



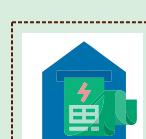
Ashok Gehlot, Chief Minister, Rajasthan



Indira Rasoi Yojana – Arrangement of food at Rs 8 to needy in all urban bodies across the state. Over 1.12 crore plates of food have been made available to people until now. The State Government provides subsidy of Rs 12 per plate.



A financial burden of Rs 310 crore was borne by the State Government due to the relaxation given in depositing bills to 1.05 crore domestic electricity consumers and 14.50 lakh agriculture and other consumers because of COVID.



Subsidy of Rs 27,229 crore provided to farmers and Rs 968 crore to domestic consumers in electricity bills in the last two years. Decision taken not to increase the electricity tariff for agriculture for five years. New 1.61 lakh agriculture connections have been issued.



For better marketing arrangements of agriculture crops, 643 **Gram Seva/ Kray Vikray Sahakari Samities** and warehouses of Rajasthan State Warehousing Corporation have been given the status of private sub-yards (Mandies).



Rajasthan Agro-processing, Agro-business and Agro-export Promotion Policy – 2019 : Provision of subsidy to the tune of Rs 2 crore to farmers on capital and interest cost. A fund of Rs 500 crore created for easy loans.



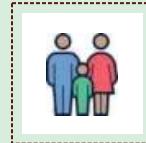
Interest-free crop loans of Rs 19,323 crore disbursed to 61 lakh loanee units of cooperative banks, which include 12.67 lakh new farmers.



Waiver of crop loan from cooperative banks of 20.85 lakh farmers amounting to Rs 8,000 crore.



With the aim to have medical colleges in every district, new medical colleges have been sanctioned in 15 more districts, now 30 out of 33 districts will have 31 government medical colleges.



Assistance of Rs 1,144 crore provided to 33 lakh destitute and helpless families at the rate of Rs 3,500 per family.



Rajasthan became the model state for excellent management of corona. Free of cost testing and treatment facility at government hospitals in all the districts. Health infrastructures strengthened. Substantial increase in oxygen beds, ICU beds, ventilators, oxygen plants was ensured.



Over 713 types of medicines and 90 kinds of tests have been made free. Medicines for serious diseases such as cancer, heart, respiratory and kidney diseases are also free. Centralised oxygen pipeline in 20 sub-district and 21 district hospitals.



Ayushman Bharat Mahatma Gandhi Health Insurance Scheme started. Free of cost treatment facility to 1.10 crore families with the addition of 10 lakh new families.



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Over Rs 10,579 crore spent on construction/development of 24,100 km roads. These include 3923 km new roads costing Rs 1,650 crore.



Government jobs provided to 79,761 youths. Over 1,519 dairy booths allotted to unemployed youths.



Exemption from any kind of approval and inspection for three years on setting up new Micro, Small and Medium Industry. **'One Stop Shop'** for all kind of facilitation to industries. **Rajasthan Investment Promotion Scheme-2019** implemented.



Rajasthan is the first State to have organised State Games. Medal winning 29 sports persons were given jobs on out of turn basis (6 DSP rank jobs). In addition 250 cases are in process.



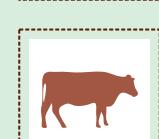
For 43,000 crores refinery project being set up at Pachpadra (Barmer), works to the tune of Rs 5,000 crores completed and work order of Rs 25,000 crores issued.



'Rajasthan Samajik Suraksha, Laghu Evam Simaant Vraddhan Krashak Samman Pension Niyanm-2019' issued. Over 2.80 lakh farmers benefitted.



Priority to creation of permanent assets in MNREGA. Payment of 99.82% wages in 15 days.



Free of cost availability of maximum useful medicines for livestock, treatment to 567 lakh and vaccination to 786 lakh livestock.



Supply of potable drinking water to 5,000 villages/hamlets and 14 cities (partial) from surface water sources through 9 large drinking water projects.



10% Reservation to the Economically Weaker Sections. Condition of immovable property in EWS quota abolished and income of Rs 8 lakh per annum considered as the only basis.



Jan Soochna Portal – Nearly 261 types of information are available for 94 schemes.



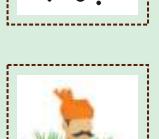
Assistance of Rs 822 crore granted to Gaushalas till now. Subsidy of Rs 2 per litre on milk collection to cattle raiser farmers.



201 **Mahatma Gandhi Government Schools** (English Medium) opened for better education to all boys/girls and 68,540 students have been enrolled. 90 new government colleges opened.



State's first underground Metro Rail made operational in Jaipur.



Farmers Welfare Fund : Fund to the tune of Rs 2,000 crore created.



Rajasthan Silicosis Policy-2019 : Provision for assistance of Rs 3 lakh for rehabilitation of the affected person and pension of Rs 1500 per month.



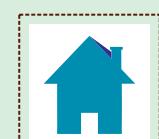
Indira Gandhi Matritva Poshan Yojana : Financial assistance of Rs 6,000 to every pregnant women becoming mother for the second time and foster mother in 4 tribal districts.



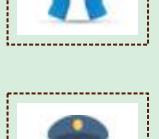
Rajasthan Solar Energy Policy-2019 and Rajasthan Wind and Hybrid Energy Policy-2019 : A big step towards environment conservation, promotion of investment and employment.



Special Investigation Unit set up to deal with crime against women in each police district and officer of DySP rank posted. Reception counters set up at police stations. ACB strengthened and Helpline 1064 started.



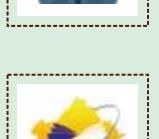
Rural Development Panchayati Raj : Construction of 5 lakh houses have been completed, out of 6.43 lakh houses sanctioned under Pradhan Mantri Gramin Awas Yojana. A total of Rs 5,410.31 crore spent on construction of houses. First prize awarded to state for completing maximum houses. New 57 Panchayat Samitis formed.



New system of FIR registration at SP offices, established, if Thanas fail to register FIR. Substantial decrease in lodging of FIR through court under section 156(3) after enforcing compulsory FIR registration at Thanas.



Reservation increased to 4% from 3% for specially-abled persons in government jobs. Increase in pension of elderly persons, widows and single women.



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NEARBY



Centre seeks better security coordination

NEW DELHI
The Union Home Ministry on Friday asked the top officers of the West Bengal government to ensure coordination with Central agencies for better security arrangements of individuals with Central security cover. The State Chief Secretary and Director-General of Police were asked to appear before Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla on Friday days after an attack on the convoy of the BJP president in West Bengal.

NEWS ▶ PAGE 9

Assembly seeks CBI probe into 'scam' in civic bodies

NEW DELHI
The Delhi Assembly on Friday passed a resolution demanding a CBI inquiry into an alleged ₹2,500-crore scam in the BJP-ruled municipal corporations. Addressing a special session, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said the scam was bigger than the Commonwealth Games scam. He said the amount could have been used to pay the salaries of employees and build infrastructure.

CITY ▶ PAGE 3

PM makes a strong pitch to farmers

Ready to continue dialogue, MSP will not stop, he says

NISTULA HEBBAR
NEW DELHI



Gearing up: Farmers protesting against the farm laws at the Tikkri border in Delhi on Friday. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday made a strong pitch to farmers, advocating the benefits of the agricultural reforms initiated by his government and criticised the Opposition parties for "shooting from the shoulders of farmers" in first pushing the reforms in their poll manifestos and now opposing them for the sake of opposition.

He was addressing farm-

ers at a function organised by the Madhya Pradesh government to release compensation to those who had incurred losses due to hailstorms.

Significantly, Mr. Modi

said his government was more than ready to continue the dialogue with farmer groups on any doubts they may have about the laws.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

Nothing but lies: farmers

Protesting farmer groups accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of "attacking" them in his speech on Friday, adding that his claims on minimum support prices (MSP) were nothing but "lies". With regard to the ongoing case in the Supreme Court, the farm leaders have not yet made any firm decision on whether to implement themselves as proposed by the top court. ▶ PAGE 9

SC finds HC order on A.P. govt. 'disturbing'

Attempt to look into 'constitutional breakdown' stayed

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday stayed an Andhra Pradesh High Court order intending to embark on a judicial inquiry into whether there is a constitutional breakdown in the State machinery under the Jagan Mohan Reddy government, requiring a declaration of President's rule.

"Has anybody seen an order like this before... As the apex court, we find this disturbing. We are staying this order... We will take up this case immediately after the vacations," Chief Justice of India Sharad A. Bobde, heading a three-judge Bench, observed.

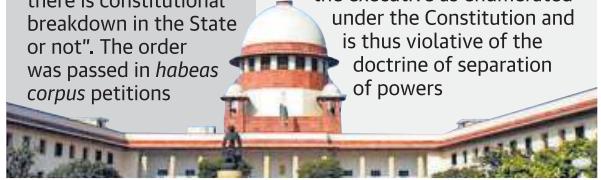
Solicitor General Tushar Mehta asked why the High Court "should go into whether there is a constitutional breakdown in the State". The government, represented by advocate Mahfooz Ahsan Nazki, said it was not up to the High Court to enquire and recommend President's rule in a State.

"It is Article 356 that deals

Bone of contention

What the State argued

- The order was "replicated" in 14 writ petitions of *habeas corpus* or allegations against the police interfering in civil disputes
- Judiciary has no role in deciding whether there is a constitutional breakdown in a State, necessitating President's rule. This power is vested in the executive under Article 356 of the Constitution
- HC order is a "serious encroachment" on the powers of the executive as enumerated under the Constitution and is thus violative of the doctrine of separation of powers



the petition filed by the government said.

The "unprecedented" order of the High Court, on October 1, came while deciding *habeas corpus* petitions filed by relatives of persons remanded in judicial custody or out on bail.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

Hathras victim was gang-raped, murdered: CBI files chargesheet against 4 accused

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Central Bureau of Investigation on Friday filed a chargesheet against the four persons accused of the gang-rape and murder of a 19-year-old Dalit woman in Uttar Pradesh's Hathras in September.

The victim was allegedly raped and assaulted by Sandeep, Luvkush, Ravi and Ramu on September 14 in Hathras, the agency said. She was admitted to a hospital in Aligarh, from where she was shifted to Safdarjung Hospital in Delhi. She died on September 29.

The CBI has invoked Sections 302 (punishment for murder), 376 (punishment for rape), 376A (punishment for inflicting injury while committing rape, resulting in the death of the woman) and 376D (gang-rape) of the IPC, besides the relevant provisions of the SC/ST Act.

HC relief for man booked under UP conversion law

Court stays arrest of labourer, brother

OMAR RASHID
LUCKNOW

The Allahabad High Court on Friday provided relief from arrest to a Muslim labourer, Nadeem, who was booked in Muzaffarnagar, along with his brother, for allegedly using coercion and allurement to convert the wife of a Hindu contractor after developing an illicit relationship with her.

The court stayed the arrest of Mr. Nadeem, who was booked under the new Uttar

Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Ordinance, 2020. No coercive action to be taken against the petitioner till the next date of hearing on January 7, the court said. "Present is a case where all the allegations are prima facie based on suspicion. Matter requires consideration," observed a Division Bench Justices Pankaj Naqvi and Vibek Agarwal.

EQUAL RIGHT TO PRACTISE RELIGION ▶ PAGE 10

India, China agree to hold another round of LAC talks

Disengagement process set to continue

ANANTH KRISHNAN

India and China on Friday agreed to hold another round of talks between senior military commanders to take forward the slow-moving process of disengagement on the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

This was agreed at the 20th meeting of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-

China Border Affairs, held via video link. The WMCC, ordinarily convened twice a year since its launch in 2012, has met six times since June this year, after the unprecedented crisis in Ladakh erupted in early May.

At Friday's talks, led by Naveen Srivastava, Joint Secretary (East Asia) in the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), and Hong Liang, Director-General of the Department of Boundary and Oceanic Affairs of China's Foreign Ministry, both sides "reviewed the

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

Talks on to give another chance to IAS aspirants

Decision in three to four weeks: govt.

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Union government told the Supreme Court on Friday that discussions were on for granting another chance to aspirants of the civil services examination, especially those whose last attempt at cracking the preliminary exam expired in October.

"The Centre as well as the UPSC [Union Public Service Commission] are taking decisions on proposal to give one more opportunity to the affected students due to the pandemic," a Bench led by Justice A.M. Khanwilkar said.

The court was hearing a petition filed by 59 aspirants, represented by senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi and advocate Anushree Prashit Kapadia. They were either unable to take the October preliminary exam or handicapped in their preparations due to the pandemic and the ensuing lockdowns.

They argued for a second opportunity and corresponding age relaxation. They said their preparations were crippled by lockdowns

Candidates in Hyderabad after appearing for the UPSC prelims in October.

and restrictions. Coaching centres were closed and study material was scarce. Many could not even take the exam.

Last-chance candidates On October 26, the Department of Personnel and Training informed the court that the government was considering giving last-chance candidates another shot at the exam.

On Friday, Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta said the issue was not adversarial and a decision would be taken on giving another opportunity in the next three or four weeks.

They argued for a second opportunity and corresponding age relaxation. They said their preparations were crippled by lockdowns

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Centre under pressure from capitalists: Selja

'Many farmers have sacrificed their lives'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GURUGRAM

Haryana Congress chief Kumi Selja on Friday said over 20 farmers have sacrificed their lives in the farmers' movement so far due to the "dictatorial attitude" of the Centre and State governments.

Farmers have been forced to protest on the borders of the national capital in the cold for the last three weeks for their legitimate demands, but the government is not ready to listen as it is under pressure from the capitalists, she added.

Ms. Selja was speaking after a tribute meet at the

Congress office in memory of Sant Baba Ram Singh and other farmers who have died during the movement.

Instead of accepting their demands, the Central government is suppressing the voice of the farmers, the former Union Minister said, adding that Bharatiya Janata Party leaders were making humiliating comments about the protesters.

The government did not hold discussions with any farmers' organisation before enacting the three laws nor did they talk to the Opposition. This government has no faith in democracy, she added.

Ms. Selja was speaking after a tribute meet at the

Farmers erect stage to honour Bhagat Singh

Protesters at Tikri border celebrate Punjab-Haryana cultural unity

JATIN ANAND
NEW DELHI

Far from being consumed by monotony as their agitation enters its fourth week, thousands of farmers occupying several kilometres between the Tikri border in Delhi and Haryana's Bahadurgarh continue to fortify their ranks in more ways than one.

Rejoicing in Punjab and Haryana's new-found cultural unity (personified by the pervasive influence of revolutionary Bhagat Singh around them) since coming together against the contro-

versial farm laws, a second stage for performance of *Haryanvi raginis* dedicated to the freedom fighter has been set up to keep morale up.

The protest site, located on the Capital's western flank, serves as a nodal office of sorts from where emissaries are being dispatched to villages in adjacent rural belt to urge more farmers to join the growing agitation.

It is also the coordination point between numerous village panchayats – engaged in gathering resources such as boilers to provide hot bathing water and blankets – and protesting farmers.

"Panchayats are being conducted in nearby villages, especially those located in Bahadurgarh where farmers are relatively well off, to



Haryanvi raginis dedicated to the freedom fighter being performed at the Tikri border in Delhi on Friday. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

mobilise more people for the agitation. Farmer leaders from here take part in many such meetings every day," said Sumit, a student leader from Rohtak who is part of a farmers' union.

"Back home, panchayats are held every day to arrange

resources for people here. We will be getting boilers for hot bathing water and, of course, blankets and quilts, from hundreds of villages in Haryana soon," he said.

Phool Singh from Jind, who was one of the first to set up camp at Tikri border a

day after clashes between security personnel and agitating farmers seeking to march on New Delhi on November 26, said their actual plan wasn't to blockade the city's borders at all.

"After two months of chalking the way forward among ourselves and with our colleagues in Punjab, the plan was to actually protest peacefully at the Ramlila Grounds in central Delhi. That was actually where we were headed," he said.

"But, when they [security personnel] asked us to stop where we were, that's what we did. Everyone dug in their heels where they were and we will not move an inch back till the laws are repealed," he added.

As the main stage at the

venue rang out with repetitions of the slogan 'Tino ka noon chaknachur, aces to khat nahin manzoor' (All three laws must be destroyed, nothing less is acceptable), Maninder Chinna from Punjab's Sangrur sat at a *kaat* panchayat around a *hukka* but minus the *kaat* (straw bed).

The way forward

"This is the way forward," he said pointing towards a poster of Bhagat Singh when asked how long the protest was likely to go on.

"The only time Punjab and Haryana came together like this was under him when we were all one. Soon, there will be one stage here solely to sing his praises all day long," he said.

Kathak teacher held for molesting student, sending obscene messages

Police say statements of other students are being recorded

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A 52-year-old Kathak teacher has been arrested for allegedly harassing and molesting his student during her dance training session, the police said on Friday.

The 23-year-old victim, studying at the Kathak Kendra, accused her teacher Pandit Ravi Shankar Upadhyay of harassment.

The complainant said the accused touched her inappropriately and sent her ob-

scene messages on WhatsApp.

The matter came to light on December 14 when the student registered a complaint against her teacher at the Chanakyapuri police station. In her complaint, the victim stated that Ravi had been harassing her during training for a long time.

Around 3 p.m. on December 14, he again molested her and tried to kiss her.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (New Delhi) Eish

Singhal said a case was lodged on the basis of the complaint under IPC sections 354 (Assault or criminal force to woman with intent to outrage her modesty), 354 A (Sexual harassment and punishment for sexual harassment) and 509 (Word, gesture or act intended to insult the modesty of a woman).

The accused is in judicial custody and statements of other students are being recorded, said the police.

Two minors die in fire

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

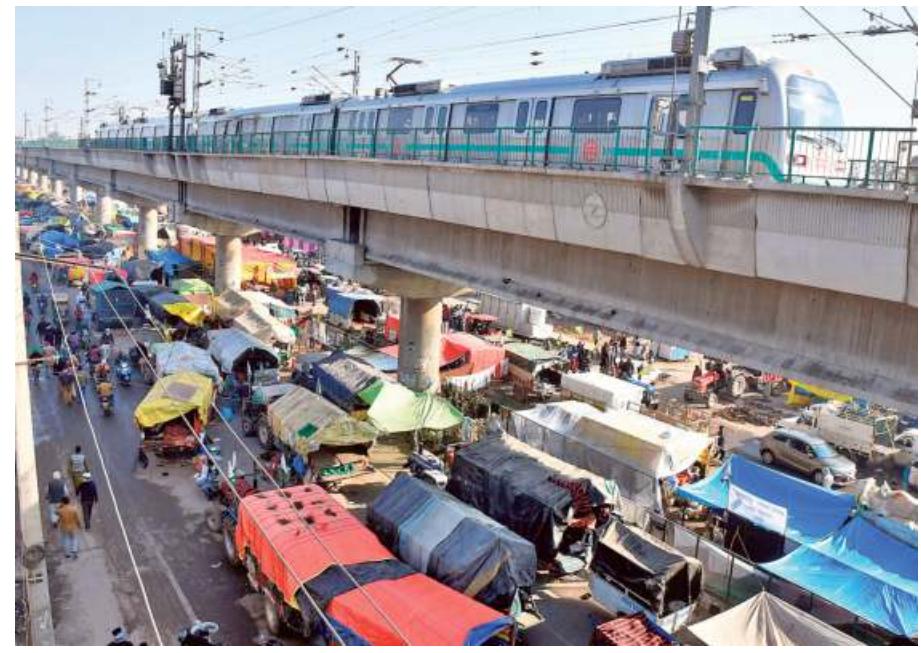
Two minor boys died on Friday after a fire broke out in a storeroom of a rented house in southwest Delhi's Sagarpur. The deceased have been identified as brothers Aayush (5) and Shriyansh (6).

Police suspect a short circuit to be the cause of the blaze. A call about the fire was received at 2.44 p.m. after which three fire tenders were rushed to the spot, a fire official said.

The ground floor of the building caught fire. Residents of the other floors were rescued by the police with the help of locals.

Doctors said the brothers died due to smoke inhalation. The bodies will be handed over to the family after post-mortem.

Not going anywhere



Tent city: Hundreds of tractors and trolleys belonging to protesting farmers parked at the

Tikri border in Delhi on Friday. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

IN BRIEF

DU admissions under 2nd special list from Dec. 21

NEW DELHI

Admissions to merit-based undergraduate courses in Delhi University under the second special cut-off list will take place from December 21-22. Only those candidates who could not or did not apply under the other lists are eligible to apply under this list, which will be available on DU's website on Monday. While colleges are required to approve applications by December 24, the last date for payment will be December 26.

Man held for duping banks of ₹300 crore

Third person to be arrested in case

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A 31-year-old man has been arrested for allegedly misappropriating funds to the tune of ₹300 crore – availed as loans and credit facilities from various banks and financial institutions, the police said on Friday.

Vaibhav Sharma, Chief Finance Officer of a Gurugram-based car dealership, was arrested on Thursday in connection with a 2018 case registered against him and other directors of the firm for misappropriation of bank money.

Action was taken by the Economic Offences Wing of the Delhi Police after an authorised representative of one of the banks alleged that the directors of the firm: Rashpal Singh Todd and Mandhir Singh Todd, and its CFO, duped their bank of ₹102 crore.

In view of sufficient incriminating evidence on record, Rashpal and Mandhir were arrested and charge-sheeted.

According to the complainant bank, the accused

had approached their branch at Bahadurshah Zafar Marg for financial assistance in 2007.

Trade advances

The firm had been availing cash credit facility, trade advances etc. for demo cars from the bank since 2007.

It had also availed term loan, cash credit facility and bank guarantee since 2013 onwards.

As per the terms and conditions executed between the bank and the firm, the accused had to furnish details pertaining to the utilisation of the funds along with details of the stock, which were hypothecated with the bank. The trade advances availed by the alleged company had to be returned within 90 days.

Till March 2018, the company had been performing as per the terms and conditions, but defaulted later. In June 2018, during an inspection of the showroom of the firm, only 29 cars were found against 200 cars, said Joint Commissioner of Police (EOW) O.P. Mishra.

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SATURDAY, DEC. 19
RISE 07:09 SET 17:29
RISE 11:09 SET 22:15
SUNDAY, DEC. 20
RISE 07:10 SET 17:29
RISE 11:45 SET 23:12

MONDAY, DEC. 21

RISE 07:10 SET 17:30
RISE 12:17 SET 00:00

Delhi Weather	max	min
Delhi City	20	04
Safdarjung	20	04
Palam	18	04

Delhi Palam Today
19°C Cold wave condition likely at some parts and marginal rise in day temperature with few clouds likely.
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Delhi Palam Tomorrow
20°C Shallow to moderate fog during morning and pleasant day with partly cloudy sky. Pollution level may deteriorate.

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Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI
The High Court on Friday said if the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) has prohibited political and other gatherings in the city till December 31 due to COVID-19, then the protesters outside Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's residence ought to be evicted.
Justice Sanjeev Sachdeva said that the court expects the police to take appropriate steps to implement the direction of the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) and also the provisions of Section 144 IPC which has been imposed in

Assembly seeks CBI probe into ₹2,500-cr. 'scam' in civic bodies

House passes resolution during special session; municipal polls due in a year

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI



The Delhi Assembly on Friday passed a resolution by voice vote demanding a CBI inquiry into an alleged ₹2,500-crore scam in the three BJP-ruled municipal corporations.

Addressing a special session of the Assembly, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said the civic bodies' scam was bigger than the Commonwealth Games scam.

He said the ₹2,500 crore could have been used to pay the salaries of sanitation workers, doctors and other employees as well as build infrastructure such as hospitals or Mohalla Clinics.

Mr. Kejriwal said: "People said the municipal corporations are corrupt and that no building is constructed without paying a bribe. The same people when asked about

the Delhi government, said it is honest."

He added that the municipal corporation elections were due in one year and Delhites will decide if they want an AAP model of governance or a BJP model, which has been on display for 15 years at the civic bodies.

Addressing the allegation that the Delhi government was not releasing funds to the municipal corporations

due to which they were unable to pay salaries, Mr. Kejriwal said the civic bodies have moved the courts over the release of funds and the courts have said all dues have been paid.

The Assembly proceeding began with AAP MLAs marching into the well of the House and shouting slogans and holding placards and banners. The House had to be adjourned for 15 minutes after which the detailed discussion began.

AAP MLA Saurabh Bhardwaj said the BJP had itself admitted that its councillors were corrupt as in 2017. Ahead of the municipal polls, the BJP changed all its sitting councillors as people were unhappy with them, he said. "The new councilors, however, created even more scams than their predecessors," Mr. Bhardwaj added.

Giving an example, the MLA said: "The building department of the corporations is known for corruption and demanding bribes. A BJP councillor was caught red-handed by the CBI for taking ₹10 lakh for construction of a building."

'Why opposing motion?'

Mr. Bhardwaj said the fact that the BJP MLAs opposed the motion for a CBI inquiry into the alleged scam in the civic bodies, exposes their lies. "If there is no corruption, then why are they opposing the investigation? Earlier they were claiming that a CBI investigation should take place but now when the Assembly moved the motion, they are opposing it. The BJP is scared that the people of Delhi will get to know the truth about the scam," he added.

Will step down from post if scam proven, says LoP
Allegations baseless, devoid of facts'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI



Leader of the Opposition in the Delhi Legislative Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri on Friday said he would step down from his post if a ₹2,500-crore scam in the civic bodies was proven. He has termed the allegations baseless and devoid of facts.

Plea by Bidhuri

Mr. Bidhuri also sought to urge Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal to "rise above all political differences" in the interest of Delhi and talk to the Mayors of the three BJP-led municipal corporations who have been sitting on an indefinite hunger strike outside his house. He said the AAP government should release dues of ₹13,000 crore "with immediate effect".

"Till date, no government in Delhi has stopped the money due to the Mun-

icipal Corporations. When there was no financial transaction [between the Delhi government and the civic bodies], then where is the scandal? Is the Delhi government making allegations against its own decision to withhold funds to the civic bodies?" he demanded.

Over 1,400 new COVID-19 cases in city

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The national capital recorded 1,418 new COVID-19 cases in a 24-hour period, taking the total to 6,14,775, according to a health bulletin released by the government on Friday.

In the same period, 37 people died due to the virus and 2,160 recovered.

The total number of deaths due to the virus now stands at 10,219 and the total number of recoveries at 5,93,137.

The number of active cases stands at 11,419.

The bulletin said 88,400 tests were conducted with a positivity rate of 1.6%. Out of the total tests, 48,180 were RT-PCR tests and 40,220 were rapid antigen tests.

This is the fourth consecutive day when the positivity rate has remained below 2%. The city at present has 6,276 containment zones.

If DDMA prohibits gatherings, evict protesters from outside CM's house

HC tells police that DMs need to ensure orders followed

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

The High Court on Friday said if the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) has prohibited political and other gatherings in the city till December 31 due to COVID-19, then the protesters outside Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's residence ought to be evicted.

Justice Sanjeev Sachdeva said that the court expects the police to take appropriate steps to implement the direction of the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) and also the provisions of Section 144 IPC which has been imposed in

HC seeks replies on pleas to protest at Shah's house

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Friday sought responses from the government and the police on AAP MLAs – Raghav Chadha and Atish Singh – pleas challenging the denial of their request for permission to hold protests outside the residences of Home Minister Amit Shah and L-G Anil Baijal.

Justice Navin Chawla issued notices to the Delhi

the area where the Chief Minister's residence is located.

The court said that if no action is taken for violation of the DDMA direction, then it will send out an "incorrect signal".

"The issue is if the DDMA order prohibits such gathering, then you have to shift them. Rather you have to evict them. Else incorrect signal will go. The District Magistrates have to ensure compliance of the DDMA directions. Compliance with DDMA orders can be ensured only by issuing appropriate directions. Issue directions and if they do not comply, then take action,"

IN BRIEF

DMRC announces restricted services

NEW DELHI

The Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) on Friday said services will be restricted between Rajiv Chowk and Vishwavidyalaya metro stations from 11 p.m. on Saturday to 9 a.m. on Sunday. "To undertake planned track maintenance work on the section, trains will run on a single line after 11 p.m. till the end of revenue services on December 19 and from the start of revenue services till 9 a.m. on December 20," it said.

Two held for kidnapping 8-yr-old boy in Gurugram

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

GURUGRAM

Two persons have been arrested for allegedly kidnapping an eight-year-old boy from Ullahwas here and demanding ₹50 lakh ransom, the police said on Friday. The boy has been rescued from Palwal.

Three on the run
Three more people, wanted in connection with the case,

are said to be absconding. ACP Preet Pal Sangwan said the accused stayed on rent posing as autorickshaw drivers near the boy's house for a fortnight before they kidnapped him.

The boy was playing outside his house in the afternoon on December 16 when the accused kidnapped him. "The boy was kept hostage in Palwal," Mr. Sangwan said.

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Sisodia pulls up U.P. Minister for sharing 'fake' images of Delhi govt. schools

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Instead of accepting a challenge for a debate between the Delhi government's education model and that of the Uttar Pradesh government, U.P. Minister Sidharth Nath Singh shared

edited images to "give a bad name to our schools", Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia said on Friday.

He said the U.P. government had nothing to show for development done in the education field and hence tweeted "fake posts

that showed four old and edited news clips of Delhi government schools".

Mr. Sisodia, in a press conference, showed each of the images tweeted by Mr. Singh who alleged that the Delhi government schools were in a "poor state".

"When AAP announced it will be contesting the U.P. elections, the BJP Minister got hassled. But when he could not find any negative news about our schools, he started sharing fake news," Mr. Sisodia said, adding: "There should be an open

debate on the Yogi Model of Education vs. Kejriwal Model on December 22 in Lucknow. This debate will be very healthy and meaningful for our democracy. It will also benefit crores of children of Uttar Pradesh and the country."



"Let us together pay tributes to the Ninth Guru for his unparalleled and supreme sacrifice, with the pledge to imbibe his values of righteousness, truth and freedom of faith."

Capt. Amarinder Singh
Chief Minister, Punjab



Issued by: Department of Information & Public Relations, Punjab

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• WAZIRPUR A-5, Near Richi Rich Banquet (Opp. Shalimar Bagh)
• JANAKPURI B-1/2, Main Najafgarh Road, Opp. Metro Pillar 543
• NOIDA, Nirula's Sec-2, Near Metro Station, Sec-15, Noida, UP
• LAJPAT NAGAR, 49, Main Ring Road, Adj. Haldi Ram, Near Moolchand Crossing

Amarinder hits out at SAD, AAP on farm laws

Their double standards have exposed their lack of commitment to farmers, says Punjab Chief Minister

VIKAS VASUDEVA
CHANDIGARH

Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh on Friday said both the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) were a bunch of hypocrites whose double standards on the farm laws had exposed their lack of commitment to the farmers.

"AAP and SAD MLAs never say what they mean, and vice versa," said the Chief Minister in an informal interaction with journalists after the launch of second phase of Punjab Smart Connect Scheme in Mohali.

The Chief Minister pointed out that while SAD was party to the introduction of the farm ordinances in the first place, the AAP government in



CAAP and SAD MLAs never say what they mean, and vice versa.. [Arvind] Kejriwal and AAP have a different face for the people with totally opposite intentions hidden inside

Delhi had been quick to implement one of the farm laws.

Hitting out at Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, Capt. Amarinder said the AAP leader had given approval to the black farm laws by notifying one of them in the national capital last month and was now indulging in pet-

ty politics over the matter by tearing copies of the central laws.

"This shows Kejriwal and AAP have a different face for the people, with totally opposite intentions hidden inside," said the Chief Minister, slamming the party over its

anti-farmer double-faced actions.

Briquetting plant

Separately, Capt. Amarinder virtually inaugurated paddy straw-based briquetting plant of 100 tonnes per day capacity in Patiala.

Calling it an overdue initiative, the Chief Minister said the new technology will not

only help check environmental pollution through gainful utilisation of paddy straw in the State, but will also enable farmers, especially small farmers, earn extra income from the sale of paddy stubble.

Expressing confidence that more such plants would come up in the future to ease Punjab's stubble burning is- sue, he said the low calorific value of 3,500 for briquettes (as compared with 7,000 for coal) is amply balanced out economically since coal costs ₹10,000 per ton as against ₹4,500 per ton for briquette. Also, with oil becoming expensive, this is a more viable source of energy, he added.

The plant has been set up at village Kulburchan in Patiala district, at a capital cost of ₹5.50 crore, by Punjab State Council for Science and Technology in collaboration with Private Partner M/s. Punjab Renewable Energy Systems Pvt. Ltd., with the support of Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change, Govt. of India, under the Climate Change Action Programme.

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PUBLIC NOTICE

BEFORE THE ADDITIONAL SUB-COURT AT CHENNAI/PATTU

In State of Tamil Nadu
I.A.Nos.2,3,4,5 & 6 of 2019

IN
O.S.NO.16 of 2019

P.PERUMAL

-----PETITIONER/PLAINTIFF

-VS-

Rotary Club of Marai Malai Nagar

Rep. by its Secretary
(Club No. 50091) & Others

TO--RESPONDENTS/DEFENDANTS

(1) ROTARY INTERNATIONAL
Rep. By its Regional Head, (R7/D7)

(2) JATINDER SINGH,
Manager Club-District Support, (R8/D8)

(3) RASHI VARSHNEY

Manager-Financial Service, (R9/D9)

Above 1 to 3 having office at South Asia

Office, Thapar House, (2nd Floor, Central Wing

124, Janpath, New Delhi, 110 001

Kindly take Notice, in the above Interlocutory

Applications and as well as in the Main Suit,

filed for Declaration, Permanent Injunction and for Interim Reliefs, the Hon'ble Additional Sub-Court at Chengalpattu, was

pleased to Order to effect Paper Publication to

Respondents / Defendants 7 to 9, for

effecting Service and posted the above

case on 06/01/2021, for your appearance.

Hence appear either personally or

through your Advocate at 10.30A.M. in the above

Mentioned Court without fail or else the matter

will be heard and decided in your absence.

M.ANANDEESWARAN,

Counsel for Petitioner / Plaintiff.

Ph: 98402 03800

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9865451532

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cell: 0413-220225

MANAGING DIRECTOR

Before the ADDITIONAL SUB-COURT AT CHENNAI/PATTU

In State of Tamil Nadu
I.A.Nos.2,3,4,5 & 6 of 2019

IN
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Mentioned Court without fail or else the matter

will be heard and decided in your absence.

M.ANANDEESWARAN,

Counsel for Petitioner / Plaintiff.

Ph: 98402 03800

Date & Time for publishing of NIT & TOR on website

23.12.2020 at 3.00 PM

Uploading of Bid document & photo copy of Earnest money & tender fee on website

05.01.2021 up to 5.00 PM

Date & Time for submission of Original copy of Earnest Money & tender fee at CDO Office

06.01.2021 up to 3.00 PM

Date & Time for Opening of Technical Bid document

07.01.2021 at 4.00 PM

Date & Time for Opening of Rate Bid

15.01.2021 at 5.00 PM

Contact no. for procurement officer

0651-2490581 / 09504577191

Help line no. for e-procurement cell

0651-2480345

2. Tender fee (DD) & bid security (earnest money) amount specified for the work in as annexure-1, should be in favour of Executive Engineer, D.W. & S. Division – Ranchi West, Ranchi payable at Ranchi.

3. Tender fee, Bid security (earnest money) & Bid Documents separately in hard copy shall be deposited in the office of the Chief Engineer D.W. & S. Dept. CDO, Near Nepal House, Ranchi either by registered post / speed post or by hand. Only those applications will be entertained whose cost of tender fee, bid security & bid documents is being received separately for each scheme/ group super scribed on sealed envelope before 06.01.2021 upto 03.00 P.M. The office of Chief Engineer D.W. & S. Dept. CDO will not be held responsible for postal delay, if any, in the delivery of the document or non receipt of the same.

4. In case of Empanelled consultant of MSME category will follow the Govt. rule.

5. Details of Notes to Bidder / Term of Refrancce (TOR) / Annexures and related information can be seen / downloaded from the https://jharkhandtenders.gov.in and http://dwsd.jharkhand.gov.in

Letter No.-2428/33A

Office of the Executive Engineer P.D., PWD, Almora (Uttarakhand)

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WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD; POLLUTION DATA: CPCB; MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 18.30 HRS)

Forecast for Saturday: Thunderstorm accompanied with lightning likely at isolated places over Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Kerala and Lakshadweep. Cold/severe cold wave conditions likely at many/few/isolated places over Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	...24.0	12.3	...	Kozhikode	...34.1	24.6	...
Ahmedabad	...25.6	13.6	...	Kurnool	...31.8	19.7	...
Aizawl	...20.9	8.3	...	Lucknow	...19.5	5.5	...
Allahabad	...18.9	7.0	...	Madurai	10.7	27.6	22.2
Bengaluru	...28.0	18.4	...	Mangaluru	...36.0	23.2	...
Bhopal	...21.7	7.4	...	Mumbai	...32.9	21.2	...
Bhubaneswar	...28.3	17.6	...	Mysuru	...30.0	19.8	...
Chandigarh	...18.8	4.7	...	New Delhi	...19.8	4.4	...
Chennai	...30.0	25.2	...	Patna	...19.6	8.4	...
Coimbatore	0.7	28.0	21.8	Port Blair	0.2	30.8	25.2
Dehradoon	...21.4	3.6	...	Puducherry	33.2	26.7	22.5
Gangtok	...11.0	6.8	...	Pune	...30.5	15.8	...
Goa	...34.5	23.0	...	Raipur	...28.0	17.2	...
Guwahati	...24.8	11.2	...	Ranchi	...22.2	8.6	...
Hubballi	...29.0	19.0	...	Shillong	...17.0	5.3	...
Hyderabad	...30.2	17.6	...	Shimla	...16.6	3.6	...
Imphal	...22.2	5.3	...	Srinagar	...8.0	6.0	...
Jaipur	...22.3	6.2	...	Thiruvananthapuram	6.5	31.2	24.1
Kochi	...30.2	25.0	...	Tiruchi	5.1	26.1	23.0
Kohima	...18.3	6.2	...	Vijayawada	...30.6	22.0	...
Kolkata	...24.0	16.4	...	Visakhapatnam	...29.3	23.4	...

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing

CITIES	SO ₂	NO _x	CO	PM _{2.5}	PM ₁₀	CODE
Ahmedabad	28	67	47	.123	.131	...
Bengaluru	12	64	40	.87	.98	...
Chennai	.8	80	.50	.101
Delhi	9	82	.58	.362	.265	...
Hyderabad	.5	98	.15	.151	.139	...
Kolkata	29	28	.39	.299	.220	...
Lucknow	.7	104	.62	.304	.188	...
Mumbai	28	23	.41	.266	.185	...
Pune	.9	92	.65	.124	.121	...
Visakhapatnam	12	10	.63	.187	.125	...

Yesterday

In observation made at 4.00 p.m. Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh recorded overall air quality index (AQI) score of 319 indicating an unhealthy level of pollution. In contrast, Elton, Kerala recorded a healthy AQI score of 37

Air Quality Code: ■ Poor ■ Moderate ■ Good (Readings indicate average AQI)

SO₂: Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.

NO_x: Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.

CO: Carbon monoxide. High concentration in air reduces oxygen supply to critical organs like the heart and brain. At very high levels, it can cause dizziness, confusion, unconsciousness and even death.

PM_{2.5} & PM₁₀: Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease

Maharashtra farmers call for 'Chalo Delhi' on Dec. 21

They will join anti-farm laws protest at Rajasthan-Haryana border

SHOUMOJIT BANERJEE

PUNE

Cranking up pressure on the Centre to repeal the contentious farm laws, the Left-affiliated All-India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) – one of the outfits spearheading the agitation in Maharashtra – on Friday said that thousands of farmers across the State would be travelling to Delhi to join the ongoing farmers' protest.

"Thousands of farmers from over 20 districts of Maharashtra will gather at Nashik on December 21 and start a 'vehicle march' to hit Delhi to strengthen the struggle and to show solidarity to lakhs of farmers camping around the national capital for the last three weeks," AIKS's national president Ashok Dhawale said.

He said that the farmers would be traversing a distance of 1,266 km to join their comrades at the Rajasthan-Haryana border at Shahjahanpur around December 24.

"The vehicle rally will commence with a public meeting at Nashik on the afternoon of December 21. There will be a demonstration near the Reliance-owned petrol pump in Nashik," AIKS's State general secretary Ajit Nawale said, adding that the 'protest convoy' would then make its way to Madhya Pradesh.

Mr. Nawale said the AIKS had three main demands:

Three minor sisters die due to suspected food poisoning

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Three sisters, aged three to nine years, died due to suspected food poisoning in Karad tehsil of Maharashtra's Satara district, the police said on Friday.

The minor siblings, who had started vomiting after having dinner with parents at home on Sunday, died in a local hospital over the past three days.

Their parents, who were also hospitalised, are out of danger now. "On Sunday night, the members of the family that lives in Sainpur village in Karad tehsil, had a meal of eggplant curry and *basundi* (sweet thickened milk). They had bought *basundi* from a shop. But after going to sleep, all of them started vomiting," B.R. Patil, senior inspector of Karad City police station, said.

After he was dead, the accused couple kept the body in the hall of their house and over the next two days chopped the body into 11 pieces using a stone cutter. They then wrapped the pieces with plastic and paper, and stored in two suitcases. Then they dumped the suitcases near Neral railway tracks behind the car shed on Tuesday, he said.

In the morning, they approached a local doctor. But as the three sisters fell ill, they were admitted to the hospital on Tuesday. "While one of the sisters died on Tuesday night, two others died on Wednesday and Thursday," he said.

The HC Bench also took into consideration the forensic report of the semen detected on the frock of the victim, which said that it did not match with the male haplotypes of blood samples of the appellant.

Acquitting Mr. Shaikh, the HC said, "We find it unsafe to convict the accused only on the basis of the testimony of the victim without there being a further corroboration to her testimony showing the complicity of the accused. It is therefore not possible for us to uphold the conviction of the appellant rendered by the trial court."

The trial court had relied

upon the testimony given by the victim, and said, "The testimony revealed that the child knew the appellant (Mr. Shaikh) well as he used to meet her father and she further knew him as a friend of her father."

The HC Bench also took into consideration the forensic report of the semen detected on the frock of the victim, which said that it did not match with the male haplotypes of blood samples of the appellant.

A medical examination revealed that the minor suffered forceful penetrative sexual assault, and the medical evidence on record disclosed the brutality of the assault.

The trial court had relied



Plan of action: AIKS leaders addressing a press conference in Nashik on Friday. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

scrapping of the three 'anti-farmer' and 'pro-corporate' farm Acts; withdrawal of the Electricity Amendment Bill; and ensuring that the Centre provides the minimum support price (MSP) at one-and-a-half times the cost of production besides the guarantee of procurement at fixed MSP rates.

"Like farmers from Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and the surrounding States of Delhi, the farmers from Maharashtra are prepared to dig in their trenches indefinitely till the Centre accedes to our demands," he said.

Mr. Nawale further said that while the agitation had received overwhelming nationwide support till now, it was only farmers from States around Delhi who had been able to physically agitate. "In spite of nationwide protests

on December 3 and the Bharat Bandh on December 8, farmers from far-flung States have not yet been able to go directly to Delhi and participate in the agitation in large numbers. The reason being railway transport was shut. Maharashtra's farmers will be the first ones to overcome the obstacles hurled by the Centre to reach Delhi," Mr. Nawale said, while hoping that this 'militant action' on part of Maharashtra's farmers would spur farmers from other southern States to join in.

Mr. Dhawale said that all like-minded organisations in Maharashtra would be supporting this 'Chalo Delhi' campaign. "When the convoy reaches Dhule on December 22 in the afternoon, a support meeting will be held there on behalf of other farm outfits, workers and labour unions across the State," he said.

SAD chief seeks President's intervention on winter session

'No lockdown on BJP rallies but lockdown on Parliament'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

CHANDIGARH

Shiromani Akali Dal president and Lok Sabha MP Sukhbir Singh Badal on Friday sought President Ram Nath Kovind's intervention for immediately convening the winter session of Parliament.

trywide lockdown? Now, by the government's own admission, the intensity of the pandemic no longer requires a lockdown. Then, how does one justify the cancellation of the winter session? What was right then cannot be wrong now," the Akali chief wrote.

Mr. Badal said that it is "absurd and ironical" that the ruling party sees no danger to public health during gatherings of thousands of people in its election rallies in Bihar and now in West Bengal but wants the countrymen to believe that Parliament could meet to pass the three controversial Bills at a time when the pandemic was at its peak, which required the Prime Minister to start the nation's fight against it with a long, coun-

trywide members and that too under controlled circumstances. The COVID excuse is patently fake and even ridiculous," he stated.

In his letter, copies of which have been marked to the Lok Sabha Speaker and the Vice President in his capacity as the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, the Akali leader said Parliament must meet immediately as "a national priority" because the ongoing farmers' movement affects nearly 100 crore people directly. "It would be insensitive if the government just looks the other way while nearly two dozen innocent and patriotic *annadatas* (food producers) have already sacrificed their lives," he wrote.

Why was Karan Johar not probed in 2019, Congress asks BJP

STAFF REPORTER

MUMBAI

Alleging that investigating agencies have become puppets at the hands of the BJP, the Maharashtra Congress on Friday asked why Bollywood filmmaker Karan Johar was not probed in 2019 over a party hosted by him when

the BJP-led government was in power and Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis was holding the portfolio of Home Department.

"The viral video based on which Mr. Johar had been summoned was from 2019 when the Fadnavis government was in power. Why

didn't the State government or the NCB act then? The agency which had summoned someone based on an old video did not dare to summon actor Kangana Ranaut who openly admitted consuming drugs," State Congress general secretary Sachin Sawant said.

KARNATAKA INDUSTRIAL AREAS DEVELOPMENT BOARD

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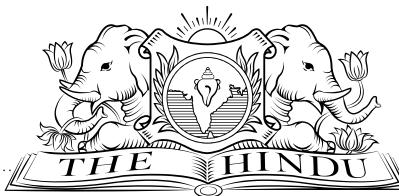
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Battle for Bengal

Police personnel should not be made instruments of a political battle

The appointment of three IPS officers of the West Bengal cadre to various posts by the Union Home Ministry on Thursday has escalated the confrontation between the State and the Centre. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has termed the deputation order despite the State's objection "a colourable exercise of power and blatant misuse of emergency provision of IPS Cadre Rule 1954". The constant hostility between the State and Central governments is now taking a turn for the worse ahead of the 2021 Assembly election. The tug of war began after a convoy of BJP President J.P. Nadda came under stone pelting in the State on December 10. The BJP apparently holds the IPS officers accountable for the incident. After an initial move to recall these officials was resisted by the State, the Centre has invoked Section 6(l) of the Indian Police Service (Cadre) Rules, which says that "in case of any disagreement, the matter shall be decided by the Central Government...." The tussle mirrors the high stakes political contest between the BJP and the ruling Trinamool Congress. The CM's style of managing the police force has gained attention for the wrong reasons in the past. Senior officials are seen as allied with the TMC and the BJP's determined drive to capture power in the State is multi-pronged.

On Friday, the Supreme Court restrained West Bengal from taking any "coercive action" against several BJP leaders in criminal cases registered against them by the State Police. The BJP will continue to knock on the doors of the Court and the Election Commission of India to bring pressure on the State government. By enforcing its writ on IPS officers, the Centre is sending a signal to all officers that their conduct will now be under scrutiny. The script is familiar. Ahead of the 2019 Lok Sabha election, the CBI issued notice to Kolkata Police Commissioner Rajeev Kumar and wanted to take him in custody, provoking Ms. Banerjee to sit on a dharna. During the polls, the ECI transferred senior police officers including Mr. Kumar. After the elections, the CM restored all officials to their previous posts. The central schemes, Ayushman Bharat and PM Kisan Samman Niyoji, are also a bone of contention. The TMC government has refused to implement them, demanding that the funds be routed through the State. The CM has also complained of insufficient central assistance to manage the COVID-19 pandemic and cyclone Amphan. The Centre's earlier demand that the Chief Secretary and DGP attend a meeting in New Delhi on the State's law-and-order situation increased tensions. All told, the partisan use of the personnel and instruments of the state by parties in power as is happening in this tussle is a disturbing signal for democracy and federalism.

Friend and neighbour

India must strengthen ties with Bangladesh and appreciate Sheikh Hasina's challenges

The virtual summit between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bangladesh counterpart Sheikh Hasina, where they discussed issues ranging from the violent border incidents to the COVID-19 fight, demonstrates their desire to reboot India-Bangladesh ties that have faced challenges in recent months. Mr. Modi called Bangladesh a "major pillar" in India's neighbourhood first policy, while Ms. Hasina invited him to visit Bangladesh in March for the celebrations of the 50th anniversary of its independence. It is a key opportunity for India, which had played a major role in Bangladesh's liberation in 1971, to revive the bonhomie and address the issues adversely affecting the partnership. Despite the friendship remaining solid, the border has been sensitive – at least 25 Bangladeshi were killed in the first six months of this year along the border by Indian forces, according to a rights watchdog. The Teesta water dispute remains unresolved. The Citizenship (Amendment) Act and the proposed National Register of Citizens, which Ms. Hasina called "unnecessary", have created a negative impression about India. Above all, China is making deep inroads into Bangladesh by ramping up infrastructure investments and expanding economic cooperation. So, it is imperative for India to bolster ties with this all-weather friend, and there may not be a better time to do so than when Bangladesh is to celebrate the golden jubilee of its independence.

Ms. Hasina has done relatively well in steering Bangladesh through crises. Under the Awami League government, Bangladesh, India's largest trading partner in South Asia, has expanded its economy and improved social welfare. Despite the Awami League's tight grip over the administration, Ms. Hasina has continued to face challenges from Islamist factions. War crimes and corruption trials have weakened the traditional opposition – the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and its ally, the pro-Pakistan Jamaat-e-Islami. But another Islamist group, Hifazat-e-Islam, made headlines recently when it organised mass protests against French President Emmanuel Macron and opposed the Hasina government's plan to build a statue of the country's founding father, Bangabandhu Mujibur Rahman, in Dhaka's suburbs. The Hifazat has claimed that installing statues is prohibited in Islam and that they would be pulled down, but the government seems determined to go ahead with its plan. In a speech marking Victory Day (December 16), Ms. Hasina said she would not allow the country to be divided on religious lines, in an indirect reference to Hifazat. India should support her fight against the radical elements. India should also not allow the ideological inclinations of the ruling party to spoil the historic relationship between the two countries. New Delhi should take a broader view of the changing scenario and growing competition in South Asia, and reach out to Dhaka with an open mind.

MSP – the factoids versus the facts

The debate on agricultural issues must take into account the changed geography of procurement and the seller's profile

PRANKUR GUPTA, REETIKA KHERA & SUDHA NARAYANAN

According to one definition, a factoid is "an item of unreliable information that is reported and repeated so often that it becomes accepted as fact". After the passage of the three controversial farm laws, the Minimum Support Price (MSP) – not mentioned in the laws – has gained a lot of attention. The predominance of factoids about MSP and procurement has meant that the debate has yielded more chaff than grain.

The MSP is meant to set a floor below which prices do not fall, and is announced by the government for 23 commodities (<https://bit.ly/2IZLCIC>). It is the price at which the government 'promises' to buy from farmers if market prices fall below it. In fact, however, government procurement is heavily concentrated on wheat and rice, with other crops barely being procured.

Over the years, factoids about the MSP and government procurement have gained so much traction that the retired gentleman in the local park cites them as facts. These pertain to how many have benefited from the MSP and who has benefited from it. According to these popular beliefs, few (6%) farmers benefit, only large farmers benefit, and only farmers of Punjab and Haryana (to some extent, western Uttar Pradesh) benefit.

More States under MSP

In a forthcoming paper, we use data on State-wise procurement from the Food Corporation of India (FCI) and agricultural household data for 2012-13 from the National Sample Survey (NSS), after which these data are not available,

to set the record straight on these three factoids.

One, the 6% figure from the NSS data 2012-13 relates to paddy and wheat alone. Even here, however, among those who sold any paddy/wheat, the numbers are higher – 14% and 16%.

Two, the Government of India has made a systematic effort to expand the reach of MSP to more States, via the Decentralized Procurement (DCP) Scheme. Introduced in 1997-98, it was not very popular in the initial years and began to be adopted by States in earnest only around 2005. Under the DCP scheme, the responsibility of procurement devolved to the State governments which were reimbursed pre-approved costs. FCI data suggest that by July 2015, as many as 15 States had taken up this programme, though not all were implementing it with equal enthusiasm. Largely on account of it, procurement began moving out of 'traditional' States (such as Punjab, Haryana, western Uttar Pradesh). Until 2000, barely 10% of wheat and rice was procured outside the traditional States. By 2012-13, the share of the DCP States rose to 25-35%.

In the case of paddy, Chhattisgarh and Odisha have been the star performers. These States today contribute about 10% each to the total paddy procurement in the country. For wheat, decentralised procurement has taken off in Madhya Pradesh in a big way, accounting for approximately 20% of wheat procurement. In 2020-21, wheat procurement from Madhya Pradesh surpassed that from even Punjab. Among agricultural households which sell paddy under the procurement system, while 9% and 7% come from Punjab and Ha-



ryana, 11% are in Odisha and 33% are in Chhattisgarh. An overwhelming majority of agricultural households selling wheat to the procurement agencies come from Madhya Pradesh (33%) compared to 22% from Punjab and 18% from Haryana. That only Punjab and Haryana farmers have benefited from the MSP is now truly a thing of the past.

Which farmer benefits

Three, as per the factoid, only large farmers have benefited. In fact, procurement has benefited the small and marginal farmers in much bigger numbers than medium and large farmers. At the all-India level, among those who sold paddy to the government, 1% were large farmers, owning over 10 hectares of land. Small and marginal farmers, with less than 2 hectares accounted for 70%. The rest (29%) were medium farmers (2-10 hectares).

In the case of wheat, 3% of all wheat-selling farmers were large farmers. More than half (56%) were small and marginal farmers.

In Punjab and Haryana, the share of small and marginal farmers is not insignificant (38% and 58%, respectively, among paddy sellers). In the non-traditional States that adopted the DCP scheme, the overwhelming major-

ity of farmers who sell to State procurement agencies are small and marginal. In Chhattisgarh and Odisha, for example, small and marginal farmers comprise 70-80% of all sellers to government agencies. Similarly, in Madhya Pradesh, nearly half (45%) of those who sell wheat to government agencies are small or marginal farmers.

Similarly, confusion reigns about other areas of interest from the point of view of the new farm laws. It is widely believed that for the first time, the new laws allow farmers to sell outside the Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC). Even for commodities for which MSP is announced, the proportion of sales via the *mandi* range is only between 10-64%; the demand for the MSP originates because the prices paid outside the *mandi* tend to be much lower. Countrywide, sales to *mandi* or government procurement agencies fetched on average 13.3% higher prices for paddy and 5.8% for wheat.

We are not unsympathetic to those who question the heavy concentration of wheat and rice in government procurement (millets are better suited to agro-climatic conditions prevailing in large parts of the country, more nutritious and also grown by small and marginal farmers), to the flaws in the current *mandi* system, or how the MSP is implemented. Yet, the debate – popular, academic or political – on these issues must take into account the changed geography of procurement and the profile of the seller.

Prankur Gupta is at the University of Texas, Austin; Reetika Khera is at the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi, and Sudha Narayanan is at the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), Delhi

Chalking out the Congress's enduring revival

Even at its nadir, the party is still politically relevant and its revival is linked to how the organisation is rebuilt



RUCHI GUPTA

Indian democracy is at an inflection point. Not only has the Indian state been captured by a ruling party which is creating a religious hierarchy of citizenship but Indian democracy is also being systematically deinstitutionalised to dismantle the very constraints on state power which make it possible to contest it. The only way to stop this assault on the institutional edifice of our democracy is by capturing state power at the Centre.

Still a force to reckon with

The importance of the Indian National Congress Party at this point cannot be overstated. Even at its nadir, the Congress commands 20% of the electoral vote and is the only Opposition party with a national footprint. It is thus the only party which can provide a coherent national framework for a viable Opposition formation. Unfortunately, the Congress party is failing to do justice to this moment, and to its own deeply inspiring legacy.

There is no dearth of advice for the Congress; however, much of it is motherhood generalities – "you must be among the people" – which does little to clarify the way forward. Critiques of the tactical choices which any political party must make in the electoral arena

also have limited value. The policies which constitute the party's political platform are contingent on the moment. What is important for the enduring revival of the Congress Party is its larger perception in the minds of the Indian people and how it builds organisation.

Nation-building identity

For this, three things need to be done. Give members a positive sense of identity: with the politicisation of every day life and consequent polarisation, political affiliation is increasingly a part of one's identity. Association with the Congress Party must allow people to feel good about themselves and give them a sense of pride and virtue if not opportunity and power.

Earlier being a Congress person imbued an identity strongly co-related to our national identity. With the range of activities such as spinning the wheel, an ordinary person could feel like s/he was part of the nation-building effort. This identity has been lost. Consequently, we lack political programmes to give supporters an accessible and respectful sense of belonging.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on the other hand does give its supporters an identity outside of partisan affiliation – of being a proud Hindu and/or ascendant subaltern who can dismiss the "corrupt elite" (the Congress and its affiliates in this narrative). The BJP's supporters have ways of exercising this identity without necessarily having to engage with the BJP organisation. Merely exercising one's Hindu identity through



festivals is becoming enough to be a BJP supporter, whereas an instinctively liberal person on the street is a Congress voter, often by default in opposition to the BJP.

With the politicisation of our national identity and its increasing association with the BJP, the Congress Party cannot come up with a counter through *ad hoc* economic promises alone, especially because citizens are sceptical of the state's intent and capacity to deliver outsized new economic benefits.

Instead, the Congress Party must articulate its own vision of India's national identity, design political programmes which will allow members/supporters to exercise this identity, and find leadership at all levels and constituencies (students, the youth, farmers, Dalits, women, etc) to embody this identity.

Politics of organisation

Second, meld the organisation with the political process: mass communication and mass outreach are at the heart of electoral politics. A political party must thus have 'organisation' across the spread of its electoral footprint. While the Congress has always been a mass-based party, the need for organisation is especially acute

right now to bypass media subservient to the ruling party and to tailor messages for different constituencies. In the absence of organisation, the Congress Party is too dependent on the media to get its message across and is constrained by blunt messaging instead of tailoring content by interest/constituency. While there is recognition in the Party on the need for organisation, there is an attempt to build organisation through procedure instead of politics. This approach can populate the organisation and help with data collection, but only a political process can create a chain of committed leadership, influence and accountability.

At the grass-root level

The Party may have data for some nominal worker in a booth, but who will inspire, coax and cajole the worker into actually going out to canvas? This is an assiduously political process where ideology and commitment of leadership at each level cannot be supplanted by technology or surveillance. Part of the impetus for a technological approach is the somewhat unrealistic manner in which we define our immediate organisational task, such as identifying 10 workers for 10 lakh booths across the country wherein it is near impossible to deploy personalised discretion inherent in a political process.

The Party may be better served if instead it were to focus first on establishing a committed block-level organisation across the country, giving importance and stature to the roughly 6,500 block presi-

dents and 700 district presidents in the process.

Issue of the leader

Third, establish strong top-down leadership: None of the above can be done without a strong and interventionist Congress President. Political parties – the Congress in particular – are defined as much by internal conflicts as external. Politics is dynamic with constantly opening and closing pathways to power. Without a strong leader at the top to take and enforce decisions, the Party will continue to be pulled in different directions.

Moreover, only the active facilitation of the Congress President can create space for substantive deliberation required right now – both as a political process to draw everyone together and to form a political platform expansive enough to accommodate the Congress's historical big tent positioning.

At present, this leadership can only be provided by Rahul Gandhi. This is not a sycophantic statement – if any other leader had to emerge in the Party, he would have done so over the last year. Instead, different factions prefer *status quo* rather than allowing one group to ascend and upset the balance of power for everyone. Organisational power thus continues to reside in Mr Gandhi. The way then to revive the Congress and consolidate this power is one and the same – its full and frontal exercise.

Ruchi Gupta is All India Joint Secretary in-charge of the Congress's student wing; twitter.com/guptar. The views expressed are personal

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.

Tensions in Bengal

Political violence is a way of life in West Bengal right from the days the Communists were at the helm of affairs. But such issues are to be sorted out at the local level only with the help of the police and the judiciary. If the Centre attempts to interfere and resort to taking unilateral actions such as calling back officers on deputation, it would prove to be the death knell of the federal structure enshrined in the Constitution. The Centre hastened an action just because one of its top leaders was at the receiving end. While no one can condone the incidents of violence, the BJP's provocative statements, often to make its political

presence felt, would have escalated the situation to this level. The BJP should aspire to rule by adhering to democratic principles and not by means of muscle flexing and gross misuse of powers at its disposal (Page 1, "Mamata refuses to allow 3 IPS officers to go to Centre", December 18).

V. SUBRAMANIAN,
Chennai

It is saddening that political tension in West Bengal is reaching flashpoint ahead of next year's Assembly elections. It has a lot to do with the BJP's desperate attempt to expand its footprint in new territory and come to power not by the legitimate means of taking up the bread-and-butter issues of politics, but

by adopting aggressive communal postures. The rest of India watches with keen interest to see which way West Bengal reacts. It is worrying that the BJP is creating tension and disturbing the peace. Polarising voters is the name of the game.

G. DAVID MILTON,
Maruthancode, Tamil Nadu

Some friction is only to be expected when different parties are in power at the Centre and States. However the current and ugly confrontation in West Bengal does little credit to either the Centre or the State. The BJP seems to be transforming itself into a battering ram, determined to demolish the established forts of other parties. The changing

loyalties of some TMC leaders has only added fuel to the fire. Democracy in India is entering a definite phase which could decide India's future course.

ANTHONY HENRIQUES,
Mumbai

Mamata Banerjee swept to power in 2011 promising good governance. But the attack on a BJP leader's convoy indicates that not much has changed in the political culture of West Bengal. With the Congress and the CPI (M) on the margins, the TMC now sees the BJP as a potential challenger especially after the Bihar and Telangana election results. If the use of violence to retain power in elections is gaining traction, the Bengal election faces

grave danger.
S.S. PAUL,
Chakdaha, Nadia, West Bengal

A resolution

I write this as a war veteran, aged 83. When in the early years of India's Independence we were a starved nation, India's leaders sought and got help in the form of the PL480. In the mid-1960s, we even raised the slogan "Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan". Was this only an empty slogan or were the leaders and all Indians genuine in their appreciation of the *jawan* and the *kisan*? If India is a grain surplus nation, with excess stock of wheat and rice, farmers' contributions need to be recognised. At this stage, only reconciliation and initiating talks with mutual respect can break the deadlock. Our leaders seem to have forgotten the age-old saying, "stoop to conquer". Both sides need to provide some "slack" and this should start from the government. The government should offer the necessary assistance and support to farmers during their effort to switch over to diversified crops.

R. GOPAL,
Chennai

I do hope the powers that be will step back for a moment and realise that the present confrontation is changed to reconciliation and dialogue. A mutually acceptable solution will not leave either party to accept a sense of defeat and with a bitter taste in the mouth.

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The mystery disease of Eluru

With over 600 people being hospitalised after contracting a sudden, unknown illness and one dead, confusion and fear have prevailed in Eluru, Andhra Pradesh, this month. **Appaji Reddem** reports on the outbreak, the response and the possible causes



(Clockwise from top left): The public gather at the enquiry counter of Eluru Government General Hospital; a patient is brought into the hospital after having a seizure; and the Tangellamudi canal is filled with garbage in Eluru town. •GIRI KVS

It has been 11 days since she suddenly collapsed and had a seizure, but Ban-tu Mallika's woes are not over. The thirty-two-year-old homemaker from Temple Street in Eluru still gets shivers, headaches and dizziness.

It was on December 6 that Mallika felt a piercing headache and giddiness at home. Feeling disoriented, she called the village health assistant, Durga, for help. It was a timely call, for minutes later she lost consciousness and had a seizure. She was rushed to the medical centre at the end of the street.

"I don't know what happened to me," Mallika said. "When I opened my eyes, I found myself on a hospital bed in the Government General Hospital (GGH). I had followed my usual routine that day. I did the household chores and had more or less the same food and water that I have been having for years. And none of my family members had any problem." Mallika was discharged on the same day after treatment.

Health assistant Durga too was surprised by the sudden attack. "Mallika had a five-minute seizure and complained of nausea after she gained consciousness. For the past couple of days, we have been monitoring her along with four others on the street who experienced similar symptoms. They still feel weak and complain of a vomiting sensation," she said.

"Mallika and four others" quickly turned to scores of people and scores to hundreds. Confusion prevailed as there seemed to be no identifiable cause of this illness. For the people of Eluru, in West Godavari district, already living in fear of COVID-19, this was a bolt from the blue. Between December 5 and December 13, over 600 people had fallen ill and no one knew why. Only theories floated around. On December 10, the Andhra Pradesh government constituted a 21-member high level multi-disciplinary committee to investigate the disease that was affecting the people of Eluru, a city with a population of over four lakh and a hub of agriculture, commerce, aquaculture and export.

The initial days

Doctors at the GGH said the illness had in fact started impacting several people in mid-November. All the patients had the same symptoms: after experiencing giddiness, back pain, fits, vomiting, anxiety, loss of memory, and headache, they all collapsed. The patients were immediately tested for COVID-19, their reports showed 'negative'. While the recovery rate was extremely high, people were shocked when one man died. The sudden outbreak grabbed global attention in the first week of December, with officials of the World Health Organization (WHO), the State and Central governments, and research organisations scrambling to find out the cause.

According to government records, a majority of the cases have been traced to JP Road, Vangayagudem, Dakshina Veedhi, Turpu Veedhi, Arundhatipeta, Kothapeta, Kobbarithota and Sanivarapupeta in Eluru. The first cases were reported from JP Road and Vangayagudem, according to hospital authorities.

On December 9, GGH was buzzing with activity. It was the second consecu-



book of referred cases with details such as the name of the patient, ward, gender, symptoms noticed, the date of admission, the reference hospital, present condition, the mobile number of the patient, date of discharge and remarks. Such micro-level data has helped immensely in handling the situation, said the GGH Superintendent.

According to the data on Temple Street, where the first incident was reported, there were 17 cases recorded from December 5 to 9. While 13 of these patients had fits, the remaining complained of dizziness, weakness, vomiting and diarrhoea. The patients were referred to GGH, Swarupanari Hospital and Vijaya Diagnostics.

The government has established a round-the-clock control room and a call centre at the municipal office. According to officials, it initiated house-to-house surveys within municipal limits. So far, 42,012 households out of 43,897 have been scanned. To check the possible scarcity of beds, a speciality hospital was kept on standby in Vijayawada. Twenty ambulances were pressed into operation, and 300 beds and 150 doctors and nurses were kept ready for patients in GGH Eluru and Asram hospital. Food, milk and drinking water were supplied to all the patients. Specialist doctors from AIIMS were flown in to conduct a detailed investigation. Experts from the National Institute of Nutrition, Indian Institute of Chemical Technology, and Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology were roped in to figure out the cause of the disease.

Possible cause

By December 10, potable water, cerebro spinal fluid, blood, and milk in the areas were tested and the CT scans of 42 patients were taken. Traces of heavy metals such as lead and nickel were found in the blood samples of patients, the AIIMS report said, but where they originated remains unclear. The Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology has concluded that the locals consumed a neurotoxic contaminant that has caused the outbreak. The Director of the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology, Rakesh Mishra, said, "The Council of Scientific and Industrial Research and the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology carried out extensive analysis using the next generation sequencing-based approach to explore

the microbiomes of samples collected from affected individuals. The samples included blood, faeces and vomitus. Our analysis showed no link between any infectious organism and this mysterious disease. The microbiomes were of healthy individuals. It is, therefore, likely that this disease was caused by a one-time event in a localised context and is not linked to any infectious organism. Considering the information available, it looks like a point-source outbreak where a neurotoxic contaminant has been consumed by the local people."

Pesticide residue

The government constituted a multi-disciplinary high-power committee to investigate the source of the disease. The panel was also expected to suggest remedial measures to prevent any such event in the future. Headed by the Chief Secretary of Andhra Pradesh, the committee included doctors, scientists and senior officials from the Andhra Pradesh government.

The Chief Minister, Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, announced on December 16 the findings of the expert panel through a video conference call and wanted further investigation into the issue. According to the details shared by the government, the probability that pesticide residues triggered the illness is high. AIIMS and the Indian Institute of Chemical Technology also agreed that this probability was high, but wanted further investigation on how the pesticides entered human bodies. The two institutes have been entrusted with the responsibility of carrying out further investigation. The Chief Minister also instructed the officials concerned to set up public labs in each district and continue the tests on food, water and soil so that the Eluru incident is not repeated. He wanted the agriculture department to focus on natural farming without using pesticides and help farmers with inputs through the Rythu Bharosa Kendras (RBKs). Over 10,000 RBKs were set up in Andhra Pradesh with the objective of helping farmers to enhance productivity while ensuring better incomes.

Various findings

Commenting on its findings, AIIMS, New Delhi stated that the blood samples of patients contained lead and nickel. All the milk samples that were collected also contained nickel. Based on the ob-

servations of patients, it said the reason for the illness could be the presence of organochloride which might have entered bodies through pesticides in the food cycle. Lead was also found in the blood samples of the relatives of the patients. AIIMS suggested that the food samples, food and vegetables be tested for a few months to help determine the exact reason for the illness. It also suggested geotagging of the samples.

The Indian Institute of Chemical Technology collected 21 water samples from different parts of Eluru along with blood samples from humans and animals. It found no traces of lead, arsenic or any other heavy metals and pesticides in the water samples. However, the blood samples contained endosulfan and dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT), which are hazardous. Blood samples also contained lead and there were no organophosphates present.

The National Environmental Engineering Research Institute, Hyderabad, which collected air, soil and ground water samples from the affected areas, said that the air quality is within acceptable limits. Except for mercury, all other metals and substances in surface and ground water are well within the limits. There were no traces of organochlorine or organophosphates in the samples. Compared to surface water, the ground water contained higher levels of mercury. The phenomenon was attributed to burning of solid waste in the region. The tests on soil are still underway.

The Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology, Hyderabad, did not find any substances beyond the permissible limits in the serum and urine samples. There were also no traces of bacteria or virus, according to their report. The National Institute of Virology, Pune, said there was no evidence to prove any kind of viral infection. The National Institute of Nutrition, Hyderabad, found pesticide residues in the tomato and brinjal samples. These pesticides could have caused the mysterious illness, according to its report.

AIIMS, Mangalagiri, suggested a detailed examination and study of samples in other regions of the State against the backdrop of the Eluru incident. While investigating the presence of pesticide residues in humans, it wanted the right inputs to be given to farmers on the use of pesticides and natural farming. It has also suggested a detailed medical protocol to be used in the event of such an occurrence in the future.

The WHO representative wanted the expert panel to focus on how the pesticide residues entered human bodies.

Poor hygiene

Meanwhile, the public in Eluru feel that there should be a streamlining of pesticide and chemical usage and discharge of the same from agri and aqua processing sectors in and around the city. Though there were no formal complaints about the high and intensive usage of chemicals and pesticides, they expressed concern as Eluru is a major hub of aqua and agri exports. There are about 30 major aqua units which store, package, weigh and export aqua products such as shrimp and fish. These firms process, pack and export about

10,000 to 12,000 tonnes of processed product to different countries.

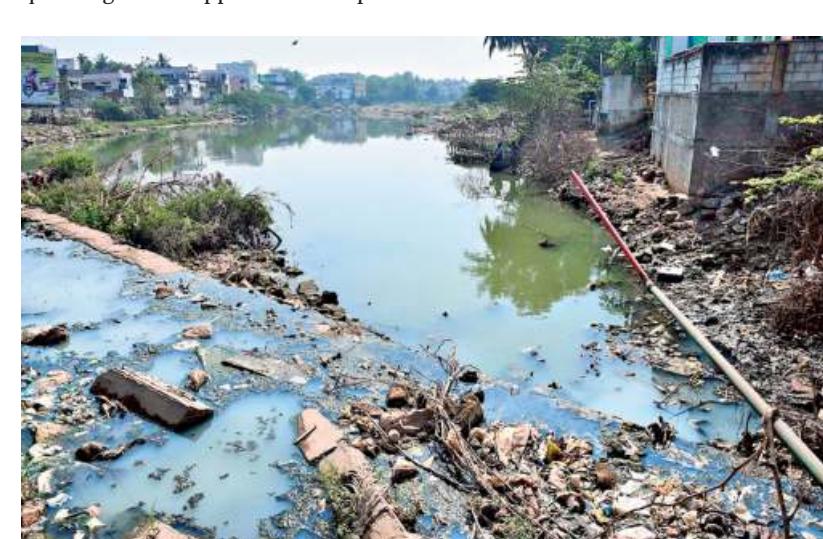
In December, the general hygiene conditions and management of garbage in Eluru are alarming. Almost all the canals are filled with garbage, still water, and plastic materials, which are a potential threat to general health. Eluru generates approximately 82 metric tonnes of garbage per day.

Several sources in and around Eluru leave effluents in irrigation and other canals which eventually seep into groundwater. The public spoke about industrial solid and liquid waste from aqua processing industries, effluents and pesticides mixing with water from aquaponds and agricultural patches. Eluru-based school teacher Sambasiva Rao said all the aqua industry certifications are upto the mark but there are violations. "The Marine Products Export Development Authority frequently conducts camps for aqua farmers on the excessive use of non-organic fertilisers, pesticides, insecticides and antibiotics. We know about the intensive use of pesticides in agriculture. All these are obviously sinking into soil and groundwater. It's an open secret," he said. Senior citizen and resident of Eluru, M. Satyanarayana, said, "Dumping garbage in open places and canals and water stagnation have become normal. There seems to be no tab on the use of pesticides and chemicals and discharge of different effluents here. This needs to change. The government should definitely focus on this aspect with commitment," he said.

Meanwhile, with this illness causing fear among the people, eating out has become uncommon and public movement has reduced in Eluru, people said. Residents also said people from other regions are now sceptical about visiting Eluru. B. Subbarao, a resident of Powerpet, said he noticed people being extra careful. "People are carrying their own water and eating out less. Fewer people are travelling to Eluru now. People have become suspicious of every small ailment. I had a headache a few days ago, and I was worried. But it turned out to be a normal headache. But the anxiety that something may happen to me is there all the time. I feel uneasy for no reason," Subbarao said.

Doctors at GGH said that such mild paranoia is natural. "It's common for the general public to take smaller illnesses more seriously and become anxious. We have had many cases at the GGH over the past few days where people who came for a check-up displayed high anxiety levels. It could be addressed in a matter of hours," said GGH Superintendent Mohan.

The Andhra Pradesh State Health Minister Alla Kali Krishna Srinivas announced on December 13 that there were no new cases reported and all the 600 odd patients admitted in hospitals with symptoms of the illness were successfully treated and discharged. But the mysterious disease with no name has taken hold of people's lives in Eluru. As trains near the Eluru railway station, passengers down the shutters. The sale of water bottles has reportedly seen a dip on platforms. It is as if the very air of Eluru has turned toxic.



FROM PAGE ONE

SC finds HC order on A.P. govt. 'disturbing'

The High Court had *suo motu* summoned the State counsel to assist it in deciding "whether in circumstances prevailing in the State of Andhra Pradesh, the court can record a finding that there is constitutional breakdown in the State or not".

The State said an application to recall the October 1 order was not taken up by the High Court, compelling the government to move the top court.

The government said the High Court's observation violated the Basic Structure

doctrine of the Constitution.

"Under the constitutional framework, it is not for the courts to decide as to whether there is a constitutional breakdown in a State. The said power has been specifically conferred upon a different constitutional authority - and rightly so. It is needless to mention that the constitutional courts do not have any judicially discoverable and manageable standards to determine if there has been a constitutional breakdown," the petition contended.

PM makes a strong pitch to protesting farmers

"My government is ready, with bowed heads and folded hands, to answer any doubt on these important reforms," he said.

Mr. Modi proceeded to give a point-by-point rebuttal of all the objections raised by the agitating farmers groups and the Opposition parties. "These are reforms that have been thought about by many governments in the past, discussed across a wide section of people, and finally implemented by our government," he said.

'Urea shortage tackled'

He accused the Opposition parties of opposing the three farm laws just because it was the Modi-led government that had initiated them. Mr. Modi said, "Our government not only implemented the Swaminathan Committee report but also resolved the chronic urea

shortage faced by farmers. Also, new fertilizer plants will be coming up in Gorakhpur, Barauni, Sidri, Talcher and Ramagundam, which will make urea abundantly available and these plants will also give employment to thousands," he said.

"MSP has remained, and will remain. It is a myth being spread that MSP will be discontinued," he said. "The three farm laws have been in place for the last six months and not only has MSP been paid but procurement has also been done at record levels," he claimed, citing figures for the same.

Mr. Modi asserted that there was no move to dismantle the Agricultural Produce Marketing Committees (APMC) or 'mandis' under the new laws. "Not a single *mandi* has been shut down in the past six months that the laws have been in place," he said.

India, China agree to hold next round of LAC talks

They also agreed to hold the ninth round of Corps Commander-level talks "at an early date" so that "both sides can work towards early and complete disengagement of troops along the LAC in accordance with the existing bilateral agreements and protocols, and fully restore peace and tranquillity", the statement said.

A statement from China's Foreign Ministry said both sides agreed to "focus on the disengagement of frontline troops and take concrete measures to deal with the issues on the ground to further de-escalate the border situation" and to hold the ninth round of commander-level talks "as soon as possible to properly resolve remaining issues on the ground and jointly maintain peace in the border area".

North of the lake, China has moved troops up to Finger 4 since May and has prevented India from reaching Finger 8, up to where India has patrolled previously.

Under the first phase of disengagement, both sides had moved back in the Galwan Valley and in the Gogra-Hot Springs area. The situation at Pangong Lake remains unresolved, as also in the Depsang plains in the far north where India has been prevented from reaching patrolling points in the area.

the strategic heights it occupied in late August south of Pangong Lake in response to China's transgressions.

Tensions have remained high south of the lake, where shots were also fired in warning, marking the first such instance of firing since 1975.

Officials told *The Hindu*, following the last round, that proposals were under discussion and would be taken up at the ninth round, and "once agreed upon, it will be done in multiple phases with on the ground verification after each step".

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Election Commission team to visit U.T., T.N.

Delegation to assess poll preparedness

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

CHENNAI

A high-level delegation of the Election Commission (EC) will be visiting Chennai for two days early next week to assess the preparedness for the upcoming Assembly election in the State.

The team will be led by Umesh Sinha, Secretary-General, EC, and will comprise Deputy Election Commissioners Sudeep Jain and Ashish Kundra; H.R. Srinivas, Chief Electoral Officer, Bihar; Pankaj Srivatsava, Director, and Malay Mallick, Secretary, EC.

The team will hold meet-

ings on December 21 with

representatives of recognised political parties, nodal officers of the Income Tax Department and virtual meetings with the District Election Officers and police officials.

On December 22, the team will hold meetings with various enforcement agencies, the Tamil Nadu Chief Secretary, the Director General of Police and other State government Secretaries.

Following this, the delegation will leave for Puducherry to assess the election preparedness in the Union Territory.

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SC stays High Court order to hold Bengaluru civic body polls

State had opposed move to conduct elections in only 198 of the 243 BBMP wards

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday stayed a Karnataka High Court judgment of December 4, which directed the State Election Commission to conduct elections in only 198 wards of the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) within six weeks.

A Bench led by Chief Justice of India Sharad A. Bobde issued notice to the Election Commission and original petitioners in the High Court – M. Shivaraj and Abdul Wajid – on an appeal filed by the Karnataka government.

The government said the High Court judgment nullified the unanimous will of the State legislature, comprising the representatives of the people, which amended the Karnataka Municipal Corporations Act, 1976, to increase the number of wards



People's voice: File photo of a BBMP meeting. Karnataka says more wards were needed to match the rise in population.

in Bengaluru to 243. The 1976 Act governs the BBMP.

The High Court, on December 4, ordered the BBMP elections to be held for 198 wards under the delimitation of wards published on June 23.

The State government, represented by advocate Subhranshu Padhi, said the High Court had severely handicapped efforts to "improve

urban governance in one of the largest and most cosmopolitan cities in India". "The increase in the number of wards was necessitated by fact that the population and demographics of the city have undergone a vast change since 2009 (when the number of wards were increased to 198) thereby necessitating an increase in the number of wards and

their redrawing into smaller and more administrable sizes," the State argued.

The petition said the HC erroneously read down the provisions to "mean that the amended provisions would not apply to elections of those corporations where elections became due prior to coming into force of the amended provisions".

The State government contended that the HC directed the State to conduct elections in a manner which was contrary to "a validly and unanimously enacted piece of legislation by the Legislature".

It said Article 243-ZA(2) of the Constitution has conferred the power on the State Legislature to, by law, make provision with respect to "all matters relating to or in connection with elections to municipalities".

Kerala CM to kick-start election tour next week

Pinarayi plans to interact with diverse groups to map mood

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The State committee of the Left Democratic Front (LDF) on Friday moved to secure an early-bird advantage in the Kerala Assembly election scheduled for mid-2021.

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan will spearhead the campaign with a tour of the State on December 22 to consolidate the advantage gained from the victory in local body elections. Mr. Vijayan will camp at district headquarters and interact with opinion leaders.

The LDF will use inputs from these meetings to gauge the development and social welfare aspirations of people.

The LDF felt that social security benefits distributed during the pandemic had helped it tide over the "calumniuous and recriminatory campaign" unleashed by the Opposition.

It said the voters had rewarded the LDF for its development work including the modernisation of primary health centres, taluk and district hospitals and government medical colleges.



Big boost: The Left camp in Kerala is upbeat after the thumping victory in the local body elections. ■ K.K. NAJEEB

Congress zeroes in on reasons for debacle

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

A protracted meeting of the Political Affairs Committee (PAC) of the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) on Thursday reportedly blamed lack of dynamic leadership, inadequate election preparedness, scarcity of funds and ill-informed selection of candidates for the debacle in the local body elections.

The party was also largely unsuccessful in ironing out factional differences.

The PAC also reportedly felt the selection of candidates did not always reflect the winnability factor.

The Congress largely failed to actively enrol voters in advance. A large number of women Congress candidates, most of them new to electoral politics, felt unsupported by the party.

The party was also largely unsuccessful in ironing out factional differences.

The PAC also reportedly felt the selection of candidates did not always reflect the winnability factor.

Third such case This is the third such death in Telangana in the past week due to harassment of app-based finance companies. Earlier this week, Eddu Srawan Yadav, 23, from Narsapur, Medak, and Kirni Mounika, 28, from Nangunur, Siddipet, allegedly committed suicide over harassment and humiliation by these companies.

"Sunil was being threatened and blackmailed by representatives of instant loan mobile app companies, who also phoned and messaged his friends and family members over social media platforms and informed them of the loan default," the police said.

His father and wife too got calls from the app companies declaring him a defaulter. Sunil had been upset after he learnt about these companies.

According to the investigators, Sunil availed nearly ₹2 lakh from 35 loan apps, including In Cash, Cash era, Cash lion, Mastermelon, Lucky wallet, Coco cash, Rupee Pus, Indian Loan and Credit finch.

Based on the complaint lodged by his wife, a case under Sections 420, 306, 504 and 506 of the Indian Penal Code and Section 67 of the IT Act was registered against some financiers.

"The genuineness of these apps and the transactions made by him are being probed," the police said.

Those in distress may contact Hyderabad-based suicide intervention centre Roshni at +914066202000.

Major push for tourism, film industries in A.P.

Cabinet clears slew of incentives for mega projects

STAFF REPORTER

VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh Cabinet on Friday cleared the new tourism policy and the proposal facilitating payment of input subsidy within one month of crop damage. It has also given its nod to amend the State Survey and Boundary Act.

Addressing the media on Friday, I&PR Minister Perni Venkataramaiah said that incentives would be provided for tourism projects in the State. Tourism projects envi-

saging an investment of more than ₹400 crore would be called 'mega tourism projects'.

The incentives for such projects include 100% subsidy in SGST, 100% reimbursement of stamp duty, provision of electricity at ₹2 per unit and 100% waiver of land use conversion charges.

The Cabinet also approved the proposal to increase the land lease period from 33 years to 99 years for mega projects.

Power charges waiver The Cabinet decided to waive the fixed electricity deposit for cinema theatres in the State for three months.



Box office: The government will grant working capital loans to 1,100 theatres. ■ K.V.S. GIRI

The charges for April, May and June would not be collected. For the remaining six months, a moratorium on payment would be extended.

The government would also provide working capital loan to 1,100 theatres as part of the 'restart package'.

A loan of ₹10 lakh would be given to the theatres located in 'A' and 'B' centres. A loan of ₹5 lakh would be provided to the theatres located in 'C' Centres, the Minister said.

New package

As part of the restart package, the government decided to extend loans to hotels, function halls, service providers and restaurants. The loan would range between ₹50,000 and ₹15 lakh. The package would benefit 3,910 units. A sum of ₹198.5 crore

would be earmarked for the purpose, the Minister said.

CBI conducts searches in bank fraud case

Former TDP MP among accused

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on Friday conducted searches against Hyderabad-based Transstroy (India) Limited, former Telugu Desam Party (TDP) MP Rayapati Sambasiva Rao and others in connection with a bank fraud case involving ₹7,926 crore.

Among those named as accused in the case are Agnite Education Limited, its chairman-cum-managing director Cherukuri Sridhar; Mr. Rao, its additional director; and another additional director, Akkineni Satish. The FIR has been filed on a complaint from Canara Bank, leader of a consortium of lenders.

'Statements fudged' The company had taken credit facilities on multiple banking arrangements. According to the bank, the accused persons fabricated

the books of accounts, fudged stock statements, tampered with balance sheets and indulged in round tripping and diversion of funds.

"Searches were conducted on the premises of private company/other accused in Hyderabad and Guntur," said a CBI official.

On Friday, the agency carried out searches in another case against Agnite Education Limited, its chairman K. Balasubramanian, and director K. Padmanabhan. They are accused of cheating the State Bank of India of about ₹313.79 crore.

In yet another case, the agency has booked Varia Engineering Works Private Limited, Himanshu Prafullchandra Varia, Sejal H. Varia, Krish Tech-con Private Limited for allegedly cheating a consortium of seven banks to the tune of ₹452.62 crore.

IN BRIEF



Kerala HC issues notice on compensation appeal

KOCHI The Kerala High Court on Thursday issued notice to the Centre and the National Aviation Company of India on a petition filed by kin of the victims of the Karipur air crash of August 7 this year, seeking compensation under the Montreal Convention.

The petition was filed by Ameena Sherin, wife of Sharafudeen who was killed in the crash. As per Article 21 of the Montreal Convention, in case of death of passengers, the airline was liable to pay up to ₹1 crore as Special Drawing Rights per passenger, the petition said.

Over 2,200 kg ganja seized in Visakhapatnam The district police arrested two persons while they were allegedly transporting about 2,200 kg of dry ganja near Makavarapalem in Visakhapatnam district on Thursday night. They were allegedly trying to shift the ganja from Visakhapatnam to Maharashtra via Hyderabad. Though the seized ganja is said to be worth ₹1.2 crore in the Agency areas of Visakhapatnam, its market value in Maharashtra or Hyderabad is expected to be close to ₹2.5 crore. The ganja packed in 55 bags were kept under bags of paddy, the police said.

This is said to be the highest quantity of ganja seized in the last couple of months.

More medical colleges</

Modi must apologise to farmers: Cong.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Friday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi should stop deceiving farmers and not 'pretend' to talk to the farmers in Madya Pradesh through video conference, while refusing to meet those who are agitating against the farm laws.

Congress general secretary Randeep Surjewala said Mr. Modi and his Ministers should apologise to the farmers for branding them as 'Khalistanis' and part of 'tukde tukde' gang. He held the Modi government responsible for the death of 24 farmers during the protests.

Mr. Surjewala said that as Gujarat Chief Minister and head of a working group of CMs on agriculture years ago, Mr. Modi had suggested that minimum support price (MSP) should be given statutory provision and legal guarantee.

PM 'lied' on MSP: farmer unions

AIKSCC says he launched an open attack by linking them to the Opposition

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Protesting farmer groups accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of "attacking" them in his speech on Friday, adding that his claims on minimum support prices (MSP) were "lies". With regard to the ongoing Supreme Court case, farm leaders have not yet made any firm decision on whether to implore themselves as proposed by the court.

"The Prime Minister has launched an open party attack on the farmers of India by claiming that they are linked to Opposition parties," said a statement from the All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee (AIKSCC), responding to Mr. Modi's address to Madhya Pradesh farmers. "In place of addressing the issue of repeal of the three farm Acts which erode farmers' hold on land and farming and establish the MNCs and big business to grow in agriculture, he has reduced him-



Holding on: Farmers at a sit-in on the Delhi-Ghazipur border on Friday. ■ SANDEEP SAXENA

self to a party leader undermining his role as a responsible executive head of the country, expected to solve problems."

The Bharatiya Kisan Union (Tikait) dismissed the Centre's claims of helping farmers by increasing the MSPs. It pointed out that the MSPs of major crops had an average yearly increase of 8-12% in the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) era, in comparison to only 1-5% under the National Democratic Alliance (NDA). "These are Modiji's lies about MSP," said

the group's leader Rakesh Tikait, adding that most pulses were not being bought at MSP prices. Even regarding paddy, a farmer in Bihar is still forced to sell his crop at half the rate of MSP because government procurement has not reached him, he said.

Mr. Tikait also termed the Centre's claims of implementing the Swaminathan Commission's recommendations as a "lie", pointing out that the Bharatiya Janata Party's formula for calculating MSP does not follow the

Commission, and has resulted in "suppressing the rights of farmers".

The PM's claim that the new laws would promote investment in farm storage infrastructure would only help corporates, said Mr. Tikait. "This means that Modiji is promoting agri-business, not farmers. Privatisation is being promoted in farming. After the Navratna companies were privatised, Modi is now eyeing the privatisation of agriculture," he said.

All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) general secretary Hannan Mollah questioned Mr. Modi's claim that the farm reforms were not a sudden move but the result of two decades of consultation and planning.

"Without discussing with farmers, what is the use of saying we have been talking for 20 years in bureaucratic rooms? No farmers' group was consulted before these laws were brought, no farmer has asked for these laws," he said.

Centre seeks better security coordination

Home Secy. talks to Bengal officials

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

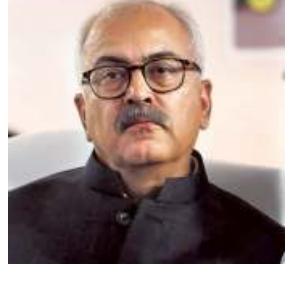
The Union Home Ministry on Friday asked the top officers of the West Bengal government to ensure coordination with Central agencies for better security arrangements of individuals with Central security cover.

Chief Secretary Alapan Bandyopadhyay and Director-General of Police Virendra were asked to appear before Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla on Friday days after an attack on the convoy of BJP president J.P. Nadda in the Diamond Harbour area of West Bengal.

No Delhi visit

After the two officers expressed their inability to travel to Delhi because of the pandemic, a video conference was held. The Ministry on Thursday wrote for a second time to the officials to appear before the Union Home Secretary in Delhi to discuss the law and order situation.

In the virtual meeting, the two officers are said to



Ajay Bhalla

have asserted the State's inability to relieve three IPS officers for Central deputation.

The Ministry had earlier ordered three senior IPS officers responsible for Mr. Nadda's security to report for Central deputation. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had said on Thursday that the orders were a "blatant misuse of emergency provision of IPS Cadre Rule 1954" and that West Bengal was "not going to cow down in front of expansionist and undemocratic force".

However, the Home Ministry is the cadre controlling authority of IPS officers.

SC notice to Bengal on plea by BJP leaders

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday restrained the West Bengal government from taking any "coercive action" against several BJP leaders in criminal cases registered against them by police.

A Bench led by Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul issued notice to the Trinamool Congress government on separate petitions filed by BJP leaders, including Mukul Roy, Kailash Vijayvargiya and Arjun Singh, against the multiple FIRs containing "vague" and even "improbable" criminal allegations against them.

"No stone has been left unturned to make use of the State machinery and the State Police to harass the petitioners," one of the petitioners said. The pleas said the government had initiated "false and frivolous cases against political leaders whose political allegiance and ideologies are different".

The BJP leaders sought an investigation by an independent agency.

Ahead of Shah's rally, many quit Trinamool

2 MLAs, other leaders resign on Friday

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

A day ahead of Union Home Minister Amit Shah's rally in Midnapore on Saturday, there was frenetic activity among the rank and file of the Trinamool Congress, with many resigning and giving ample hints that they would join the BJP.

Mr. Shah, meanwhile, arrived in Kolkata late on Friday evening.

Speculation is rife that several Trinamool leaders, including party heavyweight Suvendu Adhikari, will join the BJP at the rally. The latest addition to the list of dissident Trinamool leaders were Barrackpore MLA Silbadra Datta and Kanthi Uttar MLA Banshi Maity,

both of whom sent in their resignations to party chief and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. Speaking to presspersons later, Mr. Datta said he had resigned from the party but would remain an MLA.

Thursday had a steady stream of resignations.

On Friday, the list of disgruntled leaders crossed a dozen, including a number of district and block leaders who resigned, expressing their support to Mr. Adhikari.

Posters of Mr. Adhikari have come up in several places in Kolkata and other parts of the State. The former Minister was provided security by the Union Home Ministry.

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202123 001725	Enlistment / Fixing of Vendors for procurement of Ply Wood Pallet of various sizes for TNPL Unit-II	06.01.2021

Email: 202113004202-purchase.wdp@tnpl.co.in
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Email: 202113004213-purchase.wp@tnpl.co.in
202113004248-purchase.packing@tnpl.co.in

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Chief General Manager(MM)

Ahead of key meeting, Cong. downplays dissent in ranks

Upset leaders, however, question need for the discussions

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Ahead of a crucial meeting of Congress president Sonia Gandhi with senior leaders including some from the group of 23 (G-23) dissenters, the Congress on Friday downplayed internal dissent by asserting that "all issues stood resolved" with the announcement of election of the next party president.



Randeep Surjewala

of dissensions that are pending in the party of any nature," he added.

Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha Ghulam Nabi Azad, Deputy Leader Anand Sharma, former Chief Ministers Bhupinder Hooda and Prithiviraj Chavan, former Union Ministers Shashi Tharoor and Manish Tewari are among the G-23 leaders who have been invited.

At a press conference, the party's chief spokesperson, Randeep Surjewala, said Rahul Gandhi was the "right person to lead the Congress and take on the Narendra Modi government".

However, several G-23 members were upset that the Congress officially downplayed the importance of Saturday's meeting, with many asking what was the need for a meeting if "all issues were resolved".

Sources told *The Hindu* that Mr. Surjewala's press

NIA files chargesheet against SFJ

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) filed a chargesheet against 10 persons for allegedly carrying out "propaganda activities" both online and on ground in support of the banned group Sikhs For Justice (SFJ) and Referendum-2020.

This is the second such chargesheet filed against the SFJ in the past 10 days.

"The case relates to a series of acts of violence including acts of arson in Punjab during the year 2017-18, carrying out of propaganda activities both online and on ground campaigns, in support of SFJ and Referendum-2020. These acts were committed by a gang of radicalised Sikh youth under the direction and financial assistance from SFJ handlers located abroad as part of an organised conspiracy by the accused for launching a concerted secessionist campaign for creation of Khalistan," a statement by NIA said.

The case was initially registered by the Punjab police at Sultanwind Police Station, Amritsar (City) in the year 2018 and was subsequently re-registered by the NIA on April 5 this year.

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Application are invited from reputed architects/consultants for short listing of architects for the purpose of architectural, structural, landscape design including services such as Electrical, HVAC, water supply, firefighting etc. for the proposed Science City, Dehradun. Parties having proven experience on similar project of value at least Rs.75.00 crore in a single project in Govt./Semi Govt./Public Sector only may apply. Decision of the Council with regard to short listing will be final and binding. Registration forms and other details may be available and downloaded from our website: www.ustc.in or www.rscdon.com and to be submitted duly filled and complete in all respects latest by 11.01.2021 to the above address.

DIRECTOR GENERAL

UT OF LAKSHADWEEP LAKSHADWEEP DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION LIMITED (A GOVT. OF INDIA UNDERTAKING)
Ph: 04842-323448/458
E-mail: amindiv@asianetindia.com

Dtd: 17.12.2020

TENDER

E-tenders are invited for engagement of Steamer and Laundry Agents for M.V. Kodithala vide Tender No. LDCL/Steamer-Laundry/Kodithala/2020 operated by LDCL at Kochi Port. For details and E-tendering please visit website <https://tendersutl.gov.in>

Tender due on 01.01.2021 at 02.00 PM. For any help in e-tendering, please contact help Desk: 0120-4001002, 4001005, 6277787

Sd/- MD (LDL)

No. UCS&T/Science City Dehradun/2020/18587 Dated 18.12.2020

Short Listing of Architects for Science City, Dehradun

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Govt. lists papers for vaccine registration

It advised even those infected earlier to get a jab

BINDU SHAJAN PERAPPADAN
NEW DELHI

The Union Health Ministry on Friday listed out the documents that can be used for registering to get vaccinated against COVID-19. Beneficiaries can produce driving licence, health insurance smart card issued under the scheme of the Labour Ministry, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) job card, official identity cards issued to MPS, MLAs and MLCs, PAN card, bank or post office passbook, passport, pension document, service identity card issued to employees by the Union or the State government or public limited companies and voter ID cards.

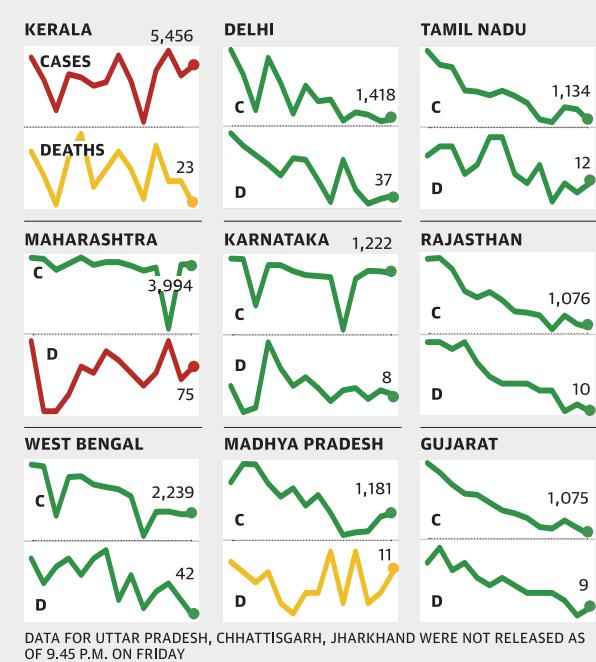
After online registration, a beneficiary will receive an SMS on the registered mobile number on the due date, place and time of vaccination. After all the doses of vaccine are administered, a QR-code-based certificate will be sent to the registered mobile number, the Ministry said.

A photo ID is a must for both registration and verifi-

Viral tracker

With 26,516 new COVID-19 cases recorded on Friday, India's tally crossed the **1 crore** mark. As many as 332 deaths were recorded on Friday. The graphs depict new cases and deaths in the last 14 days in select States. The States are classified based on where cases/deaths are rising (red); falling (green); or showing a mixed trend (orange).

NEW CASES AND DEATHS	CASES	7 DAY-CHANGE
	26,516	-13.1%
	332	-11.7%



cation at the session site.

"Protective levels of antibodies are generally developed two weeks after receiving the second dose of a COVID-19 vaccine and it must be ensured that the entire schedule of vaccination is completed by only one type of vaccine, as different vaccines are not interchangeable," the Health Ministry stated.

It is also advisable to receive a complete schedule of vaccine, irrespective of past

history of infection with COVID-19. This will help in developing a strong immune response against the disease, it noted.

'Defer vaccination'

"Persons with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 infection may increase the risk of spreading the same to others at vaccination sites. For this reason, infected individuals should defer vaccination for 14 days after symptoms resolution," it added.

The vaccine will be introduced only when the safety is proven.

"As is true for other vaccines, the common side effects in some individuals could be mild fever, pain, etc. at the site of injection. The States have been asked to start making arrangements to deal with any vaccine-related side effects as one of the measures towards safe vaccine delivery among masses," the Health Ministry said.

ICMR Director-General tests positive for virus

NEW DELHI
Balram Bhargava, the Director-General of the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), has tested positive for COVID-19 and has been admitted to the COVID-19 centre at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS). "Dr. Bhargava was admitted here three days ago. He has mild symptoms of COVID-19 and is doing well," said an official. Meanwhile, according to the data released by the Health Ministry on Friday, India reported 338 fatalities in the past 24 hours, with 10 States/UTs accounting for 75.15% of the new deaths.

'Vaccine has good response with two doses'

LONDON
Oxford's COVID-19 vaccine candidate stimulates broad antibody and T cell responses and has the best immune response when a two-dose regime is used, the University said. The vaccine "stimulates broad antibody and T cell functions," it said after publishing data from the Phase I/II clinical trials. "The booster doses of the vaccine are both shown to induce stronger antibody responses than a single dose, the standard dose/standard dose inducing the best response." REUTERS

SC initiates action against Kamra, Taneja

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday initiated contempt proceedings against stand-up comedian Kunal Kamra and cartoonist Rachita Taneja for scandalising the court and the highest judiciary with their tweets.

A three-judge Bench of Justices Ashok Bhushan, R. Subhash Reddy and M.R. Shah issued notice asking Mr. Kamra and Ms. Taneja to show cause why they should not be punished for contempt of court.

Both Ms. Taneja and Mr. Kamra have been exempted from personal appearance in court. Usually, persons facing contempt action have to be present during the hearing. The notice to them is returnable in six weeks.

Army rejects Pak. claim on UN vehicle

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Army on Friday rejected Pakistan's claims that Indian troops targeted a UN vehicle while it was en route to Polas in the Chirikot sector of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. "Reports of targeting UN vehicle are not true," the Army said.

An official source said the reports from Pakistan were false. "There was no firing from the Indian side in this sector today. Since movement of UN vehicles are known in advance, the question does not arise," the source said.

Injured Hizb militant dies in hospital

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR

An injured Hizb-ul-Mujahideen militant, who was arrested after a gunfight in south Kashmir's Anantnag on Thursday, died of his injuries in Shri Maharaja Hari Singh Hospital here on Friday.

According to police officials, Zaheer Abbas Lone was arrested during an encounter that started in the intervening night of December 16-17 at a checkpoint at Sangam-Naina road near Gund Baba Khaleel, Anantnag.

Ordinary people cannot afford COVID-19 care: SC

Court asks government to ensure treatment for all patients

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday said it was the government's duty to ensure affordable medical treatment for COVID-19 patients. It said medical care during the pandemic had become so costly that ordinary people could not afford it at all.

The court also said a successful "World War" on the virus depended on "government-public partnership". For this, the government should be transparent about the facts and figures regarding COVID-19 infection spread.

A three-judge Bench led by Justice Ashok Bhushan addressed the issue of the deteriorating health of fatigued doctors, nurses and medical workers.

It said the government needed to work out a mechanism to give them "intermittent rest".

In a 17-page order, the court said right to health is a fundamental right guaran-

Even if one survives from COVID-19, financially and economically he is finished

teed under Article 21 of the Constitution.

"Right to health includes affordable treatment. For whatever reasons, the treatment has become costlier and costlier and it is not affordable to the common people at all... Even if one survives from COVID-19, many times financially and economically he is finished," the court said.

Fee cap
The Bench said the State and local authorities should either make more provisions for affordable treatment in their hospitals or there shall be cap on the fees charged by the private hospitals in exercise of the powers under the Disaster Management Act.

"Corporate or private hospitals should strictly comply

with directions issued under the Disaster Management Act to keep 50% or any other percentage of free beds. There shall be free helpline numbers to redress the grievances of common man, when there is non-compliance of the directions by the private hospitals/corporate hospitals," the court ordered.

It said local authorities should, as far as possible, decline permission for celebrations/gatherings even during the day hours. The court said States should consider curfew on weekends/nights.

It said any decision to impose curfew and/or lockdown must be announced long in advance.

The court issued a series of directions on fire safety in COVID-19 hospitals, including steps to be taken by the States to constitute committees to conduct monthly fire audits and the appointment of nodal officers in these institutions.

High Court notice to Uttar Pradesh on conversion law

Ordinance is repugnant, says petition

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
LUCKNOW

The Allahabad High Court on Friday issued a notice to the U.P. government on a PIL petition challenging the Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Ordinance, 2020.

Petitioner Saurabh Kumar of Prayagraj prayed for declaring the ordinance ultra vires, saying it was "both morally and constitutionally repugnant". A Division Bench heard the petitioner and the Additional Advocate-General representing the government.

The court allowed the government time to file a counter affidavit on or before January 4. A rejoinder affidavit, if any, may be filed by the petitioner on or before January 6, 2021, the court said.

The matter has been listed for January 7, on which date the writ petition would be heard for final disposal.

The PIL plea also prayed for an interim direction to the government not to take any coercive action in cases of conversion by marriage or for the purpose thereof. The

provisions gave the state policing powers over a citizen's choice of life partner or religion militate against the fundamental rights to individual autonomy, privacy, human dignity and personal liberty guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution, the petitioner submitted.

The ordinance led to an unreasonable intrusion into the domain of personal autonomy, the petitioner said, referring to the advance notice of 60 days required to be given to the District Magistrate before an intended conversion, which was to be followed by a police inquiry into the circumstances of conversion.

"The very concept of forcing an individual to explain and justify a decision, which is closely personal to him or her, before an officer of the State is contrary to constitutionalism," the petitioner argued.

The Constitution imposed limitations on State power and burdened the State to explain and justify the decisions taken by it. The ordinance inverted this equation, the petition said.

All have equal right to practise religion: HC

Court stays arrest of Muslim labourer

OMAR RASHID
LUCKNOW

The Allahabad High Court on Friday said no coercive action should be taken against a Muslim labourer Nadeem, who had filed a petition seeking the quashing of an FIR against him under the new Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Ordinance, 2020.

Article 25 provides that all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practice and propagate religion, the judges said. "Present is a case where all the allegations are *prima facie* based on suspicion," observed a Division Bench of Justices Pankaj Naqvi and Vivek Agarwal.

"There is no material before us that any force or coercive process is being adopted by the petitioner to convert the wife of the informant," the court said.

Mr. Nadeem and his brother were booked on November 29 for allegedly trying to force a married Hindu woman to marry the former of converting her to Islam.

In his complaint, Akshay Kumar Tyagi, who works as a labour contractor in Haridwar where he has been living with his wife Parul and two children, alleged that one Nadeem had "trapped" his wife in a "net of love" with the aim of converting her. Mr. Nadeem, 32, a resident of Bhagwanpur in Haridwar, is a labourer, and used to frequent their house leading to his friendship with Ms. Parul, said Mr. Tyagi. Mr. Nadeem wanted to marry Ms. Parul for conversion, alleged Mr. Tyagi.

In his petition, Mr. Nadeem submitted that he had no connection with Mr. Tyagi or his wife and alleged that the latter had lodged a case to avoid paying ₹9,000, which he owed him.

The court issued notice to Mr. Tyagi and asked the respondents to file their counter affidavits within two weeks. Ordering that no coercive action be taken against the petitioner till the next date of the hearing on January 7, the court clubbed the case with a PIL that has challenged the constitutional validity of the ordinance.

Parliamentary panel calls for migrant workers' database

It wants overhaul of archaic Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897

SOBHANA K. NAIR
NEW DELHI

A national database of migrant workers should be collated at the earliest to ensure that if ever there is a repeat of a COVID-19-like pandemic, the relief measures should reach the intended beneficiaries, the Standing Committee on Home Affairs has noted in its report. The committee also recommended an urgent review of the 123-year-old Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897.



Migrants on their way to their home States, in A.P. earlier this year. ■ V. RAJU

ed that a similar effort needs to be made for the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897.

Ancient provisions

"The Committee observes that the provisions of the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897, have helped in managing COVID-19 but this Act is outdated as it was framed in the colonial era, which was even well before the Spanish flu of 1918. Therefore, the committee recommends that the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897, should be revisited updated and amended so that it is fully equipped to respond to the challenges posed by the an anticipated onset of the pandemic in the future," the report noted.

The committee said that the incoming international passengers who entered throughout March 2020 were screened only for high temperature. "Thus, asymptomatic patients as also those who travel after taking medicines for controlling temperature could not be diagnosed at the time when they could practically be the only source of infections of COVID-19 in the country," the report said.

Pandemic far from over, says Soumya

Adar Poonawalla calls for caution till a majority of the population is vaccinated

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Cautioning that the COVID-19 pandemic is far from over though the world now seems to be closer to getting a vaccine, Soumya Swaminathan, Chief Scientist at the World Health Organization (WHO), on Friday said, "Though there is light at the end of the tunnel, the road ahead is still dark and long."

Participating in a panel discussion "The people need to know: the challenges of developing a COVID-19 vaccine", Dr. Swaminathan said, "The next few months are going to be critical and tough for many countries and we have to keep ourselves safe while waiting for a vaccine. Luckily so far, we have seen a few vaccines that have met the benchmark of 50% efficacy in the interim results. That is very good news."

She said the WHO was working towards continuously providing accessible and reliable information during this pandemic.

"We have been working very closely with social media and tech companies because we recognise that

manufacturers are indemnified for a certain period of time."

"And for advance market commitment [AMC] countries, we are also creating a compensation fund, so that individual countries don't have to get into legal negotiation with every individual," she said.

Also seeking government protection against "frivolous lawsuits" during the pandemic, Adar Poonawalla, CEO of the Serum Institute of India (SII), who participated in the discussion, noted that "these lawsuits would bankrupt manufacturers".

"We need the government to step in and protect us as the U.S. government has

87% loss in passenger revenue due to COVID-19: Railways

'However, increase in freight loading revenue is expected'

DEVESH K. PANDEY
NEW DELHI

The Railways have so far incurred an 87% loss in passenger revenue, down from ₹53,000 crore last year to ₹4,600 crore, owing to COVID-19. However, an increase in freight loading revenue is expected, compensated by the enhanced transportation of non-traditional commodities such as grains and fertilizers.

At a press conference on Friday, Railway Board Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Vinod Kumar Yadav said the Railways were working towards the objective of meeting the operational expenditure from their own revenue earnings. A projected increase in loading revenue was an indicator of an improving economy and industrial growth, he stated.

The Railways' yearly cumulative loading was currently about 97%, with a deficit of 10% in revenue, which was expected to cross last year's corresponding figures.

The Railways would circu-

Not a smooth ride

In FY2021, until September, the Indian Railways earned about ₹13,736 crore less than its revenue in the corresponding period, last year

	April to Sept. 2019	April to Sept. 2020	Change
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Instapick

Last big feast?: With most festivities this year being wiped out thanks to the pandemic, it feels like everyone is going onboard for Christmas. From edibles to table settings, green, red and gold are all over our timelines. Check out these 'charcutewreaths', with local cheeses, and paired with mulled wine. Follow @modern_brie, largely credited to have started the trend.



Talking point

Global Citizen Prize: What does Black Lives Matter, Sesame Workshop, and Warren Buffett have in common? They are winners of the Global Citizen Prizes for Activism, Culture & Education, and Philanthropy respectively. The annual event will be hosted by singer John Legend, with performances by Common and Gwen Stefani, among others. On December 20 at 6.30 am IST on Jio Play app.

Pick of the week

Concerts, stand-up and other year-end events you just can't miss.



Winter shopping

Tired of virtual events? Stock up on art, craft and food at the ongoing Dastkar Winter Mela in New Delhi. Over 60 craft groups from Himachal Pradesh to Karnataka and Kashmir to Kutch present their goods, aided by the Artisan Support Fund. Choose from tussar and mashru weaves, Banarsi brocades, recycled home decor, patchwork quilts and more. Till December 28 at Nature Bazaar.

Virtual whodunit

#Gargikand is an online interactive murder mystery staged by the Mumbai-based Rangrai Theatre Company. It is spread across two evenings, and founder Tushar Tukaram Dalvi describes it as "an inspired blend of escape rooms, role-playing games and treasure hunts". The audience are not just spectators, but become detectives. Today, at 6 pm and 8 pm. Tickets from ₹299 on in.bookmyshow.com.

Writing characters

Author Varsha Seshan organises a workshop for young, aspiring writers with Sophie Gaden, a novelist, teacher and translator. Gaden will talk about creating characters that come alive and how they react to their environment and problems. She will also share techniques and activities that will help you build better characters. For ages nine to 13. Today from 4 pm. At ₹400 on varsha seshan.com. #9890798756

Modern masters

A rare masterpiece by Amrita Sher-Gil – portraying her Hungarian husband – goes under the hammer at AstaGuru's Modern Indian Art Online Auction this weekend. The *Portrait of Victor Egan* will make its first auction appearance, with an estimate of ₹10 to ₹15 crore. Other lots include SH Raza's *Sanshari*, Nicholas Roerich's Himalayas, and Krishen Khanna's *Jesus at Emmaus*. On astaguru.com.

Odds in the ring

British WBA world super-middleweight title holder, Callum Smith, goes head to head this weekend with his "dream opponent", Saul 'Canelo' Alvarez. The Mexican has remained undefeated for more than seven years, making the stakes high for both men. At 9.30 am IST on Sunday, December 20. Live streaming available on the Dazn platform (subscriptions begin from ₹69 per month).

Anamika's gift box

Designer Anamika Khanna has curated a festive hamper in association with online gifting portal, The Gift Studio. The Vegan Goodie Box holds chocolates, artisanal vegan cheeses, spreads, sauces, organic teas and more (₹7,499). There's also the Luxury Tea Trove, packed with handpicked teas from across the world (₹10,899). On thegift studio.com, currently delivering in Mumbai and Kolkata.

Wine producer and exporter Grover Zampa Vineyards has launched One Tree Hill Mulled Wine Kadha, bottled mulled wine for the cold weather. They say it is a concoction of European and Indian spices, infused with black peppers, cinnamon, cloves, ginger, tulsi, cardamom, and lemon topped with star anise, parsley, fennel, cumin seeds, orange peel, and kapok buds. Available in Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, ₹650



Spread the good word

In the season of giving, a Delhi-based project is raising support for a community library that goes beyond books

DEBASREE PURKAYASTA

During the first pandemic lockdown in March, Zomato employee Jalish Ansari lost his job. While many fellow migrants had returned to their native villages, he decided to stay in Delhi and look for other employment. Going back to his village in Bareli, Uttar Pradesh, was not an option – it would have meant compromising his daughters' education. Heena, who studies in DPS, Gurugram, and Sana in Summer Fields School, Kailash Colony (both in standard six), were anxious too, as schools were closed and online classes had just begun. Amidst this, they had one escape: The Community Library Project (TCLP), which offered them access to free books, including Heena's favourite *Chacha Chaudhary* comics and Munshi Premchand's stories.

Books for all

Launched by author Mridula Koshy in 2014, TCLP has reached over 4,000 children from underprivileged backgrounds through its four free libraries in Delhi and Gurugram. Post-Co-

vid, in April, they went online with 'Duniya Sabki', a remote library with story and picture books.

With Christmas around the corner, TCLP is tapping into the season of giving by hosting a Free Library Festival. Sign up for workshops by Shubha Mudgal and Aneesh Pradhan, Michael Creighton and Yogesh Maitreya. A concert segment features Varun Grover, Rahul Ram and The Ska Vengers. And a charity auction includes a tussar silk sari from Vidya Balan and a set of signed books by Gulzar. Proceeds will go towards building online and offline infrastructure to expand their operations.

Read like a pro

The rich collection of books, mostly in Hindi and Urdu, are donated by both individuals and organisations. This has helped TCLP conduct their Hindi Reading Fluency programme, an initiative started in 2016 to help students learn how to read independently and fluently. They can practice with books of their choice and guidance from a reading specialist.

During the pandemic, they added 50 new readers to the fold. And their next project? "Start an English Fluency Programme," concludes Koshy.

Details of the Free Library Festival, which takes place on December 19 and 20, are on the communitylibraryproject.org.

Dreaming of a desi Christmas

Where we trade in snowy nights and sleigh bells for tropical humidity and crackling murukus

JANE DE SUZA

Rudolph's red nose paled next to mine. Christmas brought on sneezing bouts of hay fever, till we realised it was exactly that. My dad carted home hay and goodwill from the local *gaushala* for our crib, and from the pong it threw up, probably cow dung. It had me sneezing and guests hurling accusatory glares at each other.

Growing up in Jamshedpur, we boasted neither fireplace nor stockings to hang over it. Our school socks, hung up in hope, were ignored by Santa. Instead, he often let out a howl, more suited to werewolf than reindeer, when punctured by a stapler while swift-gift-wrapping in the pitch dark. A growly parent sported a banded thumb the next morning, blamed on the cat, baby or sauceman.

We kids ranked each house our family visited by how sugary the *kul-*

kuls were, how crackly the *murukkus* or how deep the hostess' frown when we poked grimy fingers through the rose cookies. We ran to

the first house, waddled to the fifth, often fell asleep at the sixth.

We prayed and sang for peace on Earth and hoped a few white lies would pass under the heavenly radar. Like hanging out last year's Christmas cards on a string across the drawing room, because the postman, disgruntled with his tip, hadn't delivered enough this year. We stuck tinsel and Santa's lobbed-off head across the walls, loaded gaudily-wrapped shoeboxes by the tree, till it toppled on to the nearest guest and his fifth glass of ginger wine. Home-made wine and cake recipes, of course, were secrets that not even the Secret Service could pry from the aunties who made them.

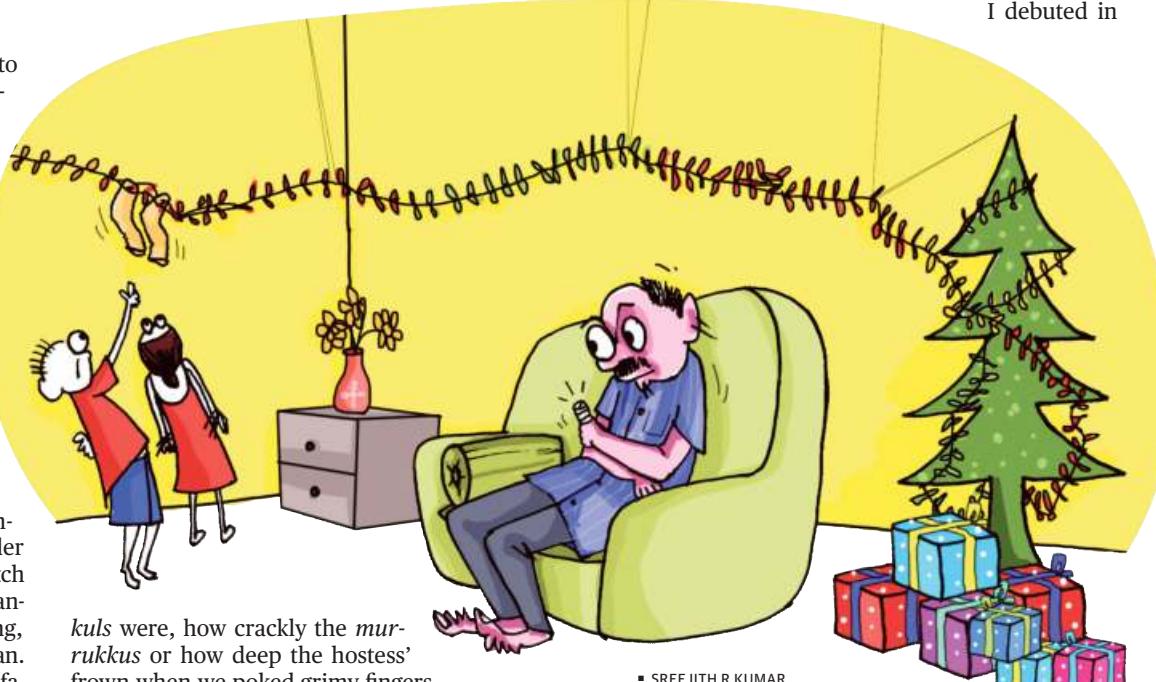
When I was three, I debuted in

a nativity skit, as a shepherd child squished into the choir, clutching an imposter lamb – my teddy bear taped over with cotton – that I kept chewing on in stage fright. One of the three kings had to carry me off, mid-song, with an acute tummy ache from eating all that cotton.

Later, travelling and living across India offered many other memorable Yuletides. Bombay, where the grounds outside the church filled up hours earlier, chairs handcuffed by tightly-tied kerchiefs, provoking snaky murmurs of "How many chairs will your aunty sit on?" Calcutta's cathedral, where people crammed in, 14 to a pew-of-eight, irrespective of caste, creed or *Kothai-boshbo* – as unavoidably Calcuttan as Liquor-cha afterwards. In Tamil Nadu, gamely singing about white Christmases while fanning away the stifling heat with hymnals, where I witnessed an unholly fist-fight over whose *kanjeevaram* saree the Mother Mary statue should wear that night. Goan masses, where sermons weren't long enough or successful enough unless someone fell asleep and snored loudly. Bangalore, where a street dog curled up near baby Jesus in the manger and no one chased it away. And then in a small town on a work trip, sitting through an entire midnight mass in a language I didn't speak, where people kneeled through three hours, and I ended up praying that they'd get whatever they were praying for.

Here's raising a filter *kaapi* to a very merry *desi* Christmas to you and those you love.

Where Jane De Suza, author of *Flyaway Boy*, pokes her nose into our perfect lives.



■ SREEJITH R KUMAR

SUNALINI MATHEW

Amidst the old peepals and the young silk cotton trees in the five acre char bagh of Mah Banu and her husband Abdur Rahim Khan I Khanan's tomb, sits a couple eating lunch. They come here regularly, says the team who has worked for five years on the conservation of the burial site in Delhi's Nizamuddin.

Dating back to 1598, during the rule of Akbar, Rahim was one of the *navratnas* in the court, winning wars with his military training and hearts with his dohas and translated texts – a man who survived despite his father Bairam Khan's assassination when he was just four. Meant to be a dedication of a husband to his wife, the tomb ended up housing his own remains too when he died in 1627.

A tomb with a view

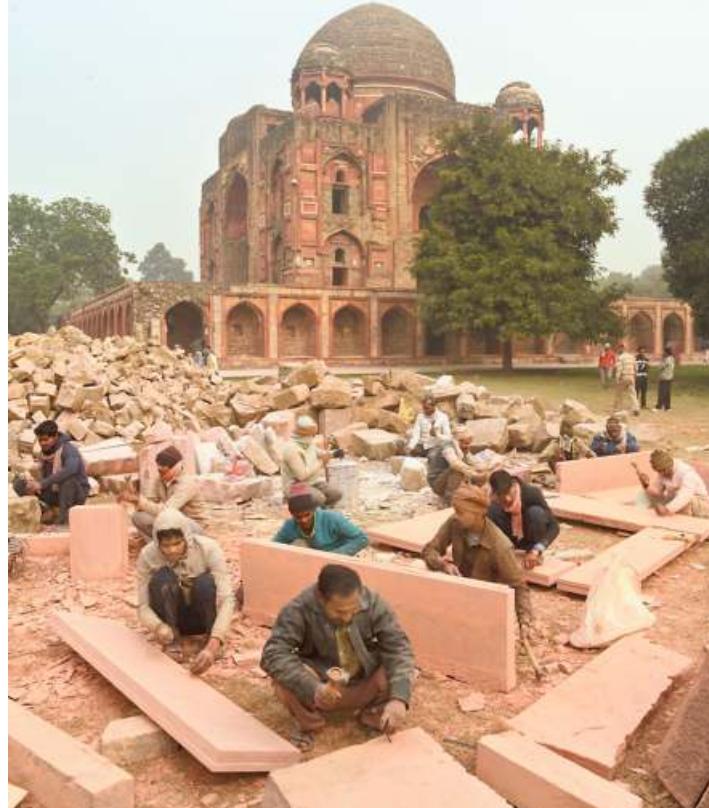
"When we start any project, we ask ourselves what the significance of the site is. Here, the significance is that it's a tomb. The historical and cultural significance is more than the archaeological and architectural significance, so restoring the dignity of the burial place has been very important," says Ratish Nanda, CEO, Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) that was responsible for the initiative. The marble and red sandstone clad tomb, along with that of Humayun's, a stone's throw away, were inspiration for the Taj Mahal, an insight by British historian and archaeologist Percy Brown.

The AKTC has planned a larger Nizamuddin Urban Renewal Initiative, involving the conservation and cultural revival of the approximately 60 structures in the area. While the building is owned by the ASI, the funding was provided by the InterGlobe Foundation.

"Without this work this building would not have continued to stand," says Nanda, adding that it had been quarried of its marble and sandstone over the centuries. There were cracks that ran from the crypt to the dome. "The work has included emergency conserva-

This is the tomb that Rahim built

The poet-warrior's final resting place that he originally built for his wife, has been restored and is now open to the public



tion. We had to strengthen the foundations all across the building to give it structural stability, but also to put back things that had been vandalised or taken away." Similarly, the corner pillars and 17 arches on each side were also restored, as they too give structural support.

The conservation of the building itself stands at the crossroads of heritage protection and revival of buildings, crafts and local livelihoods, and the need for open-air green urban spaces that provide

context to the city, so it doesn't look like just about any park anywhere in the world.

At any given time, there would be about 100 people on site from an inter-disciplinary team of conservation architects, engineers, landscape architects, and craftspeople.

There were about 3,000-4,000 craftspeople involved with 1,75,000 days of work undertaken.

Delhi views

"We put some of the marble back



Rahim's tomb (Left) Being restored, incised plaster

■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT, SUNALINI MATHEW

on the dome, to stabilise the base and to indicate what the original might have looked like," says Nanda. A large part of this double dome (an inner and outer structure) is still left uncovered, a reminder of the plunder that we subject our monuments to, over the centuries. This decision, and many others, were put through upto 60 independent peer reviews, with arguments on both sides. "That makes conservation fun," says Nanda, adding that it's important no single individual takes a decision on a conservation plan.

If you look at the building closely, the redder sandstone (due to the oxidation) and the duller white marble are from the original. There are many spaces, where there was no evidence of what was, hence left unclad exposing the Delhi quartzite beneath. In the inner vaulted chamber, about 80-85% of the work entailed cleaning the structure of grime, paint build up and cement plaster 'fortification' in the 20th century. The flooring needed to be put back too.

Rahim's last resting place is significant, because it is symbolic of his many parts: his family life, his pluralistic nature, his interest in science and the arts. His birthday was commemorated with the tomb's opening to the public on December 17.

**Handmade ornaments**

@ ShopChaupal, Gurgaon

The artisan-centric online store launched during lockdown features everything from handwoven palm leaf baskets to miniature paintings. We pick the Persian paper-mâché baubles – designed by GM Dehqani & Sons in Srinagar – for the festive season. With motifs of birds, flowers, Kashmiri symbols like almonds and the five-pointed *chinar*, each ornament has been crafted by hand. Starts at ₹450 for a set of three. shopchaupal.store

**Green collab**

@ Grey Matters Creative, Chennai

Amruta Varshini Ashokan's decor brand, known for all things concrete, has collaborated with five other local women-led brands for their 2020 Christmas hamper. It includes their concrete-glass vase and keychain, a tote bag from Everards India, a notebook and plantable pens from conscious stationery brand, Paper Dolphin, a personalised bamboo toothbrush and a jar of bamboo cotton buds from Plastic-free Madras, and a slice of plum cake from Chokawa Bakehouse. ₹849 + shipping. @greymatterscreative on Instagram

**Doll up @ Genes Lecoanet**
Hemant; Anavila

The Parisian fashion house has teamed up with NGO Silai Wali for its latest offering – limited edition dolls. Offcuts from past seasons have been used to craft these hand-sewn playmates: Marcel in Purple, Fifi in Pink, among others. ₹1,999 each on geneslecoanethemant.com. Anavila Misra's new line of toys – Busa and Friends – has adorable linen mice dolls dressed in dainty dresses, a Busa Doll in an Indigo sari, stuffed cats, elephants, pigs and more. ₹2,800 onwards on anavila.com

**Designed to read @ Tara Books, Chennai**

This one is for readers. A signature collection of the publication house's titles come in a handmade, screen-printed gift bag. A 'lockdown whimsy' to pair these square-shaped books is what led them to put together this bag that has something for everyone. Featured books include *Beasts of India*, *I Like Cats*, *The Circle of Fate*, among others. ₹4,600 on tarabooks.com

**Embroidered jute bag**

@ Padukas, Mumbai

This tribal women-centric platform has a range of hand embroidered shoulder bags with vibrant depictions of goddesses. Crafted in jute with glass and ceramic bead embellishments, each bag uses excess scrap fabrics from the textile industry. These are segregated and then hand stitched. ₹3,000 on baromarket.in



The conscious gift box

Homegrown brands across the country get creative for the holiday season

NIDHI ADLAKHA

Reconstructed kemp jewellery @ Raji Anand, Chennai

The jewellery designer known for her kemp jewellery has launched a new boho-gypsy inspired collection. The structure of the pieces retain her signature style: quirky with intricate metal embellishments. Ideal for daywear or a night out, each piece is custom-made. ₹5,000 onward. @rajanand on Instagram.

**Coasters and jars @ Varnam, Bengaluru**

The craft brand's popular Bumblebee Bee takes on the form of a functional table accessory. The four-coaster set (₹1,450), crafted in beechwood and wrightia tinctoria, a medicinal plant, has been handcrafted by artisans from Channapatna. If you're looking to store festive goodies, the Wiggle storage jars (₹900 a piece), designed in non-toxic vegetable colours, are a great option. Varnamstore.in

**Empty cocoons as neckpieces @ Aeshaane, Chennai**

When founder Neesha Amrish's 10-year-old daughter painted empty silkworm cocoons and turned them into a necklace earlier this month, she borrowed the idea for her Christmas collection. Amrish reached out to weavers at her apparel brand who sent her a bagful of cocoons. Once dyed in vibrant shades of fuchsia, red and aubergine, they went on to be used in her upcycled silk cocoon jewellery line. Starts at ₹2,681 for a necklace with 15-20 cocoons. 9884034516

Wine bags @ Studio Beej, Mumbai

Cork leather gets an arty makeover with the brand's Izna Wine bag. Lightweight yet sturdy, the multicolour design comes in options that have a mix of blue, mustard and beige. The handles make for easy carrying. The containers come packed in an organic jute bag placed within a repurposable box. All products are made-to-order. ₹2,800 on studiobeej.com

**Wreaths from Vagamon, Kerala**

'Don't hate, create' is the motto of Rekha Thomas, the brain behind Little Flower Farms, a bed and breakfast, floral biodiversity conservation initiative at the hill station. A few weeks ago, she landed in Kochi with a suitcase filled with Vagamon-foraged pine cones and has been crafting wreaths with the cones, silver oak leaves and scraps of Kalamkari block printed fabrics. All proceeds from the sales will go towards the Maria Sadanam old age home in Pala, Kerala. ₹800 each. @littleflowerfarms on Instagram

**Crewel coats @ House of Wandering Silk, New Delhi**

The textile house's latest offering is their capsule collection of Kashmiri Crewel Duster Coats. Crafted as heirloom pieces, the one-size, relaxed fit designs are hand embroidered with wool crewel stitch on a base of linen. This particular coat, Lyodur (Kashmiri for yellow), is designed in warm hues of brown and orange with teal and golden zari highlights. All orders come packed in recycled silk bags and include free, worldwide express shipping. ₹41,131 on wanderingsilk.org

FOOD SPOT

The yearning for matra-kulcha – satisfied

The east Delhi branch of Fateh ki Kachori is keeping the family flag flying, with the original in Civil Lines being as good as it was in the 70s



RAHUL VERMA

Friends came home the other evening, carrying home-cooked mutton biryani. I was a bit unhappy with their offering – not because I didn't like the biryani, but because I missed their *matra* – a simple dish of white peas that is their speciality. I made do with the biryani (and it was delicious), but the next day I went on to surf the Net for *matra*. Not just any *matra* – that of Fateh kachoriwallah.

A foodie column-reader had told me a while ago that Fateh ki Kachori – known across the city – now had a branch in east Delhi. To my joy, I discovered that the *kachori* was being home-delivered, with *matra-kulcha*.

Fateh is an old favourite of mine. Decades ago, the old man – now, alas, no more – would stand next to his cycle outside St Xavier's School in Civil Lines. On the cycle were his home-cooked *kachoris* that he'd top with boiled *matra* after sprinkling some masalas over it. This would be garnished with onions and green chillies, topped with chutney and then adorned with thin



Throwback time Matra-kulcha from Fateh ki Kachori
■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The *kulchas* were soft and spongy, and the *matra* was hot – the green chillies in the dish looked innocuous but were not – and delicious. Some of the peas had been mashed to bind the *matra* together, lending it a mix of soft and firm textures. The *matra* had been spiced well, but did not overwhelm the tastebuds.

Fateh's counter is still in Civil Lines – and may it blos-som – but I am happy that there is a representative in our part of town, too.

For many Delhi-ites, Fateh was an institution. I know some students of St Xavier's who spent more time by the cycle than in their classrooms. I last went to Fateh's some years ago, and found that the food was as good as ever.

I am happy to conclude that if the friends come with mutton biryani again, I have no reason to mope: Fateh's *matra-kachori* is just a phone call away.

The writer is a seasoned food critic

slivers of ginger and fresh coriander leaves. We used to line up for the crisp snack.

Fateh ki Kachori now has a branch in Krishna Nagar (Shop no 20, South Anarkali, Som Bazaar Chowk, open from 8.30 am to 5 pm, phone numbers: 8766261945 and 8505918204). Run by his nephew Rahul, this is a small shop which serves the old-styled *kachori* and has started delivering through various food apps.

Apart from the *matra-kachoris* (₹30), he serves *kulcha* and *matra* (₹30), too. The menu includes *alo kulche* (₹30) and *tawa fried mattar-kulcha* (₹50). They charge ₹30 for a *dona* of extra *matra* and ₹10 for a pat of Amul butter. I asked for some *kachoris* and three plates of *tawa fried mattar-kulcha*.

I had feared that the *kachoris* would be soggy by the time they arrived at my doorstep. It goes without saying that eating a *kachori* at the spot where it is being assembled cannot come close to eating it later at home. Surprisingly, they were deliciously crunchy, even though it was topped with a mash of *matra*. A sweet-and-tart sauce came with it, and I added a dollop on top. Bliss!

The writer is a seasoned food critic

NAVINA JAFA

The death clock of 2020 has struck once again as Ustad Iqbal Ahmed Khan (25 November, 1956 to 17 December, 2020), the living repository of classical Indian Sufi music and the Khalifa (leader) of the Dilli Gharana passed away on Thursday morning. During the first morning prayers, *sum* or the first and the last beat of the rhythmic cycle of music and time, brought an end to the life of the musician, whose antecedents date back to the court of Bahadurshah Zafar, according to Mirza Arif, Urdu poet and inventor, and a direct descendant of the Mughal family.

A scene from yesteryears: The Khawaja hall at the back of the Sufi Shrine of Hazrat Nizamuddin reverberated with poetry written by the 13th century Sufi Hazrat Amir Khusrau. Ustad Iqbal Ahmed Khan led the music rendered by a host of singers wearing pointed yellow hats.

Living in Shahjahanabad, Iqbal Sahab possessed an old tanpura from the Mughal days. Decorated with decorative ivory inlay, he sat during the monsoon in a room facing a small courtyard beckoning the clouds with his music. "My grandfather Ustad Chand Khan of Dilli Gharana wrote a treatise 'Iqsaami raga' (variations of the Raga) where he described 45 variations of Malhar, but I remember only 35," he once said to a group who'd dropped in, as he began to sing small verses creating an audio collage amidst the patterning raindrops.

The music of his family, including contributions by his grandfather Ustad Chand Khan and older brother Nazir Khan, captured the same spirit as the Sufi Mughal prince Dara Shikoh's syncretic journey into literature.

Renowned Kathak danseuse Rani Khanam recalls, "Some years ago I approached Khan Sahab for music for my production on Dara Shikoh based on M.S. Sathyu's play. The engagement was significant. Ustad Iqbal Sahab unravelled the treasures of his family."

The Dilli Gharana family possesses the rare heritage of Amir Khusrau that combines Arabic, Persian, and Hin-

The last qual

Ustad Iqbal Ahmed Khan of the Dilli Gharana, who passed away last Thursday, was living heritage of the confluence that Delhi is



dustani musical nuances. In one composition, the raga (musical scale), like many others Khan Sahab sang, evoked the subtlety of whirling and swaying in spiritual ecstasy. Iqbal Sahab said *Ushai* (a raga instituted by Amir Khusrau) combined Raga Sarang, Basant, and Naava. And Raga Kafi integrated the Arabic musical scale Zilah, Husaini and Sarangi.

Once at a seminar on Sufism at the Indira Gandhi Centre for the Arts in the 1990s, Iqbal Sahab sat wearing his yellow Sufi cap. At the start of his recital, before an august audience with scholars from the Deccan, Kashmir, Iran, among others, he said, "This yell-

low cap denotes the essence of spring."

He then described Delhi and Hindustan's inherent essence combining Hindu-Muslim threads in the weave of Sufism. For Iqbal Sahab, it was never merely about composition, but the socio-cultural environment of the piece. "When I sing Ra-ga Basant, my mind wanders to recreate the Sufi landscape of Hazrat Nizamuddin. I imagine my cap turning as it did with Amir Khusrau, who once pronounced his *giba*."

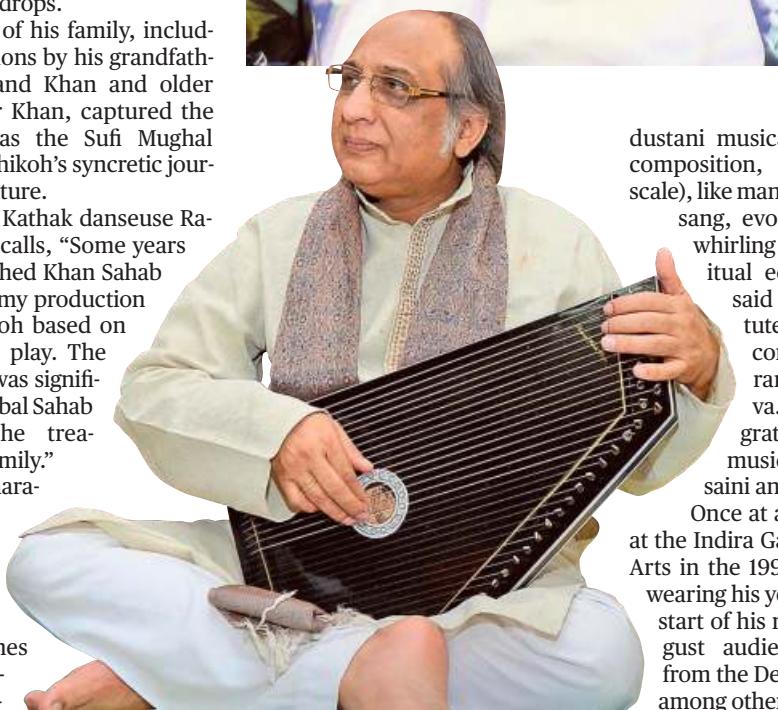
A Sangeet Natak Akademi Awardee, Iqbal Sahab remained living in the quaint musical neighbourhood Suiwan in Old Delhi. Among several initiatives to conserve his family's syncretic musical culture, he began to evolve the yearly Ustad Chand Khan Music Festival about 25 years ago, under the Sursagar Society of Delhi Gharana. He encouraged his talented daughter Vusat and his son-in-law Imran to innovate in introducing Amir Khusrau to new audiences, with new interpretations and technology.

For instance, 'Rudaad-e-Shireen' was a musical storytelling production that interpreted Khusrau's poetry to break the shackles of patriarchy. Vusat says, "For the production, together with my father, we selected compositions aligned to the events in the life of ordinary women. In many of our productions, my father insisted on young women at the centre."

Many years ago, Iqbal Sahab read out excerpts from an entry in the diary of his grandfather Ustad Chand Khan, describing the musical gatherings to celebrate the coronation of George V at the Red Fort. Later, he read out passages about the dilemmas and suffering of artists during the days of Partition.

The spirit of Ustad Iqbal Ahmed will echo on the Yaar-e-Chabutra (the platform of friendship) at the shrine of Nizamuddin, "Sakal bun phool rahi Sarson..." (The yellow mustard is blooming in every field). These Sufi lines recall Shelley's words of hope: "The trumpet of a prophecy! O Wind, If Winter comes, can spring be far behind?"

The writer is a Kathak exponent and cultural critic



344 abducted Nigerian boys freed

Boko Haram had claimed the kidnappings; not all students have been released

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

KATSINA

More than 300 Nigerian schoolboys who were seized in a mass abduction claimed by Boko Haram experienced their first full day of freedom on Friday after a six-day ordeal.

Looking worn-out and distraught, and most of them without shoes, the boys were brought to the Governor's office in Katsina, the capital of Katsina State in northwestern Nigeria, after being released late on Thursday.

The assault last Friday on a rural school in Kankara was initially blamed on criminal gangs who have terrorised the region for years. But on Tuesday, Boko Haram, the brutal jihadist group behind the abduction of 276 schoolgirls in Chibok in



Back home: A group of schoolboys being escorted by the Nigerian military after their release, in Katsina on Friday. ■ AP

2014, claimed responsibility for the raid.

Local officials said late on Thursday that the boys had been released and would spend the night in the protection of security agents.

A security source, speaking on condition of anonymity, said they had been left in

the forest after negotiations between the authorities and the abductors, but gave no further details.

State Governor Aminu Bello Masari said "344 are now with the security agencies" and were being taken to Katsina. They would be given medical care before be-

ing reunited with their families, he said. "This is a huge relief to the entire country & international community," President Muhammadu Buhari said on Twitter.

It remained unclear, however, if all the abducted schoolboys had been released, amid ongoing uncertainty over the number taken in the first place. In an interview with state channel NTA, the governor added: "I think we have recovered most of the boys, it's not all of them."

In a video released by Boko Haram on Thursday, a distressed teenager said he was among the 520 students kidnapped. The security source said late on Thursday that the exact number would be known only after a headcount in Katsina.

IN BRIEF



Alibaba 'dismayed' by facial-recognition tech

SHANGHAI

Tech giant Alibaba said in a statement it was "dismayed" that Alibaba Cloud had developed software that could recognise Uighurs. "We do not and will not permit our technology to be used to target or identify specific ethnic groups," it said. ■ AP

At least 15 children killed in Afghanistan blast

GAZNI

A motorbike loaded with explosives blew up at a religious gathering in Gilan district of Ghazni province in Afghanistan on Friday, killing at least 15 children and wounding 20 other people. Ahmad Khan Seerat, spokesman for the provincial police force, said it was a Taliban attack. ■ AP

Iran starts nuclear facility work amid U.S. tensions

Construction seen at Fordow facility

ASSOCIATED PRESS

DUBAI

Iran has begun construction on a site at its underground nuclear facility at Fordow amid tensions with the U.S. over its atomic programme, satellite photos obtained on Friday by the Associated Press show.

Iran has not publicly acknowledged any new construction at Fordow, whose discovery by the West in 2009 came in an earlier round of brinkmanship before world powers struck the 2015 nuclear deal with Tehran.

While the purpose of the building remains unclear, any work at Fordow will likely trigger new concern in the waning days of the Trump administration before the inauguration of U.S. President-elect Joe Biden. Already, Iran is building at its Natanz nuclear facility after a mysterious explosion in July there that Tehran described as a sabotage attack.

Iran's mission to the UN



A satellite photo on December 11 shows the construction at Fordow. ■ AP

and the International Atomic Energy Agency, whose inspectors are in Iran as part of the nuclear deal, did not comment. The IAEA has not publicly disclosed if Iran informed it of any construction at Fordow.

Construction on the Fordow site began in late September. Satellite images obtained from Maxar Technologies by AP show the construction taking place at a northwest corner of the site, near the holy Shiite city of Qom, some 90 km southwest of Tehran.

U.S. cyberattack is widening: Microsoft

The company says it has identified victims in seven more countries

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

WASHINGTON

A devastating cyberattack on U.S. government agencies has also hit targets worldwide, with the list of victims still growing, according to researchers, heightening fears over computer security and espionage.

Microsoft said on Thursday it had notified over 40 customers hit by the malware, which experts say came from hackers linked to the Russian government and which could allow attackers unfettered network access.

"While roughly 80% of these customers are located



It's certain that the number and location of victims will keep growing... This is not 'espionage as usual', even in the digital age

BRAD SMITH
Microsoft president

in the United States, this work so far has also identified victims in seven additional countries," Microsoft president Brad Smith said in a blog post. He said the victims were also in Belgium, Britain, Canada, Israel, Mexico, Spain and the United Arab Emirates.

of recklessness that created a serious technological vulnerability for the United States and the world."

John Dickson of the security firm Denim Group said many private sector firms that could be vulnerable are scrambling to shore up security and considering rebuilding their servers and other equipment. "Everyone is in damage assessment now because it's so big," Mr. Dickson said.

The National Security Agency called for increased vigilance to prevent unauthorised access to key military and civilian systems.

Economic recovery is 'not yet solid', says China

Country pledges financial support for revival efforts

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

BEIJING

China said its economy is yet to fully bounce back from the COVID-19 pandemic and pledged financial support for recovery efforts, at the end of a key annual policy meeting on Friday.

China suffered its first contraction in decades this year in the wake of COVID-19 that prompted drastic lockdowns in Wuhan – the central industrial city where the virus first emerged last year – and sent factory activity into a nosedive. Its economy has since improved, after authorities managed to largely contain the infection, and China may be the only



Xi Jinping

major world power to record positive growth this year.

But officials at this week's Central Economic Work Conference, presided over by President Xi Jinping, said the global recovery would be "unstable and uneven", and signalled a fiscal policy fo-

cused on maintaining economic stability. "We must be clearly aware that there are many uncertainties in the evolution of the pandemic and external environment, and the foundation for our country's economic recovery is not yet solid," said a statement from the three-day summit published by state broadcaster CCTV.

Beijing will boost financial support to technological innovation, small business and green projects to keep the economy on an even keel, the meeting said. Officials also said they would prevent "the disorderly expansion of capital", strengthening a new anti-monopoly push.

China may roll out vaccine for public soon

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

BEIJING

China plans to start opening its vaccination programme to members of the public in southwestern Sichuan province early next year, health officials said.

At least one million people have already received a jab in China after vaccine candidates were approved for "emergency use", but so far they have been limited to priority groups such as state employees and international students. China has five vaccines in the final stages of development, but none has received official approval so far.

An official said vaccines will be provided to the general public in Sichuan after the Lunar New Year holidays in February.

Trump says Moderna vaccine 'approved'

His comment comes even as regulators are yet to give final clearance



AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

WASHINGTON

U.S. President Donald Trump said on Friday that the United States has authorised a second COVID-19 vaccine, jumping the gun on regulators who are yet to give it the formal green light.

"Moderna vaccine overwhelmingly approved. Distribution to start immediately," Mr. Trump wrote on Twitter.

This follows a recommendation by an expert panel on Thursday to grant emergency use approval for Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine in the United States.

The Food and Drug Administration is expected to issue a formal approval on Friday. This would make Moderna's vaccine the second to be approved in a Western country, following the one developed by



Big boost: Mike Pence, seated right, speaks before receiving the Pfizer vaccine shot on live television on Friday. ■ AP

Pfizer-BioNTech.

Mr. Trump's announcement came as U.S. Vice-President Mike Pence, his wife Karen, and the lead public health official in the country, Surgeon General Jerome Adams, received the COVID-19 vaccine live on television, in a public display designed to boost national confidence in the measure.

Signalling the importance given to the event, top infectious diseases expert Anthony Fauci and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention director Robert Redfield were also in the room.

"Building confidence in the vaccine is what brings us here this morning," Mr. Pence said after being injected at the White House, quipping: "I didn't feel a thing."

Mr. Pence indicated that

formal approval for Moderna would be a matter of hours. "We have one, perhaps within hours two, safe and effective coronavirus vaccines," he said.

The death toll from COVID-19 has crossed 310,000 in the U.S., with the country also at the top with the most number of cases. The U.S. this week began vaccinating healthcare workers and long-term care residents with the Pfizer vaccine.

Both the frontrunner vaccines are based on cutting-edge mRNA (messenger ribonucleic acid) technology, which had never been approved prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and both are two-dose regimens.

The U.S., which recorded more than 17 million cases of the virus, will probably become the first country to approve the Moderna vaccine.

Amid federal tax probe, Biden backs son Hunter

I have full confidence in him, says the U.S. President-elect

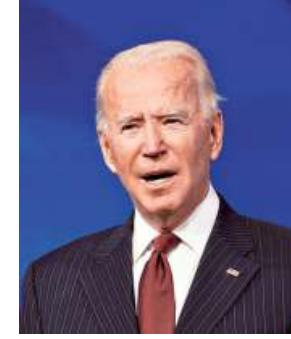
AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

WASHINGTON

U.S. President-elect Joe Biden has expressed full confidence in his son Hunter, a frequent target of Republican attacks, after it was revealed last week that he was under a federal tax investigation.

During his unsuccessful re-election campaign, President Donald Trump launched repeated accusations against Mr. Hunter and said the Bidens were a "corrupt" family and a "criminal enterprise".

"We have great confidence in our son," Mr. Biden said, sitting next to his wife Jill, in an interview on *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*, which aired on Thurs-



Joe Biden

day on CBS. "I am not concerned about any accusations that have been made against him. It used to get to me. I think it's kind of foul play but... as long as he's good, we're good." Mr. Biden said in his first full remarks on the issue since the

tax investigation became public.

Mr. Trump and his allies have regularly assailed Mr. Hunter for his business dealings in Ukraine and China. From 2014 to 2019, while his father was Vice-President, Mr. Hunter, a lawyer and lobbyist, served on the board of Burisma, a Ukrainian gas company.

Mr. Trump has accused Mr. Biden of seeking the removal of Ukraine's top prosecutor to protect Burisma, and his son, from a corruption investigation.

Mr. Hunter, 50, now an artist based in Los Angeles, has admitted to displaying "poor judgment" in some of his business dealings, but denied any wrongdoing.

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MARKET WATCH

	18-12-2020	% CHANGE
Sensex	46,961	0.15
US Dollar	73.56	0.04
Gold	49,644	0.38
Brent oil	51.70	0.27

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	463.30	-4.45
Asian Paints	2601.50	26.45
Axist Auto.	609.50	4.10
Bajaj Auto	3347.55	77.10
Bajaj Finserv	9215.60	-78.50
Bajaj Finance	5352.50	-34.20
Bharti Airtel	510.65	-4.45
BPCL	393.85	-1.55
Britannia Ind	3720.50	-9.25
Cipla	793.45	10.25
Coal India	141.70	-1.75
Divis Lab	3832.90	8.20
Dr Reddys Lab	5228.75	155.90
Eicher Motors	2480.95	14.35
GAIL (India)	125.05	1.15
Grasim Ind	909.65	-3.05
HCL Tech.	890.65	11.30
HDFC	2479.40	-15.20
HDFC Bank	1411.35	-30.45
HDFC Life	654.10	-0.45
Hero MotoCorp	3135.30	22.65
Hindalco	249.90	4.05
Hind Unilever	2333.45	18.15
ICICI Bank	517.15	6.75
IndusInd Bank	905.20	-30.60
Infosys	1189.80	30.60
Indian Oil Corp	93.95	-1.45
ITC	214.50	1.45
JSW Steel	364.20	-2.00
Kotak Bank	1949.35	-16.10
L&T	1281.55	2.75
M&M	733.60	2.95
Maruti Suzuki	7559.75	-134.25
Nestle India Ltd.	18362.75	57.40
NTPC	103.75	-0.70
ONGC	99.00	-2.50
PowerGrid Corp	193.90	0.60
Reliance Ind	1991.55	5.95
SBI Life	857.15	0.80
State Bank	271.45	3.75
Shree Cement	24574.50	64.00
Sun Pharma	575.00	3.65
Tata Motors	180.55	-1.15
Tata Steel	631.25	-4.05
TCS	2861.00	22.80
Tech Mahindra	933.80	3.70
Titan	1519.35	17.40
UltraTech Cement	5152.50	-19.30
UPL	460.30	4.90
Wipro	363.55	6.65

EXCHANGE RATES

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar.....	73.36	73.68
Euro.....	89.89	90.30
British Pound.....	99.13	99.58
Japanese Yen (100).....	70.87	71.19
Chinese Yuan.....	11.22	11.27
Swiss Franc.....	82.98	83.35
Singapore Dollar.....	55.23	55.48
Canadian Dollar.....	57.50	57.75
Malaysian Ringgit.....	18.14	18.25
Australian Dollar.....	55.77	56.02

Source: Indian Bank

Correction

An article titled "SIAM data affirms Nov.'s increase in PV wholesales" (Dec. 12, 2020) gave the percentage increase in wholesale sales of passenger vehicles in November as 12.7% and the volume sold as 2,85,367 units. It should have been 4.6% and 2,64,898 units.

IN BRIEF



Renault to raise prices by up to ₹28,000 from Jan. 2021

Automaker Renault India on Friday said it will increase prices of its entire model range by up to ₹28,000 from next month. The company, which sells models like Kwid and Triber, said the price hike from January would vary across variants and products. "The price increase is a result of increasing input costs across the spectrum and other affiliated cost increases during the pandemic," Renault India said. PTI

Birla parent Pilani may soon issue bonus shares

MUMBAI Pilani Investment & Industries Corporation Ltd., a non-banking financial company (NBFC) and parent of the Birla Group, is likely to announce the results of the e-voting by shareholders for increasing the authorised share capital of the company and issuance of bonus shares, on December 21, as per a regulatory filing. On November 10, the board had announced the bonus issue in the ratio of 2:5.

Bank credit grew 5.7%, deposits 11.3%: RBI

MUMBAI Bank credit grew by 5.7% to ₹105 lakh crore while deposits increased by 11.3% to ₹145.9 lakh crore in the fortnight ended December 4, RBI data showed. In the fortnight ended December 6, 2019, bank credit had stood at ₹99.3 lakh crore and deposits at ₹131.1 lakh crore. In the previous fortnight ended November 20, credit grew 5.82% to ₹104.3 lakh crore and deposits 10.9% to ₹143.7 lakh crore. PTI

Govt. to spell out production linked plan for autos soon: Goel

Heavy Industries Secretary says Ministry finalising details with stakeholders

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The Heavy Industries Ministry is engaged in close coordination with stakeholders on the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme which also covers the automobile sector, and hopefully it will be rolled out very soon, a top official said on Friday.

"Government has come out with a huge outlay for production linked incentives in the manufacturing sector, a big factor of which is auto. So the size is going to be approximately ₹1.5 lakh crore," Secretary in the Heavy Industries Ministry Arun Goel said at a CII event. "We are now in close coordination with the stakeholders to



Changing gear: The scheme will be offered to 10 sectors with an outlay of ₹1,45,980 crore spread over 5 years. ■ A.M. FARUQUI

work out the details and hopefully it will be seeing the light of day in the final shape very soon."

The Department of Heavy Industries frames and implements policies for the auto

sector. The Union Cabinet last month approved a Production Linked Incentive scheme worth ₹1.46 lakh crore for 10 sectors to boost domestic manufacturing, create jobs and reduce the

dependence on imports.

The scheme will be offered to white goods manufacturing, pharma, auto, telecom, textile, food products, solar photovoltaic and cell battery, among others, with a total outlay of ₹1,45,980 crore spread over five years.

Largest outlay for auto'
The largest share – ₹57,042 crore – goes to auto and auto components.

This is followed by advance chemistry cell battery (₹18,100 crore), drug makers (₹15,000 crore), telecom products (₹12,195 crore), food products (₹10,900 crore) and textile manufacturers (₹10,683 crore).

India mulls E20 fuel to cut vehicular emissions

Move will also help reduce oil imports

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The government on Friday proposed the adoption of E20 fuel – a blend of 20% of ethanol and gasoline – as an automobile fuel in order to reduce vehicular emissions as well as the country's oil import bill.

The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has published a draft notification and invited comments from the public for adoption of the fuel. The current permissible level of blending is 10% of ethanol though India reached only 5.6% of blending in a sticker.

"The notification facilitates the development of E20-compliant vehicles," ac-

cording to a statement. "It will also help in reducing emissions of carbon dioxide, hydrocarbons, etc. It will help reduce the oil import bill, thereby saving foreign exchange and boosting energy security."

Vehicle compatibility

It added the compatibility of vehicles with the percentage of ethanol in the blend would be defined by the vehicle manufacturer, which would have to be displayed on the vehicle with a sticker.

Ethanol is a biofuel and a common by-product of biomass left by agricultural feedstock such as corn, sugarcane, hemp, potato, etc.

RIL, BP start gas output from ultra-deepwater R-Cluster

Field is first of 3 being developed in KG-D6, to go on stream

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

Reliance Industries Ltd. (RIL) and BP plc have announced the start of production from R-Cluster, the ultra-deepwater gas field in the KG basin's D6 block.

The two partners are developing three deepwater gas projects in KG-D6 – R-Cluster, Satellites Cluster and MJ – which together are expected to meet 15% of India's gas demand by 2023, RIL said in a statement.

"These projects will utilise the existing hub infrastructure in KG-D6 block," the company added. RIL is the operator of KG-D6 with a

66.67% participating interest and BP holds the rest.

R-Cluster is the first of the three projects to come on stream. The field is located about 60 km from the existing KG-D6 Control & Riser Platform (CRP) off the Kakinada coast and comprises a subsea production system

tied back to CRP via a subsea pipeline, the company said.

Deepest in Asia'

"Located at a water depth of greater than 2,000 m, it is the deepest offshore gas field in Asia. The field is expected to reach plateau gas production of about 12.9 million standard cubic meters per day (mmscmd) in 2021," RIL said.

The next project, the Satellites Cluster, is expected to come on stream in 2021, followed by the MJ project in 2022, it added.

"Peak gas production from the fields is expected to be around 30 mmscmd."

RBI extends curbs as PMC draws 4 EoIs

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank of India has extended the current curbs on the Punjab and Maharashtra Cooperative Bank Ltd. till March 31, 2021, after the cash-strapped lender received four proposals from potential investors.

"PMC Bank had invited expression of interest (EoI) from eligible investors for investment/equity participation for its reconstruction. The last date for submission of EoI was December 15," the RBI said.

PMC Bank had sought time to examine the four proposals it had received for "their viability and feasibility taking into account the best interest of the depositors", the RBI said, explaining its decision.

Budget to prioritise health investments

Core sector revival will be speedy: FM

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

With the revival of the Indian economy being the primary focus, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Friday hinted that the Union Budget for 2021-22 would assign top billing to health sector concerns, while addressing the implications of the post-pandemic world for industry and the workforce.

Stressing that India would play a significant role in reviving the global economy and was ready to manufacture vaccines for the world, she said, "we owe it to humanity to put our heads together and come up with a Budget that can play a role in reviving India".

Seeking ideas from industry leaders at the CII Partnership Summit, Ms. Sitharaman said: "Feel free to send me your inputs so that we can see a Budget like never before. In 100 years of India, we haven't seen a Budget being made post-pandemic like this. And that is not going to be possible unless I get each one of your inputs and wish list. Without that, it is impossible for me to draft up something which is going to be that Budget like never before."

"Considering the size of our population, and the potential India holds for good growth-related building of our economy, I wouldn't hesitate to say that we shall be the engine of global growth, along with a few other countries, of course," she added.

Health as priority

Emphasising that the government was taking all inputs received from health sector experts for the Budget seriously, the Minister

"will also find that India will show signs of being a leader in infrastructure building. Therefore, core sector revival will be speedier than anything else."

INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGE

Dr. V.K.R.V. Rao Road, Nagarabhavi P.O. Bengaluru-560 072. www.isecc.ac.in

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS / NOMINATIONS FOR DR. VKRV RAO AWARDS IN SOCIAL SCIENCES

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Ashwin turns it on to restrict Australia

Visiting bowlers strike in bursts to break up potential partnerships; Paine stands firm to limit damage

INDIA IN AUS

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
ADELAIDE

R. Ashwin bagged four wickets as a dominant India held a 62-run lead at stumps on day two of the day-night Test at the Adelaide Oval after Australian captain Tim Paine ran out of batting partners.

Paine was left stranded on 73 when the Australian innings ended at 191 to trail India by 53 runs.

Ashwin had four for 55 while Umesh Yadav took three for 40.

Shaw flops again

At stumps, India in its second innings was one down for nine after Prithvi Shaw again failed to get going.

Fifteen wickets fell on the day which started when Pat Cummins and Mitchell Starc took just 25 deliveries to remove final four batsmen.

Australia in turn struggled to make headway as Jasprit Bumrah, Ashwin and Yadav worked their way through the batting order.

Even with India spilling five chances, it never allowed Australia to settle apart from a determined Paine who plugged on to his eighth half century, aided in part by being dropped by Mayank on 26. It was Paine's only missstep and he brought up his 50 off 68 deliveries.

Bumrah strikes

After Australia took 28 balls to get its first runs on the board, Bumrah stepped up to remove openers Matthew

Wade and Joe Burns for eight each before dinner.

Ashwin captured the wickets of Steve Smith, Travis Head and Cameron Green between dinner and tea with Smith, the world's premier batsman, facing 29 deliveries for his sole run.

In the final session Yadav took Marnus Labuschagne and Cummins to expose the tail and joined Ashwin to take the final two wickets of Nathan Lyon and Josh Hazlewood.

Lucky Labuschagne

Labuschagne survived long enough in the middle to be Australia's second-highest scorer with 47, but his wicket was always under threat.

He was dropped three times before his luck ran out after tea when he was trapped in front.

The India innings wrapped up quickly on the second morning with the last four wickets adding just 11 runs in 25 deliveries.

SCOREBOARD

INDIA – 1ST INNINGS

Prithvi Shaw b Starc 0 (2b), Mayank Agarwal b Cummins 17 (40b, 2x4), Cheteshwar Pujara c Labuschagne b Lyon 43 (160b, 2x4), Virat Kohli run out 74 (180b, 8x4), Ajinkya Rahane lbw b Starc 42 (92b, 3x4, 1x6), Hanuma Vihari lbw b Hazlewood 16 (25b, 2x4), Widdhiman Saha c Paine b Starc 9 (26b, 1x4), R. Ashwin c Paine b Cummins 15 (20b, 1x4), Umesh Yadav c Wade b Starc 6 (13b, 1x4), J. Bumrah (not out) 4 (7b, 1x4), M. Shami c Head b Cummings 0 (lbw); Extras (b-2, lb-8, nb-7, w-1); Total (in 93.1 overs): 244.

AUSTRALIA – 1ST INNINGS

Matthew Wade lbw b Bumrah 8 (51b, 1x4), Joe Burns lbw b Bumrah 8 (41b), Marnus Labuschagne lbw b Umesh 47 (191).

FALL OF WICKETS

1-0 (Shaw, 0.2 overs), 2-32 (Mayank, 18.1), 3-100 (Pujara, 49.4), 4-188 (Kohli, 76.6), 5-196 (Rahane, 80.4), 6-206 (Vihari, 83.2), 7-233 (Ashwin, 89.3), 8-235 (Widdhiman Saha, 90.3), 9-240 (Umesh Yadav, 92.2).

AUSTRALIA BOWLING

Starc 21-5-53-4, Hazlewood 6-6-4-7, Cummins 21.1-7-48-3, Lyon 21-2-68-1, Green 9-2-15-0, Labuschagne 1-0-3-0.

AUSTRALIA – 1ST INNINGS

Matthew Wade lbw b Bumrah 8 (51b, 1x4), Joe Burns lbw b Bumrah 8 (41b), Marnus Labuschagne lbw b Umesh 47 (191).

FALL OF WICKETS

1-16 (Wade, 14.1 overs), 2-29 (Burns, 16.6), 3-45 (Smith, 26.6), 4-65 (Head, 34.4), 5-79 (Green, 40.3), 6-111 (Labuschagne, 53.3), 7-111 (Cummins, 53.6), 8-139 (Starc, 60.1), 9-167 (Lyon, 66.5).

INDIA BOWLING

Umesh 16.1-5-40-3, Bumrah 21-7-52-2, Shami 17-4-41-0, Ashwin 18-3-55-4.

INDIA – 2ND INNINGS

Prithvi Shaw b Cummins 4 (4b), Mayank Agarwal (batting) 5 (21b), Jasprit Bumrah (batting) 0 (11b); Total (for one wkt. in six overs): 9.

FALL OF WICKET

1-7 (Shaw, 3.1 overs).

AUSTRALIA BOWLING

Starc 3-1-3-0, Cummins 3-2-6-1.



Eliminating a threat: Four-wicket hero R. Ashwin, second from left, takes off in joy after having Steve Smith snared by Ajinkya Rahane, second from right. ■ AFP

Kiwis draw first blood

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
AUCKLAND

New Zealand cruised to a five-wicket win over Pakistan in the first Twenty20 International at Eden Park here on Friday.

The Black Caps ended on 156 for five with seven balls to spare after losing the toss and being set a target of 154. Tim Seifert top-scored with 57, while debutant paceman Jacob Duffy took four for 33.

The scores: Pakistan 153/9 in 20 overs (Shadab Khan 42, Faheem Ashraf 31; Jacob Duffy 4/33, Scott Kuggeleijn 3/27) lost to New Zealand 156/5 in 18.5 overs (Tim Siefert 57, Mark Chapman 34; Shaheen Afridi 2/27, Haris Rauf 3/29).

Jacob Duffy. ■ AFP

Double one-two finish for TVS Racing

MOTORSPORTS

SPORTS REPORTER
CHENNAI

Stock categories (301-400cc and 165cc) at the MMRT, here on Friday.

Also notching up victories in the National championship were the 23-year-old from Bengaluru, Sesha-dri Suresh (Sparks Racing), in the Novice (Stock 165cc) and Ann Jennifer (Sparks Racing), who completed a hat-trick of wins in the girls' (Stock 165cc) category.

Aniket stars for JFC

ISL 2020-21

SPORTS BUREAU

NorthEast United FC (NEUFC) experienced the bitter taste of defeat for the first time this Indian Super League season as it lost 1-0 to Jamshedpur FC (JFC) at the Tilak Maidan Stadium in Vasco on Friday.

Aniket Jadhav's 53rd minute strike took JFC to the fifth spot with 10 points from seven games. NEUFC remains fourth.

NEUFC looked the better side initially and Kwesi Appiah had half-a-chance in the 18th minute when Idrisul Mehta's long throw-in. Appiah did well to take on a couple of defenders and had a crack at goal but his shot whizzed wide. The Ghanaian had another chance in the 24th minute but hit the side-netting.

The result: NEUFC 0 lost to JFC 1 (Aniket Jadhav 53).

Saturday's match: FC Goa v Chennaiyin FC, 7.30 p.m.

Khejrolia takes Shastri Club to final

Stock categories (301-400cc and 165cc) at the MMRT, here on Friday.

Delhi's Ranji Trophy team's duo of left-arm medium-pacer Kulwant Khejrolia (4/35) and Nitish Rana (2/32), along with Yash Garg (30, 2/32) scripted Lal Bahadur Shastri Club's dramatic 10-run win over Shraddhanand College in the semifinals of the 30th all-India Om Nath Sood memorial cricket tournament here on Friday. Chasing 197, Shraddhanand College was 71 without loss after 11 overs but thereafter, Man-of-the-Match Khejrolia led Shastri Club's rally and helped the team enter the final after five years.

The scores: L.B. Shastri Club 196/9 in 40 overs (Priyansh Arya 44, Tejas Dahiya 31, Yash Garg 30, Hiten Dalal 27) bt Swami Shraddhanand College 186/9 in 40 overs (Lakshay Thareja 39, Sumit Mathur 39, Ankush Bains 29, Kulwant Khejrolia 4/35).

Krish hits unbeaten half-century

Krish Aggarwal (51 not out) guided Lal Bahadur Shastri Club to a seven-wicket win over Ravindra Academy on

way to the final of the first Bhola Singh memorial (under-17) cricket tournament at the Chhattar Singh ground.

The scores: Ravindra Academy 160 in 38.5 overs (Sidharth Joon 56, Ankit Kumar 52, Samoopri Tripathi 4/29) lost to Lal Bahadur Shastri Club 161/3 in 33.1 overs (Krish Aggarwal 51 n.o., Dipesh Balyan 37).

Paliwal stars for Haryana Academy

A 74 from Services' Ranji player Rajat Paliwal proved crucial in Haryana Academy's nine-run win over Trikash Academy in the first Tripathi Premier League at the Tripathi Oval here.

The scores: Haryana Academy 226/7 in 40 overs (Rajat Paliwal 74, Gourav Kochad 37, Alok Singh 4/32) bt Trikash Academy 217/7 in 40 overs (Binay Rawat 48, Tushar Prashar 74 n.o.).

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Yash Bhatia hits ton

Dhruv Gehlot (53 not out) was the hero of M-10 Academy's seven-wicket victory over Harbhajan Institute of Cricket in the semifinals of the Hari Ballabh Sharma memorial (under-14) tournament. Dhruv Gehlot (53 not out) was the hero of M-10 Academy's seven-wicket victory over Harbhajan Institute of Cricket in the semifinals of the Hari Ballabh Sharma memorial (under-14) tournament.

The scores: Mata Bhatee Devi 261/6 in 35 overs (Yash Bhatia 118, Yash Bhardwaj 55, Shubham Arora 3/27) bt Airliner Academy 190/9 in 35 overs (Shubham Saini 95).

Saksham, Aryan shine

Saksham Mateer (78) and Aryan Dogra (3/37) enabled Telefunken Club beat Rann Star Club by 60 runs and enter the final of the Turf Youth Club (under-19) cricket tournament at the Guru Gobind Singh College ground.

The scores: Mata Bhatee Devi 261/6 in 35 overs (Yash Bhatia 118, Yash Bhardwaj 55, Shubham Arora 3/27) bt Airliner Academy 190/9 in 35 overs (Shubham Saini 95).

Abhimanyu strikes

Abhimanyu Gupta (4/27) and half-centurions Aryan Ghelot and Aniket Kumar helped Achiever Academy beat D.C. Raghu Academy by eight wickets in the first

The scores: Mata Bhatee Devi 261/6 in 35 overs (Yash Bhatia 118, Yash Bhardwaj 55, Shubham Arora 3/27) bt Airliner Academy 190/9 in 35 overs (Shubham Saini 95).

Deepanshu, Suraj excel

Deepanshu Kumar (68) and Suraj Kumar (3/24) helped S.N. Dubey Academy beat RKB Academy by 85 runs in the seventh S.N. Dubey memorial cricket tournament at the Pioneer Sports Club ground.

The scores: S.N. Dubey Academy 255/6 in 40 overs (Deepanshu Kumar 68, Akshey Sharma 33, Yash Chandila 34)

The scores: Mata Bhatee Devi 261/6 in 35 overs (Yash Bhatia 118, Yash Bhardwaj 55, Shubham Arora 3/27) bt Airliner Academy 190/9 in 35 overs (Shubham Saini 95).

Aniket, Nizam perform well

Aniket Kumar (110) and Nizam Malik (4/14) joined hands as Sahgal Club crushed City Academy by 127 runs in the B.R. Sharma memorial cricket tournament at the CK PlayStation ground.

The scores: Sahgal Club 304 in 37.5 overs (Aniket Kumar 110, Anmol Sharma 55, Tarun Bisht 46, Sachin Mishra 5/43) bt City Academy 177 in 28 overs (Mongia Khan 46, Vaibhav Sharma 36, Nizam Malik 4/14).

The scores: Mata Bhatee Devi 261/6 in 35 overs (Yash Bhatia 118, Yash Bhardwaj 55, Shubham Arora 3/27) bt Airliner Academy 190/9 in 35 overs (Shubham Saini 95).

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The scores: Mata Bh

TV PICKS

Australia vs India: Sony Ten 1, 2 & Sony Six (SD & HD), 9.30 a.m.
Premier League: SS Select 1 (SD & HD), 6 p.m., 8.30 p.m., 11 p.m. & 1.30 a.m. (Sunday)
Serie A: Sony Ten 2 (SD & HD), 7.30 p.m., 10.30 p.m. & 1.15 a.m. (Sunday)
ISL: Star Sports 2 & 3 (SD & HD), 7.30 p.m.

IN BRIEF



Sergio Perez to replace Albon at Red Bull

Mexican driver Sergio Perez will replace Alexander Albon at Red Bull next season, the Formula One outfit announced on Friday. Perez, who was out of contract with Racing Point, will race alongside Max Verstappen in 2021. AFP

CSA puts domestic matches on hold

JOHANNESBURG
Domestic cricket in South Africa was put on hold on Thursday until next month after as many as 10 of the 16-man squad for the first Test against Sri Lanka were exposed to the coronavirus during First Class matches this week. AFP



Thompson takes the lead at Tour Championship

MIAMI
American Lexi Thompson fired a seven-under 65 on Thursday to lead the LPGA Tour Championship by one stroke. Denmark's Nanna Koerstz Madsen, lying second, put herself in the mix for a first LPGA title. Defending champion Kim Sei-young, Caroline Masson and American Megan Khan shared third on 67. AFP

United maintains perfect away record

Aston Villa frustrated by a dogged Burnley



Comeback begins: Marcus Rashford, centre, sets Manchester United on the road to recovery after falling behind to Sheffield United. • AFP

EURO LEAGUES

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
LONDON

Manchester United mounted yet another rescue mission on Thursday, beating Sheffield United 3-2 to win its sixth consecutive Premier League away match of the season.

The Blades took a shock lead through David McGoldrick after a horrendous error by returning goalkeeper Dean Henderson but two goals from Marcus Rashford and a Anthony Martial strike turned the tables.

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's Je-kyll-and-Hyde team has won just a single match at Old Trafford this season but has taken all 18 points on the road to climb to sixth in the table.

But that is only half the story for United, which has been forced to come from behind in all six of those away games.

Aston Villa squandered multiple chances as it was held to a frustrating 0-0 draw by battling Burnley on Thursday. Villa is in 11th place while the point lifted Sean Dyche's men out of the

bottom three.

Anwar El Ghazi and Kortney Hause hit the woodwork while Matt Lowton cleared a deflected strike from Ahmed Elmohamady off the line.

Burnley's threat was limited but Sean Dyche's side is now unbeaten in three games.

The results:

Premier League: Aston Villa 0 drew with Burnley 0; Sheffield United 2 (McGoldrick 5, 87) lost to Manchester United 3 (Rashford 26, 51, Martial 33).

Serie A: AS Roma 3 (Mkhitarian 27, Veretout 43-pen, Pellegrini 68) bt Torino 1 (Bellotti 73).

SHORT TAKES

Lewandowski wins FIFA 'The Best' award

ZURICH
Robert Lewandowski was named men's Player-of-the-Year at FIFA's 'The Best' awards here on Thursday.

FIFA's 'The Best' awards winners: Player-of-the-year:

Men: Robert Lewandowski

(Bayern); Women: Lucy Bronze (Lyon).

Goalkeeper: Men: Manuel Neuer (Bayern); Women: Sarah Bouhaddi (Lyon).

Coach: Men: Jurgen Klopp (Liverpool); Women: Sarina Wiegman (Netherlands).

Puskas Award (best goal): Son Heung-min (Tottenham).

Chirag Dhun to take on Fardeen Qamar in final

SONEPAT
Top seed Chirag Dhun beat Amit Dahiya 6-3, 6-2 to set up a title clash against Fardeen

Qamar in the ₹100,000 AITA men's ranking tennis tournament at the Shantima Tennis Academy on Friday.

Fardeen beat Sandesh Dattay 6-1, 6-1 in his semifinal.

Whatmore appointed Nepal head coach

KATHMANDU
Dav Whatmore, who guided Sri Lanka to the 50-overs World Cup glory in 1996, has been named head coach of Nepal's national team. The first task for him would be to help Nepal reach the 2022 T20 World Cup in Australia. REUTERS

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