

SHORT TAKES

123 Covid cases take Noida's tally to 22,592

Noida: Uttar Pradesh's Gautam Buddh Nagar recorded one more fatality linked to Covid on Sunday that pushed the death toll to 82, while 123 new cases pushed the infection tally to 22,592, official data showed. Active cases in the district came down to 1,193 from 1,279 the previous day, while the recovery rate crossed the 94 per cent-mark, according to the data released by the UP health department for a 24-hour period. The number of active cases in Gautam Buddh Nagar is the fourth highest in the state. On the bright side, 210 more patients got discharged during the period with the overall recoveries reaching 21,317, the fifth highest in the state. With the death toll reaching 82, the district has a mortality rate of 0.36 per cent. The recovery rate of patients reached 94.35 per cent, the statistics showed. Meanwhile, the number of active cases in UP came down to 24,575 from 25,243 on Saturday, while the overall recoveries reached 5,09,556 and the death toll linked to Covid climbed to 7,742 on Sunday, the data showed. — PTI

Man held for taking loans with fake docus

New Delhi: A man has been arrested for allegedly procuring three home loans worth ₹6.70 crore by impersonating as someone else and using forged documents, police said on Sunday. The accused, Sunil Anand, was arrested on Friday. He impersonated as one Rahul Sharma and forged documents to obtain the loans, they said. The matter came to light after owner of the house Rita Babbar lodged a police complaint against the accused. In her complaint, the woman alleged that in 2014, she had given her property at Surajmal Vihar to Sachin Sharma, his father Mange Ram Sharma and relative Rahul Sharma on rent. "After the rent agreement expired in 2016, both Rahul and Sachin entered into a lease deed with Babbar and continued to reside as tenants at the latter's property," joint CP (Economic Offences Wing) O.P. Sharma said. In July 2016, the complainant's husband received a call from a finance firm informing them that Rahul had taken a loan worth ₹2.25 crore against the security of their property and that he was untraceable.

North mayor to set up waste-to-energy plant

New Delhi: A day after a fire broke out at the Bhalswa sanitary landfill site, North Delhi mayor Jai Prakash, on Sunday, visited the landfill to take stock of the situation and announced that the civic body is going to set up another waste-to-energy plant at Rani Khera with a cost of ₹1,000 crore. Mr Prakash said that the North Corporation, in collaboration with the Indian Oil Corporation Limited, is going to set up this waste-to-energy plant which would help in disposing the complete garbage collected in the North DMC area. "The corporation has installed 15 trommel machines to dispose of legacy waste that has increased the height of sanitary landfill sites. By now, we are able to reduce 30 feet of the height of the garbage at the landfill site. Four more trommel machines are under process of installation that would further increase the speed of removing legacy waste thus reducing the height of garbage at Bhalswa more speedily," Mr Prakash added.

55-yr-old dies after car catches fire

New Delhi: A 55-year-old man from Punjab, who had gone to Delhi border to express solidarity with the agitating farmers, was burnt alive after the car in which he was sleeping caught fire on Saturday night near the Delhi-Haryana border. Janak Raj, who was a tractor repairman, had gone to Delhi to voluntarily fix tractors that were being used by farmers camping near Delhi, to protest against the Centre's agricultural laws that were passed recently. After finishing his work late at night near Bahadurgarh, Janak Raj went to sleep in the car; the vehicle caught fire and he was burnt alive, officials said. Janak Raj was a resident of Dhanolua village in Barnala district. Shiromani Akali Dal, condoling Mr Raj's death, said his name will also be immortalized in the history of the peasant movement.

Tally at 5,66,648, death toll 9,066 Delhi sees less than 5K cases for 2nd day

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, NOV. 29

Delhi, on Sunday, recorded as many as 4,906 fresh coronavirus cases. With this, the tally of Covid-19 cases in the state has reached over 5.66 lakh while the death toll mounted to 9,066. Sixty-eight fatalities have been recorded in the last 24 hours, according to the latest bulletin issued by the Delhi health department.

According to a health bulletin issued by the Delhi government, 64,186 Covid-19 tests were conducted in the last 24 hours. The case tally stands at 5,66,648 in the national capital, including 5,22,491 patients who have either been discharged or have migrated or recovered. The number of active cases is 35,091, of which 21,337 are in home isolation.

The Delhi government, on Sunday, said that Covid-19 outbreak in the city was in "perpetual decline" mode with decreasing number of new cases as well as the death rate going down compared to figures from earlier this month. Health and family welfare minister Satyendar Jain made the declaration during a press conference to release the daily Delhi health bulletin as he gave updates about the pandemic, the decreasing positivity rate, and various other issues. Against 4,998 new cases in Delhi on Saturday, the number of fresh cases on Sunday was 4,906, he said.

Work from home for 50% staff of city govt

New Delhi, Nov. 29: The Delhi government on Saturday issued work-from-home orders for 50 per cent of its employees associated with non-essential services and advised private establishments to follow the practice as far as possible amid a surge in Covid cases in Delhi. Delhi chief secretary and DDMA executive committee chairman Vijay Dev, in an order, said all government offices, autonomous bodies, public sector undertakings, corporations, local bodies will function with officers of grade-one level or equivalent and above to the extent of 100 per cent. "The remaining staff will attend up to 50% as per requirement to be assessed by heads of the departments concerned (remaining 50 per cent of the staff will work from home) till December 31, 2020, or till further orders whichever is earlier," stated the DDMA order. Private offices are advised to stagger the office timings and also presence and quantum of staff with an objective to reduce the number of employees attending office at the same time. They are further advised to follow the practice of work from home as far as possible, it said. — PTI

DRDO increases ICU beds in corona-care hospital

New Delhi, Nov. 29: The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has increased the number of ICU beds to 500 in Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Covid Hospital at Delhi Cantonment, an official statement said on Sunday. The hospital was made operational on July 5 by the DRDO to treat Covid patients from Delhi and other states. It has a total of 1,000 beds.

The statement said 3,271 patients were admitted to the hospital so far, out of which 2,796 have been cured/discharged. At present, 434 patients are undergoing treatment in

the hospital out of which 356 are civilians and 78 are service personnel, it said.

"The DRDO has increased the number of ICU (Intensive Care Unit) beds to 500 in Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Covid Hospital at Delhi Cantonment on the advice of the Union government in view of the rising number of cases in Delhi-NCR. All the beds are provided with oxygen support," the statement said.

It said the hospital has been admitting patients from Delhi and states like Haryana, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab and Madhya Pradesh. — PTI

Mr Jain said that the positivity rate, down to 7.24 per cent (as on Saturday) from 15.26 per cent, has become "less than half since November 7 which is a sign of relief as it points to the fact that the outbreak is on perpetual decline."

Noting that RT-PCR tests were ordered to be increased by the Central government, he said that the labs do not have that much capacity and that the government is doing its best to provide each and every result. "As far as the decreasing number of cases is con-

cerned, we only take into consideration the individual whose report has duly been provided," Mr Jain said.

Responding to the query surrounding the lack of oxygen supply in Delhi due to the ongoing farmer agitation, the minister said initially there was a "hiccup for a few hours, but that was resolved immediately and the supply was restored."

"Oxygen supply comes from Rajasthan and is a lifesaving necessity therefore it will be made available in abundance," he said.

Number of Covid tests very low in Delhi, claims Cong

New Delhi, Nov. 29: Delhi Congress leader Alka Lamba on Sunday claimed that the number of Covid tests conducted in the city is very low and asked the Arvind Kejriwal government to provide testing facility to people free of cost.

She alleged that to "cover up" the surge, more Rapid Antigen Tests were conducted instead of the gold standard RT-PCR tests. No immediate reaction was available from the ruling AAP on Lamba's allegations.

"When daily 10,000 tests

per million were needed in November, the Delhi government conducted only 2,700 tests, which was 83 per cent less than what was required," she claimed. Ms Lamba who was earlier with the AAP also said due to the high price of the tests, the poor people avoid getting tested and asked the government to provide them test facility free of cost.

Ms Lamba also asked the government to immediately summon a special session of the Assembly and pass a resolution against the Centre's new farm laws. — PTI

Delhi to record coldest Nov. in a decade

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, NOV. 29

The national capital is all set to record coldest November in at least 10 years, with the mean minimum temperature for the month this year hovering around 10 degrees Celsius, according to India Meteorological Department data.

In Delhi, the average minimum temperature for the month of November is 12.9 degrees Celsius.

From November 1 to November 29, the city has recorded a mean minimum temperature of 10.3 degrees Celsius, which is the lowest in at least a decade, according to IMD data. The mean minimum temperature was 15 degrees Celsius last year,



People warm themselves near a bonfire in New Delhi on Sunday.

13.4 degrees Celsius in 2018 and 12.8 degrees Celsius in 2017 and 2016. On Sunday, Delhi recorded a minimum of 7 degrees Celsius. This is the seventh day this month that the minimum temperature remained below 10 degrees Celsius. The minimum tempera-

ture is likely to settle around 7 degrees Celsius on Monday as well, according to IMD.

On November 23, Delhi recorded a minimum of 6.3 degrees Celsius — its lowest minimum temperature in the month since November 2003, when the

City's air quality remains 'poor'

New Delhi, Nov. 29: Delhi's air quality remained "poor" on Sunday and is likely to deteriorate further amid a dip in the mercury and the wind speed.

The city's air quality index (AQI) was 245 at 9 am. The 24-hour average was 231 on Saturday, 137 on Friday, 302 on Thursday and 413 on Wednesday.

An AQI between zero and 50 is considered "good", 51 and 100 "satisfactory", 101 and 200 "moderate", 201 and 300 "poor", 301 and 400 "very poor", and 401 and 500 "severe".

The maximum wind speed was 15 kmph on Saturday. It is likely to be 8 to 12 kmph on Sunday and Monday, according to the IMD. — PTI



Devotees at illuminated Gurdwara Bangla Sahib on the eve of Guru Parv in New Delhi on Sunday.

— PTI

Delhi Congress restructuring to start next week: Anil Chaudhary

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, NOV. 29

The organisational restructuring in Delhi Congress is expected to begin next week at block level with giving priority to the partymen who worked hard in Covid relief work undertaken in past months.

Delhi Congress president Anil Chaudhary told a news agency that senior party workers will be deputed as observers in all 270 blocks to gather names recommended for appointment as presidents of party's block units.

"A massive relief work was undertaken by Delhi Congress to distribute food, ration kits and help migrant workers moving to their states. We will give priority in appointments to those leaders and workers who dedicatedly participated in this work for months," said Mr Chaudhary adding that those leaders who have performed well in relief work will be retained and given appointments while those who remained aloof and did not show any enthusiasm will be shunted out.

Centre should hold talks with farmers immediately, says CM

New Delhi, Nov. 29: Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday asked the Centre to immediately and unconditionally hold talks with the farmers who continued to protest against the new agri laws staying put at the Singhu and Tikri border points of the national capital for the fourth consecutive day.

The AAP has supported the farmer's protest and its national convener Mr Kejriwal asked the Centre to immediately meet the farmers.

"The Central government should talk to farmers immediately (and) unconditionally," he said in a tweet.

AAP leader Sanjay Singh said that his party demands that home minister Amit Shah should first resolve the issues of the farmers by listening to them.

"The AAP under the leadership of Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal is standing beside the farmers. We welcome the farmers to Delhi, we will fight shoulder to shoulder with them," he said.

At a press conference on Sunday, senior AAP leader and chief spokesperson Saurabh Bhardwaj said his party



Arvind Kejriwal

believes that Mr Shah has shown "utter irresponsibility" by leaving the national capital to campaign for Hyderabad municipal elections when lakhs of farmers were waiting at the Delhi border to talk to him.

Mr Bhardwaj said on one hand, Amit Shah was telling the farmers that coronavirus cases might increase due to their protest and on the other, he was claiming that in his Hyderabad roadshow there was massive public participation which shows "no social distancing was maintained".

"The AAP believes that this is the utter hypocrisy of Union home minister Amit Shah and we condemn such irresponsible act. The AAP believes that such a home minister is very dangerous for India," he said.

"In this serious situation, the home minister of our country is not in Delhi but in Hyderabad and he is holding a press conference regarding the issues related to Hyderabad municipality. He is taking out massive roadshows," Mr Bhardwaj said.

At another press conference, party MLA and spokesperson Atishi alleged that the Centre was "intolerant" towards thousands of farmers sitting at the border of Delhi.

"Posing conditions for the farmers, the government is saying that it will not talk to the farmers unless the farmers concede to its demands of moving to a particular place to hold a dialogue," she said.

AAP leader Raghav Chadha hit out at Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh over the farm laws, holding him "equally responsible for crushing" the farmer protests.

"There is a nexus and friendship between PM Narendra Modi and Captain Amarinder Singh. Together they are duping and deceiving the farmers," Mr Chadha claimed. — PTI

Trader shot dead in car in Mathura

Mathura, Nov 28: A paneer trader was shot dead in a moving car allegedly by motorcycle-borne assailants near a private medical college in Mathura district, police said on Saturday.

The incident happened in the intervening night of Friday and Saturday near KD Medical College under Chhata Kotwali police station area, police said.

"The victim, Nazim, was rushed to hospital. However, doctors declared him brought dead," police further said. Yet, the deceased man's family members have alleged that the trader was killed by police firing. No family

member is yet to submit a complaint, police stated.

In an FIR registered by Circle Officer Jagdish Kaliraman, the victim Nazim was a resident of Haryana's Punhana after midnight on Friday.

According to the FIR, police had chased motorcycle-borne assailants who managed to escape.

Police have detained a person, who was travelling with the now deceased man. The victim was taking paneer (cottage cheese) from Punhana to Agra as the family trade is to supply ghee/paneer in different areas of the region, his brother Khadim said. — PTI

Crude blast of animal scaring device injures 16-year-old boy

SHASHI BHUSHAN NEW DELHI, NOV. 29

Crude blast of animal scaring device proved life threatening for a 16-year-old from Bijnor in Uttar Pradesh.

The boy suffered serious neck injury while using a crude device in the fields to scare monkeys and birds. In this device, potash and sulphur are stuck in a metal pipe to create a blast which scares birds and animals.

About five days ago, the boy, Devesh, was unlucky enough that during the blast a two centimetre sharp metal piece flew and pierced his neck. It lodged into his spine bone.

According to the vice chairperson of the department of spinal surgery at Sir Ganga Ram Hospital (SGRH), Dr Rupinder S. Chahal, an initial look at the scans surprised them all. The metal piece had twisted and seriously damaged the neck. It had pierced 1.5 cm into the cervical bone and damaged the thyroid gland while narrowly missing the great blood vessels and the wind and food pipes. It had lodged itself just adjacent to the spinal cord. Miraculously the boy was alive.

The consultant of head and neck surgery at SGRH, Dr Sangeet Agarwal, said: "The metal piece had to be

reached without damaging the great blood vessels which were in close proximity. Another challenge was to not only save but also to repair the injured thyroid gland. Since the metal piece was bent and was penetrating so deep in the bone, it was very difficult to be removed in one piece."

"Still, we managed to successfully remove it in a single piece without damaging the cervical bone or any other critical organs. Otherwise it would have required a major reconstructive surgery," he said. "Now Devesh is fit and walking and talking. He will be discharged soon," Dr Chahal added.

SHORT TAKES

Urmila to join Shiv Sena tomorrow

Mumbai: Bollywood actress-turned-politician Urmila Matondkar will join the Shiv Sena on Monday. She has been nominated by the Uddhav Thackeray-led party to the Maharashtra Vidhan Parishad. Matondkar had contested the 2019 Lok Sabha elections on a Congress ticket from Mumbai North constituency, but lost to BJP's Gopal Shetty. After the defeat, he had resigned from the Congress citing petty politics within the party. She had joined the Congress in March 2019 ahead of the Lok Sabha elections and exited it in September 2019. After resigning from Congress, there were speculations that Ms Matondkar might join the Sena, but she had denied it. There were reports that Milind Narvekar, secretary of Uddhav Thackeray, had called her. The Thackeray and Matondkar families share a Shiv close relation.

Rains likely in TN, Kerala, coastal AP

Chennai: A well marked low pressure area over the Bay of Bengal is very likely to concentrate into a depression on Monday and bring moderate to heavy and extremely heavy rainfall over Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Kerala and coastal Andhra Pradesh over the next four days, the IMD said. Tamil Nadu Fisheries Minister D. Jayakumar said in view of the forecast, steps have been taken by the government for the safe return of 200 plus Tamil Nadu boats —engaged in deep sea fishing — with the help of Coast Guard, Kerala, Karnataka, Goa and Lakshadweep have been requested to allow Tamil Nadu boats in their fishing harbours and to render them assistance. — PTI

'False potato crisis created in Bengal'

Kolkata: Hitting out at the TMC government in West Bengal, BJP state president Dilip Ghosh on Sunday alleged that an "artificial potato crisis" has been created in the state by those patronised by the ruling party. Expressing concern over the "sudden spurt in the price of the kitchen staple, now available at ₹40 per kg, if not more", Mr Ghosh said this has hurt common man and pinched their pockets hard. "Why is the price of potato so high? The crisis has been created artificially by those patronised by the ruling party. It has been created by those who take cut money for everything," Mr Ghosh added. The BJP leader also said that a section of TMC members are unhappy with the way the leadership has been functioning. — PTI

'TIGER STATE' MP LOSES 26 BIG CATS IN 2020

Bhopal: Madhya Pradesh, which is known as the "tiger state" of India, has lost 26 striped animals so far this year, as per the National Tiger Conservation Authority. Reacting to it, Madhya Pradesh forest minister Vijay Shah said that the average death rate of tigers was less compared to their birth rate in the state in last six years. According to the National Tiger Conservation Authority's (NTCA) website, out of the 26 tiger deaths reported since April this year, MP lost 21 felines inside the tiger reserves, including 10 in the Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve. No tiger death was reported in the first three months of this year, as per the data. In 2019, the state lost 28 tigers while three cases of seizures of body parts due to poaching were also reported. Karnataka, which is on the second position in the number of tigers in the country, registered eight deaths and two seizures of tiger body parts this year, as per the data. The southern state lost 12 big cats last year. "Right now, MP has 124 tiger cubs. The cubs were not counted during the last census (in 2018). In the next count, we are going to have more than 600 tigers," Mr Shah said. "We have more tigers than the area for them. Take the example of Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve-it has 125 tigers whereas it has the territory to house only 90," he said. The minister attributed the big number of tiger deaths in Bandhavgarh to the territorial fight. — PTI

Raut opens up about drama before MVA govt formation

'Pawar-Kharge spat had almost derailed alliance talks'

SONU SHRIVASTAVA
MUMBAI, NOV. 29

Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut on Sunday revealed that NCP president Sharad Pawar and Congress leader Mallikarjun Kharge had a fierce argument in a meeting held before the formation of Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government. Mr Raut said that Mr Kharge had objected to the decision of giving the post of state Assembly Speaker's post to the NCP and that was followed by the fierce spat between the duo, which resulted in furious Mr Pawar leaving the meeting. However, later he was persuaded by Raut and Praful Patel to join the meeting.

The MVA government completed a year in office on November 28. In his weekly column "Rokthok" in *Saamana*, mouthpiece of Shiv Sena,



Sanjay Raut

Mr Raut, who was instrumental in the formation of the MVA government, recalled, "Mr Pawar had collected his papers from the table in the meeting and left the room in anger. I have never seen Mr Pawar so angry. Praful Patel and I followed him." The Sena leader also recalled that in the same meeting, Mr Pawar had suggested Uddhav Thackeray's name for the chief minister's post. But the heated arguments between Mr Pawar and Mr Kharge had changed the mood. Following that, Ajit

Pawar was busy chatting on his mobile. Ajit also left the meeting and later his phone was also switched off. The next day at dawn (on November 23), BJP leader Devendra Fadnis and Ajit Pawar took as the CM and DCM. Their government collapsed within 80 hours.

Mr Raut also claimed that while late senior congress leader Ahmed Patel was positive in the formation of the MVA government, Mr Kharge and former chief minister Prithviraj Chavan were more concerned about what would be the share of the NCP in the government.

Mr Raut also denied that Mr Pawar and Union home minister Amit Shah had a meeting in Delhi where it was decided that the NCP will support the BJP following which the early morning swearing-in took place.

BJP's DDC election manifesto in Urdu

Srinagar, Nov. 29: The BJP on Sunday released its election manifesto in Urdu for the ongoing District Development Council (DDC) polls in Kashmir.

Former MLC Vibhoh Gupta released the manifesto in presence of senior party leaders from the Valley such as Sofi Yusuf and Darakhshan Abdrabi.

It claims that while the BJP has unified the country by abrogating provisions of Article 370 and Article 35A that provided special status to the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir, the People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration an amalgam of several mainstream political parties, including NC and PDP was working against the national interest for vote

bank politics.

It further says that after reorganisation, Jammu and Kashmir has been put on a track of development and peace. The party claimed that stone-pelting was ended and terrorism was being dealt with an iron hand.

In the manifesto, the BJP also claimed credit for reserving 100 per cent of government jobs in the union territory for its residents only and framing a policy that will spur industrialisation.

The party said it has launched a war against corruption and land grabbing in the union territory. It has said basic amenities like electricity, water supply and road networks in the union territory have been improved as well. — PTI

Terrorists trying to disrupt DDC polls: Naravane

Kannur (Kerala), Nov. 28: Army Chief General M.M. Naravane said terrorists were making desperate attempts to infiltrate into J&K to disrupt the District Development Council (DDC) polls there.

He also said terrorism emanating from across the border continues to be a serious threat and that it was not abating despite all the efforts being made to check it.

In the first electoral exercise in J&K since the abrogation of Article 370, nearly 52 percent voter turnout was recorded on Saturday in the staggered polls to district development councils. He also said the terrorists, with the onset of winters, have started "moving southwards." — PTI

Youth booked in Bareilly, 3 teams set up to arrest him
UP files 1st case under 'love jihad' law

Lucknow, Nov. 29: Uttar Pradesh has registered its first case under the new anti-conversion law in Bareilly district based on a complaint from the father of a young woman.

The case was registered at the Devarniyar police station in Bareilly district on Saturday, officials said.

In a statement issued here on Sunday, additional chief secretary (home) Awanish Awasthi said a case was registered by Tikaram, a resident of Sharif Nagar village under Devarniyar police station (in Bareilly), who accused a man — Uvaish Ahmed — of the same village of trying to convert his daughter through "allurement" (*bahla-phuslaakar*). The case was registered against Uvaish Ahmed under Sections of the Indian

Penal Code and the new anti-conversion law.

Senior superintendent of police Rohit Singh Sajwan said four police teams have been formed to arrest the accused.

According to the complaint, Tikaram's daughter and Ahmed studied together in Class 12.

Three years ago, the accused started exerting pressure on her to undergo religious conversion and perform "nikaah" (marriage). But when the woman opposed, he threatened to kidnap her, Tikaram alleged.

The complainant's daughter married someone else in June this year. However, Ahmed continued to harass her family members, he said.

According to the complaint, Ahmed went to

ADDITIONAL CHIEF secretary (home) Awanish Awasthi said a case was registered by Tikaram, a resident of Sharif Nagar village, who accused a man — Uvaish Ahmed — of trying to convert his daughter through 'allurement' (*bahla-phuslaakar*).

Tikaram's house on Saturday and asked him to bring his daughter back from her in-laws' house.

Threatening her family, the accused told Tikaram that the woman will have to undergo religious conversion and marry him, according to the complaint.

Tikaram subsequently approached the police, and a case was registered

against the accused.

Deputy inspector-general of police, Bareilly range, Rajesh Kumar Pandey told reporters that the case was being investigated.

Uttar Pradesh governor Anandiben Patel on Saturday gave assent to an ordinance against forcible or fraudulent religious conversions that provides for imprisonment up to 10 years and a maximum fine of ₹50,000 under different categories.

The promulgation of the Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Ordinance, 2020, came four days after the Yogi Adityanath government approved the draft of the legislation which also curbs religious conversions only for the sake of marriage. — PTI

UP journalist's wife threatens self-immolation

Balrampur (UP), Nov. 29: The wife of a journalist, who was charred to death along with his friend in a fire that broke out in his house in Balrampur district, threatened to immolate herself on Sunday if police failed to arrest the accused.

Vibha Singh, wife of the deceased journalist, on Sunday told reporters that if the police is unable to arrest the accused persons responsible for the death of her husband, she will immolate herself along with her children.

She also said the police had assured her that the case will be resolved in a couple of days, but now she is unable to have faith in the police.

Rakesh Singh, 35, working for a local newspaper, and his friend Pintu Sahu, 32, suffered serious burns in the fire at the house in Kalwari village. Balrampur superintendent of police Dev Ranjan Verma had said on Saturday. — PTI

Mufti accuses Centre of murdering democracy
'Polls no solution to Kashmir issue, hold talks with PaK'

Srinagar, Nov. 29: PDP president Mehbooba Mufti on Sunday said elections are no solution to the Kashmir problem and called for a dialogue between India and Pakistan to address the issue.

She also accused the BJP-led government at the Centre of murdering the democracy in the name of District Development Council (DDC) polls as alliance candidates were being confined to homes while others enjoyed full freedom to campaign.

"Election is no solution to the Kashmir problem. There should be a dialogue between the two countries. If we are talking to China, which has taken our land, why not with Pakistan? Is it about being a Muslim country because everything is communal now,"



If we are talking to China, which has taken our land, why not with Pakistan? Is it about being a Muslim country because everything is communal now.

— Mehbooba Mufti, PDP chief

Mehbooba told reporters at her Gupkar residence.

The former chief minister was not allowed to address a press conference on Friday after police prevented her from visiting PDP youth chief Waheed Para's residence in Pulwama district following his arrest over alleged connections with Hizbul Mujahideen.

Asked about the significance of Saturday's poll percentage, Ms Mufti said poll percentages have been huge before also, but that is not a solution to the

Kashmir issue.

"India has around nine lakh security forces here. Which other state has so much of security forces in the civilian areas? If (abrogation of) Article 370 has resolved all issues, why is the army still stationed in Kashmir? They should have gone to the border.

"Participation in elections has no bearing on the Kashmir issue. It is there and it will be there as long as it is not resolved through dialogue with Pakistan and the people of

Kashmir," she said.

The PDP chief said the alliance candidates were not allowed to freely campaign for the DDC polls.

"Our people do not have security. They have been confined to their homes and not allowed to run poll campaign while BJP candidates are freely roaming around. This is not done? Will this country run on the BJP's agenda?"

"They tell us not to talk about Article 370. BJP ministers visit Kashmir and nine out of 10 times, they talk about the revocation of Article 370. I fail to understand that when they are confident that Article 370 is gone and will not be restored, why do they get rattled so much when I speak about it," she said.

Mehbooba said there was no freedom to talk about issues. — PTI



Devotees perform aarti at Dashashwamedh Ghat on the banks of Ganga, ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Varanasi, on Sunday. — PTI

'China to build major dam on Brahmaputra'

Beijing, Nov. 29: China will build a major hydropower project on Brahmaputra river in Tibet and a proposal for this has been clearly put forward in the 14th Five-Year Plan to be implemented from next year, the official media on Sunday quoted the head of a Chinese company tasked to build the dam as saying.

Yan Zhiyong, chairman of the Power Construction Corp of China, said China will "implement hydropower exploitation in the downstream of the Yarlung Zangbo river (the Tibetan name for Brahmaputra) and the project could serve to maintain water resources and domestic security," the *Global Times* reported.

Speaking at a conference on Thursday, Yan said the project was clearly put forward in the proposals for formulating the country's 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) and its long-term goals through 2035 made by the Central Committee of the ruling Communist Party of China (CPC), it quoted an article on the WeChat account of the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League of China on Sunday.

PROPOSALS FOR dams on the Brahmaputra have evoked concerns in India and Bangladesh

"There is no parallel in history it will be a historic opportunity for the Chinese hydropower industry," Yan told the conference organised to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the founding of the China Society for Hydropower Engineering.

The 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) and National Economic and Social Development and the Long-Range Objectives Through the Year 2035 were adopted by Plenum — a key policy body of the CPC — last month.

Details of the plan were expected to be released after the formal ratification by National People's Congress (NPC) early next year.

Proposals for dams on the Brahmaputra have evoked concerns in India and Bangladesh, the riparian states, and China has downplayed such anxieties saying it would keep their interests in mind.

China has already operationalised the \$1.5 billion Zam Hydropower Station, the largest in Tibet in 2015. — PTI

SC rejects 1993 blast convict's petition

AGE CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI, NOV. 29

The Supreme Court has dismissed a petition filed by 1993 Mumbai serial bomb blast case convict Mohammed Moin Qureshi seeking to declare that he was juvenile at the time of offence and to overturn the judgement sentencing him to imprisonment for life.

Refusing to give a hearing to Qureshi's petition, the three-judge bench comprising Justices D.Y. Chandrachud, Indu Malhotra and Indira Banerjee said that the judgment which has attained finality cannot be challenged with a petition filed under Article 32 of the Constitution.

The bench in its order observed, "The position which has emerged from the record is that the conviction of the appellant by the designated court has been upheld by the dismissal of his criminal appeal and by the rejection of the review. The issue of juvenility was raised before the designated court as well as before this court when the appeal was heard and has been specifically dealt with."

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IN BRIEF

IT DETECTS ₹450CR UNDISCLOSED INCOME IN TN RAIDS

New Delhi: The income-tax department has detected undisclosed income of ₹450 crore after it searched an IT SEZ developer, its former director and a stainless steel supplier based in Tamil Nadu, the CBDT said. The searches were carried out at 16 premises in Chennai, Mumbai, Hyderabad and Cuddalore on November 27, it said. "The searches, so far, have resulted in the detection of undisclosed income of more than ₹450 crore," the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) said in a statement. The Board is the administrative authority for the tax department. In the case of the ex-director of the information technology special economic zone (IT SEZ), the taxman unearthed evidences of about ₹100 crore "accumulated by the person and his family members in the past 3 years." "The search further unearthed that the IT SEZ developer claimed bogus work-in-progress expenses of about ₹160 crore in an under-construction project," the statement said. "The entity had also claimed capital expenses of around ₹30 crore on account of bogus consultancy fees in an operational project and inadmissible interest expenses to the extent of ₹20 crore was also claimed by the entity," it said. The search revealed certain share purchase transactions relating to the IT SEZ developer. — PTI

2 BJP MPs say TMC govt will fall in 1 month

■ **Continued from Page 1**
TMC. They are now busy (trying) to stop defections. The month of December is very crucial for them. The yearend is not going well for them. In December, milk and water will be apart."
Lashing out at Mr Khan, senior TMC MP Sougata Roy said: "I think Mr Khan has a mental problem. How can the governor call the CM (to prove her majority) when the government has 218 MLAs out of 294? Have the TMC MLAs quit their posts in the Assembly in large numbers? If not, what will be the basis of the governor's call at all? How can Mr Khan predict what the governor will do? These are all unreal and unnecessary claims. Those who do not understand the Constitution talk like this. At present the governor has neither any scope for a call nor there is a chance also."

Mr Rabindranath Ghosh claimed: "Mr Khan is day-dreaming. He was earlier in the TMC. Now he has become 'nonsense' after joining the BJP. I can take poison to die but I will not go anywhere close to an extremely communal party like the BJP."

Farmers reject early talks

■ **Continued from Page 1**
in the border areas. The protesters have also come prepared for a long haul, their vehicles loaded with rations, utensils, quilts and blankets for the cold weather and even equipped with even charging points for their mobile phones. The farmers' refusal to move to Burari came shortly after Prime Minister Narendra Modi broke his silence about the protests in his Mann ki Baat radio address, saying that the "agricultural reforms" have "unshackled" the farmers and given them "new rights and opportunities". The home minister had assured the protesters Saturday that the Centre was ready to deliberate on "every problem and every demand", saying it will hold talks with the farmers' unions on Thursday, December 3, and if they want discussions before that, they will have to shift their protest to the designated site at Burari.
Late Sunday evening, Mr Shah held deliberations with defence minister Rajnath Singh, agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar and BJP president J.P. Nadda at Mr Nadda's residence, sources said, reports PTI.
The Centre has several times requested the farmers to end their protest and come for discussions, with agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar saying the government was ready to hold talks with the farmers at any time. A meeting of the farmers' unions with the Centre has already been scheduled on Sunday.

PM defends farm bills amid major protests

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, NOV. 29

Amid unprecedented protests by farmers from several states in the national capital against the three farm laws that were passed recently by Parliament, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in his Mann ki Baat monthly radio broadcast on Sunday that the laws were advantageous for farmers, and that they addressed all the demands made by them.

Mr Modi's assurance comes when farmers from Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and several other states have laid siege near various entry points of New Delhi, seeking scrapping of these laws.

In fact, soon after the Prime Minister's broadcast ended, the agitating farmers were quick to reject Union home minister Amit Shah's proposal for early discussion on their grievances, conditional to their moving to a designated protest site.

Mr Modi, listing the benefits of the farm laws, said: "Agricultural reforms in the past few days have also now opened new doors of possibilities for our farmers. The demands that were made by farmers for years, that every political party, at some point or the other, made the promise to fulfil... those demands have been met."

Describing these laws as agricultural reforms, Mr Modi said they have "unshackled" farmers and given them "new rights and opportunities". "After a lot of deliberation, the Parliament of India gave a legal form to the agricultural reforms. These reforms have not only served to unshackle our farmers but also given them new rights and opportunities," he said, adding, "In just a short span of time, these new rights have begun to address the sufferings of our farmers."

Shah holds closed-door talks to end farm stir, terms it apolitical

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, NOV. 29

While formal talks with farmers will be held by agriculture minister Narendra Tomar, home minister Amit Shah has emerged as the key trouble-shooter for the government, preparing the groundwork, holding several rounds of discussions and meetings with farmer leaders and Punjab BJP leaders to help resolve the contentious issue.

Sources said over the last two to three days, Mr Shah has been actively involved behind the scenes discussions with a cross section of people, including farmer leaders, Haryana chief minister Manohar Lal Khattar and even some of the senior BJP leaders from Punjab and Haryana.

With thousands of farmers continuing their protest against the new agri laws, Mr Shah on Sunday said they were for the welfare of farmers and called their agitation apolitical.

Speaking to reporters, he said, "The new farm laws are meant for the welfare of farmers. After a long time the farmer is going to come out of a locked system."

Whoever wants to oppose it politically let them do it. I have never said the farmers' protest is political and would never say (that it is political)."

Mr Shah has already appealed to the protesting farmers to shift to the Burari ground in the national capital to stage their protests and said the Centre was ready to hold discussions with them as soon as they move to the designated place. However, the farmers outfits on Sunday rejected this demand.

Further, the farmers threatened even to intensify their agitation by blocking other highways and borders leading to Delhi in an attempt to completely cut-off the national capital. The home minister is also closely monitoring the security situation in the capital to ensure that no untoward situation arises.



A farmer helps a woman to cross a temporary barricade at Singhu border in New Delhi on Sunday during their Delhi Chalo march against the new farm laws. — PTI

Many Haryana khaps to join 'Delhi Chalo'

Chandigarh, Nov. 29: Haryana's many "khaps" on Sunday decided to join agitating farmers' "Delhi Chalo" call and march to the national capital to support their protest against the three central farm laws.

The decision was taken in a meeting of the chiefs of 30 "khaps" (caste councils) in Rohtak, independent MLA from Haryana's Dadri constituency Sombir Sangwan, who

also heads the "Sangwan Khap", told PTI over the phone.

Delhi's Palam Khap also took part in the meeting which was presided by its head Ram Karan Solanki, said Sangwan.

All "khaps" which took part in the meeting unanimously decided to extend support to the thousands of farmers sitting in protest on Delhi borders, he added.

It was decided that vari-

ous "khaps" will have a meeting of their individual panchayats on Monday after which they will gather and march to Delhi in support of the agitating farmers, Sangwan said.

The "khaps" leaders also called upon the central government to immediately hold talks with farmers them and resolve the issue.

During winter thousands of farmers are on roads. The government must

Cong urges PM to repeal 3 farm bills

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, NOV. 29

The Congress on Sunday charged the Centre with not taking care of the farmers and demanded that Prime Minister Narendra Modi should immediately 'suspend' the three recent laws affecting them.

Speaking to reporters, Haryana former chief minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda said, "We want the PM to intervene in this immediately and call back the laws. Instead of sending any minister, Modi should meet the farmer representatives immediately." The farmers have been protesting for four days and have blocked three sides of the border of the national capital from Haryana. The party also demanded that all cases against farmers be withdrawn.

Taking a dig at the Amit Shah, Congress chief spokesman Randeep Singh Surjewala said, "Amit Shah can travel 1,200 km and do a roadshow in Hyderabad. The farmers are just 15 km away. But he can't go and meet them." He added, "PM should talk to the farmers. Haryana CM Manohar Lal Khattar should apologise for calling farmers terrorists."

MILLION DOLLAR RAJINI QUESTION STILL HANGS IN THE AIR

AGE CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, NOV. 29

Will he? Won't he? The million dollar question might find an answer today as Superstar Rajinikanth is slated to meet secretaries of his Rajini Makkal Mandram. The secretaries will gather at the Raghavendra kalyana mandapam and the star can also be expected to attend in-person as the start of his political career could be on the line.

Urged to rethink on expressing his wish to stay away from electoral politics on October 29, perhaps due to health reasons, he will meet the district secretaries of RMM to announce his decision about contesting in next year's Assembly polls. Sources indicate that an announcement is certainly expected on Monday since Rajini himself had declared that he would make his stand known after consulting Mandram officials. Rajini had hinted that his long awaited political entry would be delayed as concerns had been expressed about the potential risks to his health during the pandemic. A letter available in the public domain hinted that the actor had been advised to restrict travel since he has a kidney condition and could be vulnerable to the Covid-19. The star was to disown the letter and yet admitted that in the letter "the doctor's advice is true".

The actor who had shown an interest in entering politics was tipped to meet Amit Shah of BJP when the Union home minister came to Chennai this month. He did not come to meet Shah but the auditor S. Gurumurthy is said to have conveyed Rajini's thinking on political entry to Shah.

BJD expels MLA for 'anti-people' activities

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, NOV. 29

In a major political upheaval in Odisha, the ruling Biju Janata Dal (BJD), headed by chief minister Naveen Patnaik, on Sunday expelled three-time MLA from Gopalpour, Dr Pradeep Kumar Panigrahi, from the primary membership of the party on the charge of "anti-people" activities.

The move came as a big surprise for many, including the party's rank and file, as Dr Panigrahi hailed from the CM's home district Ganjam and looked after Mr Patnaik's assembly constituency, Hinjili, as his representative.

"I have been the victim of a political conspiracy as I raised questions on the lapses in Covid management by the state administration, issue of migration and some other issues concerning the interest of the people. I apprehend more harassment from the government in the future," said Dr Panigrahi.

He refuted the allegations of anti-people activities. "I am not involved in any anti-people works. The party should define what anti-people activity is and come out with a clarification on my involvement in such activities," he said, urging the journalists to investigate the allegations against him.

He added that his 20 years of political career is completely clean.

Though no elaborate clarification by the BJD leadership was given on the "anti-people" activities, sources said the lawmaker's relationship with suspended IPS officer Abhaya Kant Pathak and his son Akash cost him his dearly. In fact, Dr Panigrahi's daughter marriage with Akash was scheduled to be held in December.

Vaccine trial volunteer alleges side effects; SII rejects charge

Chennai/New Delhi, Nov. 29: An Oxford Covid-19 vaccine trial participant in Chennai has sought a compensation of ₹5 crore for allegedly suffering serious side effects from the shot, a claim which is being investigated by the Drugs Controller General of India and the institutional ethics committee at the trial site.

A senior ICMR official said that a preliminary assessment has not indicated any causal link between the alleged adverse events shown by the volunteer and the "Covishield" vaccine.

The 40-year-old business consultant, who was a volunteer for the third phase of the vaccine trial conducted by Serum Institute of India (SII), has alleged he suffered a virtual neurological breakdown and impairment of cognitive functions, and has sent a legal notice to SII and others. However, the SII rejected the charges as "malicious and misconceived" and said it will seek damages in excess of ₹100 crore.

The man was administered the shot at Chennai's Sri Ramachandra Institute of Higher Education and Research, one of the trial sites on October 1.

A law firm on his behalf has now sent a legal notice to DG of ICMR, CEO, Serum Institute of India Private Limited, Pune, Drugs Controller General of India, Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation, CEO, Astra Zeneca UK, Professor Andrew Pollard, chief investigator of Oxford Vaccine Trial and vice-chancellor of Sri Ramachandra Higher Education and Research.

The man has sought a compensation of ₹5 crore and that the testing, manufacturing and distribution of the vaccine be stopped immediately.

The SII has partnered with British-Swedish biopharmaceutical giant AstraZeneca for manufacturing the Oxford vaccine candidate for Covid-19.

Dr Samiran Panda, heads

COVID-19 CASES INCH CLOSER TO 94-L MARK

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, NOV. 29

India's Covid-19 caseload inched closer to the 94-lakh mark, while the number of people who have recuperated from the disease crossed 88 lakh pushing the national recovery rate to 93.71 per cent. The total Coronavirus cases mounted to 93,92,919 with 41,810 new infections being reported in a day, while the death toll climbed to 1,36,696 with

496 new fatalities.

The active Coronavirus caseload remained below 5 lakh for the 19th consecutive day. There are 4,53,956 active infections in the country which comprises 4.83 per cent of the total caseload. The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 88,02,267 pushing the national recovery rate to 93.71 per cent, while the Covid-19 case fatality rate stands at 1.46 per cent.

of epidemiology and communicable diseases division, ICMR, said the causal link, if any, of the serious adverse events with the investigational product is objectively assessed in any clinical trial following a pre-defined scientific pathway and within a stipulated period.

"Any hurried inquiry or

inference is prone to be wrong. Both the institutional ethics committee and the DCGI are investigating the causal links, if any, between the adverse events and investigational product, which is an anti-coronavirus vaccine. A preliminary assessment has not indicated any causal link as yet," he said. — PTI

Gurung to address rally next month

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, NOV. 29



Bimal Gurung

Three-and-half-years after his escape from Darjeeling, fugitive Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) top gun Bimal Gurung, facing more than 150 cases including the UAPA, is all set return to North Bengal next month with a political rally which he will address at Siliguri.

According to reports, his visit to the Hills still remains uncertain due to a fierce opposition by his rival camp in the GJM led by Binoy Tamang and Anit Thapa, also at the helm of the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration.

Landing at Bagdogra Airport in Siliguri on Saturday afternoon after three-and-half-years, Gurung's long-time lieutenant Roshan Giri said, "Bimalji is coming here very soon. Possibly on December 6 he will reach Siliguri. We have got permission for a rally at Baghajatin area here. If

the venue turns out to be small, we will hold our rally at another place."

On the separate statehood demand of Gorkhaland Giri observed, in 2024, we will support the party which will support Gorkhaland. Bimalji already announced it on October 21."

Tearing into the rival GJM faction he claimed, "Anit Thapa and Binoy Tamang have destroyed hills. From corruption to nepotism to murder of democracy, everything happened there. Democracy will be restored there when Bimalji would return. People have faith in his leadership. We all thank them for supporting us."

BOTTOM LINE

West coast, south India likely to witness above normal minimum temperatures

North India likely to have harsher winter: IMD

New Delhi, Nov. 29: North India is likely to expect a harsher winter and the possibility of cold waves occurring could be more this season, India meteorological department (IMD) director general Mrutunjay Mohapatra said on Sunday.

The IMD, in its winter forecast for December to February, said below normal minimum temperatures are likely over north and central India.

"The winter is likely to be harsher in north India this season. The probability of occurrence of cold waves is more," Mr

Mohapatra said.

He added that the night temperatures in north India are likely to be below normal, while the day temperatures are expected to be above normal. The west coast and south India are likely to witness above normal minimum temperatures.

"During the upcoming winter season (December to February), below normal minimum temperatures are likely over most subdivisions of north, northwest, central and few subdivisions over east India," the IMD said in its winter forecast.

Scores of people die every year due to cold waves that sweep across the north Indian plains.

In a webinar last month, Mr Mohapatra had hinted that winter could be more severe this season due to the prevailing La Nina, a phenomenon associated with the cooling of Pacific waters and an antithesis to El Nino.

"Currently, Sea Surface Temperatures are below normal over central and eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean and moderate La Ni conditions are prevailing over the equatorial Pacific Ocean.

▶ **THIS IS** probably the first time that the country's weather agency has said the winter will be severe. The forecast for previous years had predicted warmer winters.

"The latest forecast indicates that the moderate La Ni conditions are likely to continue at least till the end of winter season," the IMD said.

The IMD started issuing winter forecasts from 2016. This is probably the first time that the country's weather agency has said

the winter will be severe. The forecast for previous years had predicted warmer winters.

The country also recorded above normal rainfall this year and an extended monsoon season. One of the reasons cited for this is the La Nina phenomenon. Mohapatra said parts of north India have recorded breaking low temperatures in October.

The IMD has four meteorological divisions northwest India, south peninsula, east and northeast India and central India.

The northwest division comprises states of

Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh.

Central India covers a vast stretch with states like Gujarat, Goa, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Odisha while the southern peninsula division encompasses all the southern states and Union Territory of Puducherry.

The east and northeast India division comprises Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal and all the northeastern states. — PTI

THE ASIAN AGE

30 NOVEMBER 2020

Farmers have its ear, onus is on govt to find solution

The three laws the Union government has brought in with a claim to revolutionise Indian farming and emancipate the farmer seem to have failed to convince a large section of its potential beneficiaries. They have been on a warpath ever since the bills were introduced in parliament in September this year. And after having waited for months for an amicable solution, they have now reached the national capital, and made their voices heard in the corridors of power.

The Union government has been less than honest when it says it is ready to hold talks with the agitationists. Union agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar first offered to talk to them in October, but absented himself when they turned up. Defence minister Rajnath Singh, a former agriculture minister with a fair understanding of the sector, had also offered to mediate but nothing concrete emerged. At present, Union home minister Amit Shah has said the government was willing to talk but given the way Prime Minister Narendra Modi justified the pieces of legislation in his latest radio talk on Sunday, there is

The Union government has been less than honest when it says it is ready to hold talks with the agitationists... It better address their genuine demands...

not much the government has decided to concede.

Agriculture in India, like it is the world over, is a highly protected enterprise. Governments support it in terms of subsidies for inputs such as seeds, fertilisers, finance and power, and for the purchase of the produce. The agriculture markets (*mandis*) and the minimum support price (MSP) mechanism that are in vogue in India offer the farmer some basic assurances: there will be a buyer and there will be a minimum price, so that he needs to fight a limited number of other uncertainties. In spite of them all, instances of farmer suicide are on the rise.

It is in this context that the three laws, which, in effect, undermine both agriculture markets and the MSP, should be seen. The laws allow the farmer to sell to any one, and allow anyone to purchase, with no upper limits. It also legalises contract farming. Instead of revelling at the new freedom, the farmers are petrified by the possibility of the entry of the big corporates, at present legally stopped, into the scene and hence the protests. They fear that the corporates will chase out the *mandis* and once they vanish, the government could also withdraw from the scene. Since the laws provide for no MSP, they will be at the mercy of the big players. And that's how the farmers' primary demand for legal protection to the MSP system gains credence.

The NDA dispensation has its own ways of dealing with protesters, and it has demonstrated it while addressing issues created by note ban, introduction of the Goods and Services Tax, passing of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, and following out of Article 370 of the Constitution. One way was to portray the protesters as troublemakers and anti-nationals. It's unlikely to work this time around, for it's the farmer who feeds the nation who is there on the other side. So, the government better address their legitimate demands and come out with a solution.

Iran killing: Trouble for Biden

The Iranians have pointed fingers at Israel for the targeted killing of Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, thought of as the father of their nuclear programme. There is also speculation that it could be the United States playing tricks in the dying stages of the Trump presidency or using Israel as the hitman. Either way, it was a foolish and a dangerous move that can lead to unsettling consequences in an already volatile region, whose purport is to queer the pitch for the incoming president, Joe Biden.

The assassination and its fallout can bring satisfaction to only three entities: President Trump, Israel PM Benjamin Netanyahu and the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Salman, who have been conspiring to strike blows at Iran under the overall umbrella of the flawed and failed Trump administration policy of bringing "maximum pressure" against Iran, possibly with a view to achieving regime change or Iran's military destruction. There is also a fourth entity, the Xi Jinping regime in China which last month signed a massive investment deal with Tehran. Whether this fructifies or not is conjecture, but it does offer the Chinese considerable leeway in unsettled West Asia at the expense of the US.

A justly angry Iran has threatened that it would retaliate. It would be well advised to be extremely measured in response, instead of causing a military opening up. The incoming Joe Biden team would also do well to calm nerves in Tehran, using balancing words. The killing by the Americans of Major General Qasem Soleimani, the head of Iran's elite Quds force, this January did not bring Iran to heel or cause it irretrievable loss. The recent killing of a famous nuclear scientist is not likely to reverse Iran's nuclear weapons programme, should Tehran head in that direction. The Iranian nuclear project is too well-grounded for that.

To curb this programme in return for ending crippling US and Western sanctions, the previous Obama administration had signed a comprehensive agreement with the regime of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in 2015, which President Trump scuttled in 2018. That has led Iran to raise its enrichment capacity eight times. For the incoming Biden administration, the key to stabilising West Asia lies in diplomacy, not militarisation.

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Subhani



New Delhi tries to reset its ties with neighbours



K.C. Singh

The six months of lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic followed by a gradual reopening of international travel has seen diplomacy transition from virtual meetings on e-platforms to calibrated in-person contacts. Multiple events with geopolitical impact are compelling diplomats to scurry for meetings. One, the new US President assumes office on January 20, 2021, despite the misleading fulminations of incumbent Donald Trump. Pending this, all major nations are reassessing their policy options. Two, China is trying, after signing a confidence-boosting 15-nation trade agreement (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership), to wean away or pressure America's allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific and Europe before the Joe Biden administration fills the strategic vacuum.

For India, the first is a lesser hurdle than the second. While continuity is expected in the positive trajectory of India-US relations under President Biden, a renewed emphasis on human rights and democracy may present the Indian government with a challenge as it maintains or even sharpens its majoritarian agenda in coming state elections. But Chinese actions require close monitoring as the military standoff at the Line of Actual Control in Ladakh persists into winter. Senior Chinese diplomat and state councillor Yang Jiechi was in South Korea in August and then in Myanmar, Spain and Greece in September. He arrived in Sri Lanka on October 9, promising Chinese assistance for infrastructure, including building of the Colombo Port City and upgrading of Hambantota port. Meanwhile, the Imran Khan government in Pakistan in September

decided to elevate Gilgit-Baltistan to a full province, signalling to China that the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) running through it had a more assured legal status. Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi swung through Japan and South Korea on November 24-25 to apparently woo them before President Biden unveils his Indo-Pacific strategy.

South Block naturally also stepped up its diplomatic engagements to respond to these two and other developments. While external affairs minister S. Jaishankar was on a six-day tour of Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Seychelles on November 24-29, foreign secretary Harsh V. Shringla was in Nepal on November 26-27. Separately, national security adviser Ajit Doval was in Sri Lanka on November 27-28 for the fourth Trilateral Maritime Security Cooperation meeting of India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives. Relations with Nepal have been testy since India inaugurated in May a new road in the Kalapani sector, providing easier access to Mansarovar in China. Nepalese Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli, while beleaguered in an internal political battle with rival Communist Party group, picked the territorial issue to rally his party and nation. China was no doubt delighted by the friction as it ratcheted up its military posture in Ladakh. Indian Army Chief Gen. M.M. Naravane visited Nepal to maintain the old tradition of close relations between the two militaries. In a peculiar followup, the head of the Research and Analysis Wing, India's external intelligence agency, made a high-profile visit, including a call on the Nepalese PM and the Opposition leader. The foreign secretary's visit was thus well prepared and expected to further soften the Nepalese. A border

working group meeting, which the Nepalese sought as a condition precedent to resumed bonhomie, was conceded. Mr Shringla also proposed an infrastructure and connectivity plan to counter the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative from the north. Nepal is a vital buffer between India and China and geographically and culturally more integrated to the Indian south than the Chinese north.

In Colombo the NSA, Mr Doval, had the more complex task of balancing Chinese gains in Sri Lanka after the recent electoral triumph of the wily and nationalistic Rajapaksa clan, with the brothers occupying the top two posts. Ironically, since the initiative's creation, domestic politics in Sri Lanka and the Maldives has brought to power governments closer now to China and India respectively, the reverse of the earlier situation. Thus, while in the Maldives the Solih government is more than thrilled to welcome Indian investment even in lieu of Chinese offers, in Sri Lanka the Rajapaksa clan is leaning towards the Chinese, opportunistically balancing Indian and American overtures as that allows it freedom to pursue its nationalistic and majoritarian agenda domestically. It may find Mr Biden and his team is less tolerant of its domestic politics than the Trump administration. The BJP's desire to make a dent in Tamil electoral politics would also have to be balanced against majoritarianism at home and reticence over how minority Tamils are treated in Sri Lanka.

Before Mr Jaishankar arrived in the Gulf, US secretary of state Mike Pompeo was making his farewell visits to Israel, the United Arab Emirates and finally Saudi Arabia, where he arranged a meet-

ing between Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman at the Red Sea town of Neom on November 22. I had tweeted at the start of his visit that hopefully no adventurous move was being planned against Iran, to create a diversion, as a desperate President Donald Trump ran out of legal and populist tricks to overturn the US presidential election results. On November 27, in an apparent Israeli operation, endorsed perhaps by the US and even the Saudi-UAE alliance, Dr Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, a top Iranian nuclear scientist and high-level officer of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps, was killed. This was an attempt to limit the Biden administration's options in dealing with Iran. Hopefully, the Iranians are smart enough not to be immediately provoked. But their pent-up anger over the earlier killing of Gen. Qasem Soleimani in a US drone attack and now this provocation can explode at some stage.

Mr Jaishankar's visit to Seychelles was important as the new LDS government of President Waud Ramkalawan, the priest-grandson of an immigrant from Bihar, has been opposed to Indian naval concessions. However, it was surprising the external affairs minister chose to visit only nations aligned to the US in the Gulf and those with recently established relations with Israel. In the case of Bahrain, there was some justification as the death of long-serving Prime Minister Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa needed condoling. But overall, the optics seemed insensitive to the fissures in the Islamic world caused by Trumpian diplomacy. It would limit India's options with Iran and other Islamic nations opposed to US-Saudi-Emirati actions. It would perhaps have been better to wait till the Biden administration had begun fixing the Trumpian mess.

It was surprising the minister chose to visit only nations aligned to the US in the Gulf and those with recently established relations with Israel

The writer is a former secretary in the external affairs ministry. He tweets at @ambkcsingh.

LETTERS

GUPKAR REVERSE?

The first of the eight phase District Development Council elections in Jammu and Kashmir saw encouraging voter participation. This was the first election of any kind held after division of the state of J&K into two Union Territories and revocation of Articles 370 and 35A. Defying Covid-19, people thronged the polling booths. The overall voter turnout of 40.65 per cent in Kashmir division was significant. If the entire election goes in the same pattern, it will be a huge setback to all those who want restoration of the erstwhile J&K state and its special status.

M.C. Joshi
Lucknow

UNWORTHY GOVT

THOUGH IT IS NOW amusing to observe the Centre now indeed inviting the farmer-agitators to kindly step into their designated "protest sites", earlier it did not accord them basic courtesies, actually seeking to incarcerate until the AAP government, commendably, refused. We, at Citizens For Democracy, decry the NDA government's reaction and seek dropping of trumped up charges against Bharatiya Kisan Union chief Gurnam Singh Charuni and others. The government is engaged in covert conspiracy to clear the decks for agri-profits for its friends in the corporate sector at the tragic expense of its own people. Called out on this agenda, it lathicharged and teargassed the farmers. But good beats evil, after all.

N.D. Pancholi
New Delhi

EAST INDIAN IDENTITY

ACTOR GENELIA D'SOUZA keeps saying in all her interviews that she is a Mangalorean. However, my strong belief is that she belongs to the East Indian community of Mumbai. Genelia celebrated her pre-nuptial ceremony with *umbracha pani*, instead of the *roce* Goans and Mangaloreans have, dressed in the *nav vari lugra* (the East Indian red sari) and also had the band playing East Indian Marathi songs. She wore a white gown to church instead of a *saddo* (Mangalorean sari).

Jubel D'Cruz
Mumbai

₹500 for the best letter of the week goes to R. Narayanan (Nov. 23). Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

Skand Tayal



Are 'virtual' summits of any real use?

November has seen India's participation in five virtual summits, starting with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) on November 10 and ending with G-20 on November 22, with the Asean-India on November 13, East Asia Summit on November 14 and Brics on November 17. The raison d'être of summits is to enable the principals to interact in person, enabling them to cogitate over matters of vital importance collectively, bilaterally and sometimes off the record informally. But a virtual meet over electronic waves addressing images of fellow leaders is an entirely impersonal platform. The question arises: does such virtual summity serve any useful purpose.

Virtual summits do serve two objectives. One, to clear the annual calendar of meetings so the chain of summits remains unbroken; and the second, it enables countries to articulate their priorities and float fresh ideas to collectively address regional and global challenges.

In the summits, the primary focus was on the Covid-19 pandemic and ways to contain the virus and revive economic growth. India highlighted its efforts to support many nations by supplying medicines and medical equip-

ment. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's commitment to help make the Covid vaccine "accessible and affordable to all nations" was well received. With India's recognised capacity to produce vast quantities of vaccines, this commitment is serious and will make a palpable difference to the mission of vaccinating billions of people at an affordable cost.

At the SCO meet chaired by Russia's Vladimir Putin, Mr Modi stressed the importance of "reformed multilateralism" to meet the expectations of the world battling the social and financial impact of the Chinese virus. It was a wise call as nation states have no alternative but to work together. But the structures, processes and philosophy of both the concept of multilateralism and its practice across different institutions have a crying need for reform.

At the SCO summit Mr Modi expressed India's firm commitment to regional peace, security and prosperity and against terrorism, illegal weapons, drugs and money laundering. India has high expectations from the Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS) based in Tashkent under the auspices of the SCO and recently sent an officer to work with RATS.

On November 12, Mr Modi addressed

the Asean-India summit hosted by the Vietnamese Prime Minister. In his brief remarks, Mr Modi focused on the centrality of Asean in India's "Act East Policy" and noted the importance of "a cohesive, responsive and prosperous Asean" for India's Indo-Pacific vision. The choice of words is notable. Under Chinese pressure on economically vulnerable countries like Laos and Cambodia, the 10 Asean members no longer speak with one voice on critical issues like Chinese expansionism in the South China Sea. Asean, as a group, has also not been sufficiently proactive and responsive in meeting the multiple challenges posed by the pandemic.

Progress on physical connectivity between Northeast India and Thailand through Myanmar has been tardy, that prompted the PM to stress the importance of digital connectivity with Asean. The unpalatable reality is that huge investments on development of roads or multi-modal network between East India and Asean have little economic justification or even local demand from businesses or communities. It is an endeavour solely driven by strategic and diplomatic logic and must be financed by India without any expectations of significant returns.

In East Asia, issues of common con-

cern include Chinese intrusion in SCS and terrorism. Both India and Asean leaders noted "the importance of promoting a rules-based order in the region, including via UNCLOS". However, China's shadow looms large on the region and the Code of Conduct for SCS being negotiated with China is likely to be a toothless document of pious intentions.

As Mr Modi spent Diwali with Indian soldiers at Longewala, Rajasthan, the East Asia Summit on November 14 was attended by external affairs minister Subrahmanya Jaishankar. On SCS, Mr Jaishankar did not mince words and expressed concern about "actions and incidents that erode trust in the region". In keeping with India's restraint in multilateral fora, he refrained from naming China for its transgressions.

The Brics summit on November 17 was chaired by President Putin. This group of emerging large economies has lost much of its sheen and cohesion with tensions between India and China and economic stress in Brazil and South Africa. The leaders did make their statements which are unlikely to have much impact or outcome. Brics summits are rarely noticed by any international observer outside those

from the member countries. If the India-China confrontation continues, Brics may also go into slow oblivion as the already-forgotten IBSA.

The G-20 summit hosted by Saudi Arabia was devoted to an "inclusive, resilient and sustainable recovery" from the pandemic. Mr Modi emphatically proposed a shift of emphasis from mere growth to the welfare of human beings. His call for talent, technology, transparency and trusteeship will resonate widely in distant capitals. On terrorism, the G-20 declaration supported the FATF to combat money laundering and terror financing. Ironically, China's Xi Jinping urged all to bridge their differences through dialogue and resolve disputes through negotiations!

It is fair to conclude that virtual summits are ritualistic with forgettable outcomes. Even in normal times, most summit declarations are long and verbose, lacking focus and urgency. In the post-Covid world, it might be useful to revisit the ever-growing culture of summitry, clinically examine their usefulness and inject fresh energy into the process.

The writer is a retired diplomat and has served as India's ambassador to Uzbekistan and South Korea

SHORT TAKES

CHINA SET TO BOLSTER NEPAL DEFENCE TIES

Kathmandu, Nov. 29: China's Defence Minister Gen Wei Fenghe on Sunday met Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli and held talks with Nepal Army chief Gen Purna Chandra Thapa on various issues of bilateral interest, aimed at bolstering bilateral military cooperation and taking the existing friendly ties to a new height.

Gen Wei, who is also a State Councillor, held bilateral talks with Army chief Gen Thapa at the army headquarters here during his day-long "working visit" to Nepal, said a statement issued by the Nepal Army. "The two held a cordial discussion on various issues of bilateral interest," it said. "Bilateral discussions were then held at the delegation-level mainly on issues pertaining to resumption of training and student exchange programme and follow up on defence assistance that have been impacted due to the Covid-19 pandemic," the statement said. The Chinese defence minister, who was leading a 21-member delegation, viewed both the proposals "positively and affirmed that the bilateral cooperation should resume as soon as possible, including exchange of high level visits," it said.

He also pledged to provide additional assistance to the Nepali Army in fighting Covid-19. "The Nepali Army expressed confidence that 'the visit will help in strengthening and expanding the cordial military-to-military relations between the two countries.'"

DAVID PROWSE, ORIGINAL DARTH VADER, DIES

London, Nov. 29: Actor David Prowse, best known for physically portraying the role of the antagonist Darth Vader in the original 'Star Wars' trilogy, has died at the age of 85 following a brief illness, according to his agent. His agent Thomas Bowington confirmed the news of the actor's death on early Saturday morning. "It's with great regret and heart-wrenching sadness for us and million of fans around the world, to announce that our client Dave Prowse MBE has passed away at the age of 85," Bowington said.

Jason Joiner, events producer who worked with Prowse, also announced the death on a Facebook page dedicated to the actor. "Dave was dedicated to meeting the fans for decades and lots of fans' first ever guest they met was Dave in the early days of Comic Cons and collators' events. Dave was larger than life and he will be so very much missed. Our love and thoughts go out to his family," Joiner said.

Mark Hamill, who played Prowse's on-screen son Luke Skywalker in the 'Star Wars' films, paid tributes to the late actor on Twitter: "So sad to hear David Prowse has passed. He was a kind man & much more than Darth Vader. Actor-Husband-Father-Member of the Order of the British Empire-3 time British Weightlifting Champion & Safety Icon the Green Cross Code Man. He loved his fans as much as they loved him. #RIP (sic)" Hamill wrote.

EVACUATION AS VOLCANO ERUPTS IN INDONESIA

Jakarta, Nov. 29: A volcano in eastern Indonesia erupted Sunday, sending a column of ash as high as 4,000 metres (13,120 feet) into the sky and prompting the evacuation of thousands of people.

Nearly 2,800 people from at least 28 villages were evacuated from the slopes of Mount Ili Lewotolok, which is located on Lembata island of East Nusa Tenggara province, as the volcano began erupting, said Disaster Mitigation Agency spokesman Raditya Jati.

There were no deaths or injuries from the eruption. The Transportation Ministry said a flight warning had been issued after the eruption and a local airport had been closed as ash rained down on many areas of the island. Mount Ili Lewotolok has been erupting off and on since October 2017. Indonesia's Volcanology and Geological Hazard Mitigation Center raised the volcano's alert level to the second-highest level on Sunday after sensors picked up increasing activity.

The 5,423-metre (17,790-foot) mountain is one of three currently erupting in Indonesia after Merapi on Java island and Sinabung on Sumatra island.

They are among more than 120 active volcanoes in Indonesia, which is prone to seismic upheaval due to its location on the Pacific "Ring of Fire," an arc of volcanoes and fault lines around the Pacific Ocean.

Anti-lockdown protests in London: Over 150 arrested

Arrests for breaching virus curbs, assaulting cop and possessing drugs

London, Nov. 29: Scotland Yard has said its officers policing anti-lockdown protests in central London have made 155 arrests as part of early interventions to prevent people from gathering amid the Coronavirus pandemic. The Metropolitan Police made arrests for offences, including breaching Coronavirus regulations, assaulting a police officer and possession of drugs.

Save Our Rights UK, a group holding demonstrations against the stay-at-home rules, said it held protests on Saturday against the government's Covid-19 lockdown. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson had on October 31 announced a second lockdown in England as the country crossed the grim milestone of 1 million Coronavirus cases.

The lockdown took effect on November 5 and will last until December 2. Large gatherings are banned under the Coronavirus lockdown restrictions. The Metropolitan Police on Saturday said its officers made a number of early interventions to prevent people from gathering and urge them to go home.

As part of this, coaches transporting protesters into the UK capital were intercepted and those who did not turn back were either arrested or issued fines or fixed penalty notices under the Coronavirus legislation, it said. "This was a challenging day for Met, City of London and British Transport Police officers," Chief Superintendent Stuart Bell, policing commander on the protests, said on Saturday.

"On Friday, we made it very clear how we would police this event, warning those looking to attend that they risked facing enforcement action if they attended a gathering in London," he said. "The enforcement action is a direct result of those individuals deliberately breaking the law and at times, targeting our officers with aggression and causing disruption to the road network," he added. —PTI

HK TO CLOSE SCHOOLS AMID VIRUS SURGE

Hong Kong, Nov. 29: Hong Kong has reported 115 new Coronavirus infections, the first time it has seen cases in the triple digits since August 2. The government on Sunday also announced that classes at kindergarten, primary and secondary schools will be shut for the rest of the year in light of the worsening Coronavirus situation in the city.

Of the 115 infections reported Sunday, 24 were untraceable. Another 62 were linked to recent outbreaks in dance studios across the city, taking the total number of infections in that cluster to 479, health officials said. Employees and recent guests at three restaurants in the city have also been ordered to undergo compulsory testing after multiple positive cases had been linked to the venues. Hong Kong has reported 6,239 Coronavirus infections since the pandemic began. —AP



Aerialist Svitlana Rohozhyna performs during the "EXTRAVAGANZA - The Vegas Spectacular" show at the Jubilee Theater at Ballys Las Vegas Hotel & Casino on Saturday in Las Vegas, Nevada. The production opened on March 14, 2020, for only one show before all entertainment on the Las Vegas Strip was shut down to fight the Coronavirus pandemic. The show reopened this week just as a three-week statewide pause went into effect due to surging Covid-19 numbers, forcing producers to adjust to new capacity restrictions limiting audience to 50 people. — AFP

Boris defends lockdown in attempt to curb rebellion

London, Nov. 29: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has urged his Conservative Party lawmakers to back the government's tier-based Covid-19 lockdown in a Parliament vote in a letter stressing that there "a sunset" clause — or expiry date — of February 3 on the latest restrictions. In an attempt to curb a growing rebellion within his own ranks against the new measures which face a House of Commons vote next Tuesday, Johnson wrote on Saturday evening that the tiers will be reviewed every two weeks, and areas can move down the tiers from mid-December.

"Regulations have a sunset of 3 February. After the fourth fortnightly review (January 27), Parliament will have another vote on the tiered approach, determining whether the measures stay in place until the end of March," he wrote. In his attempt to placate angry MPs opposed to further lockdowns, he also committed to publish more data and outline what circumstances need to change for an area to move down a tier, as well analysis of the health, economic and social impacts of the measures taken to suppress Coronavirus.

Most of England's population is to fall under the two toughest tiers when the second national lockdown ends on December 2. Around 32 million people — 57.3 per cent of England — will fall into Tier 2 or high alert level which means the rule of six applies with up to six members of different households allowed to meet outdoors. —PTI



Boris Johnson

set of 3 February. After the fourth fortnightly review (January 27), Parliament will have another vote on the tiered approach, determining whether the measures stay in place until the end of March," he wrote.

In his attempt to placate angry MPs opposed to fur-

Virus: Christmas markets across Europe cancelled

Berlin, Nov. 29: The European plazas where people would usually gather at crowded stalls to partake in hot mulled wine, gingerbread, sausages and other delicacies are just empty squares.

Christmas markets, a cherished tradition in Germany and neighbouring countries, have joined the long list of annual traditions that were cancelled or diminished this year

because of the Coronavirus pandemic.

November saw many European countries impose partial or tougher lockdowns as new virus cases soared.

The restrictions are either being retained or only partially loosened as Advent begins Sunday.

Nuremberg's sprawling, bustling Christkindlesmarkt, one of Germany's best known holiday markets

Man doesn't wear mask on flight, held

New York, Nov. 29: A 44-year-old man was arrested after refusing to wear a face mask on a Delta Airlines flight heading from Salt Lake City to San Francisco in the US, a media report said.

The man, identified as Joshua Colby Council, was rushing to board his flight at Salt Lake City International Airport on

Wednesday night when a gate agent stopped and asked him to put on a face mask, the *New York Post* reported. The agent followed the man, asking him to put on a mask because of the Covid-19 pandemic. He refused and continued to board the plane, the paper said.

Once on board, the captain and flight attendants

also requested him to wear a mask, but he refused. The staff then called airport security to escort the man off the plane. He refused to leave his seat. Only when all the other passengers got up and walked out did he finally leave the plane, the paper said, citing police. The incident delayed the flight for 45 minutes.

Scientists find the physics that unlocks dense memory storage capabilities

SMART | DEVICE

World's smallest atom-memory unit created

Houston, Nov. 29: Researchers have created the smallest memory device yet, an advance that may lead to faster, smaller, and more energy-efficient electronic chips for consumer electronics and brain-inspired computing.

The scientists from the University of Texas at Austin in the US also found the physics that unlocks dense memory storage capabilities for these tiny devices. In the research, published recently in the journal *Nature Nanotechnology*, the scientists reduced

the size of what was then the thinnest memory storage device, shrinking the cross section area down to just a single square nanometre. According to the researchers, getting a handle on the physics that pack dense memory storage capability into these devices enabled them to make the device much smaller. They said ultrasmall holes in the material provide the key to unlocking the high-density memory storage capability.

"When a single additional metal atom goes into

that nanoscale hole and fills it, it confers some of its conductivity into the material, and this leads to a change or memory effect," explained Deji Akinwande, a co-author of the study. Though they used the compound molybdenum disulfide — also known as MoS₂ — as the primary nanomaterial in their study, the researchers believe the discovery could apply to hundreds of related atomically thin materials. Smaller processors enable manufacturers to make more compact com-

puters and phones, they said, adding that shrinking down chips also decreases their energy demands and increases capacity.

puters and phones, they said, adding that shrinking down chips also decreases their energy demands and increases capacity.

Afghan suicide car bomb kills 30 security men

Kabul, Nov. 29: A suicide car bomber struck an army base in Afghanistan on Sunday killing at least 30 security personnel, officials said, in one of the deadliest attacks targeting government forces in months.

The attack occurred on the outskirts of Ghazni city, capital of the eastern province of Ghazni, which has seen regular fighting between the Taliban and government forces.

It came as the Afghan government and Taliban are engaged in peace talks, but a top official warned that such attacks have the potential to "harm the peace process" as violence continues to surge across the country. "Thirty bodies and 24 wounded people have been brought to hospital. All of them are security personnel," Baz Mohammad Hemat, director of Ghazni hospital, said.

Interior ministry spokesman Tariq Arian said a suicide bomber had detonated a vehicle full of explosives. "The bomber drove a Humvee vehicle right inside the base and detonated it," Ghazni governor spokesman Wahidullah Jumazada said. The base is located on a vast swath of arid land surrounded by mountains.

Video footage showed military ambulances taking the dead and wounded to hospitals and cranes deployed to remove the debris from the site of the attack in the base. The ministry of defence gave a toll of 10 security personnel killed and seven wounded. The ministry is known to downplay tolls

● **IN ANOTHER** suicide car bomb attack on Sunday, one civilian was killed and 20 others wounded in the southern province of Zabul.

in attacks against its forces.

No group has so far claimed the attack, and the Taliban who are fighting government forces have often not commented on deadly strikes since the peace talks commenced on September 12.

The Taliban have primarily targeted government forces in rural areas since signing a separate deal with Washington in February that paved the way for the withdrawal of foreign forces by May 2021.

The Pentagon said earlier this month that it would soon pull out about 2,000 troops from Afghanistan, speeding up the timeline of a full withdrawal. "Such terrorist attacks will create an atmosphere of fear, terror and pessimism among the Afghan people and will harm the peace process," said Abdullah Abdullah, who is leading the overall peace process in Afghanistan.

"The increase in violence is not acceptable to people... and runs against the peace process, negotiations and reconciliation." The Ghazni attack comes just days after two bombs killed 14 people in the historic city of Bamiyan, ending years of calm in the isolated town famous for its ancient Buddhist heritage.

— AFP

India to boost bilateral ties with Seychelles

Victoria, Nov. 29: India has vowed to further enhance its strategic partnership with Seychelles in the post-Covid era as External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar held high-level talks with the country's top leadership here during his two-day visit to the key Indian Ocean nation.

Jaishankar, who arrived here from the United Arab Emirates, also visited Bahrain as part of this three-nation tour which began on Tuesday. During his visit, he called on Seychelles' newly-elected Indian-origin President Wavel Ramkalawan on Friday and congratulated him on his recent electoral victory.

Jaishankar and Ramkalawan discussed the historical neighbourhood relationship strengthened by shared belief in values of democracy and rule of law. He "iterated India's resolve to further enhance the India-Seychelles strategic partnership in the post-Covid era," the Ministry of External Affairs said in a statement on Saturday.

The minister also "spoke of the centrality of Seychelles to India's vision of SAGAR (Security And Growth for All in the Region) that characterised India's policy towards the Indian Ocean Region. As a neighbour across



S Jaishankar

waters, Seychelles was very much a part of the Neighbourhood First policy as well," it said.

Jaishankar also carried a personal message from Prime Minister Narendra Modi and conveyed an invitation from the Indian leadership to the Seychelles President to visit India in 2021.

"Discussed our close security cooperation, strong development partnership and long-standing people-to-people contacts," Jaishankar said in a tweet after the meeting with Ramkalawan. "Assured him that Seychelles had a particular priority, both under the Neighbourhood First policy and the SAGAR outlook. Look forward to further strengthening our ties under his leadership," he said.

He recalled Ramkalawan's 2018 visit to India and expressed the confidence that under his leadership, the ties between the two countries would develop even further. —PTI

BREXIT TALKS: FISHING RIGHTS TOP OF MENU

London, Nov. 29: Last-ditch Brexit trade talks continued in London on Sunday with fishing rights remaining an "outstanding major bone of contention," according to British foreign minister Dominic Raab. European Union chief negotiator Michel Barnier told reporters that "work continues, even on a Sunday," as he arrived for the second day of talks. Both warned that a deal could not be reached without concessions from the other party. —AFP

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	44,149.72	-0.25
Nifty 50	12,968.95	-0.14
S&P 500*	3,638.35	0.24
Dollar (₹)	74.03	-0.19
Pound Sterling (₹)	98.84	-0.12
Euro (₹)	88.14	-0.23
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	48,142.43	0.008
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	48.04	0.24
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.911	0.039
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.852	-0.026

* As of Friday/Saturday

US, UK & Oz top mkts for Indian sellers on eBay

The US, the UK, mainland Europe and Australia are the top markets for Indian sellers that are exporting products through cross-border e-commerce on eBay's platform. Indian sellers have been witnessing strong demand across categories like apparel, fine jewellery, toys, auto parts and accessories and home decor, especially during the holiday season (Thanksgiving to New Year's), eBay India country manager Vidmay Naini said.

HSBC considers exit from US retail banking



HSBC Holdings Plc is considering an exit from US retail banking, according to a news report by the Financial Times. In the coming weeks, senior managers will outline the plan to the bank's board. They are also likely to suggest reducing investment banking activities to concentrate on international clients with a focus on Asia and the Middle East. A full exit from the US is no longer being considered.

Infibeam gets NCLT nod for demerger of biz

Fintech firm Infibeam Avenues Ltd (IAL) said it has received NCLT, Ahmedabad's approval for the demerger of its various entities, including SME e-commerce service and e-commerce business units. Under the 'composite scheme of arrangement', IAL had sought to demerge its SME E-commerce and the E-commerce marketplace businesses to Suvidha, while theme park and event business will be vested to DRC Systems.

China needs 4.7% growth to reach 2035 GDP target

A Chinese official said the country's average annual growth needs to reach 4.73 per cent to achieve a 2035 target of doubling the size of its economy. China has the conditions to meet the goal, said Yang Weimin, deputy director of an economic committee under the top political advisory body. President Xi Jinping said recently that it is "completely possible" for China's economy to be twice the size by 2035.

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■ Steep fall in gems & jewellery exports mar H1 figures

Trade balance with UAE turns deficit from surplus

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, NOV. 29

A drastic drop in exports has reversed India's trade balance with the UAE from surplus to deficit.

While India saw the trade balance improving with most of the major trading partners, including China, the US and the UK due to import reduction, the balance deteriorated with the UAE. From a trade surplus of \$510 million during April-September 2019, the trade slipped into a deficit of \$1.6 billion in the first half of the current fiscal.

The main reason behind the deterioration was the decline in exports. Exports to the UAE took a severe beating of 55 per cent, dropping from \$14.942 million in April-September 2019-20 to \$6.738 million in the first half of the current fiscal, as per the data from the Federation of Indian Export Organisations.



Since the imports from the UAE stood at \$8.376 million, India registered a trade deficit of \$1.637 million.

While the decline was evident across most of the product categories, export of gems and jewellery was the highest contributor to this. Gems and jewellery exports to the UAE contracted 86.7 per cent from

\$5,063 million between April and September 2019 to \$673 million in the first half of the current fiscal, finds the Gems and Jewellery Export Promotion Council.

Jewellery traditionally accounts for nearly a third of India's exports to the UAE, which dropped to a meagre 4 per cent during April-September 2020. A

large chunk of exports to the UAE happens through the Cochin Special Economic Zone. Cochin SEZ, which had exported \$3,268.90 million worth gems and jewellery in the first half of last year, saw a drop of 99.28 per cent to a meagre \$23.65 million in the first half of this year.

Exports of ready-made garments too declined 42 per cent during January-June this year to \$606 million against \$1,045 million during the year-ago period.

"Dubai is the largest trading hub in the UAE and almost 70 per cent of the shipments reaching Dubai are meant for re-exports to other markets. The re-exports were almost closed from Dubai due to the pandemic and hence the exports have fallen drastically," said K. Unnikrishnan, deputy director general, Federation of Indian Export Organisations.

PSU general insurers asked to cut flab, rationalise branches

New Delhi, Nov. 29: The finance ministry has asked public sector general insurance firms, especially National Insurance, Oriental Insurance and United India Insurance, to rationalise branches and cut down avoidable expenses to improve their financial health, sources said.

Earlier this year, the Union Cabinet decided to halt the merger process of the three state-owned general insurance companies due to their weak financial positions and the government, instead, approved



fund infusion of Rs 12,450 crore to help them meet required regulatory parameters.

The finance ministry has asked

these companies to cut the flab by rationalising branches and rein in other avoidable expenses like guest houses, etc, the sources said.

Besides, the companies have been asked to expand their business through the digital medium.

As part of the capital infusion exercise, the government approved raising the authorised share capital of National Insurance Company Ltd to Rs 7,500 crore and that of United India Insurance Company Ltd and Oriental Insurance Company Ltd to Rs 5,000 crore each.

Deemed GST registrants face physical verification

New Delhi, Nov. 29: The CBIC has asked field offices to carry out physical verification of premises of businesses which have been granted deemed GST registration between August 21 and November 16 to ascertain that they have genuine business or intend to carry out so.

The Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) has also asked taxmen not to grant GST registration on deemed basis in cases where the applicant has not opted for Aadhaar authentication or the authentication has failed.

Current provision under goods and services tax (GST) law allows for deemed registration upon completion of 21 days of application if the proper officer has not issued any notice within the 21 days.

The CBIC, in its instruction to field offices, said that data suggests that during the period from August 21 to November 16 deemed registrations have been granted in many

cases where Aadhaar authentication has not been opted for or has failed.

"These registrations granted on deemed basis require verifications to ascertain that they have genuine business or intends to carry out so," the CBIC said while issuing standard operating procedure (SOP) for carrying out physical verification of persons who have been granted deemed registration.

During the physical verification, the officer, among other things, would verify that in case the applicant intends to carry out manufacturing activity, the capital goods, if required for the said manufacturing activity, have been installed.

The officer would also verify electricity connection, bills paid in the relevant period, size of the premises whether it is commensurate with the activity to be carried out by the applicant.

— PTI

From small biz to farmers, middle India is driving demand

ADITI SHAH & RAJENDRA JADHAV NEW DELHI/MUMBAI, NOV. 29

Manish Mehra, owner of Washex Hospitality, an industrial laundry service, recently flew from Delhi to Jodhpur to win a contract to service a large, government-run hospital. "For a new relationship it is essential to know each other before you can establish the trust and confidence to work online and that need is higher in case of government departments," said Mehra, who had to stay for a week in a Jodhpur hotel.

Increased demand for air travel and hotel stays by small business owners like Mehra, accompanied by a rise in rural incomes and spending after two good monsoons, is helping the pandemic-hit Indian economy slowly recover.

Government data released on Friday showed the economy shrank 7.5 per cent in the July-September quarter, performing better than analysts' expectation of an 8.8 per cent contraction.

Annual growth of 3.4 per cent in farm sector and 0.6 per cent in manufacturing during the September quarter has raised hopes of an early recovery and some service sectors such as trade, hotels and transport contracted at a much slower pace compared with the April-June period.

Farmers, benefiting from a bumper crop, are lapping up tractors while demand for personal vehicles, due to a lack of public transport and the need for safer travel options, has boosted sales of cars and motorcycles.

There has also been an uptick in goods and services, tax collections and higher energy consumption.

A recovery is taking shape and it has been led by the manufacturing sector, which has moved from near annihilation in the July quarter to rebound mode, said Yuvika Singhal, an economist at QuantEco Research.

"Until there is a stronger recovery in high contact service sectors, which make up 60 per cent of the GDP, agriculture and manufacturing are expected to

AirAsia India says not exiting but expanding

Mumbai, Nov. 29: Budget carrier AirAsia India plans to add three more Airbus A320 neo planes by June next year as part of its fleet and network expansion.

The airline—a joint venture between Tata and Malaysia's AirAsia Investment Ltd—currently has 32 aircraft, including two A320 neos inducted recently.

In a statement to PTI, an AirAsia India spokesperson said the airline had signed an agreement for inducting five A320 neo planes last year.

The Bengaluru-based airline took delivery of the first A320 neo in October and another one earlier this month.

"We will be inducting our third Airbus A320 neo in December and we look forward to inducting our fourth and fifth A320 neo by June 2021," the spokesperson said in the statement.

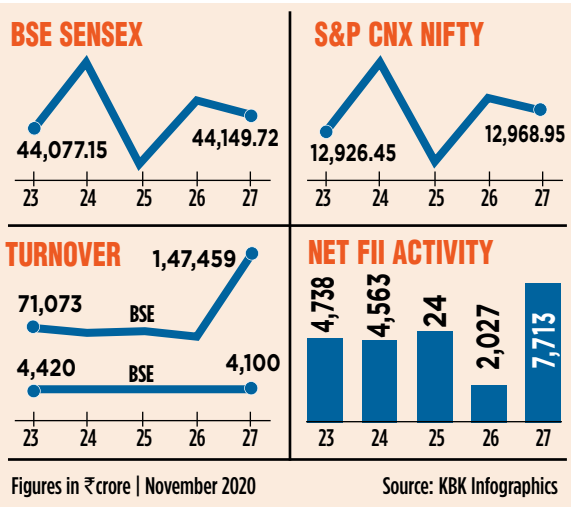
The statement was issued in response to the queries sent to the airline's managing director and chief executive officer Sunil Bhaskaran.

On Nov. 17, Malaysia's AirAsia Berhad had said it was reviewing its investment in AirAsia India. Against this backdrop, there have also been concerns about the domestic airline.

Indicating that AirAsia India is on an expansion path, the airline's spokesperson said it is planning to scale up the capacity to 70 per cent from 55 per cent at present.

—PTI

GDP data, auto sales seen as key triggers for market



RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, NOV. 29

The second quarter GDP data that exceeded the market expectations may accelerate the broader market rally seen last week when the market opens on Tuesday after the long weekend, said analysts.

A record Rs 60,358-crore buying by the foreign portfolio investors in November has seen the market closing at record highs. The futures & options rollover for the Nifty-50 index at 77 per cent and the Nifty Bank Index at 79 per cent remains positive, though profit taking by domestic institutions has also been quite large in November.

The market is closed on Monday on the occasion of Gurunanak Jayanti.

S. Ranganathan, head of research, LKP Securities, said, the contraction in GDP at 7.5 per cent was ahead of the market expectation, which was assuming a contraction of

9 per cent. Two-wheeler demand, he said, was robust and so was cement demand. Smart Investors were anticipating this, which was evident in the sharp up-move of over 5 per cent in the Nifty Midcap 50 and over 6 per cent up-move in the Nifty Smallcap 100 for the week. "The data is in line with Q2 earnings and commentary put out by several corporates," he added.

Nomura India said, "India's GDP growth rose to a better-than-expected -7.5 per cent year on year in the second quarter, a sharp rebound from the lockdown-induced decline of 23.9 per cent in the first quarter... On a seasonally adjusted basis, we estimate that GDP rose by an impressive 21 per cent quarter on quarter, almost reversing the 24.3 per cent fall in the April-June quarter."

November auto sales numbers and RBI policy announcement scheduled for later in the week would also impact the market.



carry the growth," said Singhal, adding that India is still growing on a lower GDP base and it will take more than a year to recover lost output.

A string of Marriot hotels in industrial towns like Sriperumbudur, Visakhapatnam and Nasik are operating at 50 to 60 per cent occupancy, with the bulk of guests working with domestic manufacturing companies, said Ashish Jakhanwala, CEO of hospitality firm Samhi, which owns the properties.

But Samhi's hotel in Bengaluru that mainly depends on large corporates is filling only 20 to 30 per cent of rooms.

"Demand from large corporates and international travel will take longer to recover. Hotels catering to public sector and infrastructure companies are

doing better," said Jakhanwala.

Since the end of May, when the government lifted a ban on flights, monthly domestic passenger traffic has more than doubled from 2 million in June to over 5 million in October. But that is still down from about 12 million a year ago.

India's biggest carrier IndiGo and rival Vistara are seeing an uptick in business travel but to a much smaller extent than before.

"Much of it is from small and medium enterprises (SMEs) or small business owners who cannot afford to sit at home," said Vinod Kannan, chief commercial officer at Vistara.

SMEs have contributed to a 35 to 40 per cent recovery in hotel bookings compared with pre-Covid times and between 27 and 32 per

cent recovery in flights, according to online travel agency MakeMyTrip.

In the hinterlands, the impact of Covid-19 has not been as severe as in the big cities and farmers have benefited from good rainfall for two consecutive years, leading to a bumper harvest and adequate conditions for winter-sown crops. This is driving up sales for tractor makers like Mahindra & Mahindra.

Lack of adequate and safe public transport in small towns and villages has also pushed up demand for cars and motorcycles.

Maruti Suzuki, India's biggest carmaker, had a 10 per cent growth in rural sales between July and September versus a 4 per cent rise overall, led by small, entry-level models, said Shashank Srivastava, executive director, marketing and sales.

"While Bharat is leading India in terms of a recovery, it cannot carry India," he said, adding that steady, long-term demand will depend on improving economic factors, growing incomes and a rebound in urban markets.

— Reuters

CAUGHT | IN COVID

Output from shale wells typically declines in a matter of months, so new ones need to be drilled

Pandemic has broken shale and left oil markets in Opec hands

KEVIN CROWLEY, DAVID WETHE & SHEELA TOBBEN NOV. 29

Opec's oil ministers have a few challenges to consider at a crucial summit on Monday, but for the first time in years the shale boom won't be at the top of the list.

A devastating global pandemic and a reckoning with Wall Street appear to have broken the resolve of the shale wildcatters who turned the US into the world's biggest oil producer. Years of breakneck growth, at the expense of crude kingpins in the Middle East and Russia, have come to an end. If there was ever any doubt, it's now abundantly clear who has the upper hand in the global oil market.

"In the future, certainly we believe Opec will be the swing producer - really,

totally in control of oil prices," Bill Thomas, chief executive officer of EOG Resources Inc, the biggest independent shale producer by market value, said earlier this month. "We don't want to put Opec in a situation where they feel threatened, like we're taking market share while they're propping up oil prices."

The shale industry's prudence, also echoed by the CEOs of Pioneer Natural Resources Co and Occidental Petroleum Corp, means that production will probably flatten after a steep plunge this year. US oil output will end 2021 close to 11 million barrels a day, about the same as it is now, according to forecasters IHS Markit, Rystad Energy, Enverus and the US Energy Information Administration.

"I see no more growth until 2022, 2023, and it will



be very, very light in regard to the US shale industry ever growing again," Pioneer CEO Scott Sheffield, who'll run the fourth-largest shale operation in the country after his company completes the takeover of Parsley Energy Inc, said in an interview.

That will surely come as a relief to Opec and its allies.

At the start of 2020, the group's efforts to control prices were facing increasing difficulties. The breakthroughs in horizontal drilling and

fracking that ushered in the shale revolution made it look as though US production growth might never end. Output surpassed 13 million barrels a day for the first time in February.

Then Covid-19 hit, people around the world stopped driving and flying, and the oil market crashed. President Donald Trump brokered a historic deal with Opec in April to remove almost a 10th of global production from the market. He said the US contribution would come in the form of market-driv-

en cuts.

That pledge was delivered faster than most predicted, and it made a huge difference. Investors who were already tiring of the shale industry's cash-burning spree retreated from the sector, and several producers went bankrupt. Before the summer was over, US output had collapsed by 3.4 million barrels a day, almost the same as removing the United Arab Emirates at peak production. Output from shale wells typically declines in a matter of months, so new ones need to be drilled and fracked just to maintain production at current levels. A recent uptick in drilling and fracking doesn't seem to be enough to ensure production growth.

Since hitting bottom in the summer, the number of rigs searching for crude in shale fields has increased

by 69 to 241 last week, according to data from Baker Hughes Co. That's still down from 683 in March. Similarly, the number of fracking crews in the once vibrant Permian Basin straddling Texas and New Mexico has increased to 63, an improvement from a meagre 20 in June, data from Primary Vision Inc. show. But that's less than half the 146 teams that were pumping mixtures of water, chemicals and sand into wells in January to release oil from shale rock in the area.

It's as though the US suddenly went from being a thorn in Opec's side to being an unofficial member of the cartel's alliance with Russia and other producing nations. Since June, benchmark US oil prices have been remarkably stable, hovering around \$40 a barrel, and

that's how Opec likes it.

While shale's retreat has made Opec's life easier, for the US oil industry it's been brutal. There have been 43 bankruptcies of exploration and production companies this year through October, according to a report from law firm Haynes & Boone.

Shale may be down but it's certainly not out, though. The US is still an oil superpower, and will remain so for years to come. And there's always the possibility that higher prices will get explorers drilling and fracking relentlessly like before. A sustained price rise to \$50 a barrel will "trigger growth again," according to Bernadette Johnson, vice president for strategy and analytics at Enverus. At \$60 a barrel, US shale will come back strongly, she said.

— Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Chennaiyin, Kerala play dull draw

Bambolim, Goa: Chennaiyin FC and Kerala Blasters FC played out a goalless draw in an Indian Super League match here on Sunday.

The draw meant the two-time champions ISL remained in third spot with four points from two matches while Kerala Blasters are in seventh place, having yet to secure a win and two points. The CFC coach Csaba Laszlo rang in the changes towards the end in an attempt to find the goal but that did not happen.

In Vasco, super-sub Diego Mauricio's double strike helped Odisha FC stage a stunning comeback as they held Jamshedpur FC to a 2-2 draw. Jamshedpur's Nerijus Valskis dominated the first half, scoring twice (12', 27') and putting his team in a commanding position at the Tilak Maidan. — *PTI*

Grosjean escapes crash in Bahrain

Manama: Romain Grosjean escaped from a horrific first-lap crash at the Bahrain Grand Prix on Sunday when his car split in two and burst into flames.

The French driver's Haas collided with Daniil Kyvat's Alpha Tauri on turn three, skewing into a barrier.

Grosjean, 34, was lodged in the front half of his monocoque as it appeared to fly under the barrier, leaving the rear half behind on the edge of the circuit after spinning on impact. His car's fuel tank was clearly ruptured in the accident, releasing the fuel that ignited in a huge blaze.

The crash came at a service road access point where the driver and medical crew from the circuit Safety Car were on the scene immediately.

The race was immediately red-flagged and the rest of the cars filed back to the pit lane. — *AFP*

Five-star Man City hammer Burnley

London: Man City shrugged off their problems in front of goal by hitting five past Burnley for the fourth consecutive clash between the two at the Etihad.

Pep Guardiola's men had scored just seven goals in their previous seven league games, but Riyad Mahrez's early double opened the floodgates.

Benjamin Mendy made it 3-0 before half-time and Ferran Torres got his first Premier League goal before Mahrez completed the scoring and his hat-trick. Victory propelled City to within six points of Liverpool at the top of the table with a game in hand. — *AFP*

Messi pays tribute to Maradona

Barcelona: Lionel Messi paid tribute to Diego Maradona by stripping off his Barcelona top to reveal the Argentina great's shirt after he scored the final goal of a 4-0 rout of Osasuna on Sunday.

Messi celebrated his powerful strike from outside the box to cap the comfortable victory by taking off Barcelona's blue-and-burgundy to bare the red-and-black of Maradona's shirt from his stint at Newell's Old Boys.

Messi then blew a kiss with both hands to the sky as he looked up. Messi played for Newells before he joined Barcelona at age 13. Maradona played five matches for Newell in 1994 near the end of his glorious playing career that made him a legend in his home country. Messi had kept his head bowed during the minute of silence before kickoff at the Camp Nou for Maradona. — *AP*

Live on TV

CRICKET

Lanka Premier League: Dambulla vs Jaffna from 3 pm on Sony Six

FOOTBALL

English Premier League: Leicester City vs Fulham from 11 pm; West Ham vs Aston Villa from 1.30 am (Tuesday) on Star Sports Select 1

Indian Super League: Goa vs NorthEast United from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

Italian League: Genoa vs Parma from 1.15 am (Tuesday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

WWE

Raw: Bouts from 6.30 am (Tuesday) on Sony Ten 1, HD

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INDIA FALL FLAT

Oz crush Kohli's men in 2nd ODI for unassailable series lead

Sydney, Nov. 29: Australia buried India under an avalanche of runs for a 51-run drubbing in the second one-day international and an unassailable 2-0 series lead after the majestic Steve Smith produced another master-class in the form of a 64-ball 104 here on Sunday.

Batting first, Australia rode on five fifty-plus scores including Smith's blazing knock, to post an imposing 389, for four against a sluggish India.

This was the Australian run-machine's fifth century against India in the 50-over format and second on the trot after his ton in the series-opener, which came off 66 deliveries.

A target of 390 proved to be too much for India as they were stopped at 338 for nine, with captain Virat Kohli (89) and K.L. Rahul (76) finishing as their main contributors in what turned out to be another forgettable outing for the beleaguered visitors.

India started the big chase in earnest with the in-form Shikhar Dhawan (30) and Mayank Agarwal (28) dealing in boundaries from the onset.

If Agarwal found the fence twice in the first over, Dhawan struck Mitchell Starc for three successive fours to get the Indian innings going.

A magnificent cover drive by Agarwal took the visitors past 50 in 6.1 overs. However, in trying to go for one too many, Dhawan perished.

In came Kohli and as he has mostly done through his illustrious career, the Indian captain played some delightful shots on the way to his 87-ball innings to keep the visitors in with a chance.

During his stay in the middle, Kohli pulled,



Australia's Steve Smith celebrates his century against India during the second one-day international at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Sunday. — *AFP*

drove, flicked and cut with plenty of success as India tried to keep the required rate within 9-10 runs per over.

But pacer Josh Hazlewood provided Australia their biggest breakthrough when he had Kohli caught brilliantly by a diving Moises Henriques at midwicket.

That brought Hardik Pandya in the middle and the all-rounder, in the company of Rahul, played some big shots. But they were never going to be enough. — *PTI*

FACTFILE

Australia recorded their highest total against India by making 389/4 in 50 overs in the second ODI on Sunday.

The hosts previous best was 366/8 in 50 overs in the first match of the series at the same ground. Overall, it is the third-highest total by any team against India in the ODIs.

Steven Smith recorded third fastest hundred for Australia by completing 100 runs off 62 balls during his 104-run knock. — *S.PERVEZ QAISER*

SCORECARD

Australia: D. Warner run out (Shreyas Iyer) 83, A. Finch c Kohli b Shami 60, S. Smith c Shami b Hardik Pandya 104, Marnus Labuschagne c Mayank Agarwal b Bumrah 70, Glenn Maxwell (not out) 63, Moises Henriques not out 2. Extras (lb-2, nb-1, wd-4) 7. Total (For 4 wkts, in 50 overs) 389. FoW: 1-142-1, 2-156, 3-292, 4-372. Bowling: M. Shami 9-0-73-1, J. Bumrah 10-1-79-1, N. Saini 7-0-70-0, Y. Chahal 9-0-71-0, H. Pandya 4-0-24-1, R. Jadeja 10-0-60-0, M. Agarwal 1-0-10-0.

India: Mayank Agarwal c Carey b Cummins 28, Shikhar Dhawan c Starc b Hazlewood 30, Virat Kohli c Henriques b Hazlewood 89, Shreyas Iyer c Smith b Henriques 38, K. L. Rahul c Hazlewood b Zampa 76, Hardik Pandya c Smith b Cummins 28, Ravindra Jadeja c Maxwell b Cummins 24, Navdeep Saini (not out) 10, Mohammed Shami c and b Maxwell 1, Jasprit Bumrah lbw b Zampa 0, Yuzvendra Chahal (not out) 4. Extras (nb-2, wd-8) 10. Total (for 9 wkts, in 50 overs) 338. FoW: 1-58, 2-60, 3-153, 4-225, 5-288, 6-321, 7-321, 8-326, 9-328. Bowling: M. Starc 9-0-82-0, J. Hazlewood 9-0-59-2, P. Cummins 10-0-67-3, A. Zampa 10-0-62-2, M. Henriques 7-0-34-1, G. Maxwell 5-0-34-1.

SMITH LOOKING PRETTY SCARY: SAYS MAXWELL

Sydney, Nov. 29: In red-hot form, Steve Smith is looking "pretty scary" for the opposition teams, gushed Australia all-rounder Glenn Maxwell after his teammate hammered his second successive century against India on Sunday.

"As he said the other day, he has found his hands, he is looking pretty scary at the moment for opposition teams. He is placing the ball as well as anyone around the world. When he puts the foot down, he goes and goes hard," Maxwell said.

"He is picking his spots. A lot of time, you judge him by the way he starts his innings and he just started by hitting the middle of the bat consistently."

Maxwell, who himself contributed in Australia's huge total with his unbeaten 63, said it was great to get a bit of momentum in ODI cricket after struggling in T20s but also credited performing top-order for his success. — *PTI*

Kohli blames bowlers for blooper

Sydney, Nov. 29: India skipper Virat Kohli had no qualms conceding that the visitors were outplayed by a confident and ruthless Australia in the series-deciding second ODI here on Sunday, pinning the blame on the ineffective and inconsistent bowling by his side.

"We were completely outplayed. I think with the ball, we were not that effective, we didn't hit the areas that we wanted to consistently and they have a strong batting line-up, they know the conditions and the angles well," Kohli said at the post-match presentation.

Chasing Australia's 389, India finished at 338 for 9 with Kohli (89) and K.L. Rahul (76) being the top-scorer.

"Look at the scoreboard, we got 340 and still fell short by 50 odd, so the chase always felt steep and we knew one or two wickets would take the required rate to up to 13, 16 and so we had to keep hitting," the India skipper said.

"They took the chances that they created in the field, which was the difference, otherwise it



Captain Virat Kohli en route to his 89 against Australia during their second ODI in Sydney on Sunday. — *AFP*

would have been a much closer game."

"...Credit to them, they bowled much more consistently and used the dimensions well."

Kohli said the two catches which led to his and Shreyas Iyer's (38) dismissal were the "defining moments" of the game.

"Me and KL (Rahul) were talking if we stick around till 40-41 (overs), even 100 in last 10 overs with Hardik to come, it was game on, that was the

game plan but the two catches that they hung on to were the defying moments," he said.

A pleased Australia captain Aaron Finch said his bowlers took some lessons from the way Pandya bowled.

"Moises bowled really well defensively including his cutters, and as Virat said, we got a bit of a blueprint from Hardik, by taking the pace off the ball," Finch said after the match. — *PTI*

PANDYA BOWLS FOR FIRST TIME IN OVER A YEAR

Sydney, Nov. 29: All-rounder Hardik Pandya bowled in top-flight cricket for the first time since returning from a back surgery more than a year ago, with his team under pressure against Australia during the second ODI here on Sunday.

Two days ago, after the first ODI, Pandya, who has remodelled his action to reduce the stress on his body, said he would bowl in the "important" games and only when the time is right.

Pandya bowled a good first over too, conceding just five runs against a rampaging Steve Smith and Marnus Labuschagne.

In his second over, Pandya gave away just four runs with the Australians finding it difficult to put away his slower balls. — *PTI*

Tyson draws in comeback fight

Los Angeles, Nov. 29: Mike Tyson's return to boxing at age 54 ended in a draw with 51-year-old Roy Jones Jr. on Saturday in an eight-round exhibition battle of former heavyweight champions.

Fifteen years after retiring with a 2005 loss to journeyman Kevin McBride, Tyson made his comeback at Staples Center in Los Angeles without spectators in a pay-per-view matchup that mixed curiosity and nostalgia.

California State Athletic Commission officials required two-minute rounds instead of the usual three-minute rounds, mandated larger than normal 12-ounce gloves, said neither fighter could seek a knockout and declared there could be no official winner in safety moves for the over-50 fighters.

"Sometimes that two minutes felt like three minutes," Tyson said.

"I'm glad I got this under my belt and I'm looking forward to doing it again."

An "unofficial" panel of former World Boxing Council champions at ringside scored the bout a draw, an outcome that Tyson applauded despite appearing to dominate.

"I'm good with that," Tyson said, admitting he thought he had won the fight. "Yeah, but I'm good with a draw. The crowd was happy with that."

Jones, who looked tired

and grabbed Tyson much of the fight, was unhappy at a draw.

"I ain't never happy with a draw. I don't do draw," Jones said, admitting that Tyson hurt him throughout the bout, particularly with body blows.

"If he hits you with his head, punches, body shots, it don't matter, everything hurts. Body shots definitely took a toll. Body shots are what makes you exhausted."

Tyson, who entered 50-6 with 44 knockouts, lost 100 pounds and began training again, his desire to get back in shape becoming a hunger to strap on the gloves once more. Jones, who entered 66-9 with 47 knockouts, had not fought since a February 2018 cruiserweight victory. He hoped a solid effort against Tyson might set up a fight with 45-year-old Brazilian mixed martial arts star Anderson Silva. — *AFP*

DELHI | HALF MARATHON

Walelegn edges Belihu for title

DEEPIKA DAS
NEW DELHI, NOV. 29

Ethiopia's Amedework Walelegn pipped compatriot and defending champion Andamlak Belihu in a thrilling finish to take the top spot and the event record at the Delhi Half Marathon held in a bio-secure environment at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium on a sunny Sunday.

Last year's silver medalist Walelegn took 58 minutes 53 seconds to cross the finish line ahead of two-time winner Belihu (58:54) in the men's elite section. Uganda's Stephen Kissa was third in 58:56.

In the women's section, Ethiopia's Tsehay Gemechu also could not keep her title as her countrymate Yalemzerf Yehualaw smashed the event record to take the crown.

In fact, Yehualaw ran the second fastest women's half marathon ever. Her timing of 64:46 was just a quarter of a second outside the world record time (64:31) of compatriot Ababel Yeshaneh, who finished third. Kenya's Ruth Chepngetich came second with 65:06. Yeshaneh was 15 seconds slower than Chepngetich while Gemechu finished fifth.

It was a heart break for Belihu, who was leading the race from the start and kept the lead till 20km, well on course to script a hat-trick on the day. Twentyfive minutes into the race Walelegn was not even seen

in the front row of the leading pack but after that he and Leonard Barsoton came closer to Belihu.

After the 14km mark only eight athletes were left in the leading pack with all the three pace makers subsided. And within five minutes Walelegn was seen boosting his speed and was hot on Belihu's heels. Leonard was also seen looking for opportunities.

Walelegn was giving a tough fight to defending champion Belihu and started taking long strides while crossing the 18km mark. Leonard slowly faded away as Belihu, Walelegn and Kissa passed the 20km checkpoint in 55:59 and soon Walelegn outsprinted everyone.

SABLE SHINES FOR INDIAN ATHLETICS

Avinash Sable, who qualified for the Tokyo Olympics in 3000m steeplechase, smashed the national record and event record with a time of 60:30 to emerge winner among the Indian elite runners. This was the first time an Indian ran below 61 minutes in the event. The 26-year-old Sable was 10th overall.

According to the Athletics Federation of India's official records, the earlier national half marathon record stands at 1:03:46 in the name of Maharashtra's Kalidas Hirave.

Srinu Bugatha (1:04:16), who won the race last year, was second ahead of Durga Bahadur Budha (1:04:19).

CA's latest endeavour to fight racism will go a long way



Hemant Kenkre
Silly Point

Before the start of the first One Day International starring India and hosts Australia, the Sydney Cricket Ground (SCG) saw a square brown patch surrounded by players from both teams. The teams had formed a "Barefoot Circle" to support the anti-racism movement and acknowledge the culture of the indigenous 'First Nations People' of Australia.

With this gesture, Indian sport formally became part of an off-shoot of the famous 'Black Lives Matter' (BLM) movement that has enveloped the

world, ever since the murderer of a young Black man was acquitted by a court in Florida, USA in 2013.

BLM entered cricket's portal when the members of the English and West Indian teams took a knee before play in the first Test between England and West Indies at the Aageas Bowl earlier this year.

Famed Windies pacer and commentator Michael Holding's thoughts on racism went viral melting many hearts. Windies skipper, Jason Holder had regretted that his plea to make BLM a part of the Indian Premier League

went unanswered.

On a personal level, the 'Barefoot Circle' moment felt good and satisfying. The noble gesture took me back in time to a small, but significant, incident that had occurred when I toured Australia as a member of the Cricket Club of India (CCI) team in 1982. The CCI team had toured across the sporting nation, making friends and playing hard cricket.

At a banquet, my ex-wife got into a conversation with a lady guest whose patronising attitude had been flagged off by one of our hosts. The conversation, which revolved around India and it's mystique had expected questions like: "Are your roads full of cows?" Or: "You speak good English, where did you learn the language?" Suddenly, the chat turned a bit iffy when the lady asked if "the caste

system was still followed in India?" Unperturbed, my ex-spouse replied: "The country's been working on it ever since we became independent."

She then took out an imaginary "sword from the scabbard" and asked: "Where are the indigenous people of Australia? How come we haven't seen a single one ever since we landed?" The lady was last seen retreating to the farthest corner of the banquet.

Embarrassed, our host mentioned that people like her (the lady) were few and far between, only to be reassured that it was no big deal for us Asians, having dealt with many such loose cannons who were condescending.

From then, Australia has crossed many bridges to combat racism. In 2008, their Prime Minister Kevin Rudd delivered a

public apology to their indigenous people, accepting the "blemished chapter in our nation's history." Cricket Australia's latest endeavour will go a long way in reiterating their nation's desire to achieve socio-economic parity among all citizens in a multi-cultural environment.

Social activism in sport has a long history with legendary sportspersons like sprinter Jesse Owens, tennis aces Arthur Ashe and Martina Navratilova, NFL's Colin Kaepernick and many others making statements about a cause they believed in while taking on a flawed system. Sport has an immediate emotional connect with the masses. What then would be a better platform for anyone to put forward their opinions and beliefs? Sportspersons have been putting forth the causes

for a social change using their stature and getting their message across to the masses that followed them. The definition of social activism is simple: It's an 'intentional action' with the goal of bringing about change in society. For any kind of social activism to succeed, the 'real' intentions of the activist(s) need to be pure and unadulterated.

For many years now, the Australian cricket team has been sporting pink uniforms to raise awareness for breast cancer. Past masters like Owens, Kaepernick and many others stood up for what they believed to draw attention and change perceptions.

In 2017, Deloitte, a global consulting firm, had forecast trends in the worldwide sports industry. One of the predictions was that questions about enabling, managing, or redirecting

athletes in social activism will require strategic decisions by teams and leagues. The words — teams and leagues — matter most when it comes to modern times. While movements like BLM, Barefoot Circle and many other humanitarian and/or social issues need to be taken up and exposed, there may be others that would mask a hidden agenda fuelling a selfish need of people controlling the sport.

For a country like ours, where sports stars are given godly status, managing social activism while donning national colours will be imperative as we go forward.

We have seen many good social causes morph into ones whose ends are driven by salacious commercial or political agendas. And therein lies the danger.