

# THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI WEDNESDAY 2 DECEMBER 2020



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**Shivraj Chouhan shares poem 'penned by wife', 'author' cries plagiarism**



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**Lewis Hamilton tests positive for Covid, to miss Sakhir Grand Prix**



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**SRK expands his franchise across the seven seas, hopes to take T20 to US**

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### WINDOWS



Actress Deepika Padukone leaves the Taj Mahal Palace Hotel for the shooting of her new film in Mumbai on Tuesday.

— PTI

### 48.6% voter turnout in Phase-2 of J&K local body elections

**Srinagar:** The second-phase of Jammu and Kashmir's first ever District Development Council polls recorded around 49 per cent voter turnout on Monday. J&K's state election commissioner K.K. Sharma, while addressing a press conference, said that like the first one, the second phase of DDC elections has been conducted "successfully" with 48.62 percent of the electorate using their right of vote in 43 constituencies.

Full report on Page 3

### HC pulls up RBI over scam-hit PMC move

**New Delhi:** The Delhi high court Tuesday pulled up the RBI for leaving it to scam-hit PMC Bank to decide which emergencies cited by its depositors were to be considered for disbursement of ₹5 lakh to them, saying since the central bank imposed the restrictions it should have been the one taking the decision.

— PTI

### 85-year-old held for raping 5-yr-old

**Kendrapara:** An octogenarian man from Aul area in Odisha's Kendrapara district was on Monday arrested for allegedly raping a five-year-old girl. According to the police, Sunakar Patra (85) runs a grocery shop.

Full report on Page 4

### COUNTERPOINT



If the situation continues like this, all the film stars will have to join politics!

### WEATHER

**Max:** 27°C  
**Min:** 11°C  
**RH:** 47%  
**Rain:** Nil%

Forecast: Sunny

### ASTROGUIDE

**Sarvari:** Dakshinayana  
**Tithi:** Kartika Bahula  
Vidiya till 6.19 pm  
**Star:** Mrigashira till 10.35 am  
**Varjyam:** 7.35 pm To 9.18 pm  
**Durmuhurtam:** 11.43 am to 12.27 pm  
**Rahukalam:** 12 pm to 1.30 pm  
**SUNSET TODAY 5.23 PM**  
**SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.57 AM**  
**MOONRISE TOMORROW 6.58 PM**  
**MOONSET TODAY 8.30 AM**

■ **At meeting with 3 Union ministers, farmers turn down offer to join govt panel to discuss farm laws**

■ **Leaders of 36 farmers' unions say they want the new laws withdrawn or they will intensify agitation**

## Talks inconclusive, protest to continue

**SANJAY KAW and BHASKAR HARI SHANKAR**  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 1

As the farmers' agitation completed six days on Tuesday, there seemed to be no resolution in sight at ending the crisis as both the sides remained adamant on their demands. While the government wants the farmers to end their protest and join a committee of experts to sort out issues related to the three recently enacted farm laws, farmers' leaders say that they want the new laws withdrawn or they will intensify their agitation.

With the marathon meeting between farmers' leaders and the government remaining inconclusive on Tuesday, a second meeting is now scheduled to take place on December 3.

A delegation of 35 farmer unions, who held a meeting with three Union ministers on Tuesday, rejected the Central government's offer to nominate their five members to a committee of experts to sort out issues related to the three new farm laws and said they would continue

their agitation at the Delhi-Haryana border until their demands are fully met.

Union agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar, who led the meeting which was also attended by commerce and industry minister Piyush Goyal and minister of state for commerce and industry Som

Parkash, said the government will continue its dialogue with the protesting farmers on Thursday.

After the meeting, Mr Tomar said, "The meeting was good and we have decided that the talks will be held on 3 December. We wanted a small group to be constituted but farmers' leaders wanted that the talks should be held with everyone, we do not have a problem with it... We have requested the farmers to suspend their protests and come for the talks. This decision depends on farmers' unions and farmers."

"Our movement against farm laws will continue and we'll definitely take back something from the government, be it bullets or a peaceful solution. We'll come back for more discussions with them."

■ **Turn to Page 3**

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"Our movement against farm laws will continue and we'll definitely take back something from the government, be it bullets or a peaceful solution. We'll come back for more discussions with them."

■ **Turn to Page 3**



Leaders of various farmer organisations arrive at Vigyan Bhavan after the Centre invited them to hold talks in New Delhi on Tuesday.

— PTI

## Rahul backs stir, asks govt to 'shed arrogance, give justice'

Some leaders worry about rogue elements infiltrating protests

**AGE CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs**  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 1

As the farmers' protest continued for the sixth day on Tuesday, Congress top brass led by former party president Rahul Gandhi came out in full support of the protests. Taking to Twitter, Mr Gandhi asked the government to wake up and shed "arrogance" to provide protesting farmers their rights, adding that everyone was indebted to farmers for their hard work and this debt can be



repaid only by giving them justice. "The food grower is sitting in protest on the roads and fields and speeches are being given on TV. We all are indebted to the hard work of farmers. This debt will be over only by giving them justice and their rights, and not by mistreating them or by beating them with batons or using tear gas against them," he said in a tweet in Hindi.

"Wake up and come

down from the chair of arrogance and think of giving the farmers their rights," Mr Gandhi added.

But differences have surfaced within the Congress on the agitation with a certain section of leaders in Punjab expressing apprehension about the agitation being hijacked by rogue elements, including "Khalistanis".

Ravneet Singh Bittu, Congress MP from Ludhiana, came out in the open and said that rogue elements, including

■ **Turn to Page 3**

## ■ 'Centre misusing its agencies to bulldoze states' Where did PM-Cares funds go, why no audit, Didi asks Modi

**RAJIB CHOWDHURI**  
KOLKATA, DEC. 1

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee lashed out against the Narendra Modi government for misusing Central agencies to "bulldoze" the nation's federal structure, and urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi not to vilify her government, asking him to explain where the money deposited in the PM-Cares fund had gone. The PM-Cares fund was set up by the Centre during the Covid-19 pandemic, and Ms Banerjee also asked why it was not subject to audit.

Responding to Mr Modi's criticism of her government in Varanasi on Monday for not imple-



**West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee at the state secretariat Nabanna in Kolkata on Tuesday.** — PTI

menting the PM Kisan Samman Nidhi in the state, the CM said: "See, you are the Prime Minister of the country. We respect your chair. Please try to maintain that. Do not abuse and accuse us every day.

## US opposes release of 26/11 main accused Rana

**Washington, Dec. 1:** The US government has moved a motion in a federal court in California opposing the release of Pakistani-origin Canadian businessman Tahawwur Rana, who has been declared a fugitive by India for his involvement in the 2008 Mumbai terror attack case, describing him a flight risk.



Tahawwur Rana

Rana, 59, a childhood friend of David Coleman Headley, was re-arrested on June 10 in Los Angeles on an extradition request by India for his involvement in the 26/11 Mumbai terror strike in which 166 people were killed.

Pakistani-American LeT terrorist Headley was involved in plotting the 2008 Mumbai terror attack. He was made an approver in the case, and is currently serving a 35-year prison term in the US for his role in the attack.

Rana is a declared fugitive in India. His extradition hearing is scheduled for February 12. In a motion filed before the US district court judge in LA, US attorney Nicola T. Hanna urged the court to deny Rana's motion for release for failure to prove that he is not a flight risk or that special circumstances exist and continue to detain him pending resolution of this extradition proceeding.

— PTI

■ **More on Page 6**

## Urmila joins Sena, hits out at Kangana

**SONU SHRIVASTAVA**  
MUMBAI, DEC. 1

Former Congress leader and Bollywood actress Urmila Matondkar joined the Shiv Sena on Tuesday in the presence of Maharashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackeray at his residence "Matoshri" in Mumbai.

Ms Matondkar said that she is not a "media-made star" but a "people-made star". She also said that Kangana Ranaut, who has crossed swords with Shiv Sena, has already got a lot of "unnecessary publicity".

The Sena had sent Ms Matondkar's name to governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari for a member of Legislative Council last month.

More than a year ago, Ms Matondkar had quit



**Actress Urmila Matondkar after joining the Shiv Sena in Mumbai.** — PTI

the Congress citing "petty in-house politics".

The Bollywood actress was defeated by a huge margin in Lok Sabha election 2019 from North Mumbai seat by BJP's Gopal Shetty.

■ **Govt says points-based system simple, effective & flexible**

## UK's new post-Brexit visa system opens

**London, Dec. 1:** The UK's new post-Brexit points-based visa and immigration system, described by the government as simple, effective and flexible, opened for applications from Tuesday.

The UK Home Office said applicants for the new Skilled Worker Visa can now apply to work and live in the United Kingdom from January 1, 2021, when the Brexit transition period ends to bring European Union (EU) migrants in line with non-EU countries, such as India.

▶ **APPLICANTS WILL need to have enough money to cover application fee ranges between 610 to 1,408 pounds, plus a healthcare surcharge (usually 624 pounds per year) and be able to support them-**

**selves (usually by having at least 1,270 pounds available). ▶ People will normally need to be paid at least 25,600 pounds per year unless the going rate for that job in the wider economy is higher.**

Under the new points-based immigration system unveiled earlier, points will be awarded for a job offer at the appropriate skill level, knowledge of English and being paid a minimum salary.

People will normally need to be paid at least 25,600 pounds per year unless the going rate for that job in the wider economy is higher.

The Skilled Worker visa lasts for up to five years

before it needs to be extended. Alongside the work visa, a number of other routes are also now open for applications, including Global Talent Visa, for people who can show they have exceptional talent or exceptional promise in the fields of science, engineering, humanities, medicine, digital technology or arts and culture.

An Innovator Visa will be open to those seeking to establish a business in the UK based on an innovative, viable and scalable business idea.

— PTI

## Reps oppose Neera as OMB director, call her worst pick

**Washington, Dec. 1:** US President-elect Joe Biden nominating Indian-American Neera Tanden as his director for Office of Management and Budget has run into trouble with some of the top Republican Senators openly opposing the pick due to her "combative and insulting comments" about many members of the Senate.

Ms Tanden, 50, if confirmed by the Senate, would be the first woman of colour and first Indian-American to lead the Office of Management and Budget (OMB).

The OMB serves the



President of the United States in overseeing the implementation of his vision across the executive branch. Specifically, OMB's mission is to assist the President in meeting his policy, budget, management and regulatory objectives and to fulfill the agency's statutory responsibilities.

Ms Tanden's career has focused on pursuing policies designed to support working families, foster broad-based economic growth, and curb rampant inequality.

— PTI



## Trudeau 'concerned' over stir, govt says it is 'internal matter'

**SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI**  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 1

India on Tuesday criticised the remarks by Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on the raging farmers' protests in northern India without naming him directly, saying these were "ill-informed and unwarranted" and pertained to the "internal affairs of a democratic country". New Delhi also said that "diplomatic conversations" should "not be misrepresented for political purposes".

This came after the Canadian PM said the protests were "concerning" and that Canada always backed the right to protest peacefully, adding that his government had raised the issue with the Indian authorities.

While wishing the large Sikh community in Canada on the occasion of Guru Nanak's birthday on Monday, Mr Trudeau said in a video posted on Twitter: "I would be remiss if I didn't start off by recognising the news coming out of India about the protests by farmers. The situation is concerning and we're all very worried about family and friends... I know that is a reality for many

**The situation is concerning... I know that is a reality for many of you... Let me remind you... Canada will always be there to defend the right of peaceful protest.**

— Justin Trudeau, Canadian PM

of you... Let me remind you... Canada will always be there to defend the right of peaceful protest. We believe in the importance of dialogue and that's why we reached out in multiple means directly to the Indian authorities to highlight our concerns."

Hitting back sharply, the external affairs ministry said Tuesday: "We have seen some ill-informed comments by Canadian leaders relating to farmers in India. Such comments are

■ **Turn to Page 3**

## SC rejects Kochhar's plea against termination

**New Delhi, Dec. 1:** The Supreme Court Tuesday rejected the appeal filed by Chanda Kochhar against the Bombay high court order which had dismissed her plea against being removed as the managing director and CEO of ICICI Bank.

"Sorry, we are not inclined to interfere with the high court order," a bench headed by Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul said.

The bench was hearing Kochhar's appeal against the March 5 order of the high court which had dismissed the plea against termination of her services.

— PTI



## SHORT TAKES

## NDMC, UNDP launches 'Plastic Lao Mask Pao'

**New Delhi:** In an attempt to encourage Covid appropriate behaviour and also to curb pollution simultaneously, the NDMC and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), on Tuesday, launched the 'Plastic Lao Mask Pao' campaign at Charkha Museum in Connaught Place. Citizens can deposit their plastic waste in exchange for masks. The campaign launch was inaugurated by chief secretary Vijay Kumar Dev in the presence of NDMC chairman Dharmendra, NDMC secretary Dr B.M. Mishra, and UNDP head-circular economy Prabhjot Sodhi. The objective of the campaign is to emphasise the use of masks to avoid Covid-19 and that plastics have value, which we need to recover and recycle into useful products. As part of the campaign, a mini collection centre has been set up in the premises of Charkha Museum to promote responsible use of plastic and its disposal. The visitors are encouraged to bring waste plastic products and exchange the same for reusable cloth masks and also take a pledge (#Pledge4Change) to become responsible citizens for a sustainable future.

## Over 2,400 without masks penalised

**Noida :** Over 2,400 people were issued challans for not wearing face masks at public places across Noida and Greater Noida in three days amid the Covid pandemic, the Gautam Buddh Nagar police said on Tuesday. Police commissioner Alok Singh has directed officials to issue challans to those people who are found not adhering to Covid protocols in public places, it said in a statement. According to the statement, 672 people were issued challans for not wearing face covers or masks while in public places and ₹67,200 collected from them in fines on Tuesday. Similarly, 872 people were issued challans on Monday as well as Sunday and ₹87,200 collected from them in fines both days, it added. During the three days, 2,416 people have been penalised and ₹2,41,600 collected in fines, according to the figures. As many as 9,966 people have been issued challans for not wearing face masks or covers in public places in the district and more than ₹7,68,500 collected from them in fines since November 20 when the campaign started, according to a compilation of official figures. — PTI

## Man who duped people of ₹400cr held

**New Delhi:** A 36-year-old man, who had duped many homebuyers and absconding since last year, was arrested at Kochi airport in Kerala while trying to flee to Maldives, police said on Monday. The accused, Harender Tomar, a resident of Dwarka, had cheated homebuyers in the name of land pooling policy of the Delhi Development Authority and also collected over ₹400 crores from about 4,000 homebuyers in the name of land cost, they said. Joint CP (Economic Offences Wing) O P Mishra said the accused in connivance with his associates formed a company named "Shree Siddhi Vinayak Realtors and Securities", purchased land from farmers and thereafter sold it to Revanta society at rates two to three times than the purchase price. — PTI

## 23-yr-old shot at in Mansarovar Park

**New Delhi:** A 23-year-old woman was injured by her male friend who also shot dead her mother following an argument which broke out when she refused to marry him, police said on Tuesday. The incident took place in Mansarovar Park and the deceased has been identified as Shama Khan (45). Her injured daughter was undergoing treatment at Safdarjung hospital was stated to be out of danger, they said. Khan's daughter told police that the suspect was known to them and that she was in a relationship with him for around four-five years, but later broke up. On Monday night, he came to their house and started pressuring the 23-year-old woman for marriage. This led to a heated argument and he allegedly opened fire at her. The woman's mother was hit by a bullet when she tried to save her, a senior police officer said.

■ Govt's decision to decide about curfew was tied to positivity rate

## Govt unlikely to go for night curfew: Sources

**New Delhi, Dec. 1:** The Delhi government is unlikely to go for a night curfew as the Covid case positivity rate in the city has been showing a declining trend for the last few weeks, sources said on Tuesday. Earlier in the day, Delhi health minister Satyendar Jain said in a media briefing that Delhi's positivity rate has fallen by a margin of nearly 55 per cent since early November and it should reduce further in the next two weeks.

"Positivity rate in Delhi has decreased to 7.35 per cent from 15.26 per cent on November 7. There were 3,726 new cases in Delhi yesterday with a positivity rate of 7.35 per cent," he said. Last week, the Delhi government had informed the High Court that it may decide in three to four days whether to impose night curfew in the national capital to contain the spread of Covid.

"The government's decision to decide about curfew was tied to positivity rate. Since positivity rate has declined considerably

## Delhi records 86 Covid deaths, 4,006 new cases

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 1

Delhi recorded 4,006 fresh Covid cases on Tuesday, taking the infection tally in the national capital to over 5.74 lakh, while 86 more fatalities pushed the toll from the disease to 9,260, authorities said.

These fresh cases came out of the 58,456 Covid tests conducted the previous day, including 30,297 RT-PCR tests, while the positivity rate stood at 6.85 per cent, according to the latest bulletin issued by the Delhi health department.

The number of active Covid cases stood at 31,769 in the national capital on Tuesday, down from 32,885 on Monday, it said.

meaning decreased infection, it is unlikely that the government will favour night curfew," a source in the government said.

The ministry of home affairs in its guidelines

The bulletin said the total number of novel coronavirus cases has climbed to 5,74,380 in Delhi, while the recovery rate stood at over 92 per cent. The number of Covid containment zones in Delhi rose to 5,669 on Tuesday from 5,552 on Monday.

The city had reported its highest single-day spike of 8,593 Covid cases on November 11.

Meanwhile, Delhi health minister Satyendar Jain on Tuesday said the Covid positivity rate in the national capital has fallen by a margin of nearly 55 per cent since early November and it should reduce further in the next two weeks.

issued on November 25 had said that the states and union territories based on their assessment can impose local restrictions like night curfew to check the spread of

Covid. Mr Jain, when asked about possibility of night curfew in Delhi, had last week told reporters that the government was keeping a close eye on the trend of infection.

"We are watching whatever step is to be taken. We will see if it (positivity rate) declines or reverses," he had said.

According to the Delhi government's health bulletin on Tuesday evening, a total of 4,006 fresh cases of coronavirus infection was recorded in a day while the positivity rate further dipped to 6.85 per cent. Meanwhile, interacting with reporters, Mr Jain also said the labs taking samples are being operated at their full capacity, hence there are some delays in Covid test outcomes. He said the Delhi government will be taking up the issue with the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and the Centre to allow labs to conduct 10 per cent less Covid tests than their total capacity, so that it results in a higher turnaround rate and no delay.

— PTI

## Jain: Positivity rate should decelerate in next 2 weeks

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 1

The Covid positivity rate in the national capital has fallen by a margin of nearly 55 per cent since early November and it should reduce further in the next two weeks, Delhi health minister Satyendar Jain said on Tuesday.

Interacting with reporters, he said the pathology labs taking samples are being operated at their full capacity, hence there are some delays in the test outcomes.

He further said the Delhi government will take up the issue of such delays with the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and the Centre to allow labs to conduct 10 per cent less tests than their total capacity, so that there is a higher turnaround rate and no delay in giving out diagnostic reports.

Delhi recorded 3,726 fresh Covid cases on Monday, the lowest in 15



Satyendar Jain

days, while the daily death toll crossed the 100-mark again and stood at 108. On Tuesday, 4,006 fresh incidences were reported with 86 new fatalities, while the positivity rate dropped to 6.85 per cent, according to the latest health bulletin issued by the government.

"The positivity rate stood at 7.35 per cent on Monday. It was 15.26 per cent on November 7. There has been a reduction of nearly 55 per cent since then. In the coming one-two weeks, it should further reduce and come under control," Jain said. While a total of 50,670 tests for the detection of coronavirus cases were conducted on Sunday,

the number of RT-PCR tests surpassed that of rapid antigen ones, according to a bulletin issued by the Delhi health department on Monday.

Asked about the delay in RT-PCR test reports at some laboratories, the health minister said, "Labs in Delhi are being used to their full capacity. We issued strict orders yesterday to ensure that the turnaround period is 24 hours. Since the labs are being fully used, more time is being taken by labs to process (the samples)".

"The Centre had said some special labs will be allotted. ICMR controls all such labs. So the issue of delay is being taken up so that delays do not happen," he further said. Delhi is optimally utilising both private and government labs, but there is a need for additional support which has been promised by the central government.

— PTI



A civil defence volunteer wearing a Covid-19 coronavirus-themed helmet holds a placard as he takes part in an awareness campaign at a market in New Delhi on Tuesday. — PTI

## 42-yr-old dentist held in hit-and-run case

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 1

A dentist has been arrested, days after his speeding car hit a 38-year-old woman while she was crossing road in south Delhi's Lado Sarai leading to her death, police said on Tuesday.

The accused Pankaj Sudhakar (42), a resident of Kalkaji Extension, works as a dentist at a clinic in Saket, they said.

The incident took place on the night of November 17. The woman was crossing the road when she was hit by the accused's speeding car. She was left to bleed on the road while Sudhakar fled from the

spot, police said.

The woman was rushed to AIIMS where she was declared brought dead, a senior police officer said.

"A case was registered under section 279 (rash driving or riding vehicle on a public way) and 304 A (causing death by negligence) of Indian Penal Code and investigation was taken up," DCP (South) Atul Kumar Thakur said. All the CCTV cameras installed on the route were scanned and with the help of internal inputs, police zeroed in on a Honda City car and apprehended the driver of offending car, the officer said.

## Gautam Gambhir to campaign in J&amp;K DDC polls

SHASHI BHUSHAN  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 1

Former Indian opener and BJP MP Gautam Gambhir will campaign in Jammu and Kashmir's district development Council (DDC) polls.

BJP central leaders want to encash Mr Gambhir's popularity among the youths in the Union Territory and are also planning to rope him as a star campaigner in the West Bengal Assembly polls to be held next year.

This will be BJP's first major attempt to use Mr Gambhir's celebrity status in a poll campaign outside the national capital.

The eight phase DDC polls began from November 28



Gautam Gambhir

and will conclude on December 19 and the counting of votes will be held on December 22.

According to BJP sources, a senior party leader overseeing DDC polls in J&K approached Mr Gambhir and asked him to join the campaign.

"A senior leader contacted



Protesting farmers hold placards at the border between Delhi and Haryana state Tuesday. — AP

## Students stand in solidarity with protesting farmers

**New Delhi, Dec. 1:**

Students from Delhi on Tuesday put up posters and pictures at Singhu Border to highlight the plight of farmers across the country and create awareness on a range of issues.

Ravinder Singh (22), a student of Law Faculty at Delhi University, said many issues are ailing the country and the students want to create awareness about them.

"We have many issues concerning the farmers, women, students, labourers among others. We need to address them all. We are making posters in various languages like English, Hindi, Urdu and Punjabi so that the people can read and understand what we are talking about," he said.

Earlier, students from different universities in the national capital joined the protesting farmers at Singhu border by singing songs highlighting their condition. Rajveer Kaur, a student of Punjabi Department at Delhi University, said

## Traffic woes continue amid farmers' protest

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 1

Serpentine queues of vehicles clogged many roads leading to Haryana and Uttar Pradesh on Tuesday as the Delhi Police kept the Singhu, Tikri and Chilla borders closed for traffic and heightened checking at other places in view of the ongoing farmers' protest.

The closure of borders has also resulted in heavy traffic on alternative routes.

With the Singhu bordering remaining closed, the traffic police advised people to take an alternate route.

people were given sheets and colours to make posters in support of the farmers.

"Apart from the students, many others have extended their support

"Traffic has been diverted from Mukarba Chowk and GTK road. Traffic is very very heavy. Please avoid the outer ring road from Signature Bridge to Rohini and vice versa, GTK road, NH 44 and Singhu border," the Delhi Traffic Police tweeted.

"Tikri border is closed for any traffic Movement. Badasarai and Jhatikara borders are open only for two wheeler traffic. Available open borders to Haryana are Jharoda, Dhansa, Daurala, Kapashera, Rajokri NH 8, Bijwasan/Bajghera, Palam Vihar and Dundahera," it said in another tweet.

and shown interest in making posters. They were welcomed and given sheets and colours to make the posters," she said.

— PTI

## Shaheen Bagh's dadi stopped from joining stir

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 1

The 82-year-old Bilkis, who was also called dadi by protestors at Shaheen Bagh, was on Tuesday stopped by Delhi police personnel at the Singhu border where thousands of farmers have been demonstrating against the Centre's new farm laws.

Bilkis, who also appeared in the Time Magazine feature, had expressed her willingness to join the farmers' protest at the Delhi-Haryana border at Singhu. Soon after she reached the border point to extend her support to the agitating farmers, she was stopped by the Delhi police personnel at the border.

"She was stopped at the Singhu border and was escorted by the police back to her home in Southeast Delhi," a senior police official said. Bilkis shot into limelight last year during the months-long anti-citizenship law protest at Shaheen Bagh here and



82-year-old Bilkis Bano returns after being denied to join farmers protesting in New Delhi on Tuesday. — PTI

was also recognised by the American weekly Time magazine as one of the 100 most influential people of 2020 alongside Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Bollywood actor Ayushmann Khurrana.

During the protest which began in December last year, the 82-year-old sat under a tent with hundreds of women and children, braving the extremely cold weather. She emerged as the face of the protest against the CAA and the proposed NRC. The protest at Shaheen Bagh ended in March this year due to the Covid-19.

## IMD: Air quality remains 'very poor' in Delhi

AIR CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 1

Delhi's air quality remained "very poor" on Tuesday and is predicted to turn "severe" this week due to unfavorable meteorological conditions. The city's 24-hour average air quality index (AQI) was 367. It was 318 on Monday and 268 on Sunday, according to the India meteorological department. 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 8 kmph on Tuesday and is expected to be 10 kmph on Wednesday, the IMD said.

The minimum temperature was 8.1 degrees Celsius on Tuesday and the maximum 27.2 degrees Celsius, it said.

Calm winds and low temperatures trap pollutants close to the ground, while favourable wind speed helps in their dispersion.

owned by Bollywood star Shahrukh Khan and Juhi Chawla, in two Indian Premier League (IPL) victories.

Party West Bengal unit informed the BJP central leadership about the huge popularity of Mr Gambhir in the state.

"Mr Gambhir is an asset for the party in the coming Assembly polls in West Bengal. A detailed plan will be finalised to rope in Mr Gambhir in the West Bengal polls as the star campaigner," said a BJP leader.

Last year, Mr Gambhir had campaigned for a few party candidates during the Haryana Assembly polls which included former hockey star Sandeep Singh.



## SHORT TAKES

## Goa minister calls for Cabinet reshuffle

Panaji: Goa ports minister Michael Lobo said on Tuesday that he had requested the chief minister to reshuffle the cabinet and replace inefficient members. The BJP leader was speaking to reporters after meeting chief minister Pramod Sawant at the latter's official residence at Altinho here. A reshuffle was needed as the state would go to polls in 2022, Mr Lobo said. "Exactly one year later, the code of conduct for the Assembly elections would be enforced," he said, adding that inefficient ministers should be replaced by those who can perform. He did not tell the chief minister who should be axed, Mr Lobo added. "I have requested a reshuffle, now it is the prerogative of the chief minister to decide whom to drop and whom to retain. He might even drop me if he feels I am not performing," the minister said. — PTI

## Ramayan cruise ride on Saryu soon

New Delhi: A Ramayan Cruise Service will be launched soon on the river Saryu in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, to provide mesmerising "Ramcharitmanas Tour" to devotees and tourists, the government said on Tuesday. This will be the first-ever luxury cruise service on the holy Saryu river, and the project aims at providing a mesmerising experience of the divine journey to devotees visiting holy city Ayodhya, the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways said in a statement. Ports, Shipping and Waterways Minister Mansukh Mandaviya chaired a review meeting on Tuesday for the implementation of cruise service. "It will be the first-ever luxury cruise service on the Saryu river (Ghagra/National Waterways-40) in Ayodhya. "It aims to give mesmerising experience to devotees with unique spiritual journeys while cruising through the famous ghats of the holy river Saryu," the ministry said. — PTI

## Bihar: 4 kids hacked to death by father

Siwan (Bihar): In a fit of rage, a man allegedly hacked to death his three sons and a daughter here besides critically injuring another girl child and his wife whom he had attacked with the same axe, police said on Tuesday. The incident took place late Monday night in Bhagwanpur police station area of the district where the accused Awadhesh Chaudhary, said to be "mentally unstable", picked up a quarrel with his family members at their residence in Balaha Ali Gardapur locality. Sub Divisional Police Officer, Sadar, Siwan, Jitendra Pandey said, "Chaudhary picked up an axe and began attacking his wife and children. His eldest daughter Jyoti Kumar (18) and sons Abhishek Kumar (14), Bhola Kumar (12) and Mukesh Kumar (10) died on the spot. — PTI

## C'garh: 2 civilians hurt in Naxal strike

Bhopal: Two civilians were on Tuesday injured when Maoists blew up a vehicle in which they were travelling by triggering an improvised explosive device (IED) blast in Chhattisgarh's south Bastar district of Bijapur. The incident occurred near Rajpenta village between Basaguda and Terram areas at around 10 in the morning, Bastar inspector general of police P Sunderraj said. The injured were admitted to a CRPF hospital in Basaguda and their conditions were stated to be stable. The two injured people were identified as Mohammad Iqbal Ansari, the owner of the ill fated vehicle, and Balam Pradhan, a mechanic. They were going to Terram village to fix a truck owned by Mr Ansari that had broken down on Monday night.

## Woman set on fire by neighbours in UP

Bhadohi: A 21-year-old woman was set afire allegedly by her neighbours in a village here, police said Tuesday. Five people barged into the house of the victim on the night of October 23 and set her afire by sprinkling kerosene on her and fled after locking the room, the police said. On hearing the cries of the woman, the locals took her to a hospital where she is undergoing treatment, Station House Officer K.K. Singh said, adding that she has suffered 50 per cent burn injuries. — PTI

## Share of active cases in total +ve cases shrinks further by 4.60% Covid cases on decline, recovery on rise

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
with agency inputs  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 1

The daily new cases and India's active cases of novel coronavirus continue to be on a decline while the recoveries are on a rise. On Tuesday, the total active were almost 4.36 lakh and the share of active cases in the total positive cases has further shrunk to 4.60 per cent. India's total tally of Covid-19 is 94.63 lakh with 31, 118 fresh detections. The fatalities so far have been 1.37 lakh out of which 482 deaths occurred in the last 24 hours.

In Delhi the daily rise in high number of fresh cases has halted a bit even

though it is still reporting much higher cases than many states and UTs. Kerala and Maharashtra also have high cases.

Union health ministry officials said while some states like Kerala, Delhi, Karnataka, Chhattisgarh etc have witnessed a decline in the active case-load in the past 24 hours while Uttarakhand, Gujarat, Assam and Goa have reported an addition to their caseload.

Meanwhile, the ICMR has said that the initial findings into an 'adverse event' allegedly suffered by an Oxford Covid-19 vaccine trial participant in Chennai did not necessitate halting of the trials and it is the role of drug

regulator to ascertain or refute if any causal link between the event and the intervention. On allegation of the 'adverse event' in a Serum Institute of India trial, the government said it will not affect vaccine timelines in any way.

A 40-year-old man who was a volunteer in the third phase of the "Covidshield" vaccine trial in Chennai has alleged serious side

effects, including a virtual neurological breakdown and impairment of cognitive functions. He has sought ₹5 crore compensation in a legal notice to Serum Institute and others, besides seeking a halt to the trial. However, the SII has rejected the charges as "malicious and misconceived" and said it will seek damages in excess of ₹100 crore.

ICMR director general Balram Bhargava said that adverse events occur with drugs or vaccines or any other health intervention. "If any adverse event warrants hospitalisation then it is called a serious adverse event. It is the role of the drug regulator, after collating all the data, to

ascertain or refute whether there is a causal link between the event and intervention. That causal link whether it has to be done by the DCGI and all the papers in connection to the five parameters have been submitted to him accordingly for review," he said.

It is done purely on a scientific basis and the assessment is done with very objectively-based criteria and initial causality assessment findings did not necessitate stoppage of these trials, he added. Union health ministry secretary Rajesh Bhushan said, "The adverse event will not affect timelines in any manner whatsoever".

## BSF celebrates 56th Raising Day



MoS home Nityanand Rai with BSF DG Rakesh Asthana reviews the parade during the 56th Raising Day event of BSF at Chhawla Camp in New Delhi on Tuesday. — PTI

## Navy test-fires anti-ship type of BrahMos missile

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 1

Indian Navy on Tuesday successfully test-fired the anti-ship version of the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile. This comes on heels of India on last Tuesday test-firing land attack version of the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands territory. Last week's test was conducted by the Indian Army which has at least three BrahMos regiments.

These slew of tests are being conducted when India is involved in a military stand-off with China in Eastern Ladakh. India has already



Anti-ship BrahMos

deployed BrahMos missiles in Ladakh and Northeast. All the three services — Army, Navy and Air Force — have deployed BrahMos missiles.

"Brahmos Anti Ship Missile was successfully launched by INS Ranvijay striking the target ship at maximum range with pin-

point accuracy in the Bay of Bengal," said Indian Navy on Tuesday.

BrahMos supersonic cruise missile, whose range has been extended from the existing 298 km to around 450 km, carries conventional (non-nuclear) weapon and flies almost three times the speed of sound.

China been conducting tests of anti-ship ballistic missiles into the South China Sea which have range of upto 4,000 kilometres. Chinese test is primarily targeted at USA which has been sending its nuclear powered aircraft carriers in South China Sea to challenge Chinese hegemony in the sea.

## J&amp;K DDC polls: 49% voting in 2nd phase, just 9% in Pulwama

YUSUF JAMEEL  
SRINAGAR, DEC. 1

The second-phase of Jammu and Kashmir's first ever District Development Council (DDC) elections recorded around 49 per cent voter turnout on Monday.

J&K's state election commissioner, K.K. Sharma, while addressing a press conference here said that like the first one the second phase of DDC elections has been conducted "successfully" with 48.62 per cent of the electorate using their right of vote in 43 constituencies. "The polling has been peaceful in all 43 constituencies, having a of total of 3,77,401 voters including 201,792 males and 175,609 females," he said.

He also said that Jammu division recorded an average voter turnout of 65.54 per cent with frontier district of Poonch registering the highest percentage of 75.07 per cent followed by Jammu district with 69.97 per cent. The lowest turnout in Jammu division was in Kathua, another border district, which recorded 60.10 per cent.

The Kashmir division recorded 33.34 per cent voter turnout with

There ARE total 280 constituencies in J&K (14 in each district) for the DDC polls which, the authorities say, will pave the way for taking the governance down to grassroots level

Bandipora district recording highest polling at 69.66 per cent followed by Kupwara district at 58.69 per cent and Ganderbal with around 49.14 per cent polling in the second phase of elections.

The lowest turnout of 8.67 per cent was reported from Pulwama district, the hotbed of insurgency.

There are total 280 constituencies in J&K (14 in each district) for the DDC polls which, the authorities say, will pave the way for taking the governance down to grassroots level.

Meanwhile, the J&K administration on Monday placed its seven officials under suspension for alleged dereliction of election duties till further orders.

The officials in question had failed to report on poll duties in the second phase of DDC elections in Beerwah area of central district of Budgam, an official spokesman said here.

## BSF jawan dies in Pakistan Army shelling at LoC

Jammu, Dec. 1: A sub-inspector of the Border Security Force (BSF) was killed in the line of duty on Tuesday in a ceasefire violation by the Pakistan army along the Line of Control (LoC) in Poonch district of Jammu and Kashmir, officials said.

In November, 15 people, including nine security personnel, were killed in multiple ceasefire violations by Pakistani troops in various sectors in the Union Territory.

The latest casualty took place on a day when the BSF is celebrating its Raising Day.

"The Pakistan army resorted to unprovoked ceasefire violation in Rajouri sector on the LoC again, in which BSF Sub-Inspector Patinsat Guite who was deployed at Forward Defence Location attained martyrdom while displaying

conspicuous act of bravery in not only retaliating to the enemy fire but also saved many of his colleagues' lives," a statement issued by the BSF said.

It said the border man had displayed highest degree of dedication and devotion, and laid down his life in the line of duty.

The incident took place at Tarkundi area of Mendhar in Poonch district.

Inspector General of BSF Jammu frontier, N. S. Jamwal paid rich tributes to the sub-inspector and said he was a gallant and sincere border man. "The nation will always remain indebted to him for his supreme sacrifice and devotion to duty," the statement said, adding that "the death of the border man will not go in vain". — PTI

## Talks inconclusive, protest to continue

Continued from Page 1

said Chanda Singh, a member of farmers' delegation.

Farmers, mostly from Punjab and Haryana, are holding protests at the Singhu, Tikri and Ghazipur borders of the national capital against the Centre's new agri-marketing laws.

"Today's meeting was good and some progress was made. During our next meeting with the government, we'll convince them that no clause of farm law is pro-farmer. Our agitation will continue," said Prem Singh Bhangu, president, All India Kisan Federation.

Bharatiya Kisan Union (Ekta Ugrahan) president Joginder Singh Ugrahan said the government's meeting with protesting farmers' unions remained inconclusive.

Tuesday's meeting was reportedly the third round of talks between the farmers and the government in the last few months. At the first round, chaired by agriculture secretary Sanjay Aggarwal, the farmers had walked out and tore up copies of the new law. The second round of meeting, co-chaired by

the agriculture minister and railway minister Piyush Goyal on November 13, lasted for seven hours.

Hours before Tuesday's meeting, Union ministers Rajnath Singh, Amit Shah, BJP chief J.P. Nadda and others held discussions on the matter. The leaders were of the unanimous view that the matter should be resolved at the earliest so that the agitation does not spill over to other parts of the country.

Just last December, protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act, which began in Assam, spread to all parts of the country leading to students being attacked, protesters being shot at, and polarising the nation on communal lines.

There have already been attempts to malign the farmers' agitation as a pro-Khalistan agitation.

The farmers' protests has been getting support from different quarters. Special prayers were held at all gurdwaras in the national capital on Tuesday morning for the success of the ongoing farmers' agitation. Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee

Several former sportspersons, including Padma Shri and Arjuna awardees who have extended their support to the agitating farmers, said they will return their awards in protest against the 'force' used against the protesters.

(DSGMC) president Manjinder Singh Sirsa said "ardas" was held at all the gurdwaras for fulfilment of the demands of protesters.

Several former sportspersons, including Padma Shri and Arjuna awardees who have extended their support to the agitating farmers, said they will return their awards in protest against the "force" used against the protesters. Among them are Padma Shri and Arjuna awardee wrestler Kartar Singh, Arjuna awardee basketball player Sajjan Singh Cheema and Arjuna awardee hockey player Rajbir Kaur. They said they will proceed to Delhi on December 5 and will place their awards outside the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Bilkis Bano, the octogenarian who became the

face of the months-long anti-CAA protests in the capital's Shaheen Bagh locality, was on Tuesday stopped by Delhi Police from joining the ongoing farmers' agitation. Ms Bano, popularly known as "Shaheen Bagh's dadi", was stopped at the Singhu border and escorted by the police back to her home in southeast Delhi.

Bhim Army chief Chandrashekhar Azad also joined the agitating farmers on Tuesday. An emerging Dalit leader in Uttar Pradesh politics, he slammed the Centre for using water cannons and tear gas on farmers.

The large-scale protests have badly affected vehicular movement in and around Delhi-NCR. Singhu border remained closed from both sides while traffic was diverted from Mukarba Chowk and GTK Road due to "very heavy" traffic congestion. The Delhi Traffic Police asked commuters to avoid Outer Ring Road from Signature Bridge to Rohini and vice versa. Tikri border also remained closed for any traffic movement. Badusarai and Jhatikara borders were open only for two-wheelers.

## Rahul backs stir, asks govt to 'shed arrogance...'

Continued from Page 1

"Khalistanis", entering the agitation remained a concern. Sources said that Punjab Congress chief Sunil Jharkhar held a meet-

ing with Chief Minister Amarinder Singh over this.

It might be recalled that Haryana chief minister M.L. Khattar was the first to claim that the agitation had

been infiltrated by "Khalistanis".

The stir by farmers appeared to intensify despite a strong defence of the legislation by the gov-

ernment and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who has accused the Opposition of "playing tricks" on farmers again through misinformation.

## Where did PM-Cares funds go: Didi

Continued from Page 1

us. But what have they given us to combat the Covid pandemic?"

Ms Banerjee also mocked Union home minister Amit Shah for his recent campaigning for the BJP in the Greater Hyderabad municipal polls, and wondered if he wanted to become a "municipal commissioner", leaving his Cabinet job.

"The country's home minister doesn't take care of the border. He plays politics in everything. He even campaigns in a municipal election. Let him be made municipal commissioner if he wants to run a municipality. Or let him become chief minister if he can handle a state," she said.

Ms Banerjee accused the Centre of targeting West Bengal as elections are approaching and claimed law and order was better in West Bengal than in many other states. "The Centre is using agencies to bulldoze and threaten us. We are not afraid of them. They (BJP) are not a political party but garbage of lies," she said. The West Bengal Assembly elections are due in April-May next year.

## AG grants nod for contempt proceeding against cartoonist

New Delhi, Dec. 1: Attorney general K.K. Venugopal has granted consent for initiating contempt proceedings against comic artist Rachita Taneja for her alleged objectionable tweets against the Supreme Court.

Sources said that Mr Venugopal has granted consent on a letter of a law student who had sought his consent for initiating contempt of court proceedings against Ms Taneja.

The attorney general has granted his consent for initiating contempt proceedings against Ms Taneja, said the source who is aware of the development.

The consent of either the attorney general or the



Rachita Taneja

solicitor general is necessary, under Section 15 of the Contempt of Courts Act, 1971, for initiating contempt proceedings against a person.

Among the offending cartoons is one where the BJP and Supreme Court are depicted as stick figures, with a likeness of Republic TV head Arnab Goswami in the middle, saying, "Tu janta nahi mera baap kaun hain." — PTI

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(A)	1. 11/GM/SM(WC-4)/ET/2020-21, Name of Work: M/o Road (P/F Direction Board for Public toilet/urinal in WC-4), Noida, Cost- Rs. 12.29 Lac.
Which can be uploaded by date 16.12.2020 upto 5.00 PM. Pre-qualification shall be opened/downloaded on date 17.12.2020 at 11.00 AM.	
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SHORT TAKES

KAMAL WANTS PM TO HAVE DIALOGUE WITH FARMERS

Chennai, Dec. 1: Makkal Needhi Maiam chief and actor Kamal Haasan on Tuesday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi should have a dialogue with farmers agitating in Delhi and redress their grievances.

Addressing a press conference here to announce former IAS official Santhosh Babu joining his party, Haasan, answering a question, said a dialogue with farmers was overdue.

"All he (Prime Minister) has to do is look at my farmers. Have a dialogue, it is long overdue. You must have a dialogue. Because it is very important for the nation. You also believe in the good of the nation. Agriculture must be taken care of. This is not a request," Haasan said. Party lines should blur in matters like these and efforts must be taken to address the concerns, he said.

The MNM chief said it was not good for the country to allow more and more voices to support protesters, apparently indicating that before the agitation intensified further, government should intervene and redress the grievances of farmers.

On the Modi government's handling of the farmers agitation, he said, "I like the sound of the violin. But not now. You can't be playing the violin now, when Rome is aflame."

Thousands of farmers were camping at various Delhi border points for the sixth consecutive day on Tuesday protesting against the new farm laws, which they fear would dismantle the minimum support price system and corporatise farming.

POET SAYS POEM SHARED BY SHIVRAJ IS HER

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY  
BHOPAL, DEC. 1

A melancholic poetry — an ode to a father by her daughter — has dragged M a d h y a Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan into an 'unnecessary' controversy with the 'author' ticking him off for not giving her the credit line. Chouhan had uploaded a poem on social media, saying that his wife, Sadhna Singh, has expressed her feelings towards her father who passed away last fortnight through a poem.

"The bonding between a father and his daughter is the most precious relation in the world. The relation is purely selfless", he tweeted.

Later, one Bhumika Birathare responded to Chouhan's tweets saying that the poem was penned by her in praise of her father and she was upset that some changes were made in the poem.

"This poem is written by me and is dedicated to my father. It is being shared by people on social media. Request you to kindly keep the authenticity of the same & keep in mind to give me the courtesy. Don't change the title to Babuji, Bauji or papa", she tweeted.

85-YEAR-OLD HELD FOR RAPING 5-YEAR-OLD

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO  
KENDRAPARA, DEC. 1

An octogenarian man in Odisha's Kendrapara district was on Monday night arrested for allegedly raping a five-year-old girl.

According to police, Sunakar Patra (85), a grocery shop owner, allegedly raped the child on Sunday evening after luring her to come inside the shop with chocolates. "The accused was arrested after the girl's parents lodged a police complaint. During interrogation, the accused confessed to the crime," inspector S.K. Pradhan, said.

The girl was medically examined, the officer said. The accused Patra was booked under sections 376 AB (punishment for rape on woman under twelve years of age), 294 (obscene acts), 341 (wrongful restraint) and 506 (criminal intimidation) of the Indian Penal Code.

Besides, sections 4 and 6 of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 were also slapped on him. "Soon after his arrest, the accused was produced in a local court. The court sent the accused Sunakar Pradhan to judicial custody for 14 days," the inspector informed.

# Farmer stir unsettles Punjab BJP

After break-up with ally SAD, BJP was hoping to gain as a solo force in state

YOJNA GUSAI  
NEW DELHI, DEC 1

With the stalemate between the protesting farmers, mainly from Congress-ruled Punjab, and the Modi government over three farm sector related legislations prolonging, there is a growing concern within the BJP's Punjab unit. The party, which was coexisting in the state under the shadow of former ally Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), has been hoping to gain in the state after SAD's exit from the NDA fold.

While the leadership crisis was one of the primary concerns of the BJP in Punjab, the continuing stalemate between farmer groups and the Centre could create more troubles for the party which has already declared that it will contest the 2022 Assembly polls alone.

The party's poll strategists have been working on wooing the "non-panthak" vote-bank (considered SAD's core vote-bank) as well as the youth and women and had significantly gained during the last membership drive. However, if the farmers' protest continues, the saffron party's poll strategists feel that it could negatively impact its organisational expansion and its poll prospects as the party would be perceived as "anti-farmers" in the state.

Farmers are considered SAD's strong vote-bank in



Farmers eat a meal during their 'Delhi Chalo' protest against new farm laws, at Ghazipur Delhi-UP border, New Delhi on Tuesday.

Punjab and the Badals-led party was forced to quit the NDA amid growing protests against the farm laws. The BJP has been making inroads among the farming community in the state by highlighting the BJP government's initiatives for the farming sector, including PM-Kisan.

Though there are claims and counter claims that

the protests are led solely by farmers groups who are opposed to the three legislations and want statutory status for the Minimum Support Price (MSP), in the political circle the unrest is being seen as a political attempt to woo the numerically strong farmers.

Though the government is trying to pacify farmers groups, some of its

allies are getting uneasy and want the issue resolved soon.

Jannayak Janata Party (JJP), the BJP's ally in Haryana, has asked the government to resolve the crisis soon as farmers are its core vote-bank. The BJP's ally in Rajasthan, Rashtriya Loktantrik Party's Hanuman Beniwal has sought scrapping of the three laws.

SHOW RESTRAINT, CENTRE TELLS SECURITYMEN

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 1

Even as intelligence inputs suggest that the number and strength of agitating farmers on outskirts of Delhi could increase substantially in the coming days, the Home Ministry has categorically asked all security forces deployed all along the borders of the national capital to "show utmost restraint and sensitise their security personnel accordingly."

Sources claimed that Home Ministry wants the security forces to adopt a "humane approach" towards the farmers and ensure that no force, even in terms of use of water cannon or tear gas should be used against the farmers.

"We want to have a humanitarian approach towards the protesting farmers as it has been peaceful so far. Even if there is slight or some small provocation from them, the security forces have been asked to handle the situation with a lot of restraint," a senior Home Ministry official said.

Meanwhile, inputs from multiple agencies available with the Centre suggests that the number of agitating farmers is likely to increase substantially in the coming days as farmer organisations and unions from Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh too will join the ongoing agitation.

Further, more farmer from Punjab and Haryana are expected to join the agitation as they will try and block all major highways and entry and exit points from Delhi.

As many as 500 tractor trolleys are expected to reach Delhi border over the next two to three days, officials claimed.

## Low voter turnout in Hyd local polls

Hyderabad, Dec. 1: A high-decibel, no holds barred campaign involving a battery of BJP leaders such as Union home minister Amit Shah versus the ruling TRS for the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) election was followed by low voter turnout on Tuesday.

About 35 percent of the 74 lakh-odd voters turned up to cast their votes. Counting of votes will be taken up on December 4.

Polling passed off peacefully, but not without any glitch, as repoll was ordered in ward number 26 owing to a symbol mix-up

involving the two Left parties- CPI and CPI (M), officials said.

Ballot papers were used in total 150 wards of the corporation.

Aiming to cash-in on its surprise success in the recent Dubbak assembly bypoll, the BJP seemed to have upped the stakes in the civic polls in the state capital, fielding the "who's who" of the saffron party.

Mr Shah targeted both All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) and Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) on dynasty politics.

BJP's top guns — party chief J.P. Nadda, Union ministers Prakash Javadekar and Smriti Irani

and party MP and BJYM national president Tejaswi Surya hit the campaign trail.

The saffron party leaders also targeted AIMIM chief and Hyderabad MP Asaauddin Owaisi during their campaign and accused the ruling TRS of having a tacit understanding with it.

The TRS campaign was led by its working president and state Municipal Administration Minister K.T. Rama Rao, while party president and chief minister K. Chandrababhan Naidu addressed a campaign public meeting.



Women wearing face masks shows the indelible ink mark on their index finger after casting their vote at a polling booth during the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation elections in Hyderabad on Tuesday.

## BNP all set for annual crocodile census

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO  
BHUBANESWAR, DEC. 1

Bhitarkanika National Park, one of the world's biodiversity rich sites, is all set for the annual crocodile census.

The census, according to state forest department sources, will take place for nine days — from January 5 to January 14.

Known for its unique flora and fauna, Bhitarkanika boasts of having a strong crocodile population, hundreds of bird species, reptiles and amphibians.

The Odisha government has already put a nine-day

ban on entry of tourists into the Park from January 5 to January 14 to facilitate smooth conduct of the census.

Bikash Ranjan Dash, Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) of Rajnagar Wildlife region, on Tuesday said as many as 22 groups have been formed to count the crocodiles in the 27 creeks and rivers within the park and its nearby areas.

The forest department will also deploy nine boats for the census.

According to the DFO, the restrictions on the visitors are meant to prevent noise pollution during counting of the reptiles in the park.



A crocodile basking in the sun at Bhitarkanika National Park.

— Dr Sandeep Tripathi, Principal Chief Conservator of Forest, Odisha

"The headcount drive of the endangered estuarine

crocodiles will be conducted under the supervision

of wildlife personnel. The enumerators assisted by trained local forest staff and some herpetologists, including noted crocodile researcher Dr Sudhakar Kar, would cover Bhitarkanika river system besides innumerable creeks, water inlets and nullahs, Dash said.

The engaged team members will scout the rivers and other water bodies of the park and its nearby areas to count the crocodiles while wearing masks and adhering to social distancing norms.

"All the team members will follow Covid-19 guidelines during enumeration," the DFO said.

## We will always stand by farmers: Hooda

As the farmer protests intensifies, former Chief Minister of Haryana and Leader of Opposition in Haryana Mr. Bhupinder Singh Hooda speaks to *Ashhar Khan* over the crisis.

**How do you see these protests by farmers on the borders of Delhi?**

Let me at the outset state clearly that until the farmers win this battle, we stand firmly with their demands. The attitude adopted by the government to crush the movement is completely undemocratic as every citizen and every class has the right to demonstrate peacefully for their just demands in democracy. We have been trying to bring to the notice of the government that there are serious lapses in these three bills that have now become laws but the government is refusing to listen to their woes.

**There are questions being raised that the farmers are being instigated by vested interests? Also, that they are being fed false information about the laws. Your comments?**

This is blatantly false. There is no such thing like this happening. The farmers of Haryana have been agitating against the three agricultural laws for many months and I have repeatedly urged the government to withdraw these laws or bring in a new law to guarantee minimum support price (MSP) for farmers. Similarly, we have seen in neighboring states also there have been protests for long but the central government and the BJP just refused to see and acknowledge the unease and injustice being met out to farmers. Also Mr. Khattar should tell us whether he does not consider the agitating farmers as residents of Haryana? If the farmers of Haryana are not part of the movement, then who did the government lathi-charge in Pipli? Who are the people who were detained by the Haryana Police before their Delhi march? Who where the thousands of farmers against whom the Haryana government has filed cases. They are just trying to deflect attention from the real issue.

**The way the farmers were stopped from marching to Delhi like water cannon was used, tear gas was fired and roads were dug up. What is your response?**

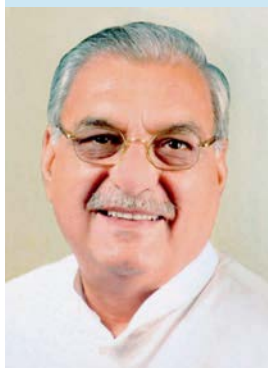
The government's job is to keep the roads and highways open, not to close them down. The government's job is to make roads but this government blocked roads and dug roads to stop the farmers. The government has completely lost the trust of the farmers and this is why the farmers do not believe in the assurances given by it and now wants a law that guarantees MSP. I don't understand why is it so difficult for the political leadership to hear out the grievances of the farmers. Till now the entire agitation of the farmers has been peaceful. But the Haryana government's role in the entire movement has been negative.

**What is your demand from the government?**

The government should care about the farmers. They should at once keep these three laws in abeyance. Then the Prime Minister should call a delegation of the farmers and hear them out. Also cases that have been filed against the farmers in Haryana, almost 12,000 of them, should be immediately taken back. I would like to appeal to my farmer brothers that if the Centre does not listen

Q&A

Bhupinder Singh Hooda



to their demands, then they should be ready for a bigger movement. It is strange that why the Agriculture Minister in the first instance gave a date so far away to have a conversation. The government should understand that farmers are on roads there grievances should immediately be heard and their issues dealt with.

**We have heard the government saying that these laws are not anti-farmers and the farmers say that they are so now what happens next?**

I feel that the farmers have made up their mind on this issue. The government should know that the farmers of Haryana and Punjab have stood shoulder to shoulder in this movement. They are also getting support from farmers of Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and other states. Ignoring them is an insult to those who work hard to put food on our tables. As a responsible Opposition, we fully support the demands of the farmers. Until the farmers win this battle, we stand firmly with the demands of the farmers. Again I do not understand what is the problem in passing a law that makes adhering to MSP compulsory? High handedness in all these issues will not get us anywhere. The government should adopt a humane approach and ensure that the issue is resolved at the earliest instead of putting conditions and giving future dates.

**What will the Congress do in all this?**

Obviously we will stand with the farmers. The Congress has taken a principled stand on this since the monsoon session of parliament when this issue came up. We were not allowed to put our points across and the government brazenly passed all legislation. Several Congress ruled states have already passed legislations to nullify the impact of the centers legislations. Infact I have several times asked the state government to do away with the law but no avail. I often find that the state government's ignorance towards such a large movement is not only shocking but also disturbing.

**What are the issues that you have with these three laws?**

The three anti agricultural laws, as I would call them, will give vested interests the opportunity to grab the ₹20-25 lakh crores agriculture commodities market by subverting and subjugating the interest of farmers, farm labourers, the small grain merchants, the labourer work and the employees working in the grain markets across India. It tantamounts to finishing forever the Minimum Support Price Mechanism which will be a death knell for the interest of the farmer.

The laws have provisions which have an overriding effect on the Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee and MSP regime.



THE ASIAN AGE

2 DECEMBER 2020

Regulators amiss in not probing vaccine ‘effect’

India, which has the world’s second largest total Covid-19 caseload, has been an active participant in the global effort to find a vaccine against the coronavirus. Several Indian manufacturers are in tie-ups with foreign pharma majors and laboratories for conducting clinical trials here, while some others are developing their own vaccines. If one were to go by the optimism they exude, then we have a solution to the pandemic in the weeks ahead, or months.

Vaccine production is a complex process, which involves science, technology, protocol, practice and ethics. World over, regulators have been willing to relax some norms, primarily administrative in nature, so that the process can be expedited and a vaccine comes out at the earliest. However, none has ever been willing to compromise on core protocols.

India, a major player in the manufacture of vaccines, has not been that active in their development, though. There are allegations that clinical trials conducted in India, whether for vaccines or for other medical formulations, are less than transparent and that international norms and protocols are not observed in the full. There have been different views about the information passed on to participants before their consent was taken in many such trials.

**We have not heard about the government or a regulator ordering a halt to the trial. A more thorough investigation was warranted considering the importance of the vaccine projects.**

It is in this background that reports of the Serum Institute of India, one of the leading players with a global reputation in the field of vaccine manufacturing, planning to sue a participant who flagged a serious adverse event that occurred during the trial for Covid vaccine must be seen. A more thorough investigation was warranted considering the importance of the vaccine projects.

There are many issues involved here. The immediate one is the response of the regulatory authorities. The global practice has been, even in the midst of the pandemic, to halt the trial, study the event when one is reported, and then decide whether to go ahead with it or not. Most leading vaccine candidates for Covid-19, too, have reported such instances. It is not yet clear if India, too, has followed the pattern; we have not heard about the government or a regulator ordering a halt to the trial. The scientific and regulatory bodies involved in the process, such as the Indian Council for Medical Research or the Drugs Controller General of India, have also been silent. This is unacceptable.

The safety of the participants of the trials is another major concern. It should not be left to the participant to take up the issue; there must be independent institutions that must go to the bottom of such charges and come up with the truth. While genuine complaints must be addressed with all seriousness, those with ulterior motives, if any, must be dealt with accordingly.

The Prime Minister has reportedly directed various government agencies to work with vaccine manufacturers and sort out the issues they face. This is a welcome move. At the same time, the government must also look for regulatory deficiencies and meet them on par with global practices. It should not allow expediency to get the better of ethical practices in the name of the pandemic.

Is Rajini under pressure?

After a series of false starts since 1996, actor Rajinikanth almost made it clear in late October that he was not game for politics. Though his fans show desperation in seeing him as a political leader and, in due course, chief minister, the superstar displayed no inclination of joining politics and even cited his health as one impeding reason. So even after that bunch of ardent fans who turned up at his Poes Garden residence to persuade him to change his mind was sent off and it almost became clear that Rajinikanth would keep off the humdrum of politics, why did he call for a meeting on Monday?

While it’s a totally different matter if Rajinikanth would provide clean governance, as his fans tout, or bring about a change in Tamil Nadu or not, why is his impending arrival, or the lack of it, on the political scene engendering palpable anticipation. Are some political parties like the DMK and AIADMK, which trace their lineage to the Dravidian tradition that Rajinikanth purportedly abhors, wary of fighting him electorally, as his supporters see it? No, those parties show no sign of fright.

Then, does he hope to turn a Pied Piper leading the masses on a so far untrodden garden path and turn the affairs of the state upside down, thus unsettling existing social structures and disconcerting cultural mores? Does he have a plan and an agenda for revolutionary changes that would go against the status quo, upending socio-politico systems for a better future? Of course there have been no such indications.

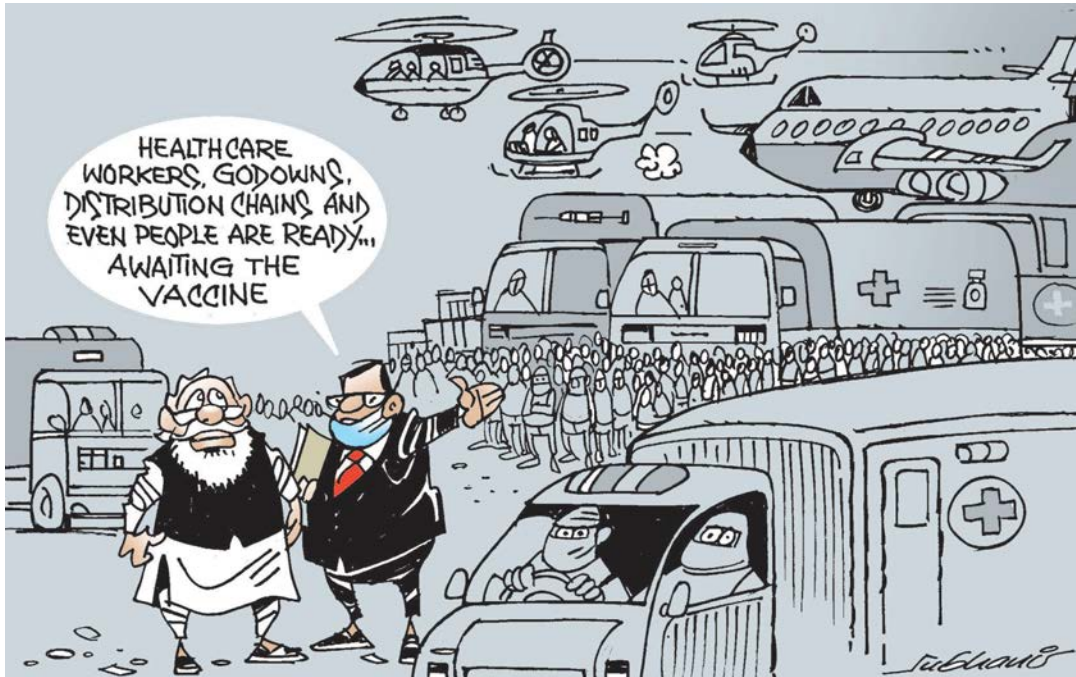
So, what is beckoning him? What’s that that makes him go back-and-forth, repeatedly? If it is the clarion call from fans, he would have easily said “no” and quit. So, the call emanates from somewhere else, suddenly evolving into a command, as someone believes that he alone can break the State’s electoral strangleholds.

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Subhani



Are America’s days over as world’s moral arbiter?

Indranil Banerjee



The Donald Trump era may be drawing to a close in the United States, but America will never be the same again. At least not the America that once shone proud, flashing its democratic credentials, hoist on its self-made pedestal.

Mr Trump and the recent US presidential elections have irrevocably tarnished the American democratic model and eroded its moral authority. Today, America increasingly looks like a tired, somewhat tattered democracy, struggling with its inherent inefficiencies and flaws, clawed by manipulators and creased by unwieldy procedures.

The bitter and highly polarised November 2020 election was watched with disbelief and distaste across the world. Even nations at the bottom of the democratic ladder couldn’t restrain their delight and disdain at America’s tortured electoral process.

“What a spectacle!” exclaimed Iran’s supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei of the US elections. Khamenei, a champion of one of the world’s most repressive regimes, tweeted: “One says this is the most fraudulent election in US history. Who says that? The President who is in office. His rival says Trump intends to rig the election! This is how #USElections & US democracy are.”

The incoming US President, Joseph R. Biden, who will be sworn in on January 20, 2021, knows that he has his job cut out for him. Before the elections he pledged to unite America and end the “grim era of demonisation”.

“It is time to heal America”, he declared, adding he fought this election “to restore the soul of America, to rebuild the backbone of this nation, the middle class and to make America respected

around the world again, and to unite us here at home”.

But all that is easier said than done. America remains totally polarised, like never before, and having once slipped from the top of the global hierarchy, it might be difficult if not impossible to crawl back. Mr Biden’s democratic credentials, statements and worldview hark back to an era forever lost. The old days of American hegemony are not lamented by the world. Internally too, Mr Biden will find it hard to restore those values so missed by liberal, egalitarian Americans.

The world will take a lot of convincing to believe that the core values of democracy, liberty and equality that America once preached is indeed being practised there again. Faith once lost is always difficult to restore. Like Sisyphus’s rock, it keeps rolling down.

The implications for the global order are profound. With moral authority came power and the United States unabashedly wielded it. Toppling regimes became acceptable worldwide if it was seen as a benevolent act by the United States for the greater glory of democracy and liberty.

Iraq’s Saddam Hussain could be hunted down and hanged as he was a despot responsible for killing opponents and throttling democracy. This disguised the real reason for the killing, which was the dismantling of the Ba’athist regime in Iraq and forever destroying that country’s strategic capabilities in the Middle East. By hanging Saddam and bombing Iraq to the ground, Washington ensured Iraq would never again pose a threat to its allies and interests in the region.

Not surprisingly, the US could similarly get away with helping repressive regimes, like the Shah’s Iran, Gen. Pervez Musharraf’s Pakistan

and the dozens of dictatorships it supports the world over.

In other words, the torch of liberty and democratic values has been used as a weapon of coercion, cajolement and manipulation by Washington in the post-World War II era. The most powerful use of these values was the vilification and undermining of enemy regimes that don’t necessarily adhere to them.

Thus, the democratic ideal and values of personal freedoms played a large part in undermining and ultimately bringing down the Soviet empire. This was a huge strategic victory, which demonstrated the advantage of holding the moral high ground and espousing a value system eagerly sought after by people from other cultures and nations.

The US has for long used its democratic credentials to further its geopolitical aims and civilisational narrative which equated good with the American way of life. This narrative has broken down. The breakdown of this dynamic is bound to have severe repercussions around the world.

While the end of using democratic credentials as a tool for hegemonic objectives will not be lamented, what will be is the erosion of those core values. All said and done, those values did serve to rescue many societies from various forms of utter despotism.

Who will shine the moral beacon in the years to come? With America’s democratic ideal broken and suspect, Europe cringing and unable to come to terms with growing ethnic and religious diversity, it will be the despotic ascendant powers like the People’s Republic of China that will seek to assume the

status of global role model. This cannot but be a terrible portent. Something better must emerge. But from where, in this wilderness of ideologies and systems currently prevailing all over the world?

One unusual suggestion has recently been made by Singapore’s best-known diplomat-academic Kishore Mahbubani. In a recent piece in the *South China Morning Post*, he wrote: “India is entering a geopolitical sweet spot. What does this mean? In a world crying out for a strong, independent voice to provide moral guidance to a troubled planet, the only realistic candidate is India. None of the three other obvious candidates — the United States, the European Union and China — can step up to the plate now.”

“India’s rise is ‘reassuring’ because it is not perceived as a threat by other powers. Given this trusted position, India can take advantage of it by providing the world ethical leadership, of the kind that Gandhiji would have provided if he were alive today”, Mahbubani wrote, adding that India could become the global champion of multilateralism and a rules-based behaviour.

Within India, however, there is widespread disillusionment and a sense of dejection arising out of the uncontrolled spread of the Covid-19 pandemic and sustained economic contraction. Massive job losses, economic dislocation and disappearing public savings have left a nation bewildered and despondent.

Internally too, India is acutely polarised and fragmented; and few in the world are looking up to it as a potential role model. Yet, as Mahbubani argues, India has the potential to emerge as the world’s ethical flag bearer. But for that to happen, the country will require a benevolent, consensual, farsighted statesman as a leader, who is capable of unifying a vast and diversified nation — and perhaps the world as well.

*The writer is an independent commentator on political and security issues*

**America remains totally polarised, like never before, and having once slipped from the top of the the global hierarchy, it might be difficult if not impossible to crawl back**

LETTERS

CURB TERRORISM

Vice-president Venkaiah Naidu pitched for eradication of cross border terrorism while addressing the 19th session of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation council of heads of government. This virtual meeting was being hosted for the first time by India. Mr Naidu asserted that terrorism is the biggest challenge for the region. He highlighted the need for a reformed multilateralism that gives a voice to all stakeholders, marks contemporary challenges and puts human beings at the centre of policies. Terrorism is truly the enemy of humanity. Peace is the essential prerequisite for progress.

Jyoti Singh  
Gwalior

MUDDY WATERS

THE ONGOING farmers’ agitation at the Delhi-Haryana border throws up a confusing picture. It appears that the tillers from the parts of the country south of the Vindhyas are not participating in the stir. There exists a somewhat similar situation in Maharashtra too, where a number of unfortunate farmers have committed suicide. Also muddying waters are Canadian PM Justin Trudeau’s unwarranted comments on the farmers’ protests. He is playing to his home galleries which consist of a pro-Khalistani Sikh voter base.

Arun Malankar  
Mumbai

REVISIT GOSPEL

THE SEASON OF ADVENT is upon us. Starting Sunday, it will lead up to the Christmas season which ends on January 6. As Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, one would do well to revisit the four parts of the Holy Bible, known as the Gospels. The Gospel of St Luke tells us the most about Jesus’ birth, and the Gospel of St Matthew tells another part of the story. The Gospel of St John tells us that Christ came from God to bring His Word or message to all. The Gospel according to St Mark describes Jesus’ adult life, introducing it with the words, “The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God...”. Mark tells of John the Baptist, who predicts the coming of a man more powerful than himself. As Boney M sang, man will live forever more because of Christ’s birth.

Jubel D’Cruz  
Mumbai

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

A.G. Noorani



Congress in crisis, but India needs strong Opp.

Parliamentary government, as it is understood in the UK, works by the interaction of four essential factors: the principle of majority rule; the willingness of the minority for the time being to accept the decisions of the majority; the existence of great political parties divided by broad issues of policy, rather than by sectional interests; and finally the existence of a mobile body of political opinion, owing no permanent allegiance to any party and therefore able, by its instinctive reaction against extravagant movements on one side or the other, to keep the vessel on an even keel. In India none of these factors can be said to exist today,” the British Parliament’s joint committee on constitutional reform observed in 1933-34.

These words, as a pretext for denying independence as well as a slur, offended Indians.

Today, it is hard to deny the truth of these observations. India has done remarkably well in many spheres, yet its one glaring failure lies in the political sphere. It has failed to evolve

a vibrant political system in which political parties alternate in occupying power. Instead, the pattern has been one of monolithic power that drives others to forge a coalition, which falls apart shortly after it comes to power.

Jawaharlal Nehru governed as Prime Minister from August 1947 till he died in May 1964. In this moment of trial, Congress leaders failed the nation. The correct procedure was to hold a leadership election. However, no one wanted the hated but ambitious Morarji Desai. So Congress president K. Kamaraj met the MPs individually and declared the consensus: Lal Bahadur Shastri.

When he died in January 1966, an election was held for the first time. Indira Gandhi defeated Desai by 355 votes to 169. In the 1967 election, the Congress was re-elected and elected Indira as leader. She appointed Desai as deputy prime minister, but he did not reconcile himself to his defeat.

This came to be known as the so-called “Congress culture” — democratic in form but barren of the spirit of democracy. Indira’s opponents

selected a presidential candidate who would checkmate her as Prime Minister. She split the party and her faction swept the polls in 1971. She ruled autocratically till 1977. To defeat this monolith, the Opposition parties united in a bid for power — only to break up in ego.

Indira Gandhi returned to power in 1980. On her assassination in 1984, her son Rajiv Gandhi became Prime Minister and presided over a corrupt, authoritarian regime. Once again, a coalition of egos united to oust him, only to fall apart.

This pattern continues. A monolith opposed by a conglomeration whose leaders cannot unite. A naked contest for power on both sides, with one difference — the monolith is led by a strong leader; the conglomerate is a house divided by a clash of egos. Certain features stand out. There is no internal democratic working in any political party. Cabals rule them all.

The BJP, the political front of the RSS, came to power under Atal Behari Vajpayee, a liberal. It lost the 2004 election to a Congress-led coalition

that ruled till 2014. As Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh won international and domestic acclaim. But his second term was torn apart by internal conflict, corruption and Sonia Gandhi’s baleful influence as Congress president.

The situation changed in 2014. The BJP returned to power, but under the leadership of autocrat Narendra Modi. He consigned the old guard to the shelf, starting with L.K. Advani, who had opposed Mr Modi’s claim to be Prime Minister. He foisted his henchman of Gujarat days, Amit Shah, upon the party as its president.

There is no one to challenge it. The Congress is like a duke in reduced circumstances. Its president no longer commands the respect she once did. Imitating Indira, Sonia promoted her son Rahul.

Three of the tallest leaders in the Congress have demanded “reforms”, specifically elections to the party’s committees and posts, including president. The chickens have come home to roost. The “strong” leader no longer commands the respect she once did. Leaders are only followed

so long as they can get the party elected and provide jobs for the minions.

Sonia Gandhi has two fatal defects — her anointed heir is not respected or liked. And she has no contribution to make to ideology or programmes. Worse, she has reduced the Congress to the level of a “B-team” of the BJP. Sonia and Rahul ostentatiously pay obeisance at temples, devotion neither revealed till recently. On Ayodhya, Kashmir and similar issues, the Congress supports the BJP. Designed to compete for the Hindu vote, this cheap stratagem has done the Congress no good. It is in a stage of decline.

Yet it would be tragic and dangerous for India’s democracy if the Congress were to pass into oblivion. India needs a powerful opposition to the Narendra Modi government’s arbitrary and rabidly communal ways.

*The writer is an author and lawyer, and one of India’s top constitutional experts*

By arrangement with Dawn



### SHORT TAKES

## GERMANY BANS FAR-RIGHT, PRO-NAZI GROUP

**Berlin, Dec. 1:** Police raided homes in three German states early Tuesday after the German government banned a far-right group, a spokesman for the interior ministry said.

The homes of 13 members of the far-right group Wolfbrigade 44 were searched in Hesse, Mecklenburg West-Pomerania and North Rhine-Westphalia to confiscate the group's funds and far-right propaganda material, the German news agency *DPA* reported.

"Whoever fights against the basic values of our free society will get to feel the resolute reaction of our government," Interior Minister Horst Seehofer said, according to his spokesman, Steve Alter. The group's goal is to re-establish a Nazi dictatorship, according to security officials. The 44 in their name stands for the fourth letter in the alphabet, DD, and is an abbreviation for Division Dirlwanger. Oskar Dirlwanger was a known Nazi war criminal and commander of a Nazi SS special unit. The far-right group was founded in 2016. It is known for possessing illegal weapons and members have participated in far-right protests. Earlier this year, the German government banned other far-right groups, including the Combat 18 and the Nordadler.

## TAINTED RICE WINE KILLS 7 IN CAMBODIA

**Phnom Penh, Dec. 1:** Seven people died and more than 130 others were hospitalised in Cambodia after drinking rice wine that health authorities believe was adulterated with a toxic substance.

The Health Ministry said the incident happened Saturday in a remote rural area of central Cambodia's Kampong Chhnang province, where villagers drank the wine at a funeral ceremony. It said a toxic substance in the wine was the cause of the deaths. Most of the people who were sickened are recovering, with some already released from the hospital, it said in a statement Monday.

Dangerous cheap but powerful alcoholic drinks are a perennial problem in Cambodia's poor rural areas, and several accidental poisonings are reported each year. Often the alcohol is not distilled properly and contains methanol, which can kill even in small amounts.

Rice wine is typically home-made and is popular at social gatherings, although in at least one case the tainted wine was a bottled brand made in the capital, Phnom Penh, that had been sold in provincial markets for several years without incident.

The Health Ministry said it sent three experts to the village on the day of the incident to investigate the situation and make sure sales and consumption of the wine were immediately stopped. In one of the worst incidents, 14 villagers died and more than 200 others were sickened in the province of Kratie in May 2018.

## BIDEN, HARRIS GREET ON GURU NANAK B' ANNIV

**Washington, Dec. 1:** US President-elect Joe Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris have greeted the Sikh community on the 551st birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev, emphasising that the timeless and universal message of compassion and unity from the founder of Sikhism can inspire and help Americans heal as people and as a nation.

In a joint statement issued by the offices of Biden and Harris, the two leaders said that for more than five centuries, Guru Nanak's teachings on spiritual enlightenment, service to humanity and moral integrity have endured and embodied each day by Sikhs in America and around the world. "For more than five centuries, Guru Nanak's teachings on spiritual enlightenment, service to humanity, and moral integrity have endured and are embodied each day by Sikhs in America and around the world, as we have seen during this challenging year," Biden and Harris said.

"We are grateful to all of the Sikh Americans who continue to stand by their neighbours as essential workers of the pandemic, and who open their hearts and community kitchens in their gurdwaras to prepare, serve, and deliver countless meals for people most in need," they said. "During the summer of protest, we saw Sikhs of all ages marching peacefully for racial and gender equality, religious pluralism, and fidelity to truth and justice — core tenets of the Sikh faith," they said.

## Euphoria in Azerbaijan



Azerbaijani soldiers hold national flags and a portrait of Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev as they celebrate the transfer of the Lachin region to Azerbaijan's control, as part of a peace deal that required Armenian forces to cede the Azerbaijani territories they held outside Nagorno-Karabakh, in Aghjabadi, Azerbaijan, on Tuesday. Azerbaijan has completed the return of territory under a Russia-brokered peace deal that ended six weeks of fierce fighting over Nagorno-Karabakh.

— AP

# Vaccine: Europe agency to decide on Dec. 29

It will convene meet to find efficacy for it to be approved

**Berlin, Dec. 1:** The European Medicines Agency will convene a meeting on December 29 to decide if there is enough data about the safety and efficacy of the Covid-19 vaccine developed by Pfizer and BioNTech for it to be approved, the regulator said Tuesday.

The agency also said Tuesday it could decide as early as January 12 whether to approve a rival Covid-19 vaccine developed by Moderna Inc. The German pharmaceutical company BioNTech and its US partner Pfizer said earlier Tuesday that they had asked the regulator for speeded-up, conditional approval of their Coronavirus vaccine, concluding the rolling review process they initiated with the agency on October 6.

The move comes a day after rival Moderna said it was asking US and European regulators to allow the use of its Covid-19 vaccine. BioNTech said if the vaccine, currently named BNT162b2, is approved, its use in Europe could begin before the end of 2020.

The companies said last month that clinical trials with 44,000 participants showed the vaccine is 95% effective. The efficacy rate in particularly vulnerable older age groups was more than 94%, they said. In a statement, the EU medicines regulator said it had already begun a "rolling review" of the Moderna vaccine based on laboratory data previously submitted by the company and would now assess data on how well that vaccine triggers an immune response and whether it is safe enough for broad use across Europe. The agency said that "if the data are robust enough to conclude on quality, safety and effectiveness," then it could approve the Moderna vaccine at a meeting scheduled for January 12.

BioNTech and Pfizer have already submitted a request for emergency approval with the US Food and Drug Administration and the UK regulator MHRA, as well as rolling submissions in other countries including in Australia, Canada and Japan.

— AP

## Trump Coronavirus adviser Atlas resigns

**Washington, Dec. 1:** US President Donald Trump's controversial special adviser on the Coronavirus, Dr. Scott Atlas, has resigned. During his four months in the role, Atlas, who had no formal experience in public health or infectious diseases, questioned the need for masks and other measures to control the pandemic that has killed over 268,000 people in America.

While questioning the usefulness of masks he was against lockdowns and promoted the idea of herd immunity. The 65-

year-old the Stanford University neuroradiologist resigned on Monday at the end of his 130-day temporary assignment, according to US media reports.

Atlas tweeted a photo of his resignation letter on Monday. In the letter, he said his "advice was always focused on minimising all the harms from both the pandemic and the structural policies themselves, especially to the working class and the poor." "I sincerely wish the new team all the best as they guide the nation," he wrote.

— PTI

## UK MPs to vote on tier-based lockdown

**London, Dec. 1:** UK Parliamentarians on Tuesday are set to vote on the government's tier-based Coronavirus lockdown as the country's health minister said the Covid-19 situation was "back under control" but vigilance was necessary. UK Health Secretary Matt Hancock attempted to rally lockdown sceptics at a Downing Street briefing on Monday evening, reiterating the need for a regional system of tiers, which come in force after England's current nationwide lockdown imposed in wake of Covid ends on

Wednesday.

"While we can let up a little, we can't afford to let up a lot," said Hancock.

"We've reduced pressures on the NHS (National Health System), we've brought down the number of Coronavirus cases, we've got this virus back under control... The success of our collective efforts means that from Wednesday, everyone in England, even those in tier three, can have some greater freedoms — but we don't have much headroom," he said.

— PTI

## Trafficking up: Nobel winner

**United Nations, Dec. 1:** Nobel Peace Prize laureate Nadia Murad said the Coronavirus pandemic has increased trafficking of women and gender-based violence, leaving the health and safety of women "on the line." The 27-year-old activist, who was forced into sexual slavery by Islamic State fighters in Iraq, said curfews, lockdowns and travel restric-

tions imposed by governments to slow the spread of the virus "have had unintended consequences on women worldwide."

"Rather than reducing human trafficking and gender-based violence, the pandemic has increased the risk of exploitation and brutality against those most vulnerable," she said. "Numerous countries have seen increases in

## VIRUS: BIBLICAL BETHLEHEM LOSES CHRISTMAS CHEER

**Bethlehem, Dec. 1:** The Coronavirus has cast a pall over Christmas celebrations in Bethlehem, all but shutting down the biblical town revered as Jesus' birthplace at the height of the normally cheery holiday season. Missing are the thousands of international pilgrims who normally descend upon the town. Restaurants, hotels and souvenir shops are closed.

The renowned Christmas tree lighting service will be limited to a small group of authorised people, as will church services on Christmas Eve. "Bethlehem is dead," said Maryana al-Arja, owner of the 120-room Angel Hotel on the outskirts of Bethlehem.

The hotel was the site of the West Bank's first Coronavirus outbreak — when a group of Greek tourists came down with the virus last March. She kept her 25 workers on staff for several months but ultimately couldn't continue to pay them.

Al-Arja, who herself was infected with the virus, said she has been forced to close the hotel and lay off the entire staff because there is no sign of the pandemic ending or tourists visiting anytime soon.

— AP

# US opposes release of Tahawwur Rana

**Washington, Dec. 1:** The US government has moved a motion in a federal court in California opposing the release of Pakistani-origin Canadian businessman Tahawwur Rana, who has been declared a fugitive by India for his involvement in the 2008 Mumbai terror attack case, describing him a flight risk.

Rana, 59, a childhood friend of David Coleman Headley, was re-arrested on June 10 in Los Angeles on an extradition request by India for his involvement in the 26/11 Mumbai terror strike in which 166 people, including six Americans, were killed.

Pakistani-American LeT terrorist Headley was involved in plotting the 2008 Mumbai terror attack. He was made an approver in the case, and is currently serving a 35-year prison term in the US for his role in the attack. Rana is a declared fugitive in India. His extradition hearing is scheduled for February 12. In a motion filed before

the US District Court Judge in Los Angeles Jacqueline Chelonian on Monday, US attorney Nicola T Hanna urged the court to deny Rana's motion for release for failure to prove that he is not a flight risk or that special circumstances exist and continue to detain him pending resolution of this extradition proceeding.

Hanna's motion comes in opposition to the latest effort of Rana to avoid detention pending extradition, by capitalising on the developments of the Covid-19 pandemic. Rana's attorney has argued that pandemic warrants his release from custody. Hanna said a fugitive facing extradition is entitled to bail only if he can demonstrate that he is not a flight risk, is not a danger to the community, and that "special circumstances" warrant his release from custody.

Rana in his court filing has said the Bureau of Prison (BOP) was unable to manage the Covid-19

pandemic and as such he should be released from custody. Hanna argued that BOP is committed to fighting Covid-19 and protecting the inmates in its custody. "In addition to ignoring the BOP's ability to manage the pandemic, Rana ignores the significant increase of Covid-19 cases in the population in which he wishes to be released," Hanna said, adding, unlike the BOP, Rana will not have immediate access to frequent Covid-19 testing, and should he test positive, treatment.

Following the increase of Covid-19 cases, Metropolitan Detention Centre Los Angeles began testing inmates, including Rana. MDC-LA has not received the results of his Covid-19 test conducted on November 27. Accordingly, it has placed Rana in isolation, pending confirmation that he is not positive for Covid-19. In denying Rana's initial motion for release in July, the court had said he constituted a flight risk.

— PTI



Nirav Modi

## NIRAV REMAND EXTENDED, FINAL HEARINGS IN '21

**London, Dec. 1:** Nirav Modi, wanted in connection with the estimated \$2-billion Punjab National Bank (PNB) scam case, was further remanded in custody on Tuesday by a court in London hearing India's extradition request for the diamond merchant.

The 49-year-old appeared on Tuesday via video-link from Wandsworth Prison in south-west London, dressed in a maroon sweater and sporting a full beard, for his regular 28-day "call-over hearing" at Westminster Magistrates' Court, where Chief Magistrate Emma Arbuthnot extended his remand for another 28 days until December 29.

"It will be another short videolink call-over hearing and then there is just over a week before closing submissions in the case," she told Modi, who spoke only to confirm his name and date of birth. The final hearings in the extradition case are scheduled over two days, on January 7 and 8 next year, when District Judge Samuel Goozee is scheduled to hear closing arguments from both sides before he hands down his judgment a few weeks later.

At the last hearing in the case on November 3, Judge Goozee heard the arguments for and against the admissibility of certain witness statements provided by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and Enforcement Directorate (ED) and ruled that the evidence to establish a prima facie case of fraud and money laundering against the fugitive diamondaire is broadly admissible.

— PTI

### SPACE | RESOURCES

Research may radically change logistics of future missions to the Red Planet and beyond

# Novel system can extract oxygen, fuel from Mars water

**Washington, Dec. 1:** A team led by an Indian-origin scientist in the US has developed a new system that can extract oxygen and hydrogen fuel from the salty water on Mars, and may radically change the logistics of future missions to the Red Planet and beyond.

The researchers noted that Mars is very cold, and water that is not frozen is almost certainly full of salt from the Martian soil, which lowers its freezing temperature. Using electricity to break the briny

water down into oxygen and hydrogen fuel requires removing the salt, which is a cumbersome and a costly endeavour in a harsh, dangerous martian environment, they said.

The team, led by Vijay Ramani, a professor at the Washington University in the US, examined the new system in a simulated Martian atmosphere at minus 36 degrees Celsius. "Our Martian brine electrolyser radically changes the logistical calculus of missions to Mars and beyond. This technology is equally

useful on Earth where it opens up the oceans as a viable oxygen and fuel source," said Ramani.

In 2008, NASA's Phoenix Mars Lander "touched and tasted" Martian water, vapours from melted ice dug up by the lander. Since then, the European Space Agency's Mars Express has discovered several underground ponds of water which remain in a liquid state thanks to the presence of magnesium perchlorate salt.

In the journal *Proceedings of the National Acad-*

● **IN 2008, NASA'S Phoenix Mars Lander "touched and tasted" Martian water. Since then, the European Space Agency's Mars Express has discovered several underground ponds of water which remain in a liquid state thanks to the presence of magnesium perchlorate salt.**

*emy of Sciences (PNAS),* the researchers noted that in order to live — even

temporarily — on Mars, not to mention to return to Earth, astronauts will need to manufacture some of the necessities, including water and fuel, on the Red Planet.

NASA's Perseverance rover is en-route to Mars, carrying instruments that will use high-temperature electrolysis. However, the Mars Oxygen In-Situ Resource Utilisation Experiment (MOXIE) will be producing oxygen only, from the carbon dioxide in the air. The system developed in Ramani's lab can produce

25 times more oxygen than MOXIE using the same amount of power, said the researchers, adding it also produces hydrogen, which could be used to fuel astronauts' trip home.

"Our novel brine electrolyser incorporates a lead ruthenate pyrochlore anode developed by our team in conjunction with a platinum on carbon cathode" Ramani said. "These carefully designed components coupled with the optimal use of traditional electrochemical engineering principles has yielded this

high performance," he said. The careful design and unique anode allow the system to function without the need for heating or purifying the water source, the researchers said. "Paradoxically, the dissolved perchlorate in the water, so-called impurities, actually help in an environment like that of Mars," said Shrihari Sankarasubramanian, a research scientist in Ramani's group and joint first author of the research paper on the study.

— PTI



## quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	44,655.44	1.15
Nifty 50	13,109.05	1.08
S&P 500*	3,669.50	1.32
Dollar (₹)	73.63	0.56
Pound Sterling (₹)	98.54	0.13
Euro (₹)	88.06	0.23
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	48,273.45	0.09
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	47.51	-0.37
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.930	0.019
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.914	0.072

\* As of 8:30 PM IST

## UK retailer Debenhams to be liquidated

British department store retailer Debenhams is to be liquidated after failing to find a buyer, administrators FRP Advisory said. It said it would start a wind-down of Debenhams, whilst continuing to seek offers for all or parts of the business. The collapse of Debenhams, which trades from 124 UK stores and employs 12,000, came a day after Philip Green's Arcadia fashion group entered administration.

## Sinha to head group strategy at Mahindra



Mahindra Group announced the appointment of Bain & Co. veteran Amit Sinha as president, group strategy. It said Sinha will work with the group businesses to help drive growth and returns. "He will also oversee synergy, risk and economist functions and play a key role in coordinating international synergies between Americas, Asia Pacific and Africa." Sinha will report to Anish Shah, deputy MD and Group CFO.

## Paytm waives merchant transaction fee

Paytm said it will waive all charges on merchant transactions, and enable its merchant partners to accept payments from Paytm wallet, UPI apps and RuPay cards at zero charges. Paytm will absorb Rs 600 crore in MDR charges annually by banks and other charges to support MSMEs during the ongoing pandemic, a statement said. This initiative will benefit over 17 million merchants on the Paytm ecosystem.

## PLI schemes for drugs, devices get good response

Production-linked incentive (PLI) schemes for bulk drugs and medical devices have received a positive response from the industry, the Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers said. For the PLI scheme for bulk drugs, 215 applications have been received from 83 pharmaceutical manufacturers. The PLI scheme for medical devices attracted 28 applications from 23 medical device manufacturers.

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# ■ Manufacturing PMI at 56.3 in November GST collections cross ₹1-L crore mark again

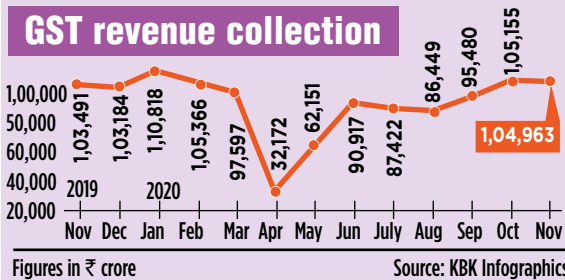
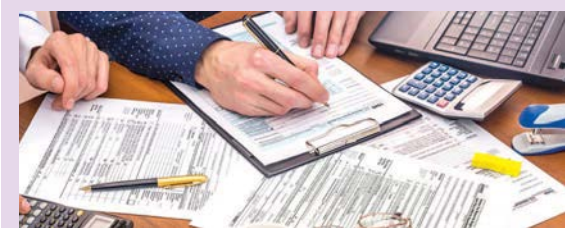
MADHUSUDAN SAHOO  
NEW DELHI, DEC.1

Goods and services tax (GST) collections rose for the third month in a row in November, recording a mop-up of nearly at Rs 1.05 lakh crore, government data released on Tuesday showed.

After marking year-on-year contraction during the April-August period, gross GST receipts have been showing a positive trend from September, indicating economic recovery in line with the lifting of lockdown restrictions across the country.

The November 2020 collections of Rs 1,04,963 crore were higher than Rs 1.03 lakh crore recorded in November 2019 but lower by Rs 192 crore compared to October 2020 figures.

In last month's mop-up, the share of CGST was Rs 19,189 crore and IGST was Rs 25,540 crore. IGST and cess amounted to Rs 51,992 crore and Rs 8,242 crore,



respectively. The total number of GSTR-3B returns filed for the month was 82 lakh, the finance ministry said in a statement.

However, manufacturing activity showed a decline in November from the decadal high recorded by the Nikkei Manufacturing

Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) in October.

As per the survey compiled by IHS Markit, Manufacturing PMI declined to 56.3 in November from October's 58.9, still remaining well above the 50-level separating growth from contrac-

tion for the fourth month. "Growth in the Indian manufacturing sector lost momentum in November, but the latest PMI reading was still consistent with a sharp rate of expansion. There were slower increases in factory orders, exports, buying levels and output," the survey noted.

Commenting on the index, Pollyanna De Lima, economics associate director at IHS Markit, said, "Although the softening of rates of expansion seen in the latest month does not represent a major setback, since these are down from over decade highs in October, a spike in Covid-19 cases and the possibility of associated restrictions could undermine the recovery. The companies noted that the pandemic was the key factor weighing on growth during November, with Covid-related uncertainty also restricting business confidence."

## Businesses expect quicker return to profitability

New Delhi, Dec. 1: Indian businesses expect a quicker return to pre-Covid levels of profitability than most others, and are positive about international trade, says a survey.

According to HSBC's annual Navigator survey, which covered more than 10,000 companies across 39 global markets, including 350 firms from India, Indian businesses continue

to have an appetite for growth and investment.

As per the survey, 87 per cent of Indian businesses, notably higher than the global average (73 per cent), expect to return to pre-Covid levels of profitability within two years, by the end of 2022.

Besides, 90 per cent of Indian businesses intend to increase financial investment to become

more successful over the next year, notably higher than the global average of 67 per cent.

On business outlook, almost half (45 per cent) of the surveyed Indian businesses are optimistic about business growth, far higher than the global average of 29 per cent.

"The overall business sentiment is understandably muted, given the chal-

lenging environment over the course of the year. However, we are witnessing signs of recovery as companies are charting new pathways to recovery," said Rajat Verma, head of commercial banking, HSBC India.

The outlook towards international trade is positive with 93 per cent of Indian firms (against 72 per cent globally). —PTI

## DELHI AIRPORT GETS 2 MN LOCAL PASSENGERS IN OCT.

Mumbai, Dec. 1: The Delhi airport on Tuesday said it handled about 2 million domestic passengers in October on the back of festive season travel demand, and it expects to return to pre-lockdown volumes soon.

Besides, the airport witnessed a healthy growth in international passenger numbers, achieving the one-million passenger mark in October since the resumption of air services from May 25, the Delhi International Airport Ltd (DIAL) said in a release. The airport has witnessed a significant rise in passenger footfall ever since air services resumed after the two-months long lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

It handled around 1.9 million domestic passengers in October, which is about 42 per cent of the pre-Covid domestic traffic handled, DIAL said.

With demand for air travel getting a boost in the wake of festive season of Navratri, Diwali and Chhath Puja, Mumbai, Patna, Srinagar, Bengaluru, Hyderabad have emerged as the top five domestic destinations, it said.

—PTI

## Festivals, wedding season aid car sales

MICHAEL GONSALVES  
PUNE, DEC. 1

Car sales, an indication of healthy economy, has seen a sharp turnaround from the Covid-19 led slowdown earlier this year, primarily due to a strong boost from good festive demand, upcoming wedding season, and soft base due to the overlapping of Diwali in November this year.

Sales in November at Hyundai, India's second biggest car maker sold 9.4 per cent more cars, Tata Motors 108 per cent, Kia Motor 50 per cent, Mahindra and Mahindra 24 per cent and Toyota Kirloskar Motor 2.4 per cent, Honda Cars 55 per cent, MG Motors 28 per cent more cars.

Sales at Hyundai Motor jumped 9.4 per cent at 48,800 units. "Building on the strong sales momentum that was driven by festive demand this year, the recently introduced i20 has helped carry forward the festive momentum even in the post-Diwali period," Tarun Garg, director (sales, marketing and service at Hyundai Motor India, said.

Tata Motors, India's

largest automaker by revenues, sold whopping 108 per cent more cars at 21,641 units last month, up from 10,400 units it sold last year.

Kia Motors saw 50 per cent year-on-year growth at 21,022 units last month. Kia Sonet sold 11,417 units.

"While there is still a lot of uncertainty in the market due to the pandemic, the overall consumer sentiment has significantly improved...We are expecting the market sentiment to improve more in coming months," Kookhyun Shim, MD and CEO at Kia Motors India, said.

Mahindra and Mahindra sold 24 per cent more cars at 18,212 units last month.

Maruti Suzuki, India's biggest car maker, which sells one out of two cars bought in the country, sold 135,775 units in November.

Sales at Honda Cars shot up 55 per cent at 9,990 units last month while Toyota Kirloskar Motor sold 8,508 units. MG Motor, which overtook Ford in the sales rankings for the first time in November, retailed 4,163 units, a rise of 28.5 per cent.

## Gas use returns to pre-Covid level

SHWETHA SUNIL &  
DEBJIT CHAKRABORTY  
DEC. 1

India's natural gas demand has rebounded to above pre-pandemic levels amid the country's drive to boost consumption of the cleanest fossil fuel to rid the skies of toxic smog.

Demand is rising across several sectors, especially city gas, fertilisers and petrochemicals, with long-haul transport poised to start using LNG in trucks, said E.S. Ranganathan, marketing director of Gail India Ltd, the nation's biggest gas utility. Consumption in October was above 2019 levels for the first time since June. The rebound comes as

Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeks to double gas's share to 15 per cent of the country's energy mix by 2030. The country, which the World Bank said in 2016 was home to 14 of the 30 most polluted cities on the planet, will see \$60 billion in investment in new pipelines and import facilities to increase use of the fuel.

"India's gas consumption has already surpassed pre-Covid levels," Ranganathan said in an interview. "All the big industries have actually come back full swing." The rebound comes after pandemic lockdowns sapped demand, forcing Gail to cancel one US cargo and postpone another from Gazprom PJSC,

which will now arrive this month, he said.

Meanwhile, rival Indian gas importers - including Indian Oil Corp. and Gujarat State Petroleum Corp. - have jumped back into the LNG spot market recently, issuing tenders seeking prompt shipments.

India has aggressively auctioned out areas for city-gas supplies covering 70 per cent of its population while starting LNG fuel stations on highways and industrial areas to convert diesel-guzzling trucks and mining vehicles. Oil refineries alone will boost consumption to 50 million cubic meters a day by 2025 from about 10 million now, Ranganathan said. —Bloomberg

## Consumer durables set to become costlier

SANGEETHA G  
CHENNAI, DEC. 1



After aggressive price cuts for the online channels during the festive season, consumer durables will soon see prices moving northwards. Prices may go up by 8-15 per cent across categories in a month or two.

"With higher commodity prices, input cost has gone up by around 15 per cent. Prices of aluminum, zinc, copper have gone up and MDI foam prices are up 200 per cent. While washing machines and air conditioners might see 7-8 per cent price rise, refrigerator and chest freezer prices may go up by even 15 per cent due to higher MDI prices," said Kamal Nandi, president, Consumer Electronics and Appliances Manufacturers Association.

MDI, or methylenediphenyl diisocyanate, is used in the production of polyurethanes.

According to Emkay Global Financial Services, on an average, copper prices have increased 20 per cent over last year and 4.5 per cent over the previous quarter. Aluminum prices have inched up 12 per cent and polypropylene prices have also rebounded 8.5 per cent over the previous quarter.

In the next one to two months, prices of consumer durables will move up as the companies have considerably reduced their inventory levels during the festive season. Most of the consumer durable companies had resorted to price cuts for the online channel during the festive season in order to clear inventory. The price cuts were evident in air conditioners, washing machines and refrigerators.

While there were no major price changes in the offline channel, brands have resorted to aggressive pricing online, says Emkay. As a result, online channels saw strong growth in white goods, with a large number of shoppers coming from tier 2 towns. Footfalls for large format retail stores saw a single digit decline as mall-based stores continued to see challenges during the festive season.

Refrigerators and ACs were the most impacted category due to the lockdown, as it coincided with the peak summer season. Brands had adopted aggressive online pricing in May and June and then during the festive season to clear off old inventory and start fresh for the next summer season.

According to Emkay, on an average, there has been an 11 per cent price decline in the category against last year, with LG, Panasonic, Lloyd, Daikin and Whirlpool reducing

prices in the range of 13-22 per cent and Voltas by 6.2 per cent.

In washing machines, there were steep price cuts in entry-level semi-automatic washing machines as demand for them has been low. Semi-automatic category, on average, saw 14 per cent price cuts. Voltas Beko had the most aggressive pricing for both categories of washing machine. The fully-automatic segment saw minimal price cuts of 2 to 3 per cent. While all the brands in the front-load category implemented price cuts, Haier went for a price increase of 7 per cent over last year.

According to Eric Braganza, president, Haier Appliances India, without resorting to price cut, the brand saw good growth. "October saw 25 per cent growth in sales over last October and October and November combined grew by 38 per cent. We usually do not go for any price cut as customers see the value proposition," he said.

The refrigerator category witnessed high-double digit demand growth this festive season.

## ETFs gaining traction, MFs' profit may get affected

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD  
MUMBAI, DEC. 1



Passive investment in equity indices-based exchange traded funds (ETFs) have beaten investment skills of all fund managers in the pandemic period, with Sensex and Nifty ETFs' giving returns above 70 per cent.

Investment in ETFs by pension funds like the Employee Provident Fund Organisation—which were hard-pressed to pay high interest of as much as 8.5 per cent on contributions in FY20—are now sitting pretty with market value of their investments hitting all-time highs.

Reports say mutual funds are now getting robust inflows in ETFs while there is profit taking in other equity funds. This may dent their profitability going ahead as ETFs are cost-effective for investors compared to traditional equity funds where asset management fees are higher.

ETF/index funds continue to gain traction as

slipped to underperforming," HDFC Securities added.

FY21 (till date) ETF net inflows continue to be robust at Rs 27,310 crore, while active equity assets continued to witness outflows of Rs 20,480 crore. Gross SIP flows have declined 9.7 per cent since March-20 to Rs 7,800 crore in October 2020 as uncertain markets tested investors' nerves.

The brokerage said it expects flows to improve as markets stabilise and individuals invest in tax savings schemes over the fourth quarter.

"Passive ETF plus index funds are gaining traction. Passive funds individual AUM has displayed phenomenal growth at FY15-FY21 (Sep20) at CAGR of 59.0 per cent to Rs 21,300 crore. Strong traction from individual investors has resulted in a robust folio growth at CAGR of 64.8 per cent. We continue to keenly watch this space as any sustained growth in this segment can dent profitability," the report said.

## Wockhardt UK lends facility for vaccine supply



RAVI RANJAN PRASAD  
MUMBAI, DEC. 1

The UK government has reserved one fill and finish production line at Wockhardt UK, a subsidiary of Indian drug maker Wockhardt, for its exclusive use for 18 months in order to guarantee the supply of vaccines required to fight against Covid-19.

On November 30 Wockhardt UK hosted a visit at its Wrexham facility in North Wales of the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Boris Johnson.

Wockhardt UK specialises in the supply of generic and speciality medicines and is one of the leading suppliers to the National Health Service of the United Kingdom.

Founder chairman of Wockhardt Habil Khorakiwala said, "The visit by the Prime Minister of the UK demonstrates our global strength in sterile injectable facilities."

## NEW PRESS SECY FOR RAMGARHIA BOARD

Patiala, Dec. 1: M a n m o h a n Singh, under secretary-public relations, Punjab State Power Corporation Limited, has been appointed as spokesman-cum-press secretary, All-India Ramgarhia Board. Mohan Singh, president of the Board, welcomed

Business NOTE  
Mamohan Singh and hoped that he would project the social welfare activities of the Ramgarhia community.



SHORT TAKES

Hamilton tests Covid-19 positive

**Sakhir, Bahrain:** The Mercedes-AMG Petronas F1 Team says seven-time world champion Lewis Hamilton has tested positive for Covid-19 and will miss the Sakhir Grand Prix this weekend.

The team issued a statement saying Hamilton was tested three times last week and returned a negative result each time, the last on Sunday afternoon at the Bahrain International Circuit where he won the Grand Prix.

“He woke up on Monday morning with mild symptoms and was informed at the same time that a contact prior to arrival in Bahrain had subsequently tested positive,” the team said.

“Lewis, therefore, took a further test and returned a positive result. This has since been confirmed by a retest. Hamilton is in isolation in accordance with the health protocols in Bahrain. Apart from mild symptoms, he is otherwise fit and well, and the entire team sends him its very best wishes for a swift recovery,” the team statement said. — *AP*

Bach unopposed in bid for 2nd term

**Lausanne:** Thomas Bach will stand unopposed to serve a second term as International Olympic Committee president, the body said on Tuesday.

Bach, a 66-year-old German lawyer, is set to be confirmed for a second and final four-year term at an IOC session in March in Athens.

Bach was initially elected for an eight-year term as Olympic chief in September 2013, taking over from Belgian Jacques Rogge. If re-elected, Bach's term will end in 2025, a year after the Paris Olympics.

The next term for the IOC presidency will start after the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, which will now take place from July 23-Aug 8, 2021, having been postponed because of the coronavirus pandemic. — *AFP*

Olympic rings back in Tokyo Bay

**Tokyo:** The five Olympic rings are back in Tokyo Bay.

They were removed for maintenance four months ago shortly after the Tokyo Olympics were postponed until next year because of the Covid-19 pandemic. The rings arrived on Tuesday after a short cruise from Yokohama and are positioned on a barge in the shadow on Tokyo's Rainbow Bridge.

The rings painted blue, black, red, green, and yellow are gigantic. They stand about 15 meters tall and 33 meters in length about 50 feet tall and 100 feet in length. The rings will be lighted at night and herald the coming of the Olympics, which are to open on July 23, 2021. — *AP*

Lopez banned 8 years for fixing

**London:** Spanish tennis player Enrique Lopez was banned for eight years on Tuesday for fixing matches at tournaments in 2017. The Tennis Integrity Unit said Lopez cannot play in or attend any officially recognized tournament while banned. He was fined 25,000.

The 29-year-old Lopez reached a career high singles ranking of No. 154 in 2018, though never qualified for the main draw at a Grand Slam event. His best doubles ranking was No. 135.

The TIU said three charges of match fixing were proven and two charges were not proven. The tournaments Lopez tried to corrupt were not identified. — *AP*

Live on TV

CRICKET

Australia vs India: Third ODI from 9.10 am on Sony Six, Ten 1, HD

FOOTBALL

Indian Super League: Hyderabad FC vs Jamshepur from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

Champions League: Istanbul Basaksehir vs RB Leipzig from 11.25 pm on Sony Ten 2; Manchester United vs PSG from 1.30 am (Thursday) on Sony Ten 2; Ferencváros vs Barcelona from 1.30 am (Thursday) on Sony Ten 1; Juventus vs Dynamo Kyiv from 1.30 am (Thursday) on Sony Six; Sevilla vs Chelsea from 1.30 am (Thursday) on Sony Ten 3

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Third time lucky?

India look to salvage pride in third ODI against Oz

**Canberra, Dec. 1:** Left chasing shadows in the first two games, a listless Indian team would most certainly tweak their bowling combination in order to avoid a second successive clean-sweep when they take on Australia in the third and final ODI here on Wednesday.

A 0-3 defeat against Australia would be their second rout in consecutive ODI series having met the same fate in New Zealand earlier this year.

“We are very much determined to go out there to win the next match and see that it's not a clean sweep,” top-order batsman Shreyas Iyer said when asked what his team can do to stop Australia's first in 20 years.

“Our bowlers are really positive with their work ethic and we could see that during training, a few of the bowlers practising with certain plans,” he added.

The first two games turned out to be run-fests in which Australia out-batted Virat Kohli's men and before they switch over to the T20 series, a win at the picturesque Manuka Oval could do their confidence a world of good.

Skipper Kohli has been the first to admit that they have been “out-played” in the two games and it is expected that some corrective measures will be taken in order to get their campaign back on track.

Navdeep Saini, India's fastest bowler, like a lot of others on his first tour of Australia, has looked clueless.

It could well be possible that one among Shardul Thakur, with an experience of 27 international games, or the ‘yorker sensation’ rookie left-armar Thangarasu Natarajan will be seen replacing Saini.

In case of Natarajan, it could be his international debut. — *PTI*



India captain Virat Kohli (left) talks with teammate Mohammed Shami during the second One-Day International match against Australia at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Friday. — *AP*

Iyer glad that Oz have plan against him

**Canberra, Dec. 1:** Overwhelmed that the Australians devised a short ball strategy against him, Indian batsman Shreyas Iyer says it can best be tackled by adopting a counter-offensive approach and taking advantage of the field placing.

Josh Hazlewood got Iyer into a tangle with a well-directed bouncer in the first ODI while he gave a better account of himself in the second game where

he scored 38 off 36 balls.

“I am really happy that they are coming up with a plan (against me),” Iyer said on the eve of the inconsequential third ODI when asked about the home team peppering him with short-pitched stuff.

“I feel overwhelmed and take it as a challenge. But I thrive under pressure and it motivates me to go against them. I feel it (a short leg and leg gully) helps to take advantage

● **Hazlewood got Iyer into a tangle with a well-directed bouncer in the first ODI while he gave a better account of himself in the second game where he scored 38 off 36 balls.**

and score more runs and make best use of it.”

Playing the short stuff

is all about mind-set for Iyer along with the adjustment while batting at the nets.

“It's all about mind-set that you need to adjust. How you need to place yourself on the wicket. Rather than bending down too much (during stance), you stand upright. It easier to pick up the short one.

“I have set a pattern for myself. Every time I play, I give myself a little bit of time and get set.” — *PTI*

Langer feels Warner paves way for others to grab slot

**Canberra, Dec. 1:** A groin injury has ruled David Warner out of at least the first Test against India and Australia coach Justin Langer says the temporarily vacant opening slot will go to the one who performs well for Australia in the upcoming tour games against the visitors.

The Australian cricket fraternity has been debating about Warner's opening partner in the Test series with a few backing the struggling Joe Burns to keep his place while others want the young William Pucovski to open.

However, the injury to Warner has changed the scenario and has created a situation where both Burns and Pucovski could open.

Langer said, it has



David Warner

taken “a bit of pressure off”.

“No wonder I'm a bit more relaxed. We've won a few games and I don't have to worry about who we're going to pick for the Test side,” Langer was quoted as saying by the Australian media after the team arrived

here for the third ODI.

Australia A will lock horns with India A from December 6 and against senior Indian team on December 11 in Sydney before the Test series.

“I've said it so many times, the hardest part of the job is selecting the teams, but we've got an Australia A game starting in a few days and it'll be a good opportunity for those guys against the Indian A side to put their hand up.

“And then after that is another Australia A game versus the actual Indian Test side at the SCG under lights with a pink ball,” Langer said.

“We'll work out who's going to play in that game and certainly there's huge opportunities for people to put their hand up.” — *PTI*

CAPTAIN FINCH STANDS FOR STRUGGLING STARC

**Canberra, Dec. 1:** Top pacer Mitchell Starc's patchy form is among the few worries for a rampaging Australia in the ongoing series against India but skipper Aaron Finch on Tuesday threw his weight behind the seasoned campaigner, saying there is no need to panic just yet.

The left-arm seamer, who has an outstanding record with the new ball in white-ball cricket, has been far from his best in the ongoing series against India. In the two ODIs, Starc has managed to claim just one wicket while giving away 147 runs in 18 overs. Australia won both the games.

“He hasn't been at his very best, and you have to understand his standards are a lot higher than what you expect from most other people because of how dominant he's been over

the last eight or nine years, especially in the white-ball formats,” Finch said.

“He'd love to be swinging the ball and getting it right early on, but the reality is when you're defending big totals and playing against good players, they're coming hard at you,” he added.

With star pacer Pat Cummins rested for the final ODI, Finch said there will be discussions on how to use Starc.

“So, there'll be conversations today about what we can do slightly different.

“We'll chat about that today. But, definitely no panic stations here from my point of view,” Finch said.

Since the World Cup last year, Starc has endured a dip in form. The pacer has picked just 12 wickets while bleeding runs at an economy of 6.28 in 11 matches. — *PTI*

Mumbai sweep aside East Bengal

**Goa, Dec. 1:** A thumping 3-0 victory over newcomers SC East Bengal helped Mumbai City FC climb top of the Hero Indian Super League table at the GMC Stadium here on Tuesday.

Hugo Boumous assisted all three goals as a brace from Adam Le Fondre (20', 48') and a strike from Hernan Santana (58') saw Mumbai register their second straight win with SCEB yet to open their account.

Mumbai made four changes from their 1-0 win against FC Goa, with Ahmed Jahouh returning to the eleven. Meanwhile, SCEB made two changes to the side that lost the Kolkata derby.

SCEB suffered a huge blow early on as defender Daniel Fox was replaced by Mohammad Rafique.

Mumbai had the opportunity to break the deadlock in the 10th minute but they failed to convert.

Six minutes later, Mumbai goalkeeper Amrinder Singh was also called into action. Rafique pounced on a misplaced pass from Jahouh before firing a shot from long range that was kept away by Amrinder. But it didn't take long for Mumbai to grab the lead. Mumbai won the ball outside their own box and Rowlin Borges provided a sublime diagonal ball towards Boumous on the left. The Frenchman displayed brilliant compo-

HYDERABAD FC LOOK TO EXTEND UNBEATEN RUN

**Vasco, Dec. 1:** Hyderabad FC will look to continue their unbeaten run when they play their third game in 10 days, taking on Jamshedpur FC in an Indian Super League match here on Wednesday.

While the league has seen a series of draws over the weekend, Hyderabad and Jamshedpur are coming into the game on the back of contrasting form.

While Hyderabad are unbeaten in two games to be currently placed at the fourth position, Owen Coyle's Jamshedpur are ninth in the table.

JFC played two eventful games so far a season opening 1-2 loss to Chennaiyin FC followed by a 2-2 draw against Odisha FC on Sunday. — *PTI*

sure in the box to beat his marker and find Le Fondre, who made an easy tap in.

The Islanders continued to dominate the game after taking the lead.

— *Agencies*

PELEGRINI'S BETIS LOSE AGAIN IN LIGA

**Seville, Dec. 1:** Eibar defeated Real Betis 2-0 in the Spanish league, handing Manuel Pellegrini's team their fifth loss in six matches.

Japan forward Yoshinori Muto and Esteban Burgos scored five minutes apart early in the second half to give Eibar the away victory.

The Basque Country club moved to 12th place, while Betis dropped to 15th after their third defeat in a row. It was outscored 17-5 in their last six games, with their only win against promoted Elche.

Pellegrini has been trying to rebuild his team without Spain midfielder Sergio Canales, who injured a tendon two weeks ago with the national side and is expected to be out until next year.

Eibar has lost only one of their last seven games. They won in Seville despite playing without defender Paulo Oliveira and forward Quique Gonz lez because of injuries, and without striker Kike Garcia because of a suspension. — *AP*



Fulham's Ademola Lookman (left) celebrates with Andre-Frank Zambo Anguissa after scoring against Leicester City in their English Premier League match at King Power Stadium in Leicester on Monday. — *AFP*

Fulham escape relegation zone

**London, Dec. 1:** The first ballooned over the cross-bar. The second was a dreadful attempt at a “Panenka” that flopped into the goalkeeper's arms. The third flew off target because of an unfortunate slip.

Three embarrassing penalty misses have summed up Fulham's miserable start to life back in the English Premier League, so hopes weren't exactly high when the team was awarded another against Leicester on Monday.

This time, no mistake. Ivan Cavaleiro one of the spot kick culprits from previous matches stepped up and curled his effort high into the net for a goal that ultimately proved the winners at King Power Stadium.

A 2-1 victory was only Fulham's second in 10 games since promotion

back to the top-flight and it lifted the team out of the relegation zone.

It also ended Fulham's penalty nightmare.

“I didn't feel pressure,” said Cavaleiro, who slipped before shanking a penalty over the bar in last week's 3-2 home loss to Everton.

“That happens in football and the manager just gave me confidence to take it and I did.”

A penalty proved to be pivotal in Monday's late match, with Aston Villa striker Ollie Watkins hitting the bar with a second-half effort to allow West Ham to hold on for a 2-1 win at their Olympic Stadium and climb to fifth place. Watkins also had a stoppage-time goal ruled out by the video assistant referee when his outstretched arm was adjudged to have made him offside before he turned in a cross from the left. — *AP*

Next year's World T20 could be shifted to UAE

**Karachi, Dec 1:** Pakistan Cricket Board CEO Wasim Khan feels next year's ICC World T20 could be shifted to the UAE as “some element of uncertainty” still remains over whether India would be in a position to host the event because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

“There is still some uncertainty over the World T20 being held in India yes because of the Covid situation there. It could be in UAE,” Khan said in an interview to the *Cricknet Baaz* YouTube channel.

Reminded that India had planned to host a home series against England and also the IPL in the first quarter of

● **The ICC has awarded the 2021 World T20 to India and Australia will now host the 2022 edition with the 50-over World Cup also scheduled to be held in India in 2023.**

2021, Khan said a clear picture would come only by April.

The ICC has awarded the 2021 World T20 to India and Australia will now host the 2022 edition with the 50-over World Cup also scheduled to be held in India in 2023.

Khan also reiterated that the PCB was wait-

ing for a written confirmation from the ICC and BCCI by January on issuance of visas to the Pakistan squad for the World T20 in India.

“Yes Mani *Sahab* (PCB chief Ehsan Mani) has written to them and requested them that given the state of relations between India and Pakistan, it would be best if the ICC and BCCI gives a written assurance about the visas being issued to us,” Khan said.

He also disclosed that an online meeting of the Asian Cricket Council last week had tentatively set June as the time to host the postponed Asia Cup in Sri Lanka. — *PTI*

SHAH RUKH INVESTS IN USA CRICKET LEAGUE

**Kolkata, Dec. 1:** Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan's Knight Riders Group, on Tuesday, announced their foray into the untapped US cricket market investing in development of Major League Cricket with a multi-million dollar T20 tournament.

As per the deal, Knight Riders, will join hands with American Cricket Enterprises (ACE) to become a stakeholder in development of the sport in the region.

“For several years now, we have been expanding the Knight Riders brand globally and closely watching the potential for T20 cricket in the USA,” Shah Rukh, the principal owner of the Knight Riders group, said in a media statement. — *PTI*