkim and Arunachal sectors. There has been no intrusion in this part of the LAC," he told presspersons on the sidelines of an event to mark Vijay Divas at Fort William.

Both the Armies had taken "some precautionary deployment" but there was gradual de-escalation due to the winter. "Neither they nor we can deploy because of the snow alongside the LAC." The Indian Army was fully "prepared to beat any challenge during winter," he said.

Deployment on the LAC,



especially in Arunachal, was a bit different from the eyeball-to-eyeball deployment on the Line of Control (LoC) with Pakistan, he pointed out.

Asked about the Doklam issue, he stressed that it was "classically a bilateral issue between China and Bhutan", and India's involvement came "only when we have to decide the trijunction between the three nations". The Royal Government of Bhutan and the Royal Bhutan Army have taken sufficient steps to protect their interest in this particular region, he said.

List of 'trusted' telecom gear firms planned

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Cabinet Committee on Security on Wednesday approved the National Security Directive on Telecommunication Sector mandating telecom service providers to procure equipment from sources designated to be "trusted", Telecom Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said here on Wednesday.

In order to maintain the integrity of the supply chain security, the government will declare a list of trusted sources/products for the benefit of telecom service providers," Mr. Prasad said.

Letter No. 2172/T-252(FDR)/UPRDA/2020
Dated 14.12.2020
Corrigendum
E-Procurement notice No. 2161/T-252(FDR)/UPRDA/2020
Dated 15.12.2020
Work description-Notice inviting online offers for setting of a PMU.
In reference of the above e-procurement notice, the last date for submission of the Bid online is being revised as 15.01.2021 till 3:00 PM. Other terms and conditions will remain same.

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Wednesday maintained in the Supreme Court that there had not been a single case of COVID-19-related financial stress to which banks have shown an "apathetic" attitude.

A three-judge Bench, led by Justice Ashok Bhushan, is hearing several pleas to industry and business sectors, including power and real estate, to extend the moratorium.

He asked whether some of these sectors had placed on record anything to reveal how wobbly they were even before the pandemic.

Mr. Salve submitted that

any resolution had to be through restructuring of debt. Private banks dealt with resolutions in line with their norms.

The Indian Banks Association, represented by senior advocate Harish Salve, said these pleas extend beyond the financial stress caused by the pandemic.

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In his turn, senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, for the State Bank of India, made a rather impassioned plea in support of the small deposi-

tors, who form the "backbone" of the banking system. "Small depositors are faceless in these proceedings. It is not a case of borrowers versus bank. They are the backbone of the financial system. Banks have to give interest to these depositors," he said.

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VHP to collect funds for work on Ram temple

India goes down two ranks in Human Development Index

But country will move up eight places when adjusted for green impact

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

India dropped two ranks in the United Nations' Human Development Index this year, standing at 131 out of 189 countries. However, if the Index were adjusted to assess the planetary pressures caused by each nation's development, India would move up eight places in the ranking, according to the report.

For the first time, the United Nations Development Programme introduced a new metric to reflect the impact caused by each country's per-capita carbon emissions and its material footprint, which measures the amount of fossil fuels, metals and other resources used to make the goods and services it consumes.

This paints a "less rosy, but clearer assessment" of human progress, said UNDP India's representative Shoko Nada.

Miles to go

Though India improved its absolute value of the Human Development Index (0.645 in 2019 from 0.642 the previous year), it dropped a place in the overall ranking

Country	HDI rank (2019)	Change from 2018
Russia	52	-3
Sri Lanka	72	1
Brazil	84	0
China	85	2
South Africa	114	1
India	131	-2
Bangladesh	133	1
Nepal	142	1
Pakistan	154	0

Norway, which tops the HDI, falls 15 places if this metric is used, leaving Ireland at the top of the table. In fact, 50 countries would drop entirely out of the "very high human development group" category, using this new metric, called the Planetary Pressures-adjusted HDI, or PHDI.

Australia falls 72 places in the ranking, while the Unit-

ed States and Canada would fall 45 and 40 places respectively, reflecting their disproportionate impact on natural resources.

The oil and gas-rich Gulf States also fell steeply.

China would drop 16 places from its current ranking of 85.

China's net emissions (8 gigatonnes) are 34% below its territorial emissions (12.5

gigatonnes) compared with 19% in India and 15% in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Strain on resources

"No country has yet been able to achieve a very high level of development without putting a huge strain on natural resources. We have to be the first generation to do things right," said Ms. Nada. She praised India's record in achieving its carbon emissions goals so far, and urged Indian policy makers to take the path of sustainable development.

The HDI itself is an assessment of a nation's health, education and standards of living.

Although this year's report covers 2019 only, and does not account for the impact of COVID, it projected that in 2020, global HDI would fall below for the first time in the three decades since the Index was introduced.

EC orders action in M.P. cash seizure

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Election Commission on Wednesday said it had directed the authorities to take action on a report by the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) about the use of unaccounted-for cash during the 2019 Madhya Pradesh election.

In a statement, the EC said it had discussed the report by the CBDT that included details of search operations and the "extensive use of unaccounted cash".

"It is reported that these entities/individuals engaged in unauthorised and unaccounted cash contributions to individuals on behalf of certain political party, which is reported to be corroborated during searches against persons by Income Tax department under Section 132 of the Income Tax Act, 1961. The report specifically mentions instances of prima facie involvement/nexus of public/govt. servants in unauthorised/unaccounted cash transactions," the EC said.

Daily COVID-19 fatalities on a sustained fall, says Ministry

'New cases per million in a week is among lowest in world'



Staying cautious: A healthcare worker takes samples at a free testing camp in Bengaluru on Wednesday. ■ MURALI KUMAR K.

positive cases had further shrunk to 3.34%.

In the last 24 hours, 26,382 persons were found to be infected. In the corresponding period, 33,813 new recoveries were registered, ensuring a net decline of 7,818 cases. India recorded fewer than 40,000 daily new cases in the past 17 days.

The new cases per million population in the past seven days is one of the lowest in the world (147). Total recoveries surpassed 94.5 lakh (9,456,449) and the recovery rate has increased to 95.21%. Of the new recovered cases, 76.43% are observed to be concentrated in 10 States and Union Territories.

According to the Ministry, Kerala reported the most single-day recoveries, with 5,066 such cases. In the past 24 hours, 4,395 people recovered in Maharashtra, followed by 2,965 in West Bengal. Of the new cases, 75.84% are from 10 States and UTs. .

IN BRIEF



Cabinet approves N-E power grid project

NEW DELHI
The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs on Wednesday approved the revised estimate of the North Eastern Region Power System Improvement Project at ₹6,700 crore. At a press briefing, I&B Minister Prakash Javadekar said the project would add 2,100 km of transmission lines and 2,000 km of distribution lines.

I-T Department searches pharma company

NEW DELHI
The Income Tax Department has searched a pharmaceutical company and its associated concerns in Chandigarh, Delhi and Mumbai, on the allegation that it acquired 117 acres of "benami" land in Indore. The searches were carried out at 11 places from December 13. The agency gathered evidence establishing that the "benami" entity was a conduit of the company. It also seized ₹4.29 crore in cash and jewellery worth ₹2.21 crore.

Plea in SC for uniform divorce, alimony rules

It asks for laws to be gender neutral

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday, while expressing "great caution", agreed to examine a plea to frame uniform guidelines on divorce, maintenance and alimony for all religions.

The petitioner, advocate A.K. Upadhyay, argued that divorce, maintenance and alimony laws in certain religions discriminated and marginalised women. These anomalies, varying from one religion to another, were violative of the right to equality (Article 14 of the Constitution) and right against discrimination (Article 15) on the basis of religion and gender and right to dignity. Mr. Upadhyay wants the laws on divorce, maintenance and alimony to be "gender-neutral" and "religion-neutral".

However, a three-judge Bench led by Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sharad A. Bobde asked Mr. Upadhyay if what he really wanted was the "destruction of personal laws" itself.

"You want all personal laws to be abolished," Chief Justice Bobde asked senior advocate Pinky Anand, who argued the plea for uniform grounds of divorce. Ms. Anand said the petitioner was only asking for removal of the anomalies in the varied laws of divorce followed in the land.

"But it cannot be done without abolishing personal laws... You are actually asking the court to demolish personal laws", the CJI said.

In an online study conducted by Abdul Ghafur, coordinator of the Chennai Declaration, and infectious diseases consultant at Apollo Hospital, Chennai, among 1,424 health professionals, only 45% said they will take the COVID vaccine as soon as it becomes available. Fifty-five per cent will either defer the vaccination or are yet to decide what to do. About one-tenth of the respondents said they will never take the vaccine.

Interestingly, 869 of the respondents had worked in a COVID hospital or unit.

In India, it is expected that about one crore health-care workers will be vaccinated first. "It is the health-care professionals who should be educating the public on the need for COVID vaccines, since they closely follow the developments and their word carries weight with the people," Dr. Ghafur says. Therefore, vaccine hesitancy in this group is worrisome, also because it might percolate down to the general population.

Responses from participants reflected their con-

Study warns of vaccine hesitancy

'Many even among medical community may not take COVID-19 shot immediately'

RAMYA KANNAN

CHENNAI

As the country readies to implement its COVID-19 vaccination programme, vaccine hesitancy could be an issue that the government needs to address forthwith. The results of an online survey showed that there was considerable hesitation even among the medical community to take the vaccine as soon as it is available.

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Responses from participants reflected their con-

Point of concern

Some highlights from an online study in which 1,424 healthcare professionals participated

- The majority of the respondents (64%) prefer to have an antibody test done before the vaccination
- If the antibody test is positive: 29% will take the vaccine as soon as made available
- If the antibody test is negative: 47% will take the vaccine as soon as made available
- Those who want to defer the vaccination are concerned about the side effects and the efficacy issues
- Less than one-tenth of the respondents (7.7%) stated they would never take the COVID vaccine
- Of the participants who were tested for COVID antigen/PCR, 26.4% were positive

cerns about the efficacy of the vaccine and fear of side effects. "We need to address this urgently, scientifically," he adds, quoting from another recent online survey by the agency Local Circles, where 59% of the public surveyed said they preferred to defer vaccination.

"A vaccine is one of the essential weapons in the armamentarium in our war against the pandemic," Dr. Ghafur says. "Any hesitation

in accepting the vaccine will have a negative consequence on our effort to control the pandemic. We should proactively address the reasons behind this hesitancy."

Chirag Trivedi, president, Indian Society for Clinical Research, adds: "It is very important to give confidence to the public by discussing the robustness of various processes involved in drug/vaccine development – clinical trial designs, conduct, monitoring, analysis, reporting and the regulatory reviews that happen before it is approved. This will make the public aware about the rigorous processes followed for clinical trials, and the approval, as followed by regulators."

Dr. Ghafur points to a mathematical model done by a team of U.S. scientists that has recommended preferentially vaccinating seronegative individuals first. His survey among health professionals also indicated that 64% prefer to do an antibody test before vaccination. That is also an option the government could use, he adds.

SOP issued for evidence in rape cases

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has issued a standard operating procedure (SOP) for proper collection and handling of forensic evidence in sexual assault cases, after it observed that many cases don't end in convictions due to inadequate scientific evidence.

The NHRC said in a statement on Wednesday that it had issued the SOP to all the States and Union Territories (UTs) "in order to ensure effective prosecution leading to conviction in cases of sexual assault on women". The document was prepared after consulting medical experts and sent to the States and UTs for implementation, it said.

The SOP, which was sent to the States and UTs on December 9 by NHRC secretary general Bimbadhar Pradhan, covers victim care, collection of samples and handing over samples to the forensic science laboratories by doctors.

2 new commands to be finalised soon

ADC and MTC being finalised

DINAKAR PERI

NEW DELHI

An Air Defence Command (ADC) and a Maritime Theatre Command (MTC) are in advanced stages of being finalised, according to two official sources. The MTC Commander would operationally report to the Chiefs of Staff Committee consisting of the three Service Chiefs and the Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS) as its permanent Chairman, one of the sources said.

In contrast, it has been proposed that the ADC Commander would operationally report to the Chief of the Air Staff, the other source said. As per a study undertaken, the Navy chief would focus on raise, train and sustain functions and will have a say in the operational aspects of the MTC through the Chiefs of Staff Committee.

Study groups set up
Study groups headed by vice chiefs of the three Services had been set up to work out the modalities of the various theatres and come up with suggestions. The creation of integrated triservice theatre commands is in the charter of the CDS.

The MTC would be a geographic command bringing

57.22% turnout in J&K 7th phase poll

Internet remained suspended in Anantnag as a precautionary measure

PEERZADA ASHIQ

SRINAGAR

Voters continued to turn up in large numbers for the District Development Council (DDC) election in Jammu and Kashmir with the seventh phase on Wednesday registering the highest turnout of 57.22%.

"A voter percentage of 57.22% was recorded in 31 constituencies with the Kashmir division witnessing 39.52% and the Jammu division 71.93%," State Election Commissioner K.K. Sharma said.

The polling pace was slow in the morning in the Kashmir Valley, which is reeling under a cold wave.

Polling booths in Bandipora witnessed long queues. The constituencies in the



Awaiting their turn: People waiting to cast their votes in Naidkhai Bandipora district on Wednesday. ■ NISSAR AHMAD

district saw the highest polling in the Valley at 70.47% followed by Baramulla (59.53%) and Kupwara (59.23%).

"It's a welcome development that people are coming out to vote. There is anger against the Centre and the

BJP among the voters. This election means little to our party that is fighting a bigger cause," senior Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) leader Ghulam Nabi Lone Hanjura said.

The volatile south Kashmir showed a rise in voting

percentage in this phase, with Anantnag recording 22.46%, followed by Kulgam 17.98%, Shopian 6.55% and Pulwama 11.06%.

Apni Party candidate Anees ul Islam Ganai, who was shot at by suspected militants on December 3, voted in Anantnag.

Officials said the Internet remained suspended in Anantnag for two days.

"In the Jammu division, a 74.38% turnout was recorded in Samba, 72.85% in Kathua, 67.75% in Ramban, 73.10% in Rajouri, 69.89% in Kishtwar and 68.66% in Jammu district," Mr. Sharma said.

The final phase will be held on December 19 and the results declared on December 22.

Officials of the Defence Ministry had made a presentation to the panel on the colour of uniforms in the Army, Navy and the Air Force.

Soon after the presentation, when Mr. Oram asked if members had any comments to make, the BJP's Rajya Sabha member Lt. Gen. (retd.) D.P. Vats raised the issue of disparity in uniforms among the three forces and cited the example of the U.S. armed forces.

Mr. Gandhi said politicians should not tell the Army, Navy or the Air Force which uniform to wear.

"It is neither their [politicians'] jurisdiction nor do

Rahul walks out of defence panel meet

'Focus should be on better equipment'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Former Congress president

A rainbow in the library

The Rotary Club of Madras Next Gen collaborates with Aravani Art Project to create vibrant and colourful libraries in the city's Government schools



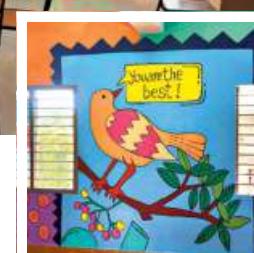
AKILA KANNADASAN

Bright red chairs around yellow tables, sky blue walls with clouds and birds painted on them – what was once a dimly lit library with paint peeling off its walls is now a vibrant space, thanks to the Build A Library project and Aravani Art Project.

The library belongs to Panchayat Union Primary School, Kolapakkam, and is among seven others that received a facelift this year.

For this project, transgender artists from Aravani Art Project (a women and transwomen art collective that does collaborative public art projects) worked with the Rotary Club of Madras Next Gen to add colour to libraries in Government schools. "We created fun, vibrant libraries that are safe spaces for children to learn the arts," says Samia Sait, a member of the club, adding that they also fixed lights, fans, doors and windows that were not in good condition. More importantly, they stocked the libraries with books collected from donors.

"By mid-2021, we hope to refurbish nine more libraries in the city," says Samia. Among their fund-raising drives for the initiative is the upcoming Bake A Library



Safe learning spaces The team plans to refurbish nine libraries next year

■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

event. "We have got home-bakers from the city donating goodies for our cause. We will sell on their behalf and proceeds from the sale will go towards the Build A Library project," she adds.

The event is also a book drive; Samia says that those who are willing can donate books as well. "They can Dunzo the books to us, drop them off at the venue, or we could go collect them from their homes." The bake sale, she says, will be controlled for crowds, so that people can attend and shop in limited numbers. "They can also pre-order on our website and get the goodies home-delivered," she says, adding that 40 home-bakers will be sending goodies such as muffins, cheese cakes, cookies, quiches and more.

The Bake A Library sale is on at Black Orchid, Channeri's Road, on December 19 and 20. For details, call 9841224265. Shop online at bakesale.rotarynextgen.com.

PRIYADARSHINI PAITANDY

Is it even Christmas if the carollers don't sing? While COVID-19 is the Grinch trying to steal Christmas this year, resilient group of carollers from Chennai are determined to fight back and spread Yuletide cheer with their music.

All grand plans of convening in front of an appreciative, live audience had to be shelved but the show will go on. As is the norm this year, carol groups too have taken to online platforms to regale listeners with renditions of popular music synonymous with the season.

For the last 25 years, Kingslin Pon Bhabha, coordinator of Octet Cantabile, and his team members have been participating in carol performances across the country. Every time, just before they get on stage, they have a ritual of praying together. This time, however, the prayer will happen virtually.

Although Kingslin feels that virtual performances are devoid of the actual emotions of a live performance, he is happy that the avenue to do what they love is still open. "During Christmas season we perform live in at least 10 programmes across Chennai, Bengaluru, Coimbatore and cities in Kerala. This time it is just three programmes for which we sent our videos to London, Mumbai and Bengaluru. The recordings were done in our respective homes. This was a new area of exposure for us," he adds.

Some of the carol groups admit that they were in a limbo as they waited for months trying to gauge the situation post lockdown in March. Redeemer Church Choir, which normally starts its practise in August only got around to it last month.

"By November we knew for sure a live event would not be possible. The other choir groups too were resorting to virtual shows," says Emmanuel Ponraj, the choir director. It is the first time in 35 years, since the church began holding this annual event that its pews will be empty and the orchestra's tunes replaced by silence.

"The church has a capacity of 500 but during our concert every year, it overflows with people. There is variety in our programme," says Emmanuel. Keeping the situation in mind, everything is scaled down this time. The choir, which usually features 50 singers, will have only 35 singers; the piano will be the only accom-



A holly jolly Christmas (Clockwise from left) The Redeemer Church Choir shooting for their virtual performance, MMA's Carols by Candlelight and (bottom) Atul Jacob Isaac of MPCS

■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

With carol performances going virtual this Christmas owing to the pandemic, Chennai's chorists are preparing to bring to your home the maximum bandwidth of cheer



puzzle where each person's recording is like pieces coming together to complete the puzzle."

This year's Christmas Pudding will be a 30-minute programme with five pieces done by five ensembles. All the compositions are originals. Like a few other groups, MPCS too has participants from countries like Switzerland, England and Australia. "A song is delegated to each individual. We have to string the songs together," explains Atul. The deadline to complete it is December 20, with the actual show going live on December 23 on MPCS's Instagram and YouTube page.

Other than the heart-warming music and the comfort it provides, the highlights of carol nights also include grand decorations at the venue: Christmas trees, tinsel and, in the case of Madras Musical Association (MMA), candles.

Their annual feature – Carols by Candlelight – is a regular fixture for many Chennaitians. Given the virtual format, it was initially a challenge to bring in this popular element into the online domain. But the team at MMA worked it out, and will now have each chorister hold-

ing a candle as they sing their lines individually from the safety of their homes.

Due to the virtual format, the choir's conductor for eight years – the revered Augustine Paul – will be another glaring miss. "He has given us the music tracks and there will be a message from him on the day of the virtual concert," says Mary. It will be livestreamed on December 19 at 6.30 pm on MMA's YouTube page.

Mary Rodrigues, president of the MMA, points out that the virtual concert has a silver lining: choir groups from all over the world can participate now. There are 30 teams: from Poland, Kuwait, Singapore, England and different parts of India this year.

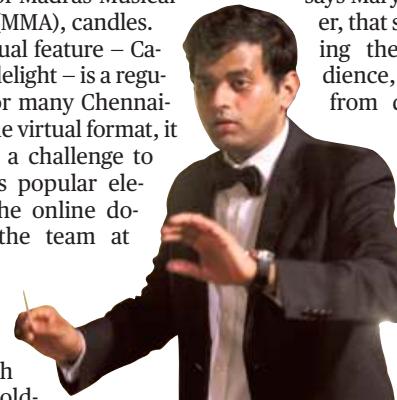
"Generally, due to time constraint, we have eight to 10 teams," says Mary. She adds, however, that she will miss watching the 1000-strong audience, of all ages and from different walks of life, join in with candles. "We stand on stage every year and see the candles light up the dark, and year on year it fills me with as much awe as the first time."

Oh tidings of comfort and JOY

panying instrument. The choristers recorded their audio bits in their homes and got together at the church to shoot the video during which they lip-synced. "Of course, physical distance was maintained," Emmanuel says, adding, "The décor too is low profile this year." The nearly 75-minute long concert will be launched on their YouTube channel on December 20 at 8pm.

Perhaps the most tech savvy of

the lot is 24-year-old Atul Jacob Isaac, who revived the Madras Philharmonic and Choral Society (MPCS) last year with Christmas Pudding – a concert blending traditional carols and modern musicals. Unlike most other choristers and conductors, Atul is no stranger to virtual concerts. Having been part of one earlier this year, he says, "Virtually, people in the choir don't get to listen to each other. A virtual concert is like a



Back to retro

How composer-actor Vijay Antony went about re-creating a superhit SP Balasubrahmanyam track with modern instrumentation

Past forward
Vijay Antony
■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Srinivasa Ramamujam

Vijay Antony lives in the now. He is currently busy with half-a-dozen Tamil projects all of which are in various stages of production. "I have always been occupied with work," says the music composer-turned-actor. "I envy audiences for enjoying music. It is difficult for me to do the same because I am always knee-deep in film-related work."

Vijay, however, has taken a trip to the past, albeit musically. He has given his musical touch to the superhit '70s track 'Namma Ooru Singari' (Ninaithaa Inikkum) for Caravan Lounge Tamil, an initiative that seeks to recreate retro tracks for the modern music lover. "I wanted it to be a tribute to the late legend SPB," he recalls. "It's a fantastic song and is always part of my memories. In fact, my 'Banaras Pattu Katti' track was inspired by it."

Vijay Antony has tried to give his own spin to a song that has charmed Tamil audiences over the years. "I have

COMING UP...

After Vijay Antony, the season will also see composers Dharan Kumar, Rajesh Vaidhya, C Sathy, Aruldev, Girish Gopalakrishnan and 'Flute' Navin, among others, trying their hand at re-imagining some hit retro Tamil numbers. These renditions, which will be released in subsequent weeks, will feature singers such as Karthik, Chinmayi, Vijay Prakash, Saïndhavi, Tanvi Shah, Sooraj Santhosh, Sathyaprakash and Nithyashree Venkataraman.

.....



many limitations as a musician," he says. "Even for my own compositions like 'Chillax', I cannot sing the part Charulatha Mani (singer) delivers. For 'Singapore Singari', I opted for flat notes. I tried to give it my attitude and a fresh treatment."

He doesn't believe that there will be comparisons with the original. "Audiences know my brand of music having listened to songs like 'Naaka Mukka'. This rendition is in the realm of what they expect from me."

'Namma Ooru Singari' is very dear to the '70s generation that grew up on MSV's magical melodies, but Vijay Antony himself is a self-confessed Ilaiyaraaja fan. "He was ruling the roost when I started watching cinema," he says, "I have a very personal connection listening to his numbers growing up."

One of Vijay Antony's last big announcements was about taking a pay

cut; in May, the actor voluntarily offered to take a 25% pay cut. "It was very instinctive," he says. "I have myself produced about ten films and know the difficulties that one goes through. Even on projects that I only act in, I tend to think and feel like a producer. I believed that taking a pay cut would help ease the burden on the producers of the three films that I was a part of."

Fans can see a lot more of him as an actor-producer rather than as a composer. "I see a bigger role for myself in that space," says the actor, who has *Thamizharasan, Khaki, Agni Siragugal, Koidiy Oruvan, Pichaikaran 2* in hand, besides untitled projects with Balaji Kumar and Vijay Milton. He adds, "Since I am acting and editing my work these days, finding time is a big challenge. Once a year, when the right opportunity presents itself, I will compose music."

The music videos of *Caravan Lounge Tamil* season 1, by Amazon Prime Music and Saregama, are available on YouTube

Walk, paddle, leave

Surf Turf in Chennai now brings stand up paddling and kayaking to the Chetpet Ecopark

PRIYADARSHINI PAITANDY

Endurance runners at Chennai's Chetpet Ecopark have thus far enjoyed admiration from walkers, joggers and others who frequent the wide, open space.

But starting this week, the attention has shifted to a set of bright blue, green and yellow kayaks and stand up paddle boards. Surf Turf, in association with the Tamil Nadu Fisheries Development Corporation, has launched stand up paddling and kayaking in Chetpet lake.

"We thought of this idea last year. We knew this way we could add value to the park that already has boating and fishing," says Arun Vasu, partner, Surf Turf.

The team was all set to launch earlier this year, till the lockdown in March threw a spanner in the works.

They are finally back in action with four kayaks and as many paddle boards. "Chennai is one of the first cities in the country to have water activities like these in the middle of the city," says Arun. The location makes it more accessible to people who have been deterred from participating in all the adventure sports of the East Coast Road by the long drive there.

The setting is perfect for beginners or those who are nervous around large water bodies, says Arun. The lake has around six to eight feet of water at the moment but this drops down to four feet during summer, he adds.

There is a small island with a tree in the middle of the waterbody with lots of birds to look at, and the comforting presence of the banks on either side.

To understand the demand, the team



Walking on water Standup paddling in the city ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



from Surf Turf ran trial sessions on three weekends in January and were pleased with the response. "Without promoting the sport, we got around 12 people on each weekend and most of them were first timers," says Arun.

Kayaking, he says, is an easy entry into water sports, while stand up paddling needs a little more skill. "Both are great workouts. You could put in more power. It is good for your core and lower body, or you could make it a relaxed activity and watch the sunrise and sunset," he adds.

Surf Turf at Chetpet Eco Park is open through the day from 6 am to 6 pm. For pricing and bookings, call: 9907540541

As they gear up for the festive season, from recreating butter chicken with tofu for Ranbir Kapoor to making Rajinikanth's favourite *payasam*, personal chefs narrate what it is like to cook for the stars



Cut to taste (Clockwise from below) Leneesh Vaikom with Mammootty, Harsh Dixit with Ranbir Kapoor, Sandhya S Kumar on the set of *Chef* with Saif Ali Khan and Harsh Dixit with Virat Kohli and Anushka Sharma ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

is fresh and I cook with that," says Harsh, who has been working with the Bollywood star for over two years.

Not all stars enjoy experimenting with their diets, however, so chefs need to think up out-of-the-box solutions. Sandhya carried ingredients such as almond milk and walnut milk for Jacqueline. Their professional training comes in handy when finding innovative ways to create tasty, comforting meals for actors on diets. "For instance, it is the cream, butter, ghee and the cashew paste that make butter chicken a calorie-rich dish. But I have learnt to replicate these ingredients with tofu puree or yoghurt to come up with a butter chicken that is soaked in flavours, minus the calorie-rich elements. If served with garlic naan, the taste has almost the same flavour profile as butter chicken," says Harsh.

facilities or don't permit guests to cook.

"We have to make do with whatever kind of kitchen has been provided for us. And we do all the shopping and clean up the kitchen afterwards," Harsh adds.

Culinary challenge

He says travelling with Ranbir and cooking with local produce is always an adventure. "I now know Ranbir's likes and dislikes and also how many calories he requires per meal. So, whether it is Bulgaria, Varanasi or Manali, I believe in sourcing local produce to ensure that it

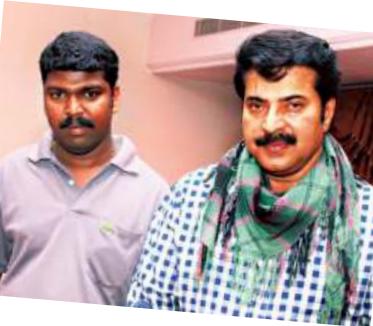


with healthy meals for her. The job comes with unique challenges. Harsh Dixit, Ranbir Kapoor's personal chef, talks about how he searched high and low for tomatoes in Bulgaria and also created a three-course meal for 12. The menu included five different kinds of dumplings, two Asian main courses and one dessert, all cooked in a basic set up with two small induction cook tops and a minuscule sink. "It is the challenge of coming up with flavourful food with local produce and serving it with finesse that makes it an interesting profession," asserts Mumbai-based Harsh.

Leneesh Vaikom, Malayalam actor Mammootty's personal chef for 10 years, says that the star insists on oats puttu for lunch and maintains a strict vigil on his low-carb diet.

"Mammooka hardly has any sweets and carbs. He is fond of seafood, especially certain varieties of fish like pearl spot. But he likes them curried and not fried," says Leneesh, who now has his own catering unit that supplies film units.

Harsh says while travelling with stars may sound romantic, there is a lot of hard work involved. It becomes tougher when the hotels they stay in either lack cooking



Mammootty likes it curried

SARASWATHY NAGARAJAN

Chef Sandhya S Kumar had a choice: board the flight and leave her precious set of seven knives behind or stay back in Dharamshala. As personal chef to Bollywood actor Jacqueline Fernandez, Sandhya had accompanied her to Himachal Pradesh for the shooting of *Bhoot Police*, when airport security raised objections.

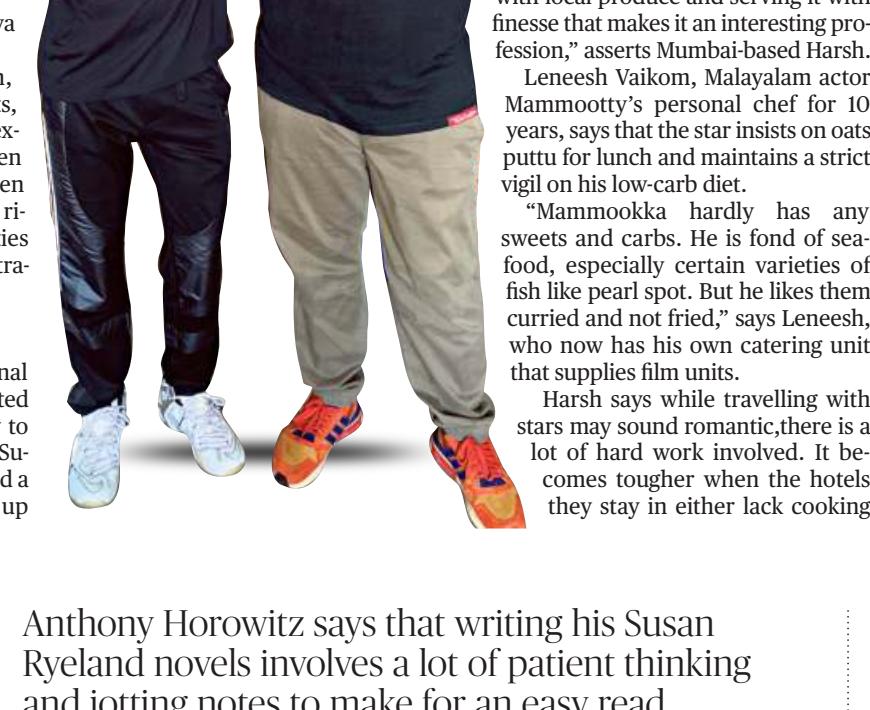
"I cannot do without them," she says; each of her knives costs about ₹5,000. "Although Jacqueline tried to persuade them, the security was extremely suspicious about my serrated bread knife! Finally, I had to write an undertaking stating my profession, and that those were not weapons but a chef's kit, before

they let it be taken in cargo," Sandhya adds.

As celebrities insist on fresh, cooked food that adhere to their diets, trained personal chefs with years of experience in leading restaurants, often become part of their entourage when they travel. Personal chefs are de rigueur in Hollywood, where celebrities insist on sticking to strict diets when travelling or on shoots.

Signature touch

In India now, experienced personal chefs are sought after, for their curated menus, signature dishes and ability to innovate with healthy food. Keerthy Suresh, for instance, reportedly engaged a chef during the lockdown to come up



Anthony Horowitz says that writing his Susan Ryeland novels involves a lot of patient thinking and jotting notes to make for an easy read



Inside the watch is complex mechanism with cogs, wheels, diamonds and batteries. What you have in *Magpie Murders* and *Moonflower Murders* is a book inside a book. In both the books you have novelist Alan Conway, hiding the solution to a modern mystery in his novel set in the 1950s. Susan, Conway's editor, has to find the solution using clues from Conway's novel. The reader gets two books for the price of one.

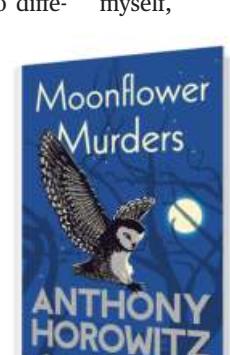
Why did you choose to set the Atticus novels in the 1950s?

• Because of Agatha Christie, Ngao Marsh, Dorothy L Sayers, Ellery Queen and so many wonderful writers of the Golden Age. The world of the 40s and 50s detective novel was more elegant, slower and cerebral.

Why did you choose to insert yourself in the Daniel Hawthorne novels?

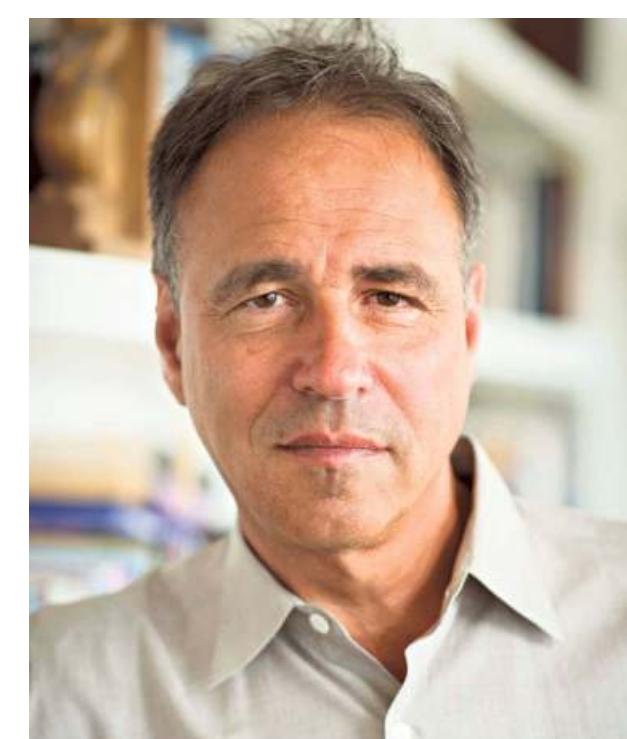
• In my books, I try to do things that nobody has done before. When I came to write the Daniel Hawthorne novels, *The Word is Murder*, *The Sentence is Death* and a third novel that is coming out in 2021, I had an idea to turn things on its head. I will make myself,

Anthony Horowitz, the narrator. I did this not as some kind of ego trip but because it amused me. Instead of being the writer who knows everything, the beginning, the middle and the end, all the suspects, the clues and everything, I will become the one person in the book



Writerly life Anthony Horowitz (top left); a still from *Alex Rider*

■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



'Like a Swiss WATCH'

MINI ANTHIKAD CHHIBBER

Anthony Horowitz has had a busy 2020. The new Alex Rider novel, *Nightshade*, where the teenage spy battles a secret cult of young assassins, is out. Also the BBC production, *Alex Rider*, starring Otto Farrant, is streaming on Sony LIV. *Moonflower Murders* (Penguin Random House ₹699), the sequel to *Magpie Murders* (2016) featuring Susan Ryeland is also on the shelves. While admitting the year has been bad for him personally and world in general, thanks to COVID-19 and Sean Connery's passing, the 65-year-old author looks at the pandemic as a time to take stock and evaluate. Speaking over the phone from London, Horowitz talked of detective fiction, the decision to continue writing Alex Rider books and the reason to put himself into the Daniel Hawthorne novels. Excerpts.

big success, why don't you write another one? So I began to think about whether I could play the same trick twice. I thought for about six months and then had an idea. I realised I could do it again in a way that could completely trick the audience. That was how *Moonflower Murders* began.

How similar or different are Atticus Pünd and Hercule Poirot?

• Atticus does have some similarities to Poirot in the sense that they are both outsiders. Atticus is also different from Poirot; he is a darker character. He has been a victim of the Nazis. He has seen evil in its purest form, which colours everything that he does. He is Jewish and Greek, lived in Germany, been in a labour camp, and his whole family is dead.

Could you comment on the structure of *Moonflower Murders*, which like *Magpie Murders* uses the book-with-a-book format?

• These books are very complex to write. It involves a lot of thinking, notes and time to make it easy to read. They are a little bit like a Swiss watch.

who knows nothing. These books are not about me. I don't talk about my life, my family or career. I am just the narrator.

What are the pros and cons of writing for television?

• Writing for television is my joy, pleasure and happiness. Obviously you have to work out the budget. You have to be prepared to get lots of notes from the director, the actors, the producer, the executive producers, husbands and wives, from everybody – that could be a con. I wrote *Foyle's War* 16 years ago. I produced the show with my wife, Jill Green, and it was a pleasure working with her. Also, television reaches a wider audience and that is great too. I'm very proud of the work I did on *Foyle's War*, *Midsomer Murders* and *Agatha Christie's Poirot*.

Why did you choose to continue the Alex Rider series?

• The one fear I have is writing a book that is not as good as the one before it. I worried that if I went on writing Alex Rider novels, they would become boring. So I decided to stop writing them. My publishers were unhappy, and also a lot of teachers and librarians wrote to me saying children wanted to read more of Alex. I also realised Alex was also quite sad at the end of *Scorpia Rising*. I thought I should return to Alex's world and make him happy again. I am glad I did, because I still have lots of ideas and the two Alex Rider books I have written since *Never Say Die* and *Nightshade* are quite good.

What do you think of the television show?

• I am lucky that I had a brilliant adapter in Guy Burt. My wife and her company produced it. Otto Farrant is perfect as Alex, so is Brenock O'Connor as Alex's friend, Tom. We had a wonderful director; it was one of those lucky things; everything went right.

You were commissioned to do continuation novels for Holmes and James Bond by the Arthur Conan Doyle estate and the Ian Fleming estate. Is there any follow up to *The House of Silk* and *Moriarty* (Holmes) and *Trigger Mortis* and *Forever and A Day* (Bond)?

• I have just finished a three-part 10,000-word Sherlock Holmes novella for the newspapers for Christmas. It is a fun story. It is called *The Adventure of Seven Christmas Cards*. As for Bond I cannot say anything but watch this space!

Words that matter

Online platform Our Own Poems and Short Stories publishes content that is just 75 to 150 long

SHILPA NAIR ANAND

Have an English story or poem in not more than 150 words and not less than 75 words? Online platform Our Own Poems and Short Stories (OOPSS) is just the space for you.

Launched on September 9 this year by friends Jayesh P and Rajat Sikder, it was inspired by certain things they observed during lockdown. "People were doing a lot of things, writing/posting about it online. Some were writing about it very well," says Jayesh.

While Jayesh is a marketing communications consultant/event management professional based in Thiruvananthapuram, Mumbai-based Rajat is an advertising professional.

RAJAT SIKDER

The decision on the word limit was the result of research which showed that people preferred to read (online), short, crisp content over the lengthy. "People want to consume more content in less time, so we discussed short reads that can be read in two or three minutes

They have been getting a large number of entries for publication but are strict about the word limit, "Anything less than 75 is too less and more than 150 words is too much. It might be easy with verse, but telling a story in 150 words is not. There are takers for it, contributors are making an effort to tell their stories within that space," says Jayesh. "We couldn't tell the OOPSS story in 150 words!" he jokes.

An editorial board selects the content, no copy is edited except for grammatical errors. "We send back copies that exceed word limit; sometimes writers don't want to change anything, other times they rework the copy," says Jayesh. The platform is free, and so designed that contributors can either write on an interface or send in their works as an attachment.

What about other Indian languages? "We would love to go into other languages, but that would require a different team and online infrastructure. We have only just started. There is time," Jayesh says.

Jayesh and Rajat want these writers' works to reach a wider, relevant network with people who have a genuine appreciation for the content," says Rajat. The idea is to get people with a similar interest together, while creating a space and also encouraging reading.

The duo's friendship goes back more than a couple of decades, to Lucknow

On a quest for good content
Jayesh P (left) and Rajat Sikder
■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Republicans acknowledge Biden's win

Senate Majority Leader congratulates President-elect; Mike Pompeo set to meet Antony Blinken

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON

More than a month after the election, top Republicans finally acknowledged Joe Biden as the next U.S. President, a collapse in GOP resistance to the millions of voters who decisively chose the Democrat. Foreign leaders joined the parade, too, including Russia's Vladimir Putin.

Speaking on Tuesday from the floor of the U.S. Senate where Mr. Biden spent 36 years of his career, Majority Leader Mitch McConnell congratulated his former colleague as President-elect. The two men spoke later in the day.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, meanwhile, was to meet with his likely successor in the new administration, Antony Blinken. And GOP Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, one of President Donald Trump's closest allies, said he'd spoken with some of Mr. Biden's Cabinet picks.

A similar shift unfolded in capitals across the world, where leaders including Mr. Putin and Mexico's Andrés Manuel López Obrador acknowledged Mr. Biden's win.

The moves came a day after electors nationwide formally cast votes affirming Mr. Biden's victory in last month's presidential election. And while that clears a more stable path for Mr. Biden to assume the presidency, it does little to stop Mr.



Final acceptance: Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, centre, with other Republican Senators in Washington. • AFP

Trump from continuing to try to undermine confidence in the results with baseless allegations that have been rejected by judges across the political spectrum.

As Republicans began discussing a Biden presidency more openly on Tuesday, Mr. Trump still pledged to press forward with almost nonexistent legal options.

"Tremendous evidence pouring in on voter fraud. There has never been anything like this in our Country!" Mr. Trump said in a tweet, just as members of his party were publicly recognising Mr. Biden's victory.

The growing acknowledgement of reality in Washington was triggered by the Electoral College formally voting on Monday to seal Mr. Biden's win with 306 votes to Mr. Trump's 232, the same margin that Mr. Trump

pulled together four years ago. The normally humdrum political ceremony didn't change the facts of the election but was nonetheless used as political cover by leading Republicans.

"Many of us had hoped the presidential election would yield a different result," Mr. McConnell said. "But our system of government has the processes to determine who will be sworn in on January 20. The Electoral College has spoken."

'Turn the page'

The bureaucratic transition from Mr. Trump's government to Mr. Biden's officially began weeks ago, despite the President's legal challenges.

Still, the suddenly conciliatory stance from many Republicans could thaw the political deep freeze that has gripped Washington lately.

Biden picks ex-rival as Transportation Secretary

WILMINGTON President-elect Joe Biden introduced Democratic primary rival Pete Buttigieg on Wednesday as his nominee for Transportation Secretary, calling the 38-year-old ex-Mayor "a new voice, with new ideas determined to move past old politics." Mr. Buttigieg would also be the first openly gay person confirmed by the Senate to a Cabinet post. The nomination was applauded by union leaders, transportation industry officials, LGBTQ activists and Democrats. AP

"Even them doing this now, the damage has been done because they've blocked, they've interrupted," said Anthony Robinson, a former Obama administration appointee who served several national security policy roles, including during the transition to the Trump administration in 2016.

"I don't want to say, 'Who cares?,' but it definitely doesn't symbolise a smooth transition," said Mr. Robinson.

Vaccine on priority

Mr. Biden's first priority will be the fair and efficient distribution of vaccines against the virus.

The President-elect said on Tuesday that he would follow the advice of Dr. Anthony Fauci, the nation's top infectious disease expert, who says that getting the President-elect himself vaccinated as soon as possible is a matter of national security.

"Dr. Fauci recommends I get the vaccine sooner than later. I want to make sure we do it by the numbers," Mr. Biden said, adding that he'd be immunised publicly, which could help build public trust in the vaccine.

Meanwhile, Mr. Trump's continued opposition to Mr. Biden may still present roadblocks.

"The President is still involved in ongoing litigation related to the election," said White House press secretary Kayleigh McEnany.

Russia denies role of FSB in opposition leader's poisoning

Chemical weapons experts tailed Navalny for years: reports

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
MOSCOW

Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on Wednesday denied recent media investigations that alleged the country's Federal Security Service (FSB) had followed and poisoned opposition leader Alexei Navalny.



Alexei Navalny

cluding on the day he was poisoned.

The investigative website Bellingcat together with CNN, Russian site The Insider and Germany's Der Spiegel on Monday published names and photos of the alleged men who tailed Mr. Navalny.

A

Joint investigation said the men are specialists in nerve agents and toxins, including the Soviet-designed poison Novichok, which European countries said was

used against Mr. Navalny, Russia's most prominent Kremlin critic.

During a visit to the Croatian capital Zagreb, Mr. Lavrov said the media reports prove Western countries' "lack of any skills for normal diplomatic work and an unwillingness to comply with international legal norms when it comes to establishing facts".

The joint report does not establish any direct contact between Mr. Navalny and the named agents and Russia has flatly denied any role in the Kremlin critic's illness.

The European Union has imposed entry bans and bank account freezes on six people suspected of being responsible, including FSB chief Alexander Bortnikov.

The 44-year-old opposition leader has said he will return to Russia after making a full recovery in Germany.

Erdogan says U.S. sanctions an attack on Turkey's sovereignty

U.S. imposed curbs on Ankara over Russian S-400 purchase

REUTERS
ANKARA

President Tayyip Erdogan said on Wednesday that U.S. sanctions imposed on Turkey over its purchase of Russian defence systems were an attack on Ankara's sovereign rights aimed at deterring its defence industry, a move which he said was bound to fail.

On Monday, Washington imposed the sanctions targeting NATO member Turkey's Defence Industry Directorate (SSB), its chief Ismail Demir and three other employees over its acquisition of Russian S-400 missile defence systems.

In his first public com-

ments on the move, Mr. Erdogan said that problems stemming from the sanctions would be overcome and vowed to ramp up efforts towards an independent defence industry, while criticising Washington for sanctioning a NATO ally.

"What kind of alliance is this? What kind of partnership is this? This decision is an open hostile attack against our country's sovereign rights," he said.

"The real goal is to block the advances our country started in the defence industry recently and to once again render us absolutely dependent on them," he added.

"Surely there will be problems, but each problem will push open a door for us for a solution."

Washington says the S-400s pose a threat to its F-35 fighter jets and to NATO's broader defence systems. Turkey rejects this and says S-400s will not be integrated into NATO. On Wednesday, Erdogan repeated that the U.S. concerns had no technical basis.

He added that Ankara still produced close to 1,000 parts for the F-35 jets, despite being removed from the programme over the S-400 purchase. Turkey had also been due to buy more than 100 F-35 jets.

Trump mulls his next move on Hunter Biden

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON

President Donald Trump is considering pushing to have a special counsel appointed to advance a federal tax investigation into the son of President-elect Joe Biden, setting up a potential showdown with incoming acting attorney general Jeffrey Rosen.

Mr. Trump – angry that outgoing Attorney General

William Barr didn't publicly announce the ongoing, two-year investigation into Hunter Biden – has consulted on the matter with White House chief of staff Mark Meadows, White House counsel Pat Cipollone and outside allies.

Dual agenda
That's according to several Trump administration officials and Republicans close to the White House who

spoke to on the condition of anonymity to discuss private matters.

Beyond appointing a special prosecutor to investigate the younger Biden, the sources said Mr. Trump is interested in having another special counsel appointed to look into his own claims of election fraud. But if he's expecting his newly named acting Attorney General to go further than Mr. Barr on either

matter, he could end up quickly disappointed.

Mr. Barr on Monday evening announced he will resign effective next week, revealing his plans about a week after Hunter Biden publicly disclosed that he was under investigation related to his finances. It is generally Justice Department policy not to disclose investigations that are in progress, though the subjects of those investiga-

tions can.

Rosen, the deputy attorney general, will step into the Justice Department's top job in an acting role.

Mr. Trump is still weighing his options, considering whether to pressure Rosen to make the special counsel appointment or, if needed, to replace the acting attorney general with someone more likely to carry out his wishes.

We won't allow communal anarchy in Bangladesh: PM

ELSEWHERE



Taliban team in Pak. as calls grow for ceasefire

A Taliban team, led by the co-founder of the insurgent movement, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, arrived on Wednesday in Islamabad for talks with Pakistani government leaders amid growing calls for a reduction in violence in neighbouring Afghanistan. The visit came as the Taliban unleashed a wave of attacks in Afghanistan, in which at least 19 members of the Afghan security forces and 11 Taliban fighters were killed. AP

Riyadh plans spending cuts to trim deficit

DUBAI

Saudi Arabia plans to cut more than 7% in spending next year, the Finance Ministry said, as the region's biggest oil producer seeks to trim a gaping budget deficit amid the coronavirus pandemic and falling oil prices. The Kingdom expects its deficit to hit \$79.4 billion this year, according to the government's budget statement, an estimated 12% of the country's gross domestic product. AP

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Sheikh Hasina

sioner Muhammad Imran. Prime Minister Hasina's speech comes in the backdrop of growing disagreement between her government and hard line Islamist group Hefazat E Islam, which has been opposing the inauguration of a statue of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in Dhaka to mark the centenary of his birth. After a meeting with Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan on Monday, a member of the Islamic group told Dhaka's Daily Star that they have suggested building of minarets in different parts of Bangladesh in memory of Bangabandhu.

The Islamist organisation has been building pressure on the government of Ms. Hasina over the past few months and has been insisting on following a more Islamic style of government. However, Ms. Hasina said in her speech that the freedom of 1971 was gained "in exchange" of the blood of Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and Christians and everyone in Bangladesh irrespective of religious identity has a right to practise religion in peace.

'Friendship to all'
"We also feel proud that our current leadership has effectively pursued Bangabandhu's foreign policy of Friendship to All and Malice to None," said High Commis-

sioner Muhammad Imran. Prime Minister Hasina's speech comes in the backdrop of growing disagreement between her government and hard line Islamist group Hefazat E Islam, which has been opposing the inauguration of a statue of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in Dhaka to mark the centenary of his birth. After a meeting with Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan on Monday, a member of the Islamic group told Dhaka's Daily Star that they have suggested building of minarets in different parts of Bangladesh in memory of Bangabandhu.

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Note - Interested bidders please note that in future any other notices /information regarding amendment /corrigendum/addendum/dates extension of bid submission etc for above tender will be available on website www.eproc.rajasthan.gov.in.

Interested bidders can participate in E-Tender through the website <http://tenders.gov.in> on 18.01.2021 before 3.00 p.m. E-Tenders will be opened on 19.01.2021 at 3.15 p.m. in the Chamber of Superintending Engineer.

DIPR/4716/Tender/2020

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E-tender Value for Zone1-Rs.37549343.16, Zone2-Rs.3082284.54, Zone3-Rs.52958839.22, Zone4-Rs.5500875.72, Zone6-Rs.5404938.98, Zone7-Rs.7585190.08 Zone11-Rs.56648568.14, Zone12-Rs.46405951.66, Zone14-Rs.65697403.28 and Zone15-Rs.55117174.92

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MARKET WATCH

	16-12-2020	% CHANGE
Sensex	46666	0.87
US Dollar	73.58	0.06
Gold	49059	0.43
Brent oil	50.54	-0.27

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	475.55	-0.20
Asian Paints	2582.45	-55.00
Axis Bank	606.10	-1.00
Bajaj Auto	3303.50	31.85
Bajaj Finserv	9257.70	-39.25
Bajaj Finance	5146.60	24.10
Bharti Airtel	516.20	12.00
BPCL	399.60	1.00
Britannia Ind	3752.60	-12.95
Cipla	786.80	5.15
Coal India	145.50	2.40
Divis Lab	3717.90	89.50
Dr Reddys Lab	5038.95	7.60
Eicher Motors	2470.10	-5.10
GAIL (India)	124.40	-0.85
Grasim Ind	914.80	2.80
HCL Tech.	885.05	-0.95
HDFC	2424.65	74.30
HDFC Bank	1410.70	19.40
HDFC Life	648.70	-2.75
Hero MotoCorp	3117.50	5.15
Hindalco	251.45	6.90
Hind Unilever	2343.95	23.90
ICICI Bank	512.45	-5.60
IndusInd Bank	921.80	-4.95
Infosys	1165.70	11.10
Indian Oil Corp	96.35	0.90
ITC	214.00	0.45
JSW Steel	370.60	4.70
Kotak Bank	1952.55	1.40
L&T	1268.25	22.00
M&M	731.95	14.00
Maruti Suzuki	7796.35	31.10
Nestle India Ltd.	18323.45	133.55
NTPC	104.90	-0.95
ONGC	102.90	2.45
PowerGrid Corp	196.20	3.40
Reliance Ind	1976.55	2.20
SBI Life	857.50	1.30
State Bank	269.40	-1.25
Shree Cement	24259.10	-0.55
Sun Pharma	576.60	4.95
Tata Motors	182.55	3.65
Tata Steel	643.40	8.05
TCS	2814.20	52.65
Tech Mahindra	921.55	-5.50
Titan	1504.45	35.70
UltraTech Cement	5113.00	-43.85
UPL	459.65	10.85
Wipro	358.40	5.70

EXCHANGE RATES		
CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar.....	73.37	73.69
Euro.....	89.56	89.95
British Pound.....	99.10	99.54
Japanese Yen (100).....	71.00	71.34
Chinese Yuan.....	11.24	11.29
Swiss Franc.....	83.12	83.48
Singapore Dollar.....	55.21	55.46
Canadian Dollar.....	57.54	57.80
Malaysian Ringgit.....	18.10	18.20
Australian Dollar.....	55.57	55.82

Source: Indian Bank

IN BRIEF



Bajaj Auto unveils Platina 100 Kick Start
MUMBAI
Bajaj Auto Ltd. has introduced the new Platina 100 Kick Start (KS) at a price of ₹51,667 (ex-showroom). "The new Platina 100KS will be a great addition to the Platina range, attracting customers aiming to choose a motorcycle that offers unrivalled comfort, a plethora of features and great mileage," said Narayan Sundaraman, head, Marketing, Bajaj Auto.

GSK introduces Otrivin spray for nasal wash
MUMBAI
GSK Consumer Healthcare Ltd has introduced Otrivin Breathe Clean, a clinically-verified saline spray formulation for daily nasal wash to prevent respiratory diseases. With the moisturising benefit of natural glycerin, the product is recommended for daily use by children above two years and adults. The spray is priced at ₹335 for a 100 ml pack.

Videcon lenders okay Twin Star Tech's bid
NEW DELHI
The lenders of Videocon Industries have approved the bid by Twin Star Technologies, promoted by billionaire Anil Agarwal's family, under the insolvency resolution process of the debt-ridden firm. The resolution plan has now been filed before the National Company Law Tribunal, Mumbai, for approval, Videocon said in a regulatory filing. PTI

LPG price dearer by ₹50, ATF up by 6.3%

NEW DELHI
Cooking gas LPG price on Wednesday was increased by ₹50 per cylinder, the second increase this month following firming of international prices. Also, aviation turbine fuel (ATF) price was raised by a steep 6.3%. Non-subsidised LPG price was increased to ₹694 per 14.2-kg cylinder from ₹644 earlier, according to a price notification of state fuel marketing companies. This is the second increase in rate this month. PTI

SBI sees recovery narrowing FY21 GDP contraction to 7.4%

Bank's research team had earlier projected economy to shrink 10.9% this fiscal



Conditions apply: All projections are conditional on the absence of another wave of infections, the SBI said. ■ AP

"We now expect GDP decline for the full year to be in single digits at 7.4%... aligned with RBI and markets' revised forecasts," SBI said in its research report.

It said the revised GDP estimates were based on SBI's 'Nowcasting Model' with 41

high-frequency indicators associated with industry activity, service activity, and the global economy.

Based on this model, GDP growth for third quarter was forecast to be about 0.1% (with downward bias).

Diesel sales fell 5.2% in first half of Dec.

REUTERS

India's diesel sales fell 5.2% in the first half of December compared with the same month last year, preliminary data from state-run fuel retailers showed on Wednesday, signalling that industrial growth in Asia's third-largest economy has not yet reached pre-COVID-19 levels.

Diesel consumption, a key parameter linked to economic growth and which accounts for about 40% of overall refined fuel sales in India, fell to 2.8 million tonnes in the first half of the month.

Petrol sales rose by an annual 9.5% during the first half of the month to 1.05 million tonnes.

U.S. puts India on 'currency manipulators' monitoring list

Treasury labels Switzerland and Vietnam as 'manipulators'

REUTERS

The U.S. Treasury labeled Switzerland and Vietnam as currency manipulators on Wednesday and added three new names, including India, to a watch list of countries it suspects of taking measures to devalue their currencies against the dollar.

In what may be one of the last broadsides to international trading partners by the departing administration of President Donald Trump, the U.S. Treasury said that in the year through June 2020 Switzerland and Vietnam had intervened heavily in currency markets to prevent effective balance

of payments adjustments.

In response, the Swiss National Bank said it does not manipulate its currency and its monetary policy approach would be unchanged, adding that it "remains willing to intervene more strongly in the foreign exchange market".

Vietnam's trade ministry declined to comment on the report and referred questions to the foreign ministry.

Treasury's criteria

To be labeled a manipulator by the U.S. Treasury, countries must at least have a \$20 billion-plus bilateral trade surplus with the U.S., foreign currency intervention

conditional on the absence of another wave of infections, SBI said in its report.

FY22 GDP growth was forecast at 11%, primarily due to base effect.

Govt. spending crucial

It further said even as growth outlook had improved, the decline in government expenditure had been quite significant to ₹3.62 lakh crore in Q2, from ₹4.86 lakh crore in Q1.

"We believe that a large part of fiscal expenditure by the government has been indirect... This gives us hope that the government might be able to spend in Q4 to resurrect growth further," SBI's researchers said.

exceeding 2% of gross domestic product and a global current account surplus exceeding 2% of GDP.

India's interventions

The Treasury also said its "monitoring list" of countries that meet some criteria has hit 10, with the additions of Taiwan, Thailand and India. Others include China, Japan, Korea, Germany, Italy, Singapore and Malaysia.

The U.S. also said that India and Singapore had also intervened in the foreign exchange market in a "sustained, asymmetric manner" but did not meet other requirements to warrant designation as manipulators.

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PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

The Finance Ministry has extended the deadline till February 15 for States to implement reforms like one nation one ration card and those in the power sector to become eligible for additional borrowing in the current fiscal.

To meet the extra fund requirements of States on account of COVID-19 pandemic, the Centre in May had decided to raise the borrowing limit of the States by 2% of their GSDP (Gross State Domestic Product), over and above the 3% limit set under the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act.

However, States were required to complete four specific reforms – implementation of one nation one ration card, ease-of-doing business reform, urban local body/utility reforms and power sector reforms – by December 31, 2020, to get the benefit.

Such States would get the facility of additional borrowing equivalent to 0.25% of their GSDP for completing each reform.

"If the recommendation from the nodal Ministry on implementation of the reform is received by February 15, the State will be eligible for reform-linked benefits," the Ministry said.

'Auto parts revenue to see double-digit contraction'

Sector set back by 3-4 years, says Jain



in HI. "Although we are optimistic about our H2 performance, we will not be able to completely recover from the Q1 and Q2 fiascos," ACMA president Deepak Jain told reporters.

The auto components sector has been set back by three to four years due to the pandemic and it could take two to three years for the sector to reach the peak levels of 2018-19.

Mr. Jain, however, said the performance of the industry during the festive season had been heartening and there were indications that the demand for vehicles, in the coming months, would be sustained.

"Together with increased focus of the auto industry on deep localisation and the recent announcement of PLI schemes for the sector and cell/battery manufacturing by the government, augur well towards making the industry a self-reliant one," the industry association's president added.



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AN-NDE

Can India end Aussies' pink-ball dominance?

The visitors are up against a side which has won all seven of its Day-Night Tests at home

INDIA IN AUS

REUTERS
ADELAIDE

India, having claimed a first series triumph on its last trip Down Under, will look for a repeat when it locks horns with Australia in the Day-Night Test at the Adelaide Oval from Thursday.

Australia has featured in half of the 14 Day-Night matches played in Test cricket and won all seven by comfortable margins.

India also won its only Day-Night Test, but the Bangladesh pace attack at Eden Gardens last year probably did not present as much of a threat in the evening sessions as Australia's will.

Australia's pace battalion has flourished with the pink ball and India's batsmen will have to be at their best if they are to hand the host a first Test defeat under lights.

Skipper Tim Paine said over the last few days Australia had also enjoyed a decent refresher course to prepare for the match, which will be played in front of a restricted crowd of 21,000.

"We've managed to get three nights on the centre wicket at the Adelaide Oval, which I think is going to be a huge advantage to our team," he said on Wednesday.

India's pace attack was a key factor in their series win two years ago and the tourists are confident they still have enough firepower even without the injured Ishant Sharma.

Top-order woes

It is at the top of both batting orders that the biggest questions remain, with Australia missing David Warner for the first Test at least and India



Up and running: Kohli & Co. in preparation mode to face the challenges Australia will pose in the Test series. ■ AFP

without Rohit Sharma until he completes 14 days of quarantine.

The teams:
India (playing XI): Virat Kohli (Capt.), Mayank Agarwal, Prithvi Shaw, Cheteshwar Pujara, Ajinkya Rahane, Hanuma Vihari, Wriddhiman Saha (wk), R. Ashwin, Mohammed Shami, Jasprit Bumrah, and Umesh Yadav.

Australia (from): Tim Paine (Capt. & wk), Joe Burns, Pat Cummins, Cameron Green, Marcus Harris, Josh Hazlewood, Travis Head, Moises Henriques, Marnus Labuschagne, Nathan Lyon, Michael Neser, James Pattinson, Steve Smith, Mitchell Starc, Mitchell Swepson, and Matthew Wade.

Umpires: Paul Reiffel and Bruce Oxenford; **TV umpire:** Rod Tucker; **Match referee:** David Boon.

Match starts at 9.30 a.m. IST.
Live on Sony Ten 1, 3 (SD & HD) and Sony Six (SD & HD).

two years ago.

WTC: India needs to step it up

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA DUBAI

India can't afford too many slip-ups in the away series against Australia and the next home assignment against England as the race for the World Test Championship (WTC) final is reaching its climax.

The Indians are in third place in the ICC Test rankings with 114 rating points.

Australia, with 116.46, is followed closely by New Zealand (116.37).

If New Zealand beats Pakistan 2-0 in the two-Test series, which starts at Mount Maunganui on December 26, it will finish on 420 points from five series.

India will then need five wins, or four wins and three draws, from eight Tests – against Australia and England – to qualify.

My personality reflects new India: Kohli



Trump card: Bumrah, a standout performer when India toured Australia in 2018, will be eager to fire again. ■ FILE PHOTO

like that," Kohli said.

"For me, it's how we have started to stand up as the Indian cricket team. And my personality has been this way from day one. This, for me, is a representation of the new India where we want to take on challenges and move forward with optimism and positivity, and make sure we are up and ready for any challenge that

comes our way."

But Kohli did admit that he enjoyed playing in Australia. "I have been touring here for many years and it is a wonderful place to play cricket," Kohli said. "When you perform well, you earn the respect of the public. Obviously there will be anticipation and chat around wanting to see you play. Similarly with Jasprit [Bumrah]. Last time he performed really well here. There is obviously going to be anticipation and excitement to watch him bowl."

Kohli will return to India after the floodlit Test for the birth of his first child. But he has backed his deputy Ajinkya Rahane to step up to the challenge of taking over the reigns. "I am sure he will do a tremendous job in my absence. But [my] focus till the time I am here remains on providing captaincy, leadership and performances as a player to the best of my abilities."

"I have said this before... I feel like this is his (Rahane) time to step up and perform strongly as an individual and captain as well. We have had a lot of mutual understanding and respect over the years. He seems to be very composed and he knows the strengths of our team and how we need to go about things."

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The human side of two giants

SPORTS BUREAU

Skipper Virat Kohli urging the Indian fans not to boo Steve Smith during the World Cup match against Australia at The Oval in London was one of the most heart-warming moments of the 2019 edition.

In the build-up to the Test series that begins in Adelaide on Thursday, Kohli and Smith were involved in a 30-minute chat. The Australian batsman asked Kohli: "What prompted you to approach the Indian crowd and ask them to stop booing me when we played our World Cup match?"

"To me, an incident happened and you guys realised what had happened. You came back after a long time, having gone through everything that you had to," replied Kohli, referring to Smith coming back after serving a one-year ban following the ball-tampering

Breaking down Test cricket's marquee modern rivalry

As Kohli's men take guard for their first overseas Day-Night Test, a look at how the Border-Gavaskar Trophy contests have panned out



FILE PHOTO

SEASON	HOST	WINNER	RESULT
1996-97	India	India	2-1 (1)
1997-98	India	India	2-1 (3)
1999-00	Australia	Australia	3-0 (3)
2000-01	India	India	2-1 (3)
2003-04*	Australia	Drawn	1-1 (4)
2004-05	India	Australia	2-1 (4)
2007-08	Australia	Australia	2-1 (4)
2008-09	India	India	2-0 (4)
2010-11	India	India	2-0 (2)
2011-12	Australia	Australia	4-0 (4)
2012-13	India	India	4-0 (4)
2014-15	Australia	Australia	2-0 (4)
2016-17	India	India	2-1 (4)
2018-19	Australia	India	2-1 (4)

* INDIA RETAINED THE TROPHY

Day-Night Tests in Australia: Australia has won all its seven pink-ball contests

2015	Adelaide	bt New Zealand by three wickets in the first-ever Day-Night Test
2016	Adelaide	bt South Africa by seven wickets
2016	Brisbane	bt Pakistan by 39 runs
2017	Adelaide	bt England by 120 runs
2019	Brisbane	bt Sri Lanka by an innings and 40 runs
2019	Adelaide	bt Pakistan by an innings and 48 runs
2019	Perth	bt New Zealand by 296 runs

India in a Day-Night Test:

2019	Kolkata	bt Bangladesh by an innings and 46 runs
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TOP PERFORMERS IN THE BORDER-GAVASKAR TROPHY IN AUSTRALIA

INDIA	Inns	Runs	HS	Avg.	50s	100s
Sachin Tendulkar	29	1441	241 n.o.	55.42	7	4
Anil Kumble	18	49	8/141	37.73	65.3	4/1

AUSTRALIA	Inns	Runs	HS	Avg.	50s	100s
Ricky Ponting	26	1893	257	86.04	7	7
Nathan Lyon	21	51	7/152	33.94	65.8	4/1

INDIA VS. AUSTRALIA IN TESTS AT ADELAIDE

2003	India won by four wickets
2018	India won by 31 runs

THE DATES

December 17-21: Adelaide (Day-Night), 9.30 a.m.
December 26-30: Melbourne, 5 a.m.
January 7-11: Sydney, 5 a.m.
January 15-19: Brisbane, 5 a.m.

(ALL TIMES IST)

We expect Smith to be fit, says Paine

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ADELAIDE

Australian batting mainstay Steve Smith, whose fitness became a cause of concern after he missed a training session, was merely down with a stiff back and will play in the opening Test against India here, skipper Tim Paine said on Wednesday.

Paine said it was not a serious niggle and a day's rest came as a "blessing in disguise" for the star. "We expect Steve to be there. He has had a stiff back a number of times before



Mutual respect: Kohli and Smith share a warm personal bond. ■ FILE PHOTO: V.V. KRISHNAN

there is a human side to things as well," said Kohli.

Thanking the Indian skipper, Smith said, "I treasured that. Remember, I sent you a message that night, saying it was top class."

Kohli's gesture earned him the 2019 ICC Spirit of Cricket Award.

SUDOKU

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★☆

Solution to puzzle 13120

S	E	A	N	C	T	S	S	R	C	A	T	H

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TV PICKS

Australia vs India: 1st Test, day one, Sony Ten 1, 3 & 6 (SD & HD), 9.30 a.m.
Premier League: SS Select 1 (SD & HD), 11.30 p.m. & 1.30 a.m. (Friday)
Serie A: Sony Ten 2 (SD & HD), 1.15 a.m. (Friday)
ISL: Star Sports 3 (SD & HD), 7.30 p.m.

IN BRIEF



Mayweather, Laila Ali in boxing Hall of Fame
CANASTOTA (NY)
Floyd Mayweather, who captured 11 world titles in five weight divisions and retired unbeaten, former heavyweight champion Wladimir Klitschko, and Laila Ali have been elected to the International Boxing Hall of Fame and Museum. AP

Jerome Stoll to step down as Renault Sport Racing president

PARIS
Jerome Stoll will step down as President of Renault's Formula 1 operation at the end of his term on December 31, the team announced on Tuesday. Stoll has spent five years overseeing Renault's racing activities since 2016. ANI

Amandeep stuns second seed Siddharth
SONEPAT
Amandeep Singh knocked out second seed Siddharth Arya 7-6(6), 4-6, 7-5 in the pre-quarterfinals of the ₹100,000 AITA men's ranking tennis tournament here on Wednesday.
The results (pre-quarterfinals): Chirag Duhani bt Tarik Gupta 6-1, 6-1; Aayush Gurnani bt A. Siddharth 3-6, 6-4, 6-3; Amit Dahiya bt Vivek Kumar 6-4, 7-5; Shivam Dalma bt Abhinav Kumar 5-7, 6-2, 6-2; Fardeen Qamar bt Chinmay Dev Chauhan 6-1, 6-1; Dhananjay Singh bt Aayush Sharma 7-6(1), 3-6, 6-3; Sandesh Dattatry bt Gajender Singh 6-1, 6-2; Amandeep Singh bt Siddharth Arya 7-6(6), 4-6, 7-5.

Boxer Manoj writes to PM

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA
Commonwealth Games gold medallist Manoj Kumar has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, urging him to save the Boxing Federation of India (BFI) from possible dereliction by the Sports Ministry.

Olympian Manoj, who is an athletes' representative in the BFI, said in a statement that the BFI was mandated by the Delhi High Court to conduct its elections before December 31 to continue as a national sports federation.

The BFI elections have been postponed due to the pandemic.

Nitish Rana powers LBS Club to victory

A blistering 69 by Nitish Rana (40b, 5x6, 5x4), powered Lal Bahadur Shastri Club to a 140-run victory over Sporting Club in the quarterfinals of the 30th All India Sperry Om Nath Sood memorial cricket tournament here on Wednesday.

The scores:

LB Shastri Club 319 for six in 40 overs (Priyanshi Arya 82, Unmukt Chand 78, Nitish Rana 69, Hiten Dalal 39) bt Sporting Club in 29.2 overs (Lalit Yadav 58, Abhimanyu Yadav 42, Yash Garg 3/40).

Ajay, Neeraj shine

A fine century by Ajay Kumar (137) and a four-wicket haul by Neeraj Chaudhary helped MM Sports beat Hemant Ratan Academy by 103 runs in the semifinals of the Manoj Soni memorial cricket tournament.

Bad day at the office for Chelsea and Man City

Lazio's patchy form continues; a win for Dortmund; Real Madrid beats Athletic Bilbao

EURO LEAGUES

AGENCIES
LONDON

Two losses in four days has stalled Chelsea's serene progress in the Premier League, turning the spotlight onto its expensively assembled attack that remains a work in progress.

Two drab draws for Manchester City in the same period is raising even more questions – notably, what has happened to what was once the most entertaining team in England?

It was an evening to forget for two of the league's supposed title contenders on Tuesday, with Chelsea's 2-1 loss at Wolverhampton – sealed by a winning goal in stoppage time – followed by City's 1-1 draw at home to West Bromwich Albion, one



Killer blow: Pedro Neto's ice cool finish off a stoppage time breakaway move saw Wolves snatch victory over Chelsea. ■ REUTERS

of the favourites for relegation this season.

Chelsea missed the chance to climb into first place, at least for one night, while City squandered an

opportunity to move within sight of the top two in the division, Tottenham and Liverpool.

Lazio continued its patchy Serie A form with a 1-1 draw

at Benevento on Tuesday as the Inzaghi brothers faced off on the sidelines.

Simone Inzaghi's Lazio has been wildly inconsistent domestically and sits eighth

on 18 points after 12 matches.

Benevento, led by former AC Milan, Juventus and Italy striker Filippo Inzaghi, moves up to 13th after the draw, six points above the relegation zone.

Winning debut

In the Bundesliga, Borussia Dortmund's new head coach Edin Terzic enjoyed a winning debut as it narrowly beat Werder Bremen 2-1 away on Tuesday to earn its first win in four league games. The Ruhr valley club's first win since mid-November moves it up to fourth place on 22 points. Werder is 13th on 11.

In LaLiga, Real Madrid was made to toil by the 10 men of Athletic Bilbao but eventually won 3-1 on Tuesday thanks to two strikes from Karim Benzema, earn-

Fiji striker Roy Krishna stars for ATKMB

His penalty strike proves the difference in the match against FC Goa

ISL 2020-21

SPORTS BUREAU

Roy Krishna earned a penalty and scored off it as ATK Mohun Bagan FC eked out a 1-0 win over FC Goa in its Indian Super League match at the Fataor Stadium on Wednesday.

The 33-year-old Fiji striker, who was quiet for most part, was fouled inside the box by defender Aibanha Dohling in the 84th minute when the former tried to dribble past him.

Though Goa goalkeeper Mohammad Nawaz guessed it right, Krishna's shot was too good. It was the Krishna's fifth goal of the campaign.

ATKMB moved up a spot to second with 13 points from six matches while Goa remained sixth place with eight points from six games.

The Kolkata side sat deep



The one that mattered: Krishna earned a penalty and scored off it, giving the Goa goalkeeper no chance. ■ ISL/SPORTZPICS

after being a goal up while Goa attacked relentlessly. Arguably possessing one of the best defences in the ISL, ATKMB was able to defy the Gurus' attacks.

Off one such Goa raid, a 1-2 between Igor Angulo and Jorge Mendoza saw the latter fail to connect the ball with just the 'keeper to beat. Goa also came very close to scoring when Saviour Gama pro-

duced a powerful long-ranger, but the ball was fisted away by ATKMB custodian Arindham Bhattacharja.

It was largely an insipid first session with both teams unable to make an impact in the final third. Goa captain Edu Bedia, the midfield-general of the team, did not have one of his best days.

With five minutes remaining in the opening period, a

diagonal ball from the defence reached Williams on the right. The Australian made enough space with one touch and unleashed a left-footer. His shot beat the goalkeeper, but ricocheted off the right post.

The result: ATK Mohun Bagan 1 (Roy Krishna 84-pen) bt FC Goa 0.

Thursday's match: Odisha FC vs Bengaluru FC, 7.30 p.m.

India to bid for 2027 AFC Asian Cup

FOOTBALL

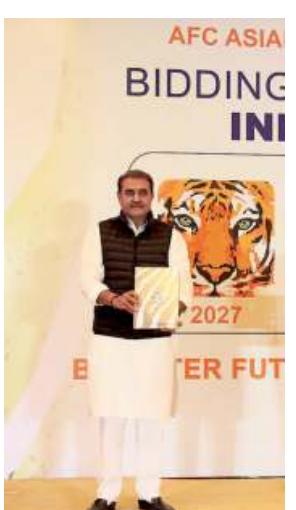
RAKESH RAO
NEW DELHI

India is set to bid for the 2027 Asian Football Confederation (AFC) Asian Cup, confident of getting the nod ahead of Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Making the announcement here on Wednesday, All India Football Federation president Praful Patel sounded extremely optimistic of India's prospects of playing the host to the prestigious quadrennial competition. The last date for submitting the bid is December 18 and the AFC is likely to announce the winning bid in the second quarter of 2021.

Bright chance

When *The Hindu* asked Patel how realistic was India's chances of clinching the bid



AIFF president Praful Patel. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

ahead of competitors like Qatar and Saudi Arabia, he said, "Our chances are bright. Qatar is hosting the next World Cup and Saudi

Arabia is a leading football nation in the continent. That does not mean we don't have a chance.

Impressing AFC

"As you are aware, China is hosting the next edition of the Asian Cup (in 2023). So why can't we impress the AFC to give us an opportunity to host the event? After all, we gained the host the 2017 FIFA under-17 World Cup and two other major events in 2022 (the FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup and the AFC Women's Asian Cup) by outbidding other contenders."

Sports Minister Kiren Rijiju assured all help from the Union Government and reiterated his commitment to do his best for the National Sports Federations to bring in "big events" to the country.

GENERAL

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Major Dhyan Chand National Stadium at India Gate, that had hosted the inaugural Asian Games in 1951, and known for its hockey facility, is all set to add squash in its complex.

The Union External Affairs Minister, Dr. S. Jaishankar, himself an avid squash player, laid the foundation for six squash courts at the Stadium, adjacent to the tennis courts, in the presence of the Union Sports Minister, Kiren Rijiju, on Wednesday.

Democratising sport

Looking forward to playing at the facility, estimated to cost about ₹5.52 crore, and scheduled to be ready in six months, the External Affairs Minister said that such facil-

GENERAL

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

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ties would democratise

sport.

"We have to democratise sport, it must not be a privilege. Most of the sports in which we have done well is because it has been democratised. I hope, in the case of squash, it is one step in that direction," Dr. Jaishankar said.

Interestingly, three of the

six courts will have moving wall facility that would convert them into doubles courts as well.

"To have space in the National Stadium itself has its own significance. This facility is not only going to be world class but also a Centre of Excellence where we will be producing world champions."

"I am sure budding

players will take maximum

benefit of this centre," said

the Sports Minister Rijiju.

Present among others were the Director General of Sports Authority of India (SAI), Sandip Pradhan and the secretary general of the Squash Rackets Federation of India (SRFI), Cyrus Poncha.

National stadium to have squash courts



New start: SAI DG Sandip Pradhan, Union Sports Minister Kiren Rijiju, Union External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar and the secretary general of SRFI Cyrus Poncha at the foundation laying ceremony. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Zimbabwe to host qualifiers of 2023 ODI World Cup

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
DUBAI

Zimbabwe will host the qualifiers of the 2023 ODI World Cup between June 18 and July 9, according to a revised schedule announced by the ICC due to the postponements caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The ICC also announced the schedule of the World League 2 and the Challenge League.

According to the schedule, the World Cup League 2 ODIs will begin on March 19 next year with Oman playing host to USA and Nepal in a sixth series of six ODIs.

"There will be 96 ODIs played across the 14 series that are scheduled to be played in 2021 and 2022 respectively and the remaining two in early 2023," the ICC said.

Lukman hat-trick fires Real Kashmir into final

IFA SHIELD

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

Real Kashmir rode on Nigerian striker Lukman Adegbemi's hat-trick to trounce Mohammedan Sporting 4-0 and reach the final of the 123rd IFA Shield football tournament at the Salt Lake Stadium here on Wednesday.

George Telegraph rallied to beat United SC 2-1 in the other semifinal at the Kalyani Stadium.

The results: Premier League: Wolves 2 (Podence 66, Neto 90+5) bt Chelsea 1 (Giroud 49); Manchester City 1 (Gundogan 30) drew with West Brom 1 (Dias 43-0).

LaLiga: Real Madrid 3 (Kroos 45+1, Benzema 74, 90+2) bt Athletic Bilbao 1 (Capa 52).

Seria A: Udinese 0 drew with Crotone 0; Benevento 1 (Schiatella 45) drew with Lazio 1 (Immobile 25).

Bundesliga: Eintracht Frankfurt 3 (Silva 24-pen, Barkok 32) drew with Borussia Monchengladbach 3 (Stindl 14, 90-pen, 90+5); Hertha Berlin 0 drew with Mainz 0; Werder Bremen 1 (Moehwald 28) lost to Borussia Dortmund 2 (Guerreiro 12, Reus 78); Stuttgart 2 (Kajadzic 85, 90) drew with Union Berlin 2 (Friedrich 4, Awoniyi 77).

The results: Real Kashmir 4 (Lukman 59, 66, 87, Mason Robertson 91) bt Mohammedan Sporting 0.

George Telegraph 2 (Saddam Hossain Mondal 78, Stanley Eze 82) bt United SC 1 (Basudeb Mandi 18).

Ferguson out for four to six weeks