



Terror plot to attack temple in J&K's Poonch foiled; 3 held

Page 10



R.C.P. Singh is JD(U) president as Nitish Kumar leaves post

Page 9



Sri Lankan police seize 20,000 kg turmeric 'smuggled from India'

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Ajinkya Rahane's fine, unbeaten century helps India take the lead

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NEARBY



Kejriwal asks Centre to repeal farm laws

NEW DELHI
Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday visited the Singhu border and addressed the farmers. He demanded that the Central government repeal the farm laws, guarantee MSP and end the struggle of the farmers.

CITY ▶ PAGE 2

Allahabad HC reunites interfaith couple in Etah

LUCKNOW
The Allahabad High Court has reunited an interfaith couple in Etah, observing that since the woman had attained the age of majority, she has a choice to live her life on her own terms and with her husband without any restriction or hindrance by others.

NEWS ▶ PAGE 10

More time to renew RC, driving licence

NEW DELHI
The Union Ministry of Road Transport and Highways on Sunday said it had issued an advisory to the States and Union Territories to extend the validity of vehicle-related documents, including driving licence, vehicle registration certificate and permits, till March 31, 2021.

NEWS ▶ PAGE 10

EDUCATIONPLUS ▶ PAGE 5

Farmers protest during airing of PM Modi's *Mann ki Baat*

Lawyer from Punjab commits suicide at stir site

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

A 55-year-old advocate from Punjab died in yet another case of alleged suicide at the farmers' agitation site in Tikri and demonstrations were held at several places across the country, with protesters clanging utensils and oil tins during the airing of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's *Mann Ki Baat* programme on Sunday. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, however, reiterated at a government function in Himachal Pradesh that no one could take away farmers' land through contract farming.

Farm leaders, meanwhile, said there had been no official response to their proposal for talks on December 29.

Amarjit Singh, a lawyer from Fazilka district, allegedly consumed a poisonous substance at Bahadurgarh and was declared dead at the Post-Graduate Institute of Medical Sciences in Rohtak.

"We are waiting for his family to come to ascertain the cause behind him taking the extreme step. We are not in the possession of any suicide note," said Inspector Surender Kumar, Station House Officer, Sadar Bahadurgarh.

Farmer unions, however,



Making a noise: Farmers beating oil tins during PM Modi's *Mann Ki Baat* programme at a protest against the farm laws at the Ghazipur border in New Delhi on Sunday. ▶ R.V. MOORTHY

Harsimrat flags dip in cotton purchase

Former Union Minister Harsimrat Kaur Badal on Sunday said apprehensions of farmers were already coming true in Punjab, with the Cotton Corporation of India (CCI) placing daily ceilings on the procurement of cotton. ▶ PAGE 9

claimed Amarjit left behind a suicide note in support of the agitation.

In a statement, the AIKSCC said farmers, workers and other sections of pe-

Nadda shares Rahul's speech on middlemen

BJP president J.P. Nadda on Sunday accused Congress leader Rahul Gandhi of playing politics over the farmers' protest, citing a 2015 speech by Mr. Gandhi where he spoke about the issue of middlemen in agriculture. ▶ PAGE 9

ople assembled and beat vessels in response to the call to clang vessels during Mr. Modi's *Mann Ki Baat* broadcast to protest against his indifference to farmers.

(Those in need of help can contact Sanjivini, Society for Mental Health over telephone: 011-4076 9002.)

176 more telecom towers vandalised

Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh's appeal to protesting farmers not to damage telecom infrastructure seems to have failed to deter new attacks, with over 176 sites being vandalised in the past 24 hours. ▶ PAGE 9

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8
SEE ALSO ▶ PAGE 2

Daily virus cases below 19,000 after 6 months

With 60 deaths, Maharashtra records the most casualties

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

India's daily new COVID-19 case load dropped below 19,000 after six months on Sunday, according to a release issued by the Health Ministry. "18,732 cases were added to the national tally in the last 24 hours. The new added cases were 18,653 on July 1. Also, 279 fatalities were reported in the past 24 hours," said the release.

The Ministry noted that 10 States/Union Territories account for 75.27% of new deaths, with Maharashtra registering the most casualties (60). West Bengal and Delhi follow with 33 and 23 daily deaths, respectively.

Lowest since July

As per the Health Ministry's data, India's total active case load has fallen to 2.78 lakh (2,78,690) currently. This is the lowest after 170 days. The total active cases were 2,76,682 on July 10.

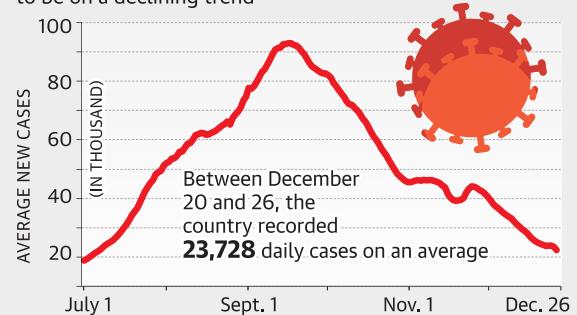
"The country has reported a trend of sustained decrease in the number of active cases. India's present active case load consists of 2.74% of India's total positive cases," said the release.

with 2,854 new cases. A total of 21,430 people recovered and were discharged in the last 24 hours.

Currently, 76.52% of the new cases are concentrated in 10 States and UTs, with Kerala reporting the highest daily new cases at 3,527. It is followed by Maharashtra

Easing burden

The number of daily COVID-19 cases in India continues to be on a declining trend



U.K. returnees test positive in Telangana

The number of people who had come to Telangana from the United Kingdom and tested positive for coronavirus has reached 20, with two more diagnosed with COVID-19 on Sunday. The two are from Medchal-Malkajgiri. ▶ PAGE 8

EU nations roll out mass vaccination

Europe launched a massive vaccination drive on Sunday with pensioners and medics lining up to take the first shots to see off the COVID-19 pandemic that has crippled economies and claimed more than 1.7 million lives worldwide. ▶ PAGE 11

try. "Kerala reported the maximum number of single day recoveries with 3,782, 1,861 people recovered in West Bengal, followed by 1,764 in Chhattisgarh. 72.37% of the new recovered cases are observed to be concentrated in 10 States/UTs," said the release.

LAC hotspots turn brand buzzwords in Valley

A Delhi-based shoemaker has leveraged the emotional connect to spur sales

PEERZADA ASHIQ
SRINAGAR

'Galwan', 'Pangong', and 'Finger 5' continue to remain flashpoints between India and China in eastern Ladakh, but for a Delhi-based shoe company these volatile locations have become money-spinners; a range of winter shoes named after them is flying off the shelves across the Kashmir Valley.

Earlier this month, the Valley's English and Urdu newspapers were splashed



Gaining popularity: Some of the models from the new range of winter shoes. ▶ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

with advertisements from the firm, John Mart, showcasing its new range with models named after the flashpoints, including

pitch has definitely spurred sales. "The branding does generate curiosity among the buyers and draws attention," he said.

The people of Kashmir are news buffs and these names resonate with them.

"One hears of 'Galwan' all through the year on television and suddenly, you get to flaunt the shoe of the same name – it does add to the machismo," said Sajad Ahmad, a gym trainer.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

'Galwan', 'Doklam', 'Kargil', and 'Point 5' among others. Wasim Ahmad, owner of Big Raja Footwear, a shop in Srinagar, says the marketing

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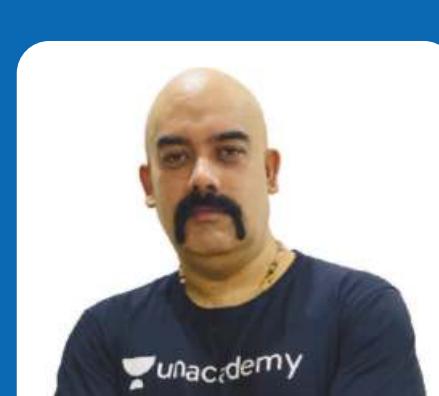
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THE ROSHNI ACT DECODED

The Act that sought to regularise unauthorised land might have sparked off a debate on the duty of a welfare state. Even as news of a new strain of the coronavirus emerges, there is another somewhat controversial subject that is making its way to the headlines: the Roshni Act. Though intended to benefit the people of Jammu and Kashmir, it has now gained ill repute.

TURN TO PAGE 9
TO READ MORE



DR. SIDHARTH ARORA

Shedding Light on the Roshni Act
December 29 | 7 PM
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The wrong call

Lured by lucrative salary packages, graduates are taking up jobs at fake call centres knowing full well what they are signing up for

SAURABH TRIVEDI
NEW DELHI

After graduating from a college in Lucknow, Kunal (name changed) was searching for a job in Delhi when his friend told him about a job in a call centre where he "could earn around ₹35,000 to ₹40,000 per month".

Unable to turn down the "lucrative offer", Kunal went for the interview and was selected. From day one, however, he was aware that he would be cheating people, but was assured that he would never be caught.

The Delhi Police Cybercrime Unit has recently arrested 96 people and busted fake call centres involved in multi-crore frauds.

The callers were impersonating law enforcement agency officials and had allegedly cheated over 8,000 foreign nationals, mainly from the United States. Most of the accused were graduates and had come to Delhi looking for a job.

DCP (Cyber Cell) Anyesh Roy said that a few of the accused, including women, even had MCA, BCA or BTech degrees.

By reference only

All of them were aware of the fraud they were involved in. "They were lured with attractive salary packages at the time of joining. They were offered around ₹25,000 a month and were hired only based on reference from existing employees of the call centre, who were paid around ₹40,000 every month," said Mr. Roy.

Over the last three years, the fake callers managed to dupe two-three people every day. The highest amount duped from a single victim was around \$45,000, he added.

"The salary of the shift manager at the call centre was ₹75,000 per month. For every USD that a victim was duped of, the caller would get ₹2 and the team leader/closer got ₹4 as incentive. Moreover, all employees were paid holiday and annual bonuses," said Mr. Roy.

A police officer said that during the lockdown, the callers worked from home and were paid holiday bonuses



The Delhi Police Cybercrime Unit recently arrested 96 people and busted fake call centres involved in multi-crore frauds. ■ PHOTO FOR REPRESENTATION PURPOSE ONLY

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ANYESH ROY
DCP (Cyber Cell)

for Christmas and New Year.

"The details of the social security number were easily available but it could only be accessed through a U.S. IP address. They used a virtual private network to access U.S. websites and data, including mobile numbers and email addresses," said the officer.

Modus operandi

The accused persons used to contact foreign nationals based in the U.S. and other countries.

They would impersonate officials of various law enforcement agencies and other government agencies such as the Social Security Administration, the Drug Enforcement Administration, U.S. Marshals Service, etc., and tell the victims that their bank accounts and other assets were frozen as their details had been found at a crime scene. The victims were then told that there are bank accounts running in their names and that illegal transactions had been made to drug cartels in Mexico and Colombia.

The callers then threatened the victims with "immediate arrest".

"Initial investigation has revealed that the owner of this call centre was managing the operations from Dubai, UAE. Further investigation is under way," said Mr. Roy.

He added that many such illegal call centres are operating from other cities in the country and that they have been keeping a tab on the activity of these centres.

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Kejriwal asks Centre to listen to farmers, end their struggle

An attempt is being made to hand over farming to big corporations: Delhi CM

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal visited the Singhu border on Sunday and participated in the 'Safar-e-Shahadat' Kirtan Darbaar. The event was organised by the Punjabi Academy of the Delhi government at the Guru Tegh Bahadur Memorial in the memory of the martyrdom of four *Sahibzaade* and Mata Gujri Kaurji.

Addressing the protesters, Mr. Kejriwal said over 40 people had so far died in the protest, which is a "fight for their survival". The Centre should repeal the farm laws immediately, guarantee the Minimum Support Price system and end the struggle of the farmers, he added.

"All of us are here today to worship Guru Gobind Singh Ji's *sahibzaade* and Mata Gujri Kaurji. I believe that we have never witnessed this level of martyrdom in the world. Our farmers from across the nation have gathered here at the Delhi border today and they are in dis-



Farmers protesting at the Singhu border in Delhi on Sunday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

tress," he said.

"Today, through this platform and at such a sacred place, I want to appeal to the Centre with folded hands to repeal the farm laws. These are our people. These are the people of our nation, listen to them, and end their struggle here. How many lives will you take?" he asked.

Farmers, who he alleged had been betrayed for the last 70 years by "all leaders

and political parties", are being called terrorists and anti-national. "Before elections, political parties used to promise that they would waive farmers' loans and give employment to farmers' children but neither ever happened," he added.

The Delhi Chief Minister said that through the three farm laws, an attempt was being made to "take farming away from farmers" and

Man chains himself to protest over farm laws

'Will free self when laws are repealed'

SAURABH TRIVEDI
NEW DELHI

Kabal Singh from Punjab's Fazilka on Sunday tied himself up with an iron chain to represent the "state of farmers in the county" after the imposition of farms laws passed by the Centre.

"The chains on my body represent the state of farmers in the country. We are just slaves for the government. If we were important to them then they would have withdrawn the laws that have been forcibly imposed upon farmers," said Mr. Singh, who has been protesting at the border for the past 20 days.

Mr. Singh is the sole breadwinner for his family that includes his wife, 13-year-old son and 86-year-old mother. "My mother's hip bone got dislocated when she was coming to Delhi in a tractor trolley. She had fallen from the trolley. She was taken to a hospital

by a group of protesters but I stayed at the border and kept protesting," he said.

He said his son is taking care of his grandmother, Balbir Kaur. "She has undergone operation and is on bed rest at home," he said, adding that he is waiting for the December 29 meeting between the farmers and the government. "After the outcome of the meeting, I will decide whether to stay or go back home," he said.

"I took ₹1 lakh loan from a local lender for my mother's treatment. But here I am paying back the debt of my motherland. Farmers are always in debt and they spend their entire life in struggle for existence," he said.

Mr. Singh added he will free himself from the chains only when the government repeals the new laws.

He hoped that his efforts to gain the attention of the Central government would not go to waste.

'PM Modi must listen to our Mann Ki Baat'

Hopeful of positive news on Dec. 29'

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Farmers protesting at Singhu, Tikri and Ghazipur borders banged utensils during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's monthly 'Mann Ki Baat' radio show on Sunday.

Last week, several farmer leaders had appealed to all citizens to bang utensils during the show to mark their protest against the three controversial farm laws.

The protesters said they are using the same formula that was used by PM Modi during the pandemic to felicitate frontline workers.

"We have come here not to hear PM Modi but to make him listen to us. He should listen to farmers' *maan ki baat*. It has been over one month since we started protesting. He is the Prime Minister, he should address our issues," said a protester from Gurdaspur, Amarpal Singh.

"Why are they [government] imposing the laws that will destroy farmers?

We are hopeful that the meeting with the government on December 29 will bring some positive news. But we won't be leaving the site until the farm laws are repealed and an Act is introduced for MSP," said Kuljeet Singh, a farmer from Ropar.

"If the laws are not repealed then we will not allow this anti-farmer government to function. We will keep protesting at every level to make PM Modi listen to us. Banging utensils is just a symbolic protest," said Ramandeep Singh, a farmer from Punjab.

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Timings
DELHI

MONDAY, DEC. 28
RISE 07:13 SET 17:34
16:07 SET 05:27
TUESDAY, DEC. 29
RISE 07:14 SET 17:34
16:53 SET 06:23
WEDNESDAY, DEC. 30
RISE 07:14 SET 17:35
17:46 SET 07:19

Delhi Weather max min
Delhi City 23 06
Safdarjung 23 06
Palam 20 08

Delhi Palam Today
20°C Shallow to moderate fog in morning. A pleasant day with sunny sky and cool winds.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow
19°C Foggy morning with cold wave condition at some places. A pleasant sunny day. Pollution level would improve.

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Raid on Pracha a very serious matter, lawyers tell Amit Shah

There is an emerging trend of investigating agencies intimidating advocates'

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Bar Council of Delhi (BCD) on Sunday wrote to Home Minister Amit Shah terming the raid on the office premises of advocate Mehmood Pracha "very serious".

The Council has demanded "immediate action" from the Home Minister.

Mr. Pracha is the legal representative for many of the people accused in cases connected to the north-east Delhi riots that broke out in February this year.

"There has been an understanding between the representatives of the Bar Association/Bar Council and the Delhi Police that in the event of any case against an advocate, the Bar Association/Bar Council representatives will be informed and taken into confidence," the Council said.

"This broader understanding is to maintain harmony and cordiality between the

Lawyers who are vocal about defending civil liberties are being systematically targeted

DELI HIGH COURT WOMEN LAWYERS' FORUM

rupts] independent discharge of responsibility by an advocate, as provided under the Constitution of India being integral part of the Justice Dispensation System, the Advocate Act, 1961, and the Bar Council of India Rules," the letter stated.

Meanwhile, the Delhi High Court Women Lawyers' Forum (DHCWLF) has written to the President of the Delhi High Court Bar Association expressing concerns over the alleged recent trend of intimidation of lawyers who are representing accused persons in the Delhi riot cases.

Deeply concerned

"We write to you as a group of lawyers who are deeply concerned about the recent instances where the investigating agency has been arraigning lawyers as accused in criminal cases," the DHCWLF said.

"Though, on the face of it,

the proceedings initiated against such lawyers are ostensibly independent of the matters being handled by the agency, but the pattern emerging from all such instances, where lawyers are being targeted, is hard to ignore," it added.

"Raids at Mr. Pracha's office is the latest example of such intimidation by the Delhi Police. Mr. Pracha is representing several accused persons in the riot cases. The recent trend indicates that there are other lawyers too who are being intimidated and discouraged from representing their clients in these cases," DHCWLF said.

"The larger issue is lawyers who are vocal about defending civil liberties are being systematically targeted. This is an act of vindictiveness on the part of the investigating agencies whose actions are preventing lawyers from carrying out their duties," it said.

Police told to preserve footage of raid

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

A court on Sunday directed the police to preserve the video footage of the search conducted at the premises of advocate Mehmood Pracha, a lawyer representing some of the accused in the north-east Delhi riot cases.

Duty Magistrate Udhav Kumar Jain, however, did not pass any order on whether to hand over a copy of the video to Mr. Pracha. The court directed its staff to preserve the entire video of the search with its seal and place it before the court concerned for necessary orders.

The court was hearing an application by Mr. Pracha in which he has alleged that he was threatened by the Investigating Officer (IO) that a false case would be registered against him.

The advocate further submitted that the entire search was videographed as per a court order and that he was entitled to a copy of the video footage.

Dip in hospitalised, isolated patients

Over 900 people recover in 24 hours

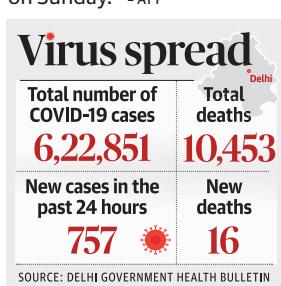
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The national capital recorded 757 new COVID-19 cases in the past 24 hours, taking the total to 6,22,851, according to a health bulletin released by the Delhi government on Sunday.

Sixteen more deaths were also reported in a single day, taking the death toll to 10,453. Out of the total cases, 6,05,685 patients have recovered and there are currently 6,713 active cases.

The test positivity on Sunday was 1.01%, and the death rate – based on data over the last ten days – was recorded at 2.85%. The number of containment zones in the city currently stands at 4,931. As per Delhi government records, the recovery rate in the city is currently at 97.24% with as many as 939 patients having recovered in the last 24 hours.

A dip was also reported in hospitalised patients and those under home isolation.



With 91 more patients discharged from hospitals, there are now 2,621 infected people hospitalised.

A total of 209 patients in home isolation also recovered, bringing the total number of such patients down to 3,335.

One dead, 2 hurt in road accident at Nehru Place

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

A 55-year-old man was killed and two others injured when a tempo and a truck collided in south-east Delhi's Nehru Place on Sunday, said the police.

The police said the truck driver had parked his vehicle on the road in a negligent way, obstructing traffic and resulting in the collision. A case under relevant sections of the IPC has been registered based on the statement of an eyewitness.

brought dead," said Deputy Commissioner of Police (Southeast) R.P. Meena.

Jaichand and Samsher, who were also in the tempo were sent to the hospital in an injured condition.

The police said the truck driver had parked his vehicle on the road in a negligent way, obstructing traffic and resulting in the collision. A case under relevant sections of the IPC has been registered based on the statement of an eyewitness.

Court provides relief to man applying for Sub-Inspector job

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court has observed that reservations cannot be given with one hand and taken away by another – through invoking technicalities, and forgetting the hardship and difficulties faced by such members in accomplishing the smallest of the

things, including literacy and awareness.

A Bench of Justices Rajiv Sahai Endlaw and Asha Meena made the remarks while directing the government to allow a Scheduled Tribe man to submit his height relaxation certificate for recruitment as Sub-Inspector in Delhi Police, Central Armed Police Forces, and Assistant Sub-Inspector in Central Industrial Security Force.

Lekhraj Meena had cleared the Computer-Based Examination (Paper-I) and Physical Standard Test (PST)

during the recruitment process. However, he could not produce his height relaxation certificate while undergoing the Physical Efficiency Test (PET).

Height relaxation

Mr. Meena was granted five days by the examiners at the Group Centre (CRPF) in Greater Noida to produce his certificate for height relaxation. He, however, took 10 days to submit the certificate, and the examiners declined to accept it.

Taking note of Mr. Meena's petition, the court directed the government to "permit the Mr. Meena to submit the certificate". It also directed the government to allow Mr. Meena to be considered for recruitment if the certificate is in order and he qualifies in PST/PET.

The High Court remarked that "members of the STs have been granted certain reservations/relaxations, not only legislatively but also constitutionally, and shows the need therefor".

"The said need has to be fulfilled, not only by providing

reservations/relaxations but also by providing relaxations in implementing the said reservations and benefits conferred on the STs," the Bench observed.

"The said reservations/relaxations are in admission of the disadvantages which the STs have suffered for generations and these disadvantages place them in an unequal position vis-a-vis other citizens," the High Court noted.

"Such disadvantages extend to all parameters of daily life, making it more difficult than for others," it said.

Quota cannot be denied by invoking technicalities: HC

Court provides relief to man applying for Sub-Inspector job

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

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"The said need has to be fulfilled, not only by providing

EXPRESSION OF INTEREST (EOI) FOR DEVELOPMENT OF GREENFIELD PORT

West Bengal Industrial Development Corporation (WBIDC), under the Department of Industry, Commerce & Enterprises, Government of West Bengal, and on behalf of West Bengal Maritime Board, invites expression of interest from prospective developers having relevant experience towards development of a deep sea port at Tajpur, West Bengal, in a Public Private Partnership (PPP) framework.

Information memorandum for EOI and all other details including date extensions, clarifications and amendments will be made available only on <https://wbidc.com> and <https://wbtenders.gov.in>.

Prospective applicants with suitable credentials will be provided with Extracts of Draft TEFR upon request made to ceowmbm.ice-wb@bangla.gov.in.

Submission of EOI: Online, only through <https://wbtenders.gov.in>

Date & time for submission of EOI: No later than 1500 hours IST on 19.02.2021.



(a) North East Limits - 21°39' 35.13" N / 87°38' 56.71" E
(b) North West Limits - 21°37' 43.27" N / 87°30' 8.00" E
(c) South East Limits - 21°26' 41.37" N / 87°41' 5.42" E
Map not to scale
Location: Tajpur, Purba Midnapore, West Bengal





TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD; POLLUTION DATA: CPCB; MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 17.30 HRS)

Forecast for Monday: Cold wave to severe cold wave conditions very likely at some pockets over Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, Saurashtra and Kutch

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	—	25.6	10.4	Kozhikode	—	33.8	24.4
Ahmedabad	—	30.0	13.4	Kurnool	—	29.0	17.2
Aizawl	—	23.0	6.1	Lucknow	—	22.8	5.9
Allahabad	—	24.0	7.2	Madurai	—	30.1	20.6
Bengaluru	—	29.8	15.2	Mangaluru	—	34.5	19.9
Bhopal	—	28.7	10.8	Mumbai	—	29.4	21.6
Bhubaneswar	—	27.6	12.2	Mysuru	—	30.0	16.0
Chandigarh	—	20.8	3.8	New Delhi	—	22.6	6.0
Chennai	—	29.6	21.5	Patna	—	22.8	8.2
Coimbatore	—	31.2	17.2	Port Blair	16.4	29.6	—
Dehradoon	—	21.1	4.0	Puducherry	—	29.4	20.2
Gangtok	—	13.2	5.8	Pune	—	32.0	14.7
Goa	—	33.4	20.6	Raipur	—	29.3	12.4
Guwahati	—	25.9	11.6	Ranchi	—	25.4	7.6
Hubballi	—	29.0	16.0	Shillong	—	15.1	6.0
Hyderabad	—	31.0	14.5	Shimla	—	18.3	5.4
Imphal	—	22.0	2.6	Srinagar	—	9.4	—
Jaipur	—	24.2	8.6	Thiruvananthapuram	—	31.7	23.6
Kochi	—	32.2	22.2	Tiruchi	—	32.5	20.4
Kolkata	—	17.0	5.6	Vijayawada	—	28.8	18.5
Kolkatta	—	24.5	11.2	Vishakapatnam	—	28.0	20.0

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing Yesterday

CITIES	SO ₂	NO _x	CO	PM2.5	PM10	CODE
Ahmedabad	13	101	37	157	162	■■■■■
Bengaluru	9	89	33	151	124	■■■■■
Chennai	10	11	—	153	126	■■■■■
Delhi	21	87	455	414	■■■■■	In observation made at 4.00 p.m., Greater Noida, Uttar Pradesh recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 418 indicating a unhealthy level of pollution.
Hyderabad	11	62	51	163	152	■■■■■
Kolkata	25	30	62	339	239	■■■■■
Lucknow	9	84	89	422	378	■■■■■
Mumbai	9	67	—	332	—	■■■■■
Pune	—	39	242	148	—	■■■■■
Visakhapatnam	17	16	50	312	243	■■■■■

Air Quality Code: ■ Poor ■ Moderate ■ Good (Readings indicate average AQI)
SO₂: Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.

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

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

PM2.5 & PM10: Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease

INTERVIEW | UDAI LAL ANJANA

'Measures being taken to ensure fair prices for farm produce'

550 village cooperative societies, agricultural cooperative marketing societies notified as mandi sub-yards: Rajasthan Minister

MOHAMMED IQBAL

The cooperative sector in Rajasthan has been playing an important role in agricultural activities of farmers. The Congress government here has been working for farmers' welfare since they are treated as the backbone of the State's economy, says Cooperative Minister Uday Lal Anjana in an interview to The Hindu

the State's economy. Several new schemes and policies for farmers, introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic, are being implemented effectively in a transparent manner.

Farmers are finding it increasingly difficult to sell their produce at remunerative prices. What efforts have been made in this regard?

■ The State government has notified 550 village cooperative societies as well as agricultural cooperative marketing societies as mandi sub-yards for ensuring fair prices and expeditious payments to farmers. They can now sell their produce at one of the notified markets near their agricultural land and village. Open bidding has also fetched them better price. Over 19,200 farmers have benefited from the sale of 6.70 quintal of pro-



Over 2,000 farmers associated with 840 cooperatives have availed of an aggregate loan amounting to ₹20.46 crore under the scheme. They held more than 1.14 lakh quintals of their produce worth ₹32 crore.

UDAJI LAL ANJANA

Rajasthan Cooperative Minister

duce for ₹152.95 crore.

The State government had recently assured low-interest loans to save farmers from forced selling. Has the scheme benefited the farmers?

■ Efforts are being made to make expensive equipment available on lease at affordable prices. Village cooperative societies and agricultural marketing cooperative societies

are being associated with custom hiring centres and ₹8 crore has been sanctioned for opening these centres at 100 cooperatives. New village cooperative societies have also been formed across the State. They will help the farmers access loans, purchasing fertilisers and other activities at their own village panchayat. The approval for 129 primary agricultural credit societies and 21 large area multi-purpose societies has associated 75,000 more people with the cooperative sector.

Which crops are being procured on minimum support prices in Rajasthan? How are the procurement centres functioning?

■ We have enhanced the limit for procurement of moong and groundnuts by 10%, providing the benefit to over 29,000 farmers. The 266 pro-

curement centres for moong and 365 for groundnuts have so far purchased 30,638 metric tonnes and 7,253 metric tonnes of the two farm pro-

cesses. The functioning of cooperative banks has often come into question in Rajasthan. Are some efforts being made to improve the process for loan disbursement by these?

■ For the first time in the country, Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot introduced an online registration and disbursement scheme for farm loans in 2019. This has done away with discrepancies in the distribution of loans. Biometric and Aadhaar-based verification, which helped in selecting genuine farmers, has led to the association of 12.72 lakh new members with the farm loan process.

My aspiration to join the Army hindered, says man held under new U.P. ordinance

Muslim youth says his religion can be reason behind 'implicating' him

OMAR RASHID

LUCKNOW

A 21-year-old Muslim man from Bareilly, who was the first person to be arrested under the new ordinance against unlawful conversion in U.P., fears the case could hinder his aspirations of joining the Indian Army.

Out on bail after serving three weeks behind the bars,

Uvaish Ahmad claimed the charges against him were baseless and alleged that the police charged him under the ordinance in an eagerness to lodge the first FIR, barely 24 hours after the ordinance was promulgated.

"My career and image are ruined. I have a police case against me now. I wanted to do a government job. I was preparing to join the Army. That was my main goal," Mr. Ahmad told *The Hindu* on Sunday, three days after his release from district jail in Bareilly.

into converting".

"The government should see why are they are falsely implicating me. Maybe because I am a Muslim," Mr. Ahmad said. "Whatever there was, friendship or love, ended a year ago. We have not been in touch ever since she got married," said Mr. Ahmad. Till last year, he was pursuing B.Sc when the kidnapping allegations forced him to abandon studies and relocate to Delhi where he got involved in scrap dealing. "I didn't want to live in the village any more," he said.

'No community-based autonomy, assured Shah'

Groups wary of peace deal with NSCN(IM)

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT GUWAHATI

A conglomerate of civil society organisations in Manipur on Sunday said Union Home Minister Amit Shah has assured them that the Centre would not approve community-based autonomy in the State.

Non-Naga groups in Manipur are wary of reports that the Centre was contemplating a territorial council each in Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh as a solution to the protracted Naga political is-

sue. Such a council is believed to be an alternative to the idea of a greater Naga homeland purportedly pursued by the Isak-Muivah faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland, or NSCN(IM). The Zomi has also been seeking a self-rule area in Manipur modelled on Assam's Bodoland Territorial Council.

"Mr. Shah assured us that no autonomy will be granted to any community in Assam," said Coordination Committee on Manipur's Integrity leader Khurajam Athouba.

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PERSONAL

CHANGE OF NAME

CHANGE OF Spouse Name I, Santa Jacob (Existing Name of spouse as per change of the next-of-kin POR / Service Document/Pension Certificate), spouse of Jacob K M (Name of husband), service no. 280738 EX SGT Indian Air force resident of Kuttiparichel House, Mulakulam (N) PO, Piravom, Ernakulam (Dist) Kerala, have changed my name from Santa Jacob (Existing Name of spouse as per change of the next-of-kin POR / Service Document/Pension Certificate) to Santha Jacob (Proposed Adopted/Corrected New Name) as per Affidavit dated 22-12-2020

PUBLIC NOTICE

DARMEET SINGH R/WZ-194, 2nd FLOOR, GALLI NO.16, KRISHNAPURI, NEW DELHI-110018 OF AFGHANISTAN is applying to the Secretary to the Government of India in the Ministry of Home Affairs for Naturalization and that any person who knows any reason why Naturalization should not be granted should send a written signed statement of the facts to the said Secretary.

PUBLIC NOTICE

KERALA STATE PRUGES & PHARMACEUTICALS LTD. (A Government of Kerala Undertaking) Kaloor - P.O. Alappuzha, Kerala-690522, Tel: 0473 253514, Website: www.wkpl.co.in e-mail: ksp@kpl.kerala.gov.in Separate tenders are invited for LVP/SVP Project 1. TENDER WORKS Tender Id: 2020-kspd_394116_2 2. EPOXY FLUOROPOLY WORKS Tender Id: 2020-kspd_394116_2 For more details, please visit the web site: www.etenders.kerala.gov.in. Details/Complaints/Modifications/Retenders can be seen in the above websites. S/o Managing Director

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EDUCATION PLUS

GET THE EDGE

Reflections on a year gone by

What are the pros and cons of online education, when seen from a student's perspective?



■ R.W. ALEXANDER
JESUDASAN

The COVID-19 outbreak left its mark on almost all spheres of life, including education. While technological advances allowed learning to continue online, it is worth exploring what students across different levels feel about this change, even as attempts are being made to reopen educational institutions in a phased manner. Speaking to students from across the country threw up some interesting points:

Is technology a boon or bane: Rohit, a student in West Bengal pursuing online classes offered from Chennai, felt that this period gave him an opportunity to develop basic skill sets to enhance his competency. "Youngsters also learnt vlogging and coding, which are now becoming quite popular," Aditi from Odisha agrees. "The positive effect of attending online classes is that we know a lot more about information technology, various apps and programmes. Apart from academic learning, technological learning too has gained importance during this lockdown." However, Anil from Noida felt that the lack of

physical contact has made people "dull, lazy and inactive. Everyone has become addicted to smart phones and electronic gadgets." A point of view that Nisha from Chennai concurs with. "The virtual walls have curbed our social and cultural lives."

Attendance and assessment: Irrespective of the learning platform, many say that students log in at the beginning of the class and then move away to watch YouTube videos or play games. As a result, they do not gain anything from the classes. One student points out that even online exams are not foolproof. "While many take it seriously, some have tried to cheat and then share it in their peer groups," he says, adding that online classes cannot replace a real classroom environment.

Teachers under stress: Teachers have experienced tremendous stress due to the online mode of education. First, the preparation time has almost doubled. Second, teachers believe that the students do not take their in-

The virtual walls have curbed our social and cultural lives

structions seriously. Teachers now have to call each student to remind him/her to submit assignments or to appear for assessments. "Online classes do not provide enough variations for the teacher to innovate," believes Kolkata-based Nidhi. Many miss the physical interactions and socialisation with teachers and their peer groups.

Physical discomfort: Given the long hours spent before the screen, either on a laptop or a smartphone, students are beginning to report ear and eye strain and also body pain. Depression and stress-related illnesses have also become common. While many report to being stressed by the online approach, Noida-based Harish points out, "People can't share their feelings or express themselves in the way they used to before." This, he says, leads to feeling low mentally.

Lack of socialisation: After close to eight months of a single mode of content delivery, students confess to being bored with online education. One student likened it to "a lion being confined to a small space in a zoo". Most students would prefer a return to the offline mode of learning or at least a blended approach.

They point out that interactions with classmates from diverse backgrounds led to different kinds of learnings about culture, traditions, and food habits, which are lacking now. Prithvi, a student from Noida, confesses that he now realises how not being able to socialise with his peers has affected him adversely. Others fear that lack of opportunities to socialise with their peer group and other age groups can have serious repercussions on an entire generation.

No extracurricular activities: Most college students begin to understand, value and internalise the institutional ethics and traditions only towards the end of the first year. This helps them build a strong affinity and connect with their institution. This is now not possible with online learning. Further, sports and cultural clubs have not had an opportunity to function during this year. This has meant that students have not been able to experience college life at its best.

Names of students have been changed on request.

The writer is Pro Vice-Chancellor, Hindustan Institute of Technology & Science, Chennai.

and statistics content. IELTS score of 6.5 with no individual score less than 5.5

FEE: £ 21,300
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INSTITUTE: School of Management and Entrepreneurship, SNU

ELIGIBILITY: At least two years' work experience and a Bachelor's degree or equivalent with at least 50% marks or equivalent CGPA. Applicants have to qualify in the Shiv Nadar University Management Aptitude Test as

well as a personal interview. CAT/XAT/GMAT/CMAT scores are accepted.

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DEADLINE: December 31

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DEADLINE: March 1, 2021

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VIEWPOINT

Ease the exam load

How merging the NEET and JEE can greatly reduce the strain on students



■ P. V. NAVANEETHAKRISHNAN

Earlier this year, Tamil Nadu government passed a resolution reserving 7.5% seats in undergraduate medical admissions for government-school students who qualified NEET. However, it is possible that this may be challenged in court. In the past, reservations in engineering admissions for children of Tamil scholars, staff of Anna University and from rural schools and the Tamil Nadu government quota were all abolished gradually by the courts.

NEET has come to stay. Similarly, JEE (Main) will be perpetual. The latter originally came into being through a resolution on October 18, 2001, of the Government of India, under the National Policy on Education 1986 and instituted in 2002.

Why can't Tamil Nadu schools adopt the same syllabus for Physics, Chemistry, Maths and Biology, as is prescribed for NEET and JEE (Main), for classes XI and XII?

adopt the same syllabus for Physics, Chemistry, Maths and Biology, as is prescribed for NEET and JEE (Main), for classes XI and XII? For Physics and Chemistry, there may be a need to judiciously combine the two syllabi prescribed. This process has several advantages. The syllabi prescribed for NEET and JEE (Main) are comprehensive and adequate for higher studies. The students will not face any difficulty since they are capable and self driven. Their preparation for the board exams will also be adequate for the NEET or JEE (Main). Also, there will be no need for the government to arrange coaching classes for NEET. This will result in more focus and greater confidence among students. After the board exams, a short orientation for NEET or JEE (Main) may only be required.

Merging the two

Along with the above suggestion is another: to combine the NEET and JEE (Main) exams into one. From 2019, the National Testing Agency (NTA) has been conducting JEE (Main) twice a year (it will be held four times only in 2020). Those who miss the first exam can take the second without waiting for a year. For those who take both, the better marks will be counted. Percentile rank lists, and not raw rank lists, will be merged to prepare a single list. NEET too deserves to be held twice a year for the same reason. But this may mean that some students may have to take four entrance exams a year, besides the board exams, which may be too stressful.

I have been suggesting that in the place of an exclusive NEET and JEE (Main), exams on their subjects – Biology, Maths, and Physical Sciences – could be held over a single day. Candidates for NEET can choose to answer Biology and Physical Sciences; those for JEE (Main) Maths and Physical Sciences; and those who try for both will write all the three. The admitting authorities can also accordingly consider only the relevant subjects. This will reduce the strain on the students. The exam can also be held twice in a year in the same way.

The writer is a former Professor and Head, Entrance Exams and Admission, Anna University, Chennai.

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Essential dry run

Constant, long-term monitoring of adverse events after vaccination is essential

In the next couple of weeks, Phase-3 data of two COVID-19 vaccines tested by Indian manufacturers are expected to be submitted for emergency use approval. If even one of the vaccines gets the approval, a countrywide rollout to immunise the four high-risk groups starting with healthcare workers will begin soon thereafter. India has been vaccinating millions of young children with a variety of vaccines each year and hence has the entire system in place to roll out any new vaccine under the universal immunisation programme. But this is the first time a vaccine to be administered outside the programme and specifically for adults is to be rolled out. Since several aspects of the COVID-19 vaccination programme are new – vaccinating millions of adults belonging to specific groups, administering two doses of the vaccine a few weeks apart, and the process of enrolling the recipients and rolling out the immunisation programme – the government has rightly decided to undertake a dry run for vaccine administration. The dry run is expected to be initiated this week in four States – Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Gujarat, and Punjab. It will allow the administrators to test the vaccination process and check the usage of the Co-WIN IT platform for management of the entire vaccination process including data entry, allocation of date and time and a drill of session sites with test beneficiaries. The linkages between planning, implementation and reporting mechanisms will also be tested.

Since four high-risk groups have been prioritised to receive the vaccine, the first task is to register the recipients on the Co-WIN platform. Unlike vaccinating children under the universal immunisation programme, the COVID-19 vaccine will be administered to 100 adults at each designated site on a pre-defined date and time. Prior to vaccination, the bona fide of the registered adults are to be determined. The IT platform has to generate the date and time when people can receive the second dose. When more than one vaccine becomes available, it is essential to ensure that people receive the same vaccine twice. Checking and reporting of all adverse events immediately and days after the vaccination is essential, all the more as no COVID-19 vaccine has undergone long-term follow-up for safety during the trial. Both the vaccines that are at an advanced stage of testing in India do not require ultra-low temperature for delivery and storage. Hence, the existing facilities of the universal immunisation programme in most districts can be used for storing the vaccines. As the plan is to vaccinate 300 million people in the four high-risk groups, 600 million doses will be required. This exercise should therefore look at creating additional storage capacity at these facilities to store millions of COVID-19 vaccines, as facilities for vaccine storage cannot be dedicated to a single vaccine.

Limited partnership

The geographically selective Congress-Left alliance is difficult to implement

The Congress-Left Front alliance for the Assembly election in West Bengal is notable for several reasons, though not unexpected. Both have been cooperating at the national level for several years now, and were partners in the recent Assembly election in Bihar. The CPI(ML), which was part of the 'grand alliance' in Bihar, is not part of the alliance in West Bengal. The Congress and the Left Front argue, and perhaps even believe, that the election will not be a straight contest between the AITMC led by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and the BJP. Both the Congress and the Left Front are staring at extinction in the State, caught in the crossfire of the intense battle between the BJP and the AITMC. The alliance is an effort to salvage what is left of their support base and consolidate their meagre resources. The downslide of the Left Front did not end with its ouster from power in 2011 after 34 years. Rising from the ashes of the Left Front was AITMC, but the shallowness of its politics was soon apparent. The BJP rose even more dramatically, winning more than 40% of the votes and 18 Lok Sabha seats in the State in 2019. An argument in support of the Congress-Left Front alliance is that those who rallied behind the BJP and the AITMC in recent years because they dislike the other more will have a new alternative now. However, that scenario of a return of voters and workers to the Congress and Left Front appears too optimistic.

More likely, the impact of the alliance will be restricted to constituencies that have a considerable Muslim population. A second claimant for the anti-BJP votes in around one-third of the total 294 constituencies could significantly aid the Hindutva party's bid for power. The alliance leaders do not consider Ms. Banerjee any less an enemy than the BJP. An element of personal rivalry is evident, but the Congress and the Left Front may also be hoping to emerge as a viable anti-BJP platform in the State, following the eviction of Ms. Banerjee from power. At present, however, the alliance is more a sign of confusion than a strategy for resurgence for both the Congress and the Left Front. Cohabitation will not cure the structural and ideological disabilities of either or change the environmental factors. In fact, this alliance in West Bengal could aggravate the troubles for both in Kerala, where they will be principal opponents in the Assembly election. The BJP has made significant inroads in the State, which was evident in the recent local body elections. The geographically selective alliance of the Congress and the Left Front is difficult to implement on the ground, and might end up opening new avenues for the BJP.

Notes from a year of unease

Following a year of debilitating problems, restoring India's image in 2021 will not be easy



M.K. NARAYANAN

The year 2020 was a debilitating one for much of the world, India included. India had more than its share of problems. As 2020 comes to a close, it might be worthwhile to take a hard look at these issues to ensure that 2021 does not become another wasted year.

Pandemic and other issues
The COVID-19 pandemic, which embraced every segment of Indian society and at a conservative estimate afflicted more than a crore of its citizens (leading to about 1.5 lakh fatalities), was the most insidious threat. News of the availability of more than one vaccine for treatment of COVID-19 has by no means changed the element of fatalism that has gripped society.

Apart from the pandemic, 2020 witnessed other events that aggravated the sense of unease. Since April, India has confronted an unprecedented situation on the border with China in eastern Ladakh. Unprovoked Chinese aggression at several points even led to the death of a score of Indian soldiers. Ever since, the border has remained live; as of now there is no end in sight. Chinese intransigence has led to a grave hiatus in India-China relations.

Internal problems such as Naxalite violence and Jammu and Kashmir endured during much of 2020. The resentment caused by the altered status of J&K and the incarceration of political leaders has yet to subside, even as J&K held elections to its District Development Councils. West Bengal is beginning to resemble a 'war zone' as it prepares for Assembly elections in

2021. Relations between Delhi and Kolkata are at their nadir today, and grave concerns exist about violence during the elections. The divide between West Bengal and the Centre is also mirrored in the relations between the Centre and other Opposition-ruled States, a grim commentary on the state of Centre-State relations today.

Highly damaging from the point of view of any established democracy was the resort to populist demagoguery, mainly by the ruling dispensation intended to obscure ground realities, to achieve desired political ends. This has led to unprecedented levels of political polarisation. Linked to this is also a policy of engineering defections which has plumbed new depths. The recourse to vitriolic public discourse is again a sad commentary on India's democracy today. Not entirely unrelated to this is the diminishing role and utility of Parliament as a platform for an honest exchange of views. The sanctity of Parliament was further undermined in 2020 with sessions being dispensed with under various pretexts.

On other parameters as well, 2020 proved to be a bad year. The economy is in recession. India has slipped further down the scale in the Human Development Index. Slippages have occurred in the Global Economic Freedom Index. New items of legislation on social issues (a law against forced conversion by marriage, for instance) tend to aggravate an already divisive polity. The farmers' agitation is another instance where official intransigence has led to a situation in which the Supreme Court had sought to intervene, though without tangible results.

Challenges for the year ahead
Restoring India's image in 2021 will, hence, not be easy. The moot question is where to begin. For all the criticism, and notwithstanding a perceived decline on many pa-



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rameters, three aspects in favour of the ruling dispensation stand out: a string of electoral successes for the ruling party; the personal popularity of the Prime Minister; and the absence of any serious competitor on the national stage. This provides the ruling party with a relative degree of freedom to undertake major changes, including structural shifts, provided it is not overly consumed by the euphoria that it has decimated the Opposition.

The state of the economy should be next. Mere claims that the economy has rebounded hardly suffice. India must seek, in all honesty, to enhance its competitive advantage vis-a-vis other nations which, according to various global indices, appear to be performing better than India. Misleading concepts that an export-oriented economic strategy is damaging – implicitly suggesting that India should look inward rather than outwards to enlarge its economy – need to be rejected, and India should enhance its export capacity. India's real strength flows from its diversity, and its ability to utilise all available opportunities. In 2021, we need to see India's genius blooming in full measure. Side by side with this, all attempts to tamper with technological and academic excellence, as prompted in some quarters during 2020, need to be avoided.

The other pressing challenge in 2021 would be job creation for the youth, who are India's most abiding asset. The government must take urgent steps to set right the disruptions in the labour market caused by the pandemic and other contributory factors. Creating new jobs in new industries should be a critical requirement. Stimulating demand would ensure growth in

India must not remain content or satisfied with the current stand-off with China in the Ladakh sector. India should think of what better options are available to it to resolve a conflict that is certainly working to its disadvantage, and is enabling many of its neighbours to play China against India. If India is to be viewed as the only nation in Asia that can stand up to the China challenge, it must come up with a whole new paradigm of ideas on which further actions can be formulated. Statements critical of China, even amounting to abuse in many instances, are hardly an answer to the most serious foreign policy challenge the country faces.

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job opportunities, and this should go hand in hand with this task. The importance of such measures must not be underestimated.

Restoring confidence

Next year must be the year in which a serious attempt is made by the government, and Delhi in particular, to restore confidence in constitutional proprieties, practices and principles. There is an impression amongst those who have differences or disagreements with the ruling dispensation at the Centre that the latter is violating the principles and rules sanctified by the Constitution, and that the Opposition's rights are being steadily undermined. The intention, according to the latter, is to achieve single-party rule across the entire nation.

It could well be argued that this is a total misunderstanding or misreading of the actions taken by the Centre, but it is apparent that there is a crisis of confidence which is affecting the body politic. In these circumstances, perceptions appear to have as much impact as facts. In 2021, this impression needs to be reversed. The starting point would be effecting an improvement in Centre-State relations, particularly between Delhi and States ruled by Opposition parties. 2021 could well be the make-or-break point as far as this delicate balance enshrined in our federal Constitution is concerned. As digital technology advances, other concerns that an unduly centralised Central government could use this to further reduce the independent authority of States will again need to be dispelled. Effective cooperation between the Centre and the States must be restored as early as possible to instil confidence about India's democratic future.

M.K. Narayanan is former National Security Advisor and former Governor of West Bengal

Towards an effective vaccination distribution policy

The government must examine the principle underlying the triage scheme and whether private players should be allowed space



BHASKAR DUTTA

India plans to vaccinate 300 million people against COVID-19 over the next 6-7 months. The government plans to give priority to front-line workers and elderly people is in line with the practice being followed in the U.K. and the U.S., the two major countries that have been the leaders in the COVID-19 vaccination drive. The rationale for this is to protect those who are most likely to be infected in the future as well as those who are most vulnerable to the health consequences of the infection. However, a vaccination drive such as this should have two distinct objectives: one, providing protection to those vaccinated, and two, to minimise or at least slow down the speed and spread of the viral transmission. Ideally, a vaccine distribution programme should keep both these in mind. In some cases, there is no conflict between these two objectives. For instance, the priority given to healthcare professionals satisfies both objectives: these are individuals who have high levels of exposure and they also act as active disease vectors since they interact with large numbers of people. However, the priority given to older people may not actually minimise the total social and economic cost inflicted by the virus in the long run. The elderly are less mobile, have a lower level of social interaction, and are hence less likely to spread the virus. Obviously, a younger person who interacts

ment. A different and somewhat contentious issue is whether the government will allow private players any space in the vaccination process.

Who gets priority?

The government's strategy of giving priority to front-line workers and elderly people is in line with the practice being followed in the U.K. and the U.S., the two major countries that have been the leaders in the COVID-19 vaccination drive. The rationale for this is to protect those who are most likely to be infected in the future as well as those who are most vulnerable to the health consequences of the infection. However, a vaccination drive such as this should have two distinct objectives: one, providing protection to those vaccinated, and two, to minimise or at least slow down the speed and spread of the viral transmission. Ideally, a vaccine distribution programme should keep both these in mind. In some cases, there is no conflict between these two objectives. For instance, the priority given to healthcare professionals satisfies both objectives: these are individuals who have high levels of exposure and they also act as active disease vectors since they interact with large numbers of people. However, the priority given to older people may not actually minimise the total social and economic cost inflicted by the virus in the long run. The elderly are less mobile, have a lower level of social interaction, and are hence less likely to spread the virus. Obviously, a younger person who interacts



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with a larger number of people is both more likely to be infected and subsequently infect others. This suggests that densely populated areas – for instance, the Dharavi slum – should receive far more attention than they are likely to get under the current strategy. Of course, the point is that allocation guidelines must squarely face the trade-offs between the direct and indirect objectives. This is a difficult trade-off but one about which reasoned thought is essential.

Involving private hospitals

The government's procurement strategy seems to depend entirely on domestic sources. It also plans to rely entirely on public resources for distribution without involving private hospitals. Moreover, the government plans to bear the entire cost of vaccination. The latter is particularly important and appropriate since crucial health facilities should be accessible to all. But consider the following proposition. Suppose Pfizer or some other multinational pharmaceutical company approaches the government both for authorisation of a vaccine as well as for permission to import and sell (for a profit) to those who can afford it. Let us assume, in order to focus on the ethical issue, that the vaccine is med-

ically safe and effective. What should the government do?

Any approval from the government will enable the affluent to jump the vaccination queue. This will inevitably attract the charge that the government is catering to the interests of the richer groups in the population. But perhaps a more dispassionate analysis would suggest that allowing the private sector to provide additional supplies of the vaccine would not really be a bad policy decision after all – even when the interests of the poor are taken into account. The most important consideration that has to be kept in mind is that this would not decrease the availability of the vaccine to the poor. Of course, this assumes that the government will and should continue to procure all available domestically produced vaccines and supply them through its own distribution channel. In other words, it should follow its own distribution policies as if the additional sources of supply do not exist. It has to ensure that there is no reduction in the availability of the vaccine for the poor. In fact, there may actually be an increase in supply and hence less waiting time for the less affluent since some of the richer individuals in the target group will opt out of the government distribution system and prefer to get vaccinated at some private outlet.

Another potential benefit accruing to the entire population is that the larger the numbers who get vaccinated, the lower will be the speed of virus transmission amongst the non-vaccinated.

But is it all likely that private suppliers will request government permission to import and distribute the vaccine in India? Two recent headlines suggest that this is possible. The first is the news that the regulatory authorities have authorised the emergency use of the Moderna vaccine across the U.S. Several other vaccines are already conducting Phase 3 trials and there is a strong possibility that there will be a significant boost in the global supply of COVID-19 vaccines. The second is that a Belgian Minister has revealed very sensitive price information by tweeting the prices that the European Union has agreed to pay for leading COVID-19 vaccines. It turns out that these prices are substantially lower than the prices that Moderna and Pfizer, for example, have been quoting to other countries. For instance, the tweet reveals that Moderna will be charging \$18 per dose while Pfizer's price at €12 is even lower. In contrast, Indian newspapers have mentioned that Pfizer is contemplating a price of \$37 per dose in India. Of course, the EU could get a very good deal simply because the large size of its market gives it a lot of bargaining power. But India too provides a large market even if the cost of vaccination is around ₹5,000. Of course, some centralised purchasing will be essential in order to exploit the bargaining power associated with the size of the market. But this should not be particularly hard to achieve.

Bhaskar Dutta is Professor of Economics, Ashoka University

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

CM candidate for TN

By announcing in the presence of the Home Minister that the party will continue its alliance with the BJP for the 2021 Assembly polls, the AIADMK seems to be falling into the trap set by the BJP to bring the regional party under its fold. The irrefutable fact is that the AIADMK is a major regional party with a large following. The BJP, though a national party, has relatively little support in the State. So, the statement that the BJP will decide the chief ministerial

candidate in Tamil Nadu is not reasonable ("Jayakumar rejects Javadekar's view on CM candidate issue," Dec. 27).

D. SETHURAMAN,
Chennai

State interference
Citizens have a right to practise a religion of their choice as well as choose a partner of their choice. It is astonishing that Madhya Pradesh has now given its nod for an anti-conversion Bill ("M.P. Cabinet nod for anti-conversion Bill," Dec. 27). How these seemingly

unconstitutional Bills will stand the constitutional test in court remains to be seen.

JAMES ARPUTHARAJ WILLIAMS,
Bengaluru

What kind of a democracy is this where a boy and a girl cannot fall in love, marry and live life peacefully without government interference? In U.P., a couple, Rashid and Pinki, married consensually, and Pinki converted to her husband's religion. Rashid has been arrested and Pinki has been moved into a shelter home.

Inter-faith couples are going to face the additional problem of state harassment now. To make matters worse, sections of the media call this "love jihad". The fact that this is happening State after State is really worrying. India is not a theocracy.

ARSHI RAHIL,
Uttar Pradesh

Still no 4G
Prime Minister Narendra Modi calls the DDC polls a new chapter in democracy, yet the government keeps extending the 4G Internet

ban in J&K ("PM: DDC polls a new chapter in democracy," Dec. 27). Access to Internet is a fundamental right and the ban has been hampering J&K's developmental prospects.

V.S. SINDHURI,
Kakinada

It is amusing to watch the BJP call the DDC polls a victory of democracy after the party suffered a massive setback. Democracy is exactly what the party destroyed in August 2019. Dissolving the State

Assembly and keeping leaders of the erstwhile State under home arrest is not happens in a democracy. Opposition leaders claimed they were not allowed to campaign in these polls. Despite that the Gupkar Alliance won big. This shows the people's anger against the shabby treatment meted out to the former State.

V.S. ABOOBAKER,
Mumbai

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The facade cracks for China

The year 2020 has put on display the many defects in the country's growing might



HARSH V. PANT & KALPIT A. MANKIKAR



The Spring Festival is when the Chinese are at their sprightly best. The spectacular dragon and lion dances, music performances, and people sending out New Year greetings create a festive air. This year, however, the COVID-19 outbreak disrupted the revelry, forcing the government to order citizens to be sequestered in their homes. But in the aftermath of the world grappling with the contagion, China seemed to embody Winston Churchill's saying: never let a good crisis go to waste.

Hong Kong became one of the most significant arenas where the Communist Party of China came down with full might. The special administration region, which enjoys autonomy, had been on the boil since June 2019 over a legislation (which was later scrapped) that would allow the local government to extradite criminals to the mainland. Demonstrators had resorted to vandalism over the law, an act that the Communist Party of China saw as a challenge to its writ. The island had witnessed protests earlier in 2014, when demonstrators lay siege to parts of the island seeking reforms to the electoral process. This time round, the reprisals were swift and unflinching. On June 30, 2020, minutes before the anniversary of Hong Kong's handover to China by the British, China's legislature approved a new national security law for Hong Kong. While critics contend that the law essentially curbs dissent and civil liberties, China insists it will help restoration of stability. Beijing backed up its efforts to bring to heel a recalcitrant opposition by passing another law that empowers the government to expel lawmakers in Hong Kong's Legislative Council without recourse to judicial process. Following this, four legislators were disqualified over national security grounds, and the remaining Opposition resigned in protest.

Beyond Hong Kong, China also took on Taiwan, challenged India along the Himalayan frontier, esca-

lated tensions in the South and East China Seas, bullied European nations, and flexed its trade muscles vis-à-vis Australia. At a time when global multilateralism has been facing serious challenges, China's manipulation of institutions like the World Health Organization has led to an even greater sense of disenchantment with the multilateral order.

No room for dissent

In the domestic sphere, too, there has been a clean-up even among the Party's own ranks. Cai Xia, a former professor at the Communist Party's Central Party School that grooms its top leadership, was expelled in August for calling President Xi Jinping a 'mafia boss'. Ms. Cai, who has been a champion of political reform, is living abroad. Another comrade, Ren Zhiqiang, who obliquely criticised Mr. Xi's management of the pandemic, received an 18-year jail sentence on bribery charges. Mr. Ren's father had served as one of Mao Zedong's vice-ministers; Ms. Cai's parents had taken part in the 1949 Communist Revolution. Financial czar Jack Ma was left red-faced after his Ant Group's \$37 billion IPO was grounded ahead of its debut in November. China's second-richest man had earlier slammed financial regulators at a conclave of bankers, and an exposé in 2017 of a politburo member's daughter in a newspaper controlled by Mr. Jack had not gone down well. Red 'Princelings' now know that the Communist Party is in no mood to brook any dissent. Businessmen may be the economy's stars, but the message that the Party is the ship's captain, is clear.

For nearly four decades, China pursued an exports-led growth strategy called 'international circula-

tion', entrenching itself into production networks. The economy is now charting a new course due to factors like bleak economic outlook of nations reeling from the pandemic, the U.S. imposing restrictions against Chinese technology firms, and its 'decoupling' push. Under the new strategy, China will make domestic consumption a bigger engine of growth, while also relying on international circulation. Mr. Xi announced at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit this year that the new policy will come into effect from 2021.

During the Bund Summit, a conclave of regulators and bankers held in Shanghai, China signalled that it will improve financial ties with the world. The China Securities Regulatory Commission is building more channels for investors based abroad to put their money into capital markets on the mainland. The fine print of how China plans to execute the shift from an export-led growth strategy to bolstering its domestic market will become clearer once the 14th five-year plan is approved by its legislature in early 2021.

'Wolf Warrior' approach

Cinema is a reflection of society – every nation likes to see its imagined persona on screen. The 'Wolf Warrior' series, in which the Chinese assume the onerous responsibility of "saving the world", has undercurrents of the nation's exceptionalism. These movies seem to be having an impact on an unlikely quarter – China's diplomatic corps. Mr. Xi has repeatedly highlighted the need for developing a "fighting spirit" to breach the hurdles facing China. On a state visit to Nepal, Mr. Xi warned that a bid to divide China would end in

"smashed bodies and bones ground to powder". This aggressive posturing is far removed from Deng Xiaoping's counsel to 'keep a low profile'. Instead of building goodwill, China's envoys used their official social media handles to push a theory that American military was the cause of COVID-19, and trolled Australia over alleged war crimes committed by its elite soldiers fighting in Afghanistan. Quizzed about the verbal bellicosity of its representatives abroad, Foreign Minister Wang Yi asserted that they would certainly push back against insults to national honour.

The Trump Administration also took on China frontally, both bilaterally and in concert with other nations, even as the State Department released a comprehensive report which is being described as a potential blueprint for the U.S.'s response to China's rise as an authoritarian superpower. By escalating a tariff war with China, U.S. President Donald Trump underscored the need for a potential economic decoupling of the world's two major economies. During his election campaign, President-elect Joe Biden, too, took a hard line vis-à-vis China, and it is unlikely that his approach towards China would radically alter the trajectory of America's China policy. And the more pushback Mr. Xi faces globally, the more aggressive his domestic and foreign policy agenda is likely to become.

The muzzling of anti-establishment voices in Hong Kong, 'wolf warrior' diplomacy, and an aggressive pursuit of national interests have hurt China's image. A survey by the Pew Research Center across 14 nations shows that a majority of the respondents have an unfavourable opinion of China. Today's China aspires to be a global power but bristles at criticism, domestic or foreign. Many in China may see this year as one in which the country came into its own as a power dictating the global agenda, but for many around the world, this is also the year when China's vulnerabilities, as well as the challenges it poses to the global order, became all too apparent.

Harsh V. Pant is Director, Studies at the Observer Research Foundation (ORF) and Professor at King's College London. Kalpit A. Mankikar is Fellow with Strategic Studies Programme, ORF

A costly deal for Sudan

Normalisation of ties with the state of Israel is a big trade-off for the terror delisting

GARIMELLA SUBRAMANIAM

The recent U.S. move to remove Sudan's designation, which had been in place since 1993, as a state that sponsors terrorism could potentially come at a huge price that no sovereign nation should demand, or another acquiesces to. The Sudanese government's recognition of the state of Israel – which looms as Khartoum's trade-off for the terror delisting – should be the sole prerogative of the people of that country, not of a superpower such as Washington or any other to arbitrarily impose its will.

Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok had himself articulated the dilemma that his unelected government should take upon itself the responsibility for such a pivotal decision to accord formal recognition to Israel, given the sensitive historical background. That goes back to the time when Khartoum played host to the Arab League gathering, which adopted the so-called "three nos" resolution to deny recognition, initiate negotiations and seek peace with Israel, in the wake of the 1967 Six-Day war. It would seem a stretch to assume that bilateral relations between the two countries were germane to a determination of Sudan's status on the international stage.

On the other hand, the factors that influenced the designation of Sudan as a sponsor of terrorism are relatively clear. They relate to the former military regime's backing for the Palestine Liberation Organization, Hamas and Hezbollah, besides the harbouring of Osama bin Laden until 1996. Sudan is a rather different country now since the overthrow of the 30-year-long dictatorship of Omar Hassan al-Bashir in the popular uprising in 2019. The democratic transition that has been underway in the North African country since August 2019 is expected to lead to general elections in 2022. The ultimate objective of the mass uprising was, after all, to ensure that the military, which still shares power in the transitional government, returned to the barracks.

The reintegration of Sudan into the global community via a renegotiation of its national debt and reopening of investment opportunities

would be crucial ingredients for this overall endeavour. The country has suffered a crippling impact from the loss of vast oil reserves to South Sudan, which seceded in 2011. The COVID-19 pandemic and the worst floods in a century have compounded the problems of food shortages, skyrocketing inflation, and severe unemployment.

The deal struck with the United States will provide Sudan crucial access to global financial institutions, resume dollar-denominated transactions, and revive foreign investment after nearly three decades.

Long in the making

In fact, the stage had been set for the removal from the terrorism bracket with the easing of U.S. economic sanctions in 2017, which was followed by the exchange of ambassadors between the two countries after 23 years in 2019. Unfortunately, what has proved decisive in an appraisal of Sudan's emerging status is President Donald Trump's own electoral calculations and his several highly controversial interventions in the West Asian peace process. The transactional approach towards a matter that has implications for global security was perhaps too awkward for Washington. As such, for the record at least, the terror delisting has been treated as an outcome in exchange for a compensation payment of \$335 million for the victims of the 1998 Al Qaeda attacks on U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. Sudan has, for its part, stopped short of a commitment to re-establish normal diplomatic relations with Israel, and opening of embassies is not part of the arrangement.

There is concern that the recent turn of events could ease the pressure on the military to hand over the former dictator, Mr. Bashir, to the International Criminal Court for investigations of genocide and war crimes. Apprehension on that score is only legitimate, given that the U.S., which is not a signatory to the Rome Statute that underpins the Hague Court, has sought to block its operations. The assertion of national sovereignty is integral to Sudan's democracy.

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DATA POINT

Clipped wings

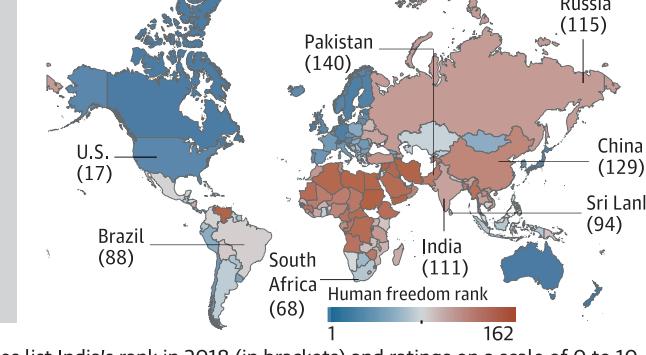
The recently released Human Freedom Index report placed India at the 111th spot among 162 nations for the year 2018, a fall of 17 places since 2017. The index measures personal and economic freedom in countries using as many as 76 indicators. India's worst falls since 2008 were recorded under indicators measuring freedom of religion and the freedom to associate, assemble and to form or join political/commercial organisations. Overall, compared to 2008, the score measuring individual freedom deteriorated in the country in 2018, while that for economic freedom improved. By Naresh Singaravelu and Suman Sen

PERSONAL AND ECONOMIC FREEDOM | The tables list India's rank in 2018 (in brackets) and ratings on a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 represents more freedom under select indicators of personal freedom and economic freedom in 2008 and 2018, and the corresponding Z-scores. The Z-score is a measure of how many standard deviations away from the mean score a country's rating is for a particular indicator. The higher the Z-score, the better the country fared in that indicator. For instance, India had a positive Z-score under media freedom in 2008, indicating an above-average rating. In 2018, it dropped below zero

Personal freedom indicator	2008 score	2018 score	2008 Z-score	2018 Z-score
Personal freedom (110)	6.55	6.43	-0.57	-0.49
Rule of law (102)	4.30	4.33	-0.85	-0.45
Safety and security (98)	7.60	8.06	-0.45	-0.08
Religious freedom (139)	6.67	5.04	-0.52	-1.24
Association, assembly and civil society (111)	7.63	6.30	0.93	-0.32
Media freedom (65)	6.21	5.00	0.31	-0.14

India's rating dropped across various indicators for personal freedom, such as safety from physical aggression and freedom to practice a religion of one's choosing. Though the overall Z-score here increased marginally, it still remains under zero. Besides, since 2008, India's ranking dropped 14 places under personal freedom

MAPPING FREEDOM | The map depicts the 2018 ranking of countries under the Human Freedom Index (HFI). The darker the red, the lower the ranking, and the darker the blue, the higher. The HFI measures economic freedom with indicators like freedom to trade, and personal freedom on markers like freedom of speech, religion and assembly

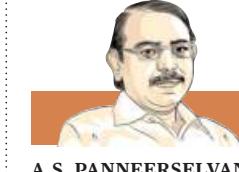


Though India improved marginally overall, the Z-score worsened for indicators such as size of government (which measures taxation and govt. spending), legal system and property rights, and freedom to trade internationally. The country's score improved significantly for the 'sound money' indicator, which measures inflation and freedom to own foreign currency

FROM THE READERS' EDITOR

Yearning for an end to impunity

The state's excesses this year on both journalism and journalists have crippled our basic rights



A.S. PANNEERSELVAN

state, the die is firmly cast in favour of the latter. Citizens are trying in vain to find ways to restore the balance in which their dignity will not be trampled upon with impunity.

Responsible reporting

Are there journalistic means to confront something as fantastic as "Annual Flat Earth International Conference" in the United States? Why are science-deniers given space in the media in the name of fair representation? Is it right to give space to those who misguide and invent a mythical past and present? Why are we using the term 'alternative facts' for outright lies? It is well-documented that misinformation is germinated, incubated and nurtured by those who wield power. What should be the nature of reporting that is socially responsible?

We must remember that it is not only journalism, but journalists, too, who are facing existential questions. I have been following the painstaking documentation done by FreeSpeechCollective on the constant threat to a constitutionally guaranteed right. FreeSpeechCollective is an initiative by journalists, activists and lawyers to protect the right to freedom of expression and vigorously promote free speech and the right to dissent. Its "Impunity Indicator" tracks excesses against journalists and other democratic actors and documents the failures of various institutions – the executive, police and the judiciary – in protecting fundamental rights. Any reader who goes through the details put out by the collective will agree with its assertion that these details are indeed a grim reminder of the tortuous, but dogged, resistance to the silencing of free speech, put up by families, friends and colleagues".

Their latest report, 'Behind Bars', that records the arrests and detentions of journalists in India in the decade 2010-2020, should galvanise everyone to act. The study points out how various laws – the Indian Penal Code, the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, sections of the Disaster Management Act and Epidemic Diseases Act, and Section 144 of the CrPC – were used to silence critical voices. The report reads, "Seventy-three of the 154 cases documented in this study have been reported from BJP-ruled states. Another 30 cases were reported from states ruled by BJP and its National Democratic Alliance (NDA). Of the cases in BJP-ruled states, Uttar Pradesh led the pack with 29 cases."

Fervently hope 2021 ushers in a better environment for free speech and democracy.

readerseditor@thehindu.co.in

The Hindu

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO DECEMBER 28, 1970

President Dissolves the Lok Sabha Poll Completion by Early March

[New Delhi, Dec. 27] The Lok Sabha was dissolved to-day a year ahead of schedule to enable Mrs. Indira Gandhi's Government to seek a fresh mandate from the people.

A communiqué issued from Rashtrapati Bhavan to-night said that the President Mr. V.V. Giri had accepted the advice of the Union Cabinet to dissolve the Lok Sabha.

The communiqué was issued after Mrs. Gandhi had called on Mr. Giri and conveyed to him the Cabinet's decision to go in for a mid-term poll. The Cabinet held an emergency meeting this evening at short notice.

The President signed the momentous order dissolving the Lok Sabha around 9 to-night.

Informed sources said the election would be completed before March 8.

While the communiqué did not make a reference to a poll, the Prime Minister in a broadcast to the nation to-night expressed the hope that mid-term elections to the Lok Sabha would be completed "in time for the Lok Sabha to assemble in March 1971, well before the end of the current financial year".

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO DECEMBER 28, 1920 Students' Conference. Second Day's Proceedings. Non-Co-operation Adopted.

[Nagpur, December 27] The attendance at the Student's conference became meagre on the last day and after hot discussion in the Subjects Committee the open conference was resumed last night at 7.

Lajpat Rai was President. He opened the proceedings by making a short speech contradicting certain rumours set afloat about his Presidential Address. He said he had heard it remarked that in his written speech he was strongly against Non-Co-operation clauses relating to schools and colleges but that in his verbal address he changed his attitude completely. He explained that such a statement was a baseless lie. He had not written an address but had only written down a few pages dealing with the general prevailing opinion about the value of modern civilisation and the value of authority. It was only a part of the address, which he wanted to complete by discussion on Non-Co-operation at Nagpur, but which he never completed for want of time and lack of information as to the aims and objects of the conference and the resolutions drafted by the Reception Committee.

Committee members rebut Karnataka officer's allegations

No accusation till date that tender proposal was drafted with bias: Nimbalkar

STAFF REPORTER
BENGALURU

Claims and allegations made by D. Roopa, Secretary - PCAS, Home Department, who is in the dock over alleged unauthorised intervention in the ₹619 crore Safe City Project tender, were met with strong rebuttals from members of the Chief Secretary-led State Level Apex Committee monitoring the tender.

The State government has instituted a probe by Bengaluru Police Commissioner Kamal Pant over the call Ms. Roopa made to the project consultant allegedly requesting a copy of the classified Request for Proposal (RFP) before its publication.

Hemant Nimbalkar, member secretary of the Apex Committee, who held a press conference on Sunday, responded to allegations of "bias in tender drafting" by Ms. Roopa. He said, "There has been no allegation till date that the RFP has been drafted with bias, not even by the bidders."

Attempts were being made to cast aspersions on the process, he said.

Ms. Roopa had claimed



Hemant Nimbalkar



D. Roopa

there were two complaints alleging irregularities in the tender pending as of June 2020. However, there is no information on whether these complaints have been closed. In her letter to the Chief Secretary, she claimed to be a "whistleblower" who was "studying" the tender file and found "serious irregularities in tender drafting".

She said that the Additional Chief Secretary (ACS), Home Department, had given her the project file to "study", implying that her intervention was not unauthorised.

However, this has been denied by Rajneesh Goel, ACS, Home Department,

who has released a list of seven questions addressed to Ms. Roopa challenging her to produce evidence to the claims she has made.

"The file has never been marked to you and also does not contain any observations/comments by you," Mr. Goel's note said.

BEL's participation
Ms. Roopa had also alleged that "Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) was wrongly disqualified in the tender by the tender scrutiny committee and tender was sought to be given to a particular vendor. BEL complained to PMO and this led to cancellation of biased tender". This charge

was dubbed "infactual" by Mr. Nimbalkar on Sunday.

Till date, the government has called for tenders for the project thrice, the third one under way presently. "In Call-I, BEL never participated and the tender was cancelled in January 2020, as all three participants could not qualify in the pre-qualification requirements for the tender," Mr. Nimbalkar said.

Call-II saw BEL participate and its bid was accepted after technical qualification. It is clear that claims made that BEL was wrongly disqualified is thus proven to be false, his statement said.

However, BEL did write to the PMO and played a role in the tender being cancelled. A copy of the letter available with *The Hindu* shows the objections raised by BEL were not on the draft of the RFP. The letter takes objection to Matrix Solutions and Surveillance Pvt. Ltd., one of the bidders, quoting Chinese brand Huawei for all major elements like cameras, servers and storage.

Call-III of the tender process is active, and January 8 is the last date for submission of bids.

Three held in loan app case in Telangana

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
HYDERABAD

In the continuing crackdown on instant app-based lenders, the Telangana police on Sunday busted a Pune-based call centre allegedly used for harassing borrowers for recovery and arrested three people, including a Chinese woman.

The trio was arrested based on a complaint by a city-based person that he was harassed by the online loan app firms over repayment with higher rate of interest, the police said.

The action comes close on the heels of the arrest of four people, including a Chinese national, here on Friday for allegedly using coercive methods to recover dues from defaulters who had used 11 instant loan apps developed by them and availed loans.

The crackdown was launched after three cases of suicide, including that of a software engineer, due to harassment by such companies were reported in Telangana in the last one month.

Those arrested in the latest action were the director of the call centre in Pune, his wife a Chinese national, and an HR manager.

Cong. leaders in Kerala for more youth as candidates

At AICC meeting, leaders call for a generational shift

G. ANAND
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Several Congress leaders on Sunday reportedly expressed a profound lack of conviction that the party's current leadership in Kerala could offer a convincing fight to the Left Democratic Front (LDF) in the Assembly election in 2021.

By several accounts, scepticism that the LDF could win again next year was pervasive among a section of leaders as they took turns "baring their soul" on party matters to Tariq Anwar, All India Congress Committee (AICC) general secretary in charge of Kerala affairs.

LDF gains discussed

Mr. Anwar is here on a "stocktaking mission" to examine the local body poll debacle and correct the course.

Several MLAs and MPs reportedly pointed out that the "modest" lead and new inroads the LDF had established in the polls was an "ominous sign" that the ruling front had improved its re-election chances drastically. Moreover, they felt the LDF had moved to cement



New wave: KPCC chief Mullappally Ramachandran and other leaders with central observers Tariq Anwar, Ivan D'souza and P.V. Mohan in Thiruvananthapuram. ■ S. MAHINSHA

its victory further by fielding youngsters to lead local bodies.

The leaders argued for a convincing generational shift in selecting candidates to counter the purported ebb in enthusiasm among the youth to vote for the Congress. The generational tension was evident in the local body polls with relatively young faces new to electoral politics winning overwhelmingly.

"The AICC might have reservations about changing the party's leadership framework abruptly. But, it might be inclined to accommodate more youngsters as

candidates and perhaps give them a bigger role in fixing the election campaign modalities and finalising the manifesto. The AICC realises that the Congress has to offer a credible social media-powered platform of change to counter the LDF campaign," a party insider said.

He said the party would shift out district presidents having parliamentary responsibilities, signalling leadership changes in Wayanad, Ernakulam and Palakkad. District-level leaders had given more weightage to group equations than the winnability factor in candidate selection.

FROM PAGE ONE

Farmers protest during PM's speech

"While the farmers demand government investment in agriculture infrastructure and food processing, the government refuses to help farmers' development and plans to spend crores of rupees to help corporates and multinational companies to invest in Indian agriculture. This is the path of self-destruction, not *atmanirbharata* (self-reliance)," said the statement.

Meanwhile, farmer leader Hanuman Mollah said there has been no response from the government to the farmers' proposal for talks and dismissed claims that the Left parties were behind the agitation. "The government till now said we did not want a meeting, now that we have

specifically told them when, where and what of the meeting, there is no response from them," the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) general secretary said.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, in an address to mark three years of the Himachal Pradesh government, said people with vested interests were spreading rumours to create misunderstanding that the minimum support price (MSP) scheme would end, but the facts were contrary.

He reiterated that no one could take away farmers' land from them. Mr. Singh said misinformation was being spread that farmers' land would be taken away through contract farming.

LAC hotspots turn brand buzzwords in Valley

The brand has set up special outlets in volatile south Kashmir's Pulwama, Kulgam and Anantnag, besides Sopore and Kupwara in north Kashmir.

Hilal Ahmad, of Kohinoor Footwear in Pulwama, said the names of the shoes did create a buzz among youth in the town. "One customer remarked that buying the shoes reminds us of Ladakh, which once was a sister district of the Kashmir region but is now a separate Union Territory," a salesman at the shop said.

Tapping into the emo-

tional connect with these locations has paid off for the firm, which was launched in 2014 in J&K.

Pawan Kumar Lakra, Delhi-based proprietor of John Mart, said, "I zeroed in on these names on the basis of their popularity. There is a tendency in India to name brands after borrowed foreign names. I was keen to name the range of shoes after well-known spots of India like Doklam and Galwan.

The quality of my shoes is attracting buyers but the branding, too, helps locals connect with it."

Woman was electrocuted by husband: Kerala police

'Govt. will ensure that the company pays pending wages to all employees'

STAFF REPORTER
BENGALURU

Karnataka Labour Minister A. Shivaram Hebbar visited the trouble-hit Wistron plant at Narasapuram near Kolar on Sunday for the first time since violence broke out at the factory over pending wages recently. He said the government was working towards getting the iPhone manufacturing plant restarted in the next 20 days.

The police waited for the findings of officials from the Electrical Inspectorate on Monday before proceeding with the arrest.

Confesses to assault

According to the police, Arun allegedly confessed to have assaulted Shakakumari late on December 25.

"After an argument, Arun attacked her by hitting her on the nose and attempted to strangle her in the bedroom. He later dragged her to the sitting room, where she was electrocuted using a live wire connected to the electricity meter. Blood stains were found in both rooms. Arun waited until around 6 a.m. to alert the neighbours," an officer said.

While the police firmly believe that Arun married Shakakumari with an eye on her property, the financial transactions of both are being examined. They married in October after four years of friendship.

All samples were sent to the Centre for Cellular and

Tests on to check if they are carrying the U.K. strain

STAFF REPORTER
HYDERABAD

The number of people who had come to Telangana from United Kingdom and tested positive for coronavirus has reached 20, with two more diagnosed with COVID-19 on Sunday. The two are from Medchal-Malkajgiri.

Since December 9, a total of 1,216 people came to the State from the U.K.

All samples were sent to the



Some employees resorted to violence at Wistron in Karnataka on December 12 over salary dues. ■ K. MURALI KUMAR

blem and our priority is to restart the plant as soon as possible," he said.

Investor sentiment

There have been concerns in the State government over

the message the incident

had sent to investors, and the government was keen on correcting it, sources said.

However, he said the company would not be let off the hook. "The government will ensure that all pending dues of salaries and overtime pay

will be paid by the company to all employees, both on rolls and on contract," he said. While promising that all those working at the plant would get back their jobs, he said those arrested by the police for violence at the plant would have to face legal consequences.

The Minister said the Labour Department was committed to promoting good ties between management and workers. "The Toyota Kirloskar plant at Bidadi was shut for the past 26 days. After three meetings on the issue, first shift has started. We are confident that in the next 10 days, second shift, too, will start," he said.

20 returnees test COVID-19 positive

Molecular Biology (CCMB) for genome sequencing to know the strain of the virus. Director of Public Health Dr. G. Srinivasa Rao said they were awaiting the results. Whether the coronavirus in the 20 patients is the new U.K. variant might be known by Monday.

The 20 people who tested positive include eight from Medchal-Malkajgiri, four from Hyderabad, two from Jagtial, one each from Mancherial, Nalgonda, Rangareddy, Sangareddy, Siddipet, and Warangal Urban.

154 yet to be traced

Till Saturday evening, 184 of the 1,216 people who had come from the U.K. were yet



TELANGANA

patients, who were kept under quarantine and their health condition was monitored.

Of the 79 immediate contacts, three

tested positive for coronavirus.

They were admitted in different hospitals. Besides, their immediate contacts were also traced. Till Saturday evening, Health department staff had identified 79 immediate contacts of the 18

patients, who were kept under quarantine and their health condition was monitored.

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Make a resolution to use local products: PM

Modi urges people to substitute foreign items with Indian ones

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

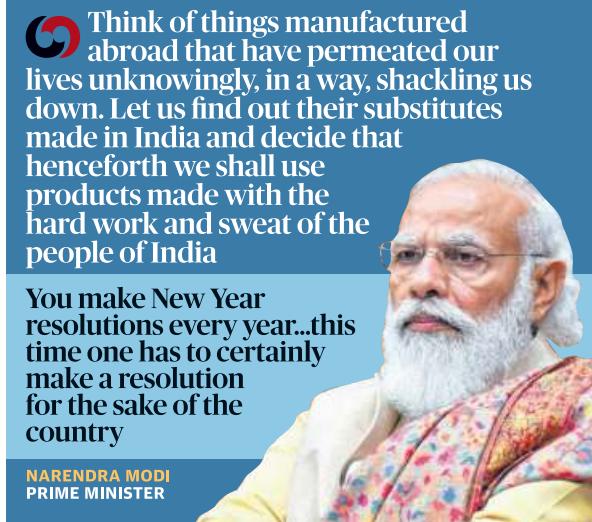
NEW DELHI
In his last *Mann ki Baat* broadcast of the year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday urged people to make a New Year resolution to substitute foreign-made products for indigenous goods in 2021 "for the sake of the country".

Mr. Modi also asked manufacturers to make sure that Indian-made products are up to global standards, as a part of the government's Atmanirbhar Bharat (self-reliant India) push and the 'Vocal for Local' campaign.

He reiterated his earlier appeal to Indians to make a list of products used daily, identify which ones are made abroad and look for Indian substitutes.

"Think of things manufactured abroad that have permeated our lives unknowingly, in a way, shackling us down. Let us find out their substitutes made in India and decide that henceforth we shall use products made with the hard work and sweat of the people of India," he said.

You make New Year resolutions every year...this time one has to certainly make a resolution for the sake of the country



NARENDRA MODI
PRIME MINISTER

had a unique flavour.

Mr. Modi said while there were many challenges in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the country had learnt a lesson with every crisis.

Plastic menace

He said due to the pandemic, the topic of single-use plastic was not discussed much this year, but ridding India of single-use plastic should be another resolution for 2021.

Amid the ongoing agitation by farmers from Punjab against the farm laws, the Prime Minister spoke of the sacrifices of Guru Teg Bahadur, Mata Gujari, Guru Gobind Singh and his sons, remembered as the four Sahibzade, and Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh, adding that it was these kind of sacrifices that kept the fabric of India intact.

Leopard population

Mr. Modi also spoke of the increase in the leopard population from 7,900 in 2014 to 12,852 in 2019.

Referring to the "uniqueness" of the Bhagavad Gita, the Prime Minister reminded listeners that it was Gita Jayanti two days ago. He lauded the efforts to clean up the Someshwar beach in Karnataka by a couple, Anudeep and Minusha, and different areas in the Himalayas by Pradeep Sangwan, but said there was a need to question why so much plastic and garbage ended up at these places to begin with.

PM spoke on everything but farmers: Cong.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Sunday accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of "showing insensitivity" towards farmers. The party said while Mr. Modi spoke on everything from "garbage to animals" in his last *Mann Ki Baat* broadcast of the year, he did not mention the farmers' agitation.

Congress MP from Punjab Ravneet Singh Bittu said the Union government, before its next meeting with farmers, should withdraw the clause of penalty for stubble burning in the farm laws and the Electricity (Amendment) Bill 2020 in its entirety.

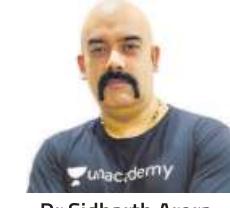
"Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke on garbage to animals in his last *Mann Ki Baat* but did not speak a word about the farmers' agitation. Surely, a Prime Minister who as a tea-seller has spent time on railway platforms should understand the pains of the farmers," Mr. Bittu said at a press conference here.

Mr. Bittu said many soldiers posted at the borders with Pakistan and China too had requested the government to intervene at the earliest, so that their parents can return home.

"We don't understand what the government wants? The farmers have been sitting on protest for 32 days now, many have died due to the biting cold. Does the government want their blood," he asked.

Shedding light on the Roshni Act

The Act that sought to regularise unauthorised land might have sparked off a debate on the duty of a welfare state



Dr Sidharth Arora
Top Unacademy Educator

Even as news of a new strain of the coronavirus emerges, there is another somewhat controversial subject that is making its way to the headlines: the Roshni Act. Though intended to benefit the people of Jammu and Kashmir, it has now gained ill repute. The enactment of the Roshni Act, its alleged misuse, the High Court's decision, and the subsequent review petition is an example of how sometimes Acts fail to be implemented properly.

What is the Roshni Act?

The Roshni Act is formally known as the J&K State Lands (Vesting of Ownership to the Occupants) Rules, 2007 under Section 18 of the Roshni Act without approval from the legislature. This fueled allegations that the changes were made to suit the elite.

As against the expected transfer of 20.46 lakh kanals of land, permission was accorded for 6.04 lakh kanals and only 3.48 lakh kanals of land were actually transferred.

Enacted in 2001, by the Farooq Abdullah government, it sought to regularise unauthorised land. As per the Act, anybody who had occupied unauthorised land in J&K, could pay a certain fee, as decided by the government, and the land would be regularised.

The targeted proceeds—approximately ₹25,000

crores—were to be used for hydropower projects, thus bringing "roshni" (light) to the State.

Ever-changing posts

In 2001, when the law was enacted, 1990 was set as the cut-off date for encroachment on State land. However, this date was revised under subsequent governments.

Under Section 8(b), the total land that could be so vested was initially restricted to 10 kanals; the limit was later revised to 100 kanals.

Subsequently, a Division Bench of the High Court comprising then Chief Justice Gita Mittal and Justice Rajesh Bindal pronounced its judgment on 9 October 2020, declaring the challenged Act as, "unconstitutional, contrary to law and unsustainable". It also directed a CBI probe.

Following the order, the J&K government decided to declare all the actions taken under the Act to be "null and void" and to retrieve all the land. Most recently, however, the J&K government has filed a review petition, pleading for modifications to the judgment. The petition says that declaring all allotments null and void would cause "unintentional" suffering to a lot of common people and that landless cultivators and the poor could not



be clubbed with rich and influential land grabbers.

Conflict

The present issue raises a pertinent question: What is the duty of a welfare state? Is it to punish the wrong-doers or to save the innocent? Is it to continue with an "unconstitutional law" or to risk "public backlash"?

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176 more tower sites vandalised

Harsimrat flags dip in cotton purchase

Akali leader seeks PM's intervention after CCI puts a ceiling on daily procurement

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
CHANDIGARH

Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh's appeal to protesting farmers to not damage telecom infrastructure seems to have failed to deter new attacks, with more than 176 signal transmitting sites being vandalised in the past 24 hours, sources said on Sunday. The towers belong to Reliance Jio and the common access infrastructure of the telecom industry

This has taken the total number of telecom tower sites damaged to 1,411, they said. Incidents of snapping of power lines to attempts to axe the towers have been reported from various areas. "Site managers are slapped and abused for trying to persuade protesters from damaging sites," one of the sources said.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH

Former Union Minister and Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) leader Harsimrat Kaur Badal on Sunday said the apprehensions of farmers were already coming true in Punjab, with the Cotton Corporation of India (CCI) placing daily ceilings on the procurement of cotton and effecting a four-times reduction in its purchase.

Urging Prime Minister Narendra Modi to take note of the CCI's actions, Ms. Badal said in a statement issued on Sunday, "Even though you have given repeated statements about the continuance of minimum support price (MSP), your inability to specify anything regarding assured government purchase at MSP is already having an adverse effect on government departments. It is

unfortunate that the CCI is not ready to procure limit as per even last year's schedule and is throwing cotton farmers at the mercy of private players

'Issue directive'

"A clear cut directive needs to be issued by you [the PM] guaranteeing government procurement of all agricultural products listed under the

MSP system. This is the need of the hour as even a government department like CCI, which has a mandate to procure cotton on MSP, is abdicating its responsibility. If CCI can do this, what can farmers expect from private players?" the statement said.

She urged the Prime Minister to bring in simultaneous legislation, making it mandatory for private players to procure farm produce at rates not less than the MSP.

Ms. Badal said that even though cotton arrivals had

peaked in the Malwa region, the CCI had announced that it would stagger purchase by restricting buying to only 12,500 quintals per day across 22 purchase centres. She said this would not only result in overcrowding at mandis with farmers vying with each other to get their produce procured first, but would also result in corrupt practices besides distress sale to private players.

"As per the present schedule fixed by CCI, the purchase season would extend till September next year. Small farmers can neither store their produce nor wait it out for so long. They will be forced to sell cheap to private players," she said.

Ms. Badal said the situation was already precarious at the major mandis of Bathinda, Abohar, Mansa and Mau.

The Congress has come out in support of the ongoing protests by the farmers against the three agriculture reform Bills.

The BJP chief said Mr. Gandhi was not concerned

Nadda shares 2015 speech of Rahul speaking on middlemen

Cong. leader playing politics on farmers' issues, BJP chief says

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Bharatiya Janata Party president J.P. Nadda on Sunday accused Congress leader Rahul Gandhi of playing politics over the farmers' protest, citing a 2015 speech by Mr. Gandhi in the Lok Sabha when he spoke about the issue of middlemen in agriculture.

Mr. Nadda tweeted a video of the speech and commented that the Congress leader was now opposing what he had advocated earlier.

The Congress has come out in support of the ongoing protests by the farmers against the three agriculture reform Bills.

The BJP chief said Mr. Gandhi was not concerned



People of the country and farmers have recognised your double standards

J.P. NADDHA
BJP president

about the interest of the country and the farmers, but was only playing politics.

"But this is your bad luck

that your hypocrisy will not work. People of the country and farmers have recognised your double standards," Mr. Nadda tweeted in Hindi.

Old conversation

In his speech, apparently made in the last Lok Sabha when he was an MP from Amethi, Mr. Gandhi is seen recounting a conversation with a potato farmer who asked him how it was possible that they sold potatoes for ₹2 per kg, but their children bought a packet of potato chips for ₹10.

Mr. Gandhi then said the farmer's explanation for this was the distance between the farms and the factories, leading to middlemen taking a cut.

"Congress leader Rahul Gandhi left for abroad on a short personal visit, the party said.

Though the Congress did not disclose Mr. Gandhi's destination, the chief spokesperson of the party, Randeep Surjewala, confirmed that he would be away for a few days.

"Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has left for abroad on a short personal visit and will be away for a few days," Mr. Surjewala said.

Sources said Mr. Gandhi left for Milan in Italy on a Qatar Airways flight in the morning.

His grandmother stays in Italy and he had visited her earlier too.

Foundation Day

Mr. Gandhi's travel abroad comes amid the farmers' protest against the three agriculture laws and a day ahead of the Congress's 136th Foundation Day celebrations on Monday.

The flag of the party will be hoisted at the All India Congress Committee headquarters on the occasion.

'BJP should stop insulting farmers'

Congress, Akali Dal slam saffron party for using derogatory terms against protesters

VIKAS VASUDEVA
CHANDIGARH

The ruling Congress and the former NDA member Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) on Sunday hit out at the BJP, accusing party leaders of using derogatory terms against the protesting farmers.

Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh asked the BJP leaders to stop maligning the farmers and their genuine fight for justice by using offensive terms such as "urban Naxals", "Khalistanis" and "hooligans".

"If the BJP cannot distinguish between anguished citizens fighting for their survival and terrorists, militants and hooligans, it should give up all pretence of being a people's party," the Chief Minister said in a statement.

"Lost right to rule"

A party which treats citizens exercising their democratic right of protest as Naxals and terrorists had lost all right to rule over those citizens, he added.



All-round support: Women and children raising slogans against the new farm laws at the Tikri border in Delhi. ■ PTI

with these remarks, the BJP leadership had hit a new low in its desperation to promote its political agenda.

He pointed out that such protests by angry farmers were taking place not just in Punjab but also in BJP-ruled States such as Haryana and Uttar Pradesh.

"Do the farmers protesting at all these places look like Naxals to you? And does

plea of the *annadatas* (food producers) and responding to their concerns, the BJP was busy trying to demean them and stifle their voice, he said.

BJP should apologise
The SAD also condemned the BJP leaders for terming the farmers of Punjab "urban Naxals".

"It is reprehensible that the Punjab BJP unit has fallen so low that it is calling the farmers of the State urban Naxals. This insult is intolerable and I advise the Punjab unit to take back this slur inflicted on the *annadatas* immediately and apologise for the same," SAD farmer's wing president Sikandar Singh Maluka said.

The Punjab unit of the BJP, meanwhile, accused the Congress government of patronising criminal elements and unleashing violence against political opponents. BJP State general secretary Subhash Sharma wrote a letter to the Chief Minister stating that despite being fully aware of the content and intent of the farm laws, the Congress had been misguiding the farmers.

R.B.C. Singh, close confidant of Nitish, is new JD(U) president

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
PATNA

Ram Chandra Prasad Singh, Rajya Sabha member from the Janata Dal(U) and close confidant of Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, became the new party president on Sunday after Mr. Kumar resigned from the post.

The Chief Minister had been holding the post for long, and Mr. Singh was the national general secretary.

At the national executive committee meeting held at the party headquarters in Patna, Mr. Kumar proposed Mr. Singh's name as the new president, which was subsequently accepted unanimously by the party's executive body and party leaders.

Taking charge
Mr. Singh, a former IAS officer of the Uttar Pradesh cadre, has been with Mr. Kumar since the latter's stint as Union Agriculture Minister. "I've been with Mr. Kumar for the past 23 years and hope to rise to the expectations of the party as its president," Mr. Singh told media.



New role: Bihar CM Nitish Kumar with newly elected JD (U) chief R.C.P. Singh at the party office in Patna on Sunday. ■ PTI

persons. He added that he would strive to make the JD (U) a national party and "also ensure that developments like Arunachal Pradesh did not happen again".

Recently, six JD(U) MLAs in Arun

More time to renew RC, driving licence

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Union Ministry of Road Transport and Highways on Sunday said it had issued an advisory to the States and Union Territories to extend the validity of vehicle-related documents, including driving licence, vehicle registration certificate and permits, till March 31, 2021.

In a statement, the Ministry said the decision was taken in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Similar advisories

The Ministry had issued similar advisories to extend the validity of documents related to the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988, and the Central Motor Vehicle Rules, 1989, on March 30, June 9 and August 24.

The validity of documents, including all types of permits and fitness certificates, were extended till December 31. The latest advisory said, "Taking into consideration the need to prevent the spread of COVID-19, it is further advised that the validity of all of the above referred documents may be treated to be valid till 31st March, 2021. This covers all documents whose validity has expired since 1st Feb, 2020 or would expire by 31st March, 2021."

Distancing norms

The Ministry said the extension would help citizens in availing transport services while adhering to social distancing norms. The Ministry statement said the States and UTs were asked to implement the "advisory in letter and spirit so that the citizens, the transporters and various other organisations which are operating under this difficult time during the pandemic may not get harassed or face difficulties".

3 held for Poonch terror plot

Police say they were planning to attack a temple to disturb harmony

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
JAMMU

The Jammu and Kashmir police on Sunday said they had arrested three Pakistan-linked militant associates and recovered six grenades from them, foiling a terror plot to attack a temple in the border district of Poonch and disturb communal harmony.

Senior Superintendent of Police Ramesh Kumar Angral said the arrested were planning to carry out a grenade attack on a temple at the behest of their Pakistani handler to disturb communal amity in the district.

The officer told presspersons in Poonch that the plot was revealed after the Special Operations Group (SOG) of the police, along with troops of the 49 Rashtriya Rifles, detained two brothers – Mustafa Iqbal Khan and Murtaza Iqbal of Galhuta village – from their vehicle near Basooni in the Mendhar sector on Saturday.

On interrogation, it was found that Mustafa had received a call from a Pakistani number and was directed to execute the grenade attack.

"On being questioned further, he admitted to have been tasked with throwing a grenade at a temple in Ari village. A video on how to use a grenade was also found in his phone," the SSP said.

The SSP said it came to light that Mustafa was involved in militant activities,



Plot foiled: Army personnel taking away a person with Pakistan links in Poonch. ■ PTI

and on his confession two of

his associates – Mohammad Yaseen and Rayees Ahmad of Dabbi village of Balakote near the Line of Control (LoC) – were apprehended.

Another police official said the three were arrested later, while Murtaza Iqbal is still in custody.

The SSP added, "Vital clues were obtained during the questioning of the trio and searches were conducted in the house of Mustafa

from where six grenades, some balloons with Pakistani marking and a few posters of hitherto unknown J&K Ghaznavi Force were recovered."

Asked about the link between the arrested persons and the December 13 encounter in Dogrian village of Poonch which left two Pakistani terrorists dead, he said it was the follow-up of that very operation.

Allahabad HC reunites interfaith couple in Etah

'Woman has the choice to live her life on her own terms'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
LUCKNOW

The Allahabad High Court has reunited an interfaith couple in Etah, observing that since the woman had attained the age of majority, she has a choice to live her life on her own terms and with her husband without any restriction or hindrance by others.

A Division Bench of Justices Pankaj Naqvi and Vivek Agarwal also quashed the FIR lodged against the woman's husband.

Custody of parents

A chief judicial magistrate (CJM) court had earlier sent the woman to a Child Welfare Committee (CWC) and then to the custody of her parents. Shikha's husband, Salman, alias Karan, had filed a *habeas corpus* writ petition pleading that she had been sent to her parents' house by the CWC against her wishes.

...the corpus has attained the age of majority and she has a choice to live her life on her own terms and she has expressed that she wants to live with her husband...

The Bench interacted with the woman, who submitted that she was a major, born in 1999, and had entered into wedlock with Salman. "As the corpus has attained the age of majority and she has a choice to live her life on her own terms and she has expressed that she wants to live with her husband Salman @ Karan she is free to move as per her own choice without any restriction or hindrance being created by third party," the HC noted in an order dated December 18.

The CJM Etah, in an order dated December 7, had

handed over the woman to the custody of the CWC, which a day later handed her over to her parents, "without any application of mind and against her wish," the court noted. "The act of the CJM and the CWC Etah reflects lack of appreciation of legal provisions," the judges said.

FIR quashed

The court quashed the FIR registered on September 27 under Section 366 of the Indian Penal Code (Kidnapping, abducting or inducing woman to compel her marriage) at the Kotwali Dehat police station.

The court had also directed the investigating officer of the case to ensure that appropriate protection was granted to the couple till they returned to their residence, and directed the police chief of Prayagraj to provide police security for their safe passage.

Govt. defends new rule under GST

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Central government has defended its new rule under the Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime that mandates cash payment of at least 1% of tax liabilities for businesses with a turnover of over ₹50 lakh a month, instead of using their input tax credits to discharge their entire tax dues.

The rule, introduced last Wednesday, had attracted criticism from several chartered accountants and tax payers over social media, stoking fears that the mandatory cash payment would adversely affect small businesses, increase their working capital requirement and make GST a more complex indirect tax dues.

The rule, introduced last Wednesday, had attracted criticism from several chartered accountants and tax payers over social media, stoking fears that the mandatory cash payment would adversely affect small businesses, increase their working capital requirement and make GST a more complex indirect tax dues.

Revenue Department sources, however, said these fears were misplaced and "only risky or suspicious dealers and fly-by-night operators" would be affected by the move aimed at curbing fake GST invoice fraud. Several entities with a turnover of ₹6 crore a year (or ₹50 lakh a month) would be excluded from the ambit of the rule, they said.

If a registered person deposited more than ₹1 lakh as income tax in each of the last two years, or received a refund of more than ₹1 lakh in the preceding financial year on account of export or inverted tax structure, they will be exempted from the rule," an official said.

Official data suggest that just four lakh taxpayers supply a value greater than ₹50 lakh a month, while only around 1.5 lakh of those pay less than 1% tax in cash, the source said.

Inner-Line Permit is Centre's biggest gift to Manipur'

Prime Minister thought denying ILP will be an injustice to the indigenous people of the State, says Home Minister

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI/IMPHAL

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday said the Inner-Line Permit (ILP) had been the Centre's biggest gift to Manipur since its statehood.

Implemented under the British-era Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, the ILP is an official document issued to let an Indian citizen enter a protected area for a limited period. Pressure groups in the northeast view this permit as a shield against the entry of illegal immigrants.

"ILP was a long-standing



Spot visit: Union Home Minister Amit Shah waving at a gathering in Imphal on Sunday. ■ PTI

demand of the people of Manipur. Prime Minister Narendra Modi thought denying ILP will be an injustice to the indigenous people of Manipur. So, he gave it to the State in December last year. This is the biggest gift given by the Centre to Manipur since it was established as a State,"

Mr. Shah said at a public function in State capital Imphal.

Apart from Manipur, ILP is needed in Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland. Several groups in Meghalaya have been demanding the implementation of ILP.

Slams Congress

The Union Home Minister slammed the Congress for failing to solve the problem of extremism in Manipur.

"No effort was made during the Congress rule to initiate peace process with such groups or facilitate sur-

render of their members and people kept getting killed. The BJP government has established peace in Manipur," he said, claiming peace agreements with most groups were signed after 2014.

"I believe the remaining groups, currently outside the purview of peace process, will soon join the mainstream," Mr. Shah said.

"There was a time when Manipur was known for bandhs and blockades. Law and order always used to be in discussion. Modiji had promised to the people of Manipur that bandhs and

blockades will be a thing of the past and over the past three years, there was not a single bandh in the State," he said.

He appealed to the State's civil society groups to have faith in the government and include Manipur's development in their charter of demands.

The civil society organisations had on Saturday said the people of Manipur would not accept any ethnic-based territorial council within Manipur. They said such an arrangement would create more political and ethnic problems in the State.

'Those stranded during lockdown faced racial abuse'

Report from Nagaland govt. documents trauma of the State's residents stranded across the country

VIJAYA SINGH
NEW DELHI

A report from the Nagaland government has noted how stranded residents from the State were subjected to "racism and harassment" in the wake of the March 24 nationwide lockdown.

A report by a working group on the inter-State movement of stranded persons, authored by IAS officer Dinesh Kumar, was presented to the Nagaland government earlier this month.

The report chronicles the return of migrants during the months of May, June and July following relaxations by the Union Home Ministry that allowed some Shramik special trains and a limited number of buses to operate.

Faced discrimination

The panel report highlighted that the Nagaland context was slightly different as the demographic of stranded persons was different.

It said, "Nagaland persons who are part of the hospitality sector suddenly saw themselves out of jobs due to continuing lockdown and were running out of their limited means of sustaining themselves outside Nagaland. There were instances of racial discrimination and removal of some Nagaland persons from their rented homes by the owners in other States, who also found themselves stranded suddenly."

The report said that as many as 18,255 stranded persons registered on the 'I am Stranded' portal, that was created by the State government to ensure that all affected persons were registered and brought back in a systematic manner. A one-time assistance of ₹10,000 was also offered to residents who wished to stay back. Eventually, 13,549 residents returned.

On March 23, the Home

Ministry issued an advisory to all States to ensure sensitisation of law enforcement agencies to take action against harassment of persons of the northeast amid several incidents of racial attacks linking them to the COVID-19 outbreak in India. Several incidents were reported where those from the northeast were blamed for the pandemic that is said to have originated from Wuhan in China.

Suddenly homeless
"Nagaland students, who were studying in various parts of India, suddenly had no means to return home; adding to their woes was the anxiety of their parents/loved ones back here in Nagaland – in some of the remotest villages/areas in the

country. Additionally, a migrant population of persons of outside States also was present in Nagaland which became suddenly stranded owing to closure of economic/construction activities within the State," it said.

It added, "In many occasions, the teams found themselves dealing with highly distressed persons with immediate grievances including being thrown out of their homes, losing their jobs, depression, racial/sexual abuse. The teams handled to the greatest extent possible with empathy and ensuring the best was done to alleviate the problems/distress as faced by the stranded persons. There were several instances of persons crying due to distress/helplessness, the calls/messages from whom were dealt empathetically despite the team themselves working long hours."

The working group was created on May 9.

SII to launch pneumonia vaccine

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The first indigenous vaccine against pneumonia, developed by the Serum Institute of India (SII), will be launched by Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan on Monday, says information released by the Institute here on Sunday.

According to sources, the vaccine will be much more affordable than the existing ones manufactured by two foreign companies.

In July, India's drug regulator had granted market approval for the Pneumococcal Polysaccharide Conjugate vaccine.

awarded a D.Litt. by the Rabindra Bharti University for his research on dance sculptures in the medieval temples of north Gujarat.

With a photographic memory and an insatiable quest for knowledge, Kothari travelled to every nook and corner of the country to document both celebrated and less-known performers. He remained the quintessential Sunil bhai to a generation of exponents, always accessible, always encouraging.

He was always keen on taking a twirl with a dancer, try out a dance movement in a workshop and punctuate an academic paper presentation with a brief demonstration himself. The fact that he



Sunil Kothari spent hours learning Bharatanatyam from T.P. Kuppaiah Pillai and Kathak from Pandit Badriprasad gave him the confidence that many of his contemporaries lacked.

In the league of archivists and scholars like T.K. Govind Vidyarthi and Mohan Khokhar, Kothari researched and recorded the journey of Indian dance forms – how they took shape, blossomed, and survived the colonial rule. With 20-odd books to his credit, as a dance historian, Kothari focused on anecdotal accounts.

Kothari was instrumental in establishing the School of Arts and Aesthetics at the Jawaharlal Nehru University and mentored many art scholars. "While documenting any art form, he inspired students to follow a 'people-first' approach to understand the artiste and their passion for the art first," said arts writer Shrikhandi Sahai, a student of Kothari at JNU.

Veteran Kathak exponent Geetanjali Lal, a neighbour of Kothari in the Asian Games Village, said, "He devoted his entire life to dance. His lucid pieces, including his analysis of the technical aspects of Kathak, have been widely appreciated and have contributed significantly to the field of dance studies. He was a true icon of Indian classical dance."

Eminent dance scholar Sunil Kothari dead at 87

The Sangeet Natak Akademi fellow blazed a new trail in documenting Indian classical dance forms

ANUJ KUMAR
NEW DELHI

Eminent dance scholar and critic Sunil Kothari, 87, passed away on Sunday morning in a private hospital in Delhi because of COVID-19-related complications. A Sangeet Natak Akademi fellow, Kothari blazed a new trail in documenting Indian classical dance forms.

Born in Khetda district of Gujarat, Kothari qualified as a chartered accountant and taught in Mumbai's Sydenham College for a brief while before turning to dance studies. He completed his Ph.D. on the dance drama traditions of south India and *Natyashastra* in 1977 from M.S. University, Baroda. He was

knitting past and present trends in dance forms, in leading newspapers, including *The Hindu*.

Kothari was instrumental in establishing the School of Arts and Aesthetics at the Jawaharlal Nehru University and mentored many art scholars. "While documenting any art form, he inspired students to follow a 'people-first' approach to understand the artiste and their passion for the art first," said arts writer Shrikhandi Sahai, a student of Kothari at JNU.

CM

YK

AN ODE TO HOME

As we wrap up a year of being indoors, a look back at our living spaces, our favourite spots, that were conducive to our overall wellbeing

SWETA AKUNDI



BEDROOM

At the end of the day, her bedroom is the one space that Devika Menon feels she can call her own. She moved to Bengaluru post-marriage and a new job. "It was not easy to settle down with a new person. I couldn't sleep. My work was taking a toll on me. I was diagnosed with depression and anxiety, and was on medicines," she says.

The pandemic pushed her life into second gear just at the right time. She moved back to her home in Kerala to live with her parents, her husband and her dogs. "I was being showered with love and care. Work too seemed to get better and I am sure it had something to do with me being home," she says. From not being able to sleep at all, Devika now finds herself yawning at 10 pm.



DINING ROOM

"It feels strange to be in the same city, in the same time zone, sleep in the same bed, have food at the same dining table, day after day, for so long. I don't think I have done this since the early 2000s," says Captain Janak Deb, The Chennai-based pilot is part of Air

India's Vande Bharat mission, bringing Indian citizens stranded in foreign countries back to their homeland during the pandemic. Due to the high-risk nature of his job, he could not visit his folks in Bhopal and instead had to tide over the period alone in Chennai.

It was a year of solitude for him and better health as well. "I have an erratic schedule. These past months, I have been able to eat my meals at home at reasonable hours, instead of having to pull night shifts and eat at hotels at odd times," he says.



HALLWAY

In the days of complete lockdown, for many of us, our daily routines revolved around our homes. Sundreysh Sarup took that literally.

From April to August this year, every morning the Gurugram-based marathon runner would create a mini route loop for himself starting from his balcony, cutting across various rooms to the apartment lift and back. He would then run on this loop of 30-40 metres for two hours, once completing 15 kilometres at a stretch: that's 375 revolutions. His puppy would be at his heels, barking bemusedly as it tagged along. "We did not know what else to do!" he laughs. "At that time we could not step out to run even in our societies, and I needed those two hours to allow

my mind some fresh thought and beat the blues."

To create the route, he would have to rearrange the furniture every morning so that "there were as few sharp turns as possible. Of course, putting the furniture back in its place was part of the deal with the wife," he says.



■ GETTY IMAGES/
ISTOCK PHOTO

KITCHEN

If there was one space inside his house that Delhi-based Vishal Sinha rediscovered, it was the kitchen. This year, his passion for eating different cuisines transformed into a motivation to cook them; the pandemic made him pick up culinary skills from the scratch, like many others.

"The biggest challenge was rediscovering and rearranging all the spices and ingredients in my kitchen – that is the one thing Google doesn't have access to, yet," he laughs, adding that neither him nor his wife cooked before this. "Everything I learnt was from a permutation and combination of YouTube tutorials by various chefs."

Being in his kitchen for two hours after a hard day has become a stress buster for Vishal, who also lost 12 kilograms in the process. He loves the creative process of fusion dishes, and the sheer variety of ingredients and flavours they comprise. "The whole process of sourcing ingredients like *pathar ke phool* and lotus roots was a lot of fun," he says. This way, he hopes his 18-year-old son, who will be starting college, will remember his 'Papa ke haath ka khana'.



LIVING ROOM

In Aparna Jain's TV room, strangers turn friends watching each other trying to hoop a hula hoop around their bellies. Aparna, who turned 50 recently, had been eager to try a form of exercise that wasn't regimented, but fun. Hula hooping fit the bill, and she soon began to take online classes practising in her living room. "I would not have been able to do it if I weren't for working from my home this year," she says.

Thrice a week, her living room transforms into a place of silliness and laughter. As much as she enjoys the workout, she also enjoys finding a network of women she can vibe with. "They were absolute strangers before I got to know about their lives, work, what they believe in and stand for," she says.



BALCONY

When work-from-home began in earnest, Saloni Dahake realised that the view from her standing work desk – a south facing balcony that opened up to more buildings on a busy Mumbai street – was not much to look at. A few monstera should spruce it up, she figured.

This, over the course of the year, unlocked a love for plants – Saloni has over 140 of them in her 2BHK house. Starting on shelves in her balcony, they now cover a good part of the house; creepers flow across walls from counters where natural sunlight falls. "It is my horticulture therapy. There is joy in seeing something grow. No two plants, even of the same species, look alike, because the way you raise them is different," she says.

With her job revolving around social media and consuming content, being surrounded by greenery calms her down. "Gifting plants to friends is another kind of joy," she says.

Get on a 'smartphone' diet

Here are a few hacks to make your gadgets dull and boring in order to wean yourself off them

AISHWARYA UPADHYE

What is the first thing you do when you wake up? Check your phone for time, messages, emails or just to scroll through social media? Does it make you anxious if you don't? If yes, it is probably time for a detox.

Manoj Kumar Sharma, additional professor for Clinical Psychology at Bengaluru-based technology de-addiction and counselling centre, SHUT (Service for Healthy Use of Technology) says he has seen a 50% increase in the number of people affected by gadget addiction since the lockdown. "The cases have gone up from eight per week in pre-COVID times to almost 20 now. Gadget addiction is not necessarily the main reason why people seek help. They come in for anxiety or insomnia, but when we look into their routines, it is tied to heavy gadget usage. Most are children from Class IV to VII," he says.

Psychologist Leonora Mohan from Visakhapatnam says aggressive actions like taking away the phone from children harm more than help. "It makes the child angry, anxious and impatient and also puts the parent in bad light. It is healthy to have conversations about the addiction before enforcing rules. It instils a sense of trust in the child," she says.

For most of her adult patients, Leonora advises a phone diet, the way you would follow a food diet. It means you decide which apps are needed and which ones are unnecessary and keep a check on how much time you are spending on each app. Here is how:

Maintain social distance
Ensure that your phone is not the last thing you see before bed and the first thing you check when you wake up. Place it on a side table or preferably out of the bedroom. When at home, put the phone on loud mode instead of carrying it around to minimise your habit of



checking every notification the moment it arrives.

Turn off pop up notifications

Pop ups and push notifications encourage you to check your phone frequently. Disable app notifications through Permission Manager from your phone settings.

Go grey

Make your phone screen less bright by shifting to greyscale. For iPhones, go to Display Accommodations in the Accessibility option under Settings, toggle and select

Stop those personalised ads
Your search engine keeps a tab on almost

everything you search using the apps and the data is saved to enhance future search results and show you ads based on your recent searched items. You can turn off 'save history' or 'Web & App Activity toggle' under the browser settings section. On your iPhone or iPad, turn off Safari syncing in iCloud under Settings.

Remove distracting apps

How many times have you picked up the phone to text but ended up scrolling through your Instagram and Facebook feed just because it was right next to your WhatsApp?

Track the apps on which you spend extra time and move them away from the home screen so that they are not the first things you see when you unlock the phone. You can also use WhatsApp web on your PC to avoid checking the phone frequently.

Parental locks

Most Android phones come with parental locks that help in supervising your child's phone remotely by syncing their Google account with your own through Google family link. Once accounts are synced, parents can monitor the apps downloaded on the child's device and set filters on them. They can even set controls such as bedtime and screen time limit.

App irony

There are apps that help you to keep off social media apps! Download them to keep a check on how much time you are spending on each app and then actively work on reducing the usage. These apps also help you set time limits on social media apps and lock them once you exceed the given duration.

CONVERSATIONS WITH SELF

Keeping in touch

We should remember and be thankful to the people we have in our lives



■ GETTY IMAGES/STOCK PHOTO



T Srinath

We are nearing the end of 2020 and I am reminded of a song my father used to sing when happy, 'Should old acquaintances be forgot?' I recall the song and with several remembrances. The last many months have been tough for me and for several others. In spite of their personal challenges, friends and even acquaintances I may not have kept in touch with, unhesitatingly called and enquired about me when they learnt about my recent setback.

My father, who served in the Indian army would often say, "If we can draw on people without compunction, surely in a crisis, if we have invested in them in the past with the many who have given me reason to feel thankful.

We can draw on people without compunction, surely in a crisis, if we have invested in them in the past

My few attempts to keep in touch, I now know, are bearing fruit. So I have resolved to, in some way, keep in touch and stay connected

with the many who have given me reason to feel thankful.

The writer is an organisational and behavioural consultant. He can be contacted at tsrinath@gmail.com



Winners of the Big Little Book Award 2020, illustrator Rajiv Eipe and author Subhadra Sen Gupta discuss the art of telling stories without words and writing for children

NEERAJA MURTHY

The power of images



Broad strokes Rajiv Eipe's (inset) illustration in the book *A Book For Puchku* by Deepanjana Pal • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Rajiv Eipe's first illustrations were for Geeta Dharmarajan's *Dinosaur-Long-As-I27-Kids* (Katha, 2010) telling the story of a one-of-its-kind Dino that loved taking children for rides. Since then, the illustrator has been bringing different characters to life. This year's winner of Big Little Book Award 2020 in the illustrators category, Rajiv dedicates his award "to all the wonderful illustrators doing amazing and inspiring work in children's books in India".

He adds over phone from Parag, "It is inspiring to see organisations recognising and shining a light on people working in the children's literature space. There is so much work happening right now that it is good to see it being encouraged." Besides illustrating, Rajiv also runs Plankton Collective, a small animation studio in Bengaluru, with two friends from his design school.

Edited excerpts from an interview:

Tell us about your passion for art.

• I started drawing at an early age. I didn't know that one could make a career out of drawing pictures for books at that stage. One could either be a fancy artist displaying paintings in galleries, or paint signboards and hoardings. I must have discovered book illustration around the time when I

was in Art College (J J School of Art, Mumbai).

Tell us the process/research that you follow before illustrating a children's book?

• It begins with rough drawings and style options after having read the manuscript to get a sense of who the characters are, what the final page of the book might look like, whether the illustration style matches the tone of a story. After discussions with the art director and editor, a clear direction emerges. That helps to make rough thumbnail layouts of the entire book, and to have a glimpse of the story's flow. Then, I create final illustrations. The average timeline for a picture book is usually three months.

What are the challenges when creating illustrations for a children's book and a comic book/graphic novel?

• The challenge is to make a career in illustration financially viable. In terms of the actual work, the main challenge is to make sure the illustrations serve the story. You need to be able to maintain some level of consistency throughout the illustrations of a longish book, and make sure the illustration adds something to the story, and is not just a repetition of the text.

What are the skills that budding illustrators have to develop to sustain in the field?

• Besides good drawing and composition skills, it helps to have some amount of patience and empathy. Also, a love for books and storytelling, an eye for detail, and a willingness to accept criticism and accommodate different ideas and viewpoints.

Considering the importance of visual storytelling in children's books, do you feel illustrators are not given due credit?

• I haven't personally experienced this. I have found, in the children's publishing industry, that illustrators are valued and respected as much as authors. But in general, people working in children's literature aren't given enough credit and importance for the incredible work they do.

Complex concepts in simple stories



Words matter
The Teenage Diary of Jahanara by (inset) Subhadra Sen Gupta
■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

In the year of the pandemic, there has been good news for writer Subhadra Sen Gupta and illustrator Rajiv Eipe, who were honoured with the Big Little Book Award 2020 for their significant contribution to Indian children's literature. An initiative of Parag (Tata Trusts), The Big Little Award aims to create a platform for parents, young readers, schools and publishers to connect and spread the joy of reading good children's books.

Every year, one Indian language author is chosen for the award; in its fifth edition this year, English is the selected language. Subhadra was among two people selected from 318 nominations by the jury.

Subhadra's forte is historical writing, which reflects in her books. In her three-decade journey as a writer, she has written over 60 books, a majority of them for children. Balancing her career in advertising (for two decades), she has been able to carve a niche with her inimitable writing style. Explaining complex concepts in a simple but engaging way is a hallmark of her books in different genres – fiction, non-fiction, travel, scripts, and comics.

Edited excerpts from an email interview:

For someone who has been writing for children for so many years, it must have been an amazing feeling to win the award.

• Oh yes. It was a beam of sunlight after a very cold, grey year. I was surprised at how happy I felt. It's a great feeling of validation of all your work. Most importantly, it is about children. For 30 years, I've been talking to children and it has been worth it. For years, not many people

took children's writing seriously. There were no awards, and even commissions from publishers were difficult. I have gone through all that. So now, the more awards we have, the better. I am happy to be a part of the work that Parag and Tata Trusts are doing.

Most of your books have your email id at the end for your young readers to give feedback. Has this interaction given you new insights?

• A few years ago, I began to save the mails in a separate folder and it has nearly 300 mails, some from adults, and from all across the world. I just helped an American high school student with her project. The feedback helps me

gauge what they liked and what they did not because kids are, thankfully, not polite and tell me. No kid will ever say my book was 'nice'. Also, if they like my books, I become a friend and they write freely.

Who are the writers that you admire?

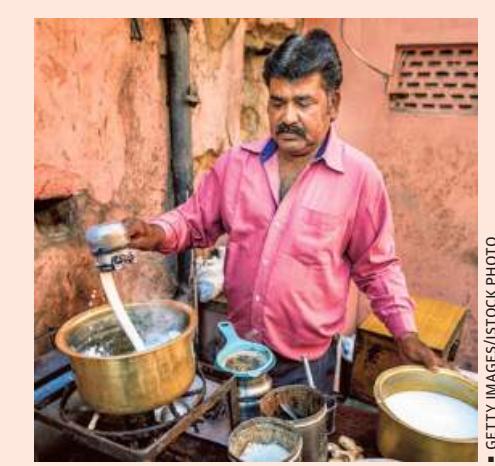
• The one I am thinking of right now is John Le Carre. I am addicted to detective fiction and at one time dreamed of being the Agatha Christie of India. I read a lot of history, especially Rama-chandra Guha, Upinder Singh and my favourite: Abraham Eraly.

Most of your books revolve around history. What would be your tip for budding writers on writing history that people want to read?

• First, e-mail me. I'll guide you so you don't see a fat history book and have a panic attack. There are ways to research and ways to use the information cleverly. I am offering my experience of 30 years of panic attacks.

Did you write through the pandemic?

• In the beginning, I froze. Somehow the silence and isolation got to me. I realised how much I needed my family and friends, and just getting out of the house to freshen my mind. Yet, one book is nearly done, again around the life of people in the past like *Let's Go Time Travelling*. This time by request from the children. One kid wrote to me ordering I 'make' a book about people in the past. So I obey.



GETTY IMAGES/STOCK PHOTO

Creating opportunity

Father-daughter entrepreneur duo CK Kumaravel and CK Dhamyanthi recently launched Cyclepreneur – an initiative they claim is intended to help the local tea seller who belongs to the vulnerable communities affected and rendered jobless during lockdown.

Launched at the Namma Café outlet in RA Puram, Chennai, the Cyclepreneur project will provide cycles, tea, coffee and snacks to the tea sellers, which they can sell in their neighbourhood. Says CK Kumaravel, "We aim to have 2000 cyclepreneurs by 2021." The first Namma Café outlet was opened in November on CP Ramaswamy Road, in the city. Besides the outlet at RA Puram, there are three more in Chennai.

Besides the Cyclepreneur initiative, Namma Café has also launched a library space called Namma Library – the duo say it is "an exclusive space for Tamil books". Tamil publisher, Gandhi Kannadhashan, helped source books for the library, which will have *Thirukkural*, poems by Subramanya Bharati besides titles written by late former President of India APJ Abdul Kalam and other eminent authors.



GETTY IMAGES/STOCK PHOTO

The next big talent

The top 100 finalists of a national-level talent competition, Young Artiste 2020, has been awarded with mentorship programmes worth ₹25 lakh to aid in the pursuit of their chosen art form. Supported by the Singhal Iyer Family Foundation (SIFF), the finale of Young Artiste 2020 will be held next year. The competition was launched earlier this year and had to be put on hold due to COVID-19.

"Young Artiste was instituted with the view to set up a national-level platform to tap into and recognise the hidden potential of young artistes in India, and provide a fertile learning ground for them to harness their skills," a statement quoting Sandeep Singhal, Trustee – SIFF, says.

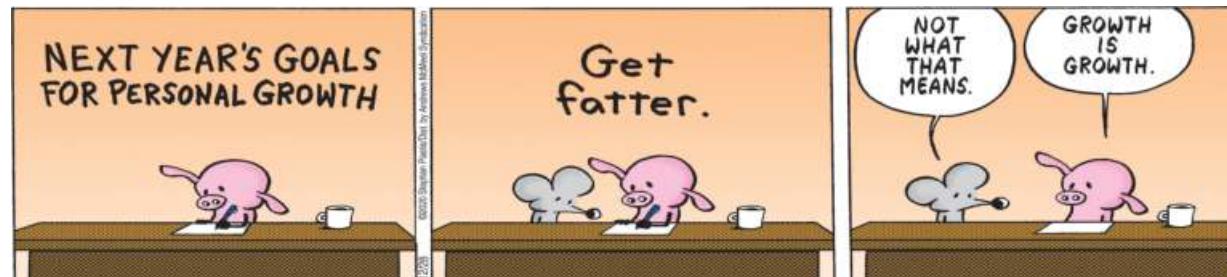
The 100 finalists were selected from over 12,000 applications received from participants between the ages of 11 and 18. The finalists are now a part of the Young Artiste Advanced Mentorship Programme wherein they will be mentored by prominent names like Dr L Subramaniam, Kavita Krishnamurthy and Madhavi Mudgal besides Rukmini Vijayakumar (Bharatanatyam), Anupama Bhagwat (Sitar) and Nikhita Gandhi (Indian and western vocals) among others. "The finalists will be exposed to masterclass style sessions, exposing them to a variety of concepts like music production, composition, choreography, application of their genre in music/dance and making their chosen art form a full-time career," the statement adds.



POOCH CAFE



PEARLS BEFORE SWINE



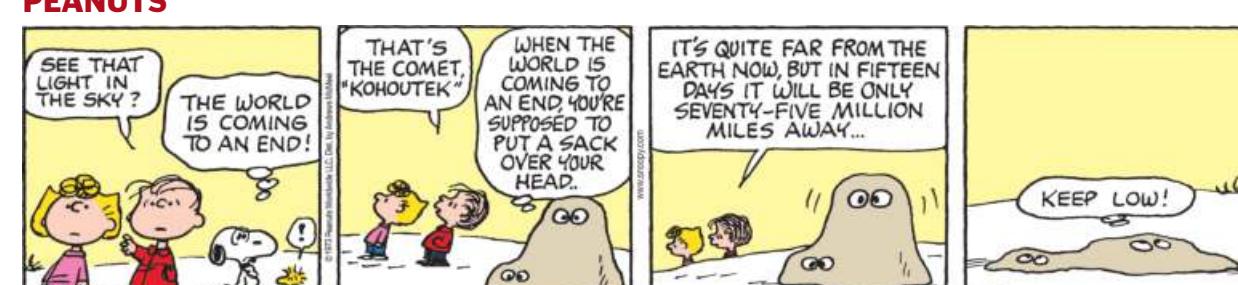
HAGAR THE HORRIBLE



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PEANUTS



TIGER



CALVIN AND HOBBES



EU nations roll out mass vaccination

Goal is to offer the shots to all adults through 2021; frontline workers and elderly prioritised

REUTERS
MADRID/ROME

Europe launched a massive vaccination drive on Sunday with pensioners and medics lining up to take the first shots to see off the COVID-19 pandemic that has crippled economies and claimed more than 1.7 million lives worldwide.

"Thank God," 96-year-old Araceli Hidalgo said as she became the first person in Spain to get a vaccine. She told staff at her care home in Guadalajara she hadn't felt a thing. "Let's see if we can make this virus go away."

In Italy, the first country in Europe to record significant numbers of infections, 29-year-old nurse Claudia Alvernini was one of three medical staff to receive the first shots of the vaccine developed by Pfizer and BioNTech.

"It is the beginning of the end... it was an exciting, historical moment," she said at Rome's Spallanzani hospital.

The region of 450 million



Fight begins: Araceli Hidalgo, 96, receiving the first dose of the vaccine on Sunday in Guadalajara, Spain. ■ GETTY IMAGES

people has secured contracts with a range of suppliers for more than two billion vaccine doses and has set a goal for all adults to be inoculated during 2021.

With surveys pointing to high levels of hesitancy towards the vaccine in countries from France to Poland, leaders of the 27-country EU are promoting it.

"We are starting to turn the page on a difficult year,"

ensure that there is equal access to the vaccines across the region.

But even then, Hungary on Saturday jumped the gun on the official roll-out by starting to administer shots of the Pfizer and BioNTech vaccine to frontline workers at hospitals in the capital Budapest.

Slovakia also went ahead with some inoculations of healthcare staff on Saturday and in Germany, a small number of people at a care home for the elderly were inoculated a day early too. "We don't want to waste that one day that the vaccine loses shelf life. We want to use it right away," Karsten Fischer, from the pandemic staff of the Harz district in the German state of Saxony-Anhalt told local broadcaster MDR.

The distribution of the Pfizer-BioNTech shot presents tough challenges. The vaccine uses mRNA technology and must be stored at ultra-low temperatures of about -70 degrees Celsius.

In Italy, temporary solar-powered healthcare pavilions designed to look like five-petaled primrose flowers — a symbol of spring — sprung up in town squares around the country.

In Spain, doses were being delivered by air to its island territories and the North African enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla. Portugal is establishing separate cold storage units for its Atlantic archipelagos of Madeira and the Azores. "A window of hope has now opened, without forgetting that there is a very difficult fight ahead," Portuguese Health Minister Marta Temido told reporters.

In the Czech Republic, Prime Minister Andrej Babis was at the head of the queue. In Vienna, three women and two men over 80 got the vaccine in the presence of Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz.

Outside the EU, Britain, Switzerland and Serbia have started vaccinating their citizens in recent weeks.

Sri Lankan police seize 20,000 kg of turmeric

Spice allegedly smuggled from India

MEERA SRINIVASAN
COLOMBO



Customs officials examining a turmeric haul in Colombo, in this file photo. ■ AFP

Sri Lanka police on Sunday seized 20,000 kg of turmeric smuggled by sea, reportedly from India, amid a shortage persisting since Sri Lanka banned imports to support local farmers in the pandemic year. Four Sri Lankan nationals were arrested, police said.

"The consignment had been loaded to a fishing trawler mid-sea. We suspect it came from India. It was apprehended along the island's southern coast," police spokesman DIG Ajith Rana told *The Hindu*.

The pandemic, which hit Sri Lanka in March, has severely impacted its economy, prompting the government to restrict imports and pledge greater support to local farmers. Sri Lanka consumes an estimated 7,000 tonnes of turmeric annually — the ingredient is widely used across different cuisines in the island nation — and nearly 5,000 tonnes were imported from India until COVID-19 struck the country.

Meanwhile, consumers are still finding it hard to purchase turmeric at reasonable prices in the capital, sources said.

Lawmakers press Trump on relief Bill as jobless aid expires

Biden accuses Trump of 'abdication of responsibility'

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WEST PALM BEACH



Joe Biden

President Donald Trump appeared no closer to signing an end-of-year COVID relief and spending bill Sunday as unemployment aid expired, the government barrels toward a mid-pandemic shutdown and lawmakers implored him to break the impasse he created after Congress approved the deal.

The fate of the bipartisan package remained in limbo on Sunday as Mr. Trump continued to demand larger COVID-19 relief checks and complained about "pork" spending. Without the widespread funding provided by the massive measure, a government shutdown would occur when money runs out at 12:01 a.m. on Tuesday.

Washington has been reeling since Mr. Trump turned on the deal after it had won sweeping approval in both houses of Congress and after the White House had assured Republican leaders that Mr. Trump would support it.

Instead, he assailed the Bill's plan to provide \$600

COVID-19 relief checks to most Americans — insisting it should be \$2,000. House Republicans rejected that idea during a rare Christmas Eve session. But Mr. Trump has not been swayed in spite of the nation being in the grip of a pandemic.

"I simply want to get our great people \$2,000, rather than the measly \$600 that is now in the bill," Mr. Trump said. He accused Mr. Trump of an "abdication of responsibility" that has "devastating consequences."

Lauren Bauer, a fellow in economic studies at the Brookings Institution, has calculated that 11 million people would lose aid immediately; millions more would exhaust other unemployment benefits in weeks.

ELSEWHERE



Avalanches in Iran kill 11 in mountainous area

TEHRAN
A series of avalanches in Iran killed 11 people in a mountainous area north of the capital, state TV reported on Sunday. The report said rescue teams were searching for a number of missing people after the avalanches struck in four different areas on the Alborz mountain range. State TV aired footage of emergency crews using a helicopter to search for those missing and injured. The incidents happened on Friday following strong winds and snowfall a day earlier. AP

Niger votes in legislative, presidential elections

NIAMEY
Niger is voting on Sunday in presidential and legislative elections that could see the West African country's first democratic transition of power since independence amid a growing threat from jihadists in the region. Polls opened with a good turnout. Some 7.4 million Nigeriens are voting to elect legislators and the successor to President Mahamadou Issoufou. Attacks by Islamic extremists has affected local elections for weeks. AP

China orders Ant Group to rectify businesses

Authorities had earlier launched an antitrust investigation into parent Alibaba Group



were due to begin trading in Shanghai and Hong Kong.

On Thursday, authorities said they had launched an antitrust investigation into parent Alibaba Group and would summon Ant in coming days, the latest blow for Jack Ma's e-commerce and fintech empire.

The PBOC's demands also include that Ant be more transparent about its third-party payment transactions and not conduct unfair competition, and that its setup of financial holding companies comply with the law to ensure the capital adequacy, Mr. Pan said.

China's annual Central Economic Work Conference, a gathering

of top leaders and policy makers to chart the economy's course in 2021, vowed this month to strengthen anti-monopoly efforts and rein in "disorderly capital expansion."

During the meeting, regulators pointed out Ant's issues including its poor corporate governance, defiance of regulatory demands, illegal regulatory arbitrariness, the use of its market advantage to squeeze out competitors, he said.

Ant said, via a statement on social media, that it would set out the plan and timetable in a timely manner, without saying when new steps would be implemented.

Afghan peace talks set to resume in Doha: official

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE KABUL

The next round of negotiations between the Taliban and the Afghan government will be held in Qatar from next month, a top official said on Sunday, despite President Ashraf Ghani's recent calls for them to be moved to home.

Peace talks began on September 12 at a luxury hotel in Doha, but negotiations are currently on a break until January 5.

"The second round of talks will begin on January 5 in Doha," said Faraidoon Khwazoon, spo-

The two "discussed the venue for the next round of talks" after which Mr. Ghani announced the government's support for a second stage of talks with the Taliban, the presidency said.

Ghani for talks in Afghanistan
Earlier in December, negotiators from both sides decided to take a break after months of often frustrating meetings, which were bogged down by disputes on the basic framework of discussions and religious interpretations.

Meanwhile, Mr. Ghani and

some other top Afghan officials immediately called for the next round of meetings to be held in Afghanistan.

"It is not appropriate to insist on holding talks in luxurious hotels. It is necessary that the people see how the talks happen, which issues are focused on and why," Mr. Ghani said soon after the break in talks was announced.

The Taliban did not comment on Mr. Ghani's call, but they have in the past always refused to hold the negotiations in Afghanistan.

Chinese delegation in Nepal for dialogue with rival NCP factions

We will brief CPC delegation about recent upheavals: Karki

KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE
NEW DELHI

A high-level diplomatic team

led by vice-minister of the

International Department of

the Communist Party of China,

Guo Yezhou, arrived in

Kathmandu on Sunday to

hold a dialogue with the two

factions of the Nepal Com-

munist Party (NCP). The Chi-

inese team will meet its counter-

part in Foreign Affairs De-

partment of the NCP, led by

former Prime Minister

Madhav Kumar Nepal, on

Monday morning.

"We have fraternal rela-

tionship not just with the

Communist Party of China

but also with the Communist

Party of India (CPI), CPI(M)

and Communist Party of

Bangladesh. We maintain

communication among our

selves as a matter of routine.

Since there have been some

upheavals in Nepal in the re-

cent past, we may share

some of our thoughts with

the visiting delegation too," Ram Karki, deputy Head of Foreign Affairs Department of the NCP, told *The Hindu* from Kathmandu.

The Chinese team is in

Kathmandu to try and bro-

ker a truce between the Oli

and the Prachanda-Nepal

factions, which appears like

a challenging task in the

backdrop of the dissolution

of the *Pratinidhi Sabha*

(House of Representatives).

The visiting delegation is

expected to meet with co-

chair of the party Pushpa

Kamal Dahal "Prachanda"

and Prime Minister K.P.

Sharma Oli, the two figures

leading the two factions of

the ruling Nepal Communist

Party, respectively. Actions

of the warring factions in the

past few days have indicated

that the divide between the

two sides is more or less

complete.

Mr. Karki pointed out that

the division in the party "is a

matter of time unless Prime Minister Oli realises that he made a mistake by dissolving the *Pratinidhi Sabha* on December 20."

"Unfortunately, the affairs of the NCP have reached a point where no visiting delegation can really stop it (a split in the party)," said Mr. Karki, accusing Mr. Oli of following neo-liberal agenda despite being a communist party figure.

"Given his history of authoritarian behaviour, it does not appear that he will realise his mistake and in that he is sharing tendencies that we see nowadays in several other countries of the world," said Mr. Karki.

During months-long ten-

sion between the two sides, it was Chinese Ambassador to Nepal Hou Yanqi, who played a key role in creating a stable channel of dialogue between Mr. Oli and Mr. Pra-

chanda.

Pearl murder: Sindh govt. will not free four accused

Decision on account of SC order

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
ISLAMABAD

four men's detention was "illegal".

The court, however, had clarified that the accused should not be released if there is a Supreme Court res-training order regarding their detention.

Citing its sources, the *Express Tribune* newspaper said that the provincial government will not release these men in view of the Supreme Court's September 28 order.

A three-judge apex court Bench headed by Justice Mushir Alam, which is hearing the appeal by the Sindh government, on September 28 noted that till the next date of hearing, the accused shall not be released.

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invites applications for the post of

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Last

ASK US



VIDYA BALA

Q. My daughter (40) is working. Neither she nor her husband has pension benefits. I want to ensure a decent pension at the end of her service 20 years hence. I want to invest a maximum of ₹10 lakh in a long-term fund giving good returns after 15-20 years without much risk. She has insurance policies with a life cover of ₹10 lakh.

S.S. AMALRAJ

A. Please ask your daughter to increase her term insurance cover as it is inadequate for an earning member in the family.

For investing, you have two options. If you are totally risk averse, simply use the higher returns available for senior citizens to invest in Senior Citizens' Savings Scheme. If you have exhausted it, then invest in RBI Floating Rate Bonds 2020. Use the interest from either or both of these to invest SIPs in Nifty-based index funds (30%) and banking, PSU and corporate bond funds (together 70%). This way you will ensure your ₹10 lakh is intact (you can gift it later along with the investment).

The other and slightly riskier alternative is to directly invest in Nifty-based index funds for about 30% of your corpus and 70% in corporate bond and gilt funds. Both, especially the equity index fund will be volatile and see losses even over three-year periods. If you wait patiently, you can ensure a decent corpus for her. Please use SIP over 18-24 months. About 5-8 years before her retirement, she can start shifting the money in the index fund to safer deposit options.

Q. I am a government employee set to retire in April 2021. I want to invest my terminal benefits in secured investments. I am more concerned about the safety of the money invested than interest income. Since deposit insurance covers only up to ₹5 lakh, can I invest in different banks/institutions in fractions of ₹5 lakh? Does this cover Post Office savings schemes?

JAYAKUMAR P

A. Yes, you can split the deposits across various banks – specifically make sure you have them in systemically-important banks such as SBI, HDFC Bank and ICICI Bank. RBI considers these banks vital and would not allow them to fail.

Avoid small payment banks or co-operative banks with high interest given their risks in recent times. There is no deposit insurance for government schemes as they are sovereign guaranteed. That means unless the country goes bust, your money is guaranteed by the government. We suggest you have a mix of bank deposits (for liquidity), Post Office Senior Citizens' Scheme, 10-year government pension policy called PM Vaya Vandana Yojana (if it is available in 2021 at good rates) and RBI Floating Rate Savings Bond 2020.

Q. My father is a Central government employee. He has ₹5 lakh as fixed deposit in SBI. It is nearing maturity and now, he wants to deposit it in Post Office schemes. What are the benefits of investing thus? Is there any other way of earning more interest?

TAMIZH ARASAN

A. Your father is doing the right thing by choosing Post Office schemes. They are government guaranteed and hence, carry no risk. In this low-rate scenario, every good scheme will earn low interest. Let him lock into a shorter period of 1-year post office deposits and when rates go up, he can lock into longer periods.

The only other safe option with better returns is the RBI Floating Rate Savings Bond 2020. They carry 7.15% interest (with lock-in of 7 years) and rates will be floating. Since we are in the bottom rate cycle, when rates move up, the interest will go up. The only issue is you will find them only in select branches of banks such as SBI, Axis Bank, HDFC Bank and ICICI Bank.

(The writer is co-founder, Primeinvestor.in)

Readers can send in queries on personal finance and investing to moneywise@thehindu.co.in. Our experts who write on personal finance will answer these queries. Moneywise will not give specific recommendations for investment in a particular mutual fund scheme, share or fixed deposit.

LOOSE CHANGE

RAVIKANTH



"So, it's true! People say it's safer to deal in digital money than in hard cash!"

Keeping a watch on your financial health

Providing for a health crisis and grabbing bear-market opportunities come highly recommended for the new year

NAVEEN KUKREJA

The economic uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic led to widespread job losses, income disruptions, liquidity crisis and debt repayment failures for a large section of people. On the investment front, equity markets officially entered the bearish market zone during the months of March and April, creating panic among many investors while presenting a wealth creation opportunity for the more seasoned ones.

With 2020 drawing to a close, it would be prudent to apply the lessons learnt from long-term financial fitness.

Handling disruption

Income disruptions and job losses caused by the pandemic have re-emphasised the importance of having an adequate emergency fund in place.

These disruptions caused a large number of borrowers and credit card holders to opt for a moratorium on loan and credit card repayments.

Only those who had adequate emergency funds prior to the pandemic were able to manage their expenses and make debt repayments despite the disruption. Those who did not have emergency funds to fall back on might have ended up liquidating their long-term

investments and/or failed to repay their debt commitments.

Hence, ensure that you create an emergency fund large enough to meet unavoidable expenses such as rent, daily living expenses, children's education, EMIs, other debt repayment obligations, insurance premiums, utility bills, and monthly contributions towards crucial financial goals for at least six months.

As financial emergencies can strike any time, park your fund in liquid instruments such as savings accounts to make instant withdrawals.

Those comfortable with Internet or mobile banking can park their funds in high-yield fixed deposits offered by small finance banks and other scheduled banks. There could not have been a bigger wake-up call than the pandemic to help us realise the importance of having adequate health insurance. It served to remind us that a single hospitalisation bill could easily wipe out one's life savings in the absence of

A crucial financial step for 2021 is to buy adequate health and critical insurance to cover medical expenses

health insurance. Hence, one of the most crucial financial steps to take in 2021 is to purchase adequate health and critical insurance policies to cover unforeseen medical expenses for you and your family. Even those covered under an employer's group cover should buy a separate health insurance policy.

Employer-provided health covers are often inadequate to deal with rising healthcare costs and would only be valid till the period of employment.

Economic uncertainties also led to steep corrections in the equity markets in March and April. This resulted in the value

in most SIPs, which had started in the last 3-4 years, turning deep red. Such a steep fall in returns resulted in many investors panicking and halting their equity SIPs due to fear of further losses.

Allow no breaks

However, what these investors failed to realise is that such losses are only nominal and become real only when the investor redeems his/her investments at a loss. Equity markets had started to steadily recover from April as the government gradually began unlocking the economy, and market indices started to reach new highs from November.

Hence, investors who continued with SIPs throughout the year purchased units at a much

lower cost, averaged out their investment cost and would now be registering much higher returns vis-a-vis investors who halted their SIPs. The periods of steep market corrections similar to the one seen in March and April this year serve as an excellent opportunity for long-term wealth creation.

As quality equities are available at very attractive valuations during such bearish market phases, mutual fund investors with investible surplus should exploit such market conditions by making lump sum investments in a staggered manner to top up their existing equity fund investments. Such moves would al-

(The author is CEO & Co-founder, Paisabazaar.com)



COVER STORY: THE NITTY-GRITTY

Changing with the times

Norms on standardisation of health cover and exclusions help customers to better understand insurance policies

K. NITYA KALYANI

It's been a terrible 2020 no matter where in the world you are or what you do for a living.

With 2021 bringing in rays of hope on a workable vaccine for COVID-19, let us look at some positives in insurance as well that could be available to us in the future.

The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) has been coming out with standardised covers in health and life insurance, thus creating a basic definition of what should be in such a policy. Using these as reference points, we can understand other policies and identify the benefits and terms we want.

Along with a standard individual health insurance product, the regulator has also published guidelines on standardisation of health insurance and of exclusions – that big bugbear of insurance.

It has long been said that the gap between expectation and



Standardisation of health insurance can help prospective customers identify benefits that they may want. ■ GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

reality is the reason why we are so disenchanted with insurance, especially health insurance. One way to ensure expectations themselves are based on reality is to establish a common definition of the technical terms used in policies.

This is an important part of the guidelines on standardisation of policies.

Standards for hospitals

Insurance terms, be they copayment, deductible or network provider, and medical

terms and standard nomenclature from blindness to end-stage liver failure; to activities of daily living, are detailed under these guidelines.

So are standards and benchmarks for hospitals in the provider network beginning with certification from the National Accreditation Board for Hospitals and Healthcare Providers.

On the same page

While we may not be looking at these while buying policies, it helps to know that they are being codified and defined so that all of us – customers, insurance companies and medical service providers – have a common understanding of the terms used.

The standardisation of exclusions presents an especially interesting picture. Take artificial life maintenance, including by use of a life-support machine where it will not lead to patient recovery.

These expenses cannot be excluded up to the point when a treating doctor confirms that

the patient is in a vegetative state and they will be payable under the framework of the policy contract.

The guidelines also say that all policies shall cover modern treatment methods and advancement in technologies, listing several such procedures such as oral chemotherapy, immunotherapy, robotic surgeries, vaporisation of the prostate and stem cell therapy and that insurers may endeavour to cover any other modern treatment methods as well.

Another sign of thinking along with the times is that the guidelines mention that rest cure, rehabilitation and respite care, including custodial care for help with bathing, dressing and moving around, which is an exclusion now, is something that insurers should try to cover with add-on riders – especially the coverage that kicks in at age 65 onwards.

(The writer is a business journalist specialising in insurance & corporate history)

Bank fixed deposit rates

Bank Name	Highest Slab	1-year tenure	3-year tenure	5-year tenure	Interest Rates (%)
SMALL FINANCE BANKS					
Suryoday Small Finance Bank	7.50	6.75	7.15	7.50	
Jana Small Finance Bank	7.25	6.75	7.00	7.00	
Equitas Small Finance Bank	7.00	6.60	7.00	6.75	
Utkarsh Small Finance Bank	7.00	6.75	6.75	6.75	
AU Small Finance Bank	6.75	6.60	6.75	6.50	
ESAF Small Finance Bank	6.50	6.50	6.00	5.50	
Ujjivan Small Finance Bank	6.50	6.50	6.05	5.80	
Fincare Small Finance Bank	6.50	6.00	6.30	6.00	
Capital Small Finance Bank	6.40	6.00	6.00	6.00	
PRIVATE SECTOR BANKS					
IndusInd Bank	7.00	7.00	6.75	6.75	
RBL Bank	6.95	6.75	6.95	6.50	
DCB Bank	6.95	6.50	6.95	6.95	
Nainital Bank	6.35	5.25	5.35	5.35	
IDFC First Bank	6.00	5.75	5.75	5.75	
Bandhan Bank	6.00	5.75	5.75	5.75	
City Union Bank	6.00	5.50	5.75	5.50	
Karur Vysya Bank	6.00	5.50	5.65	5.65	
Tamilnad Mercantile Bank	5.75	5.75	5.50	5.50	
Karnataka Bank	5.70	5.30	5.55	5.55	
Dhanlaxmi Bank	5.60	5.25	5.50	5.50	
South Indian Bank	5.50	5.40	5.50	5.50	
Federal Bank	5.50	5.10	5.35	5.50	
FOREIGN BANKS					
Deutsche Bank	5.50	3.85	4.50	5.50	
DBS Bank	5.50	4.25	5.50	5.50	
HSBC Bank	4.00	3.10	4.00	4.00	
CitiBank	3.50	2.75	3.50	3.50	

Home loan interest rates

Name of Lender	Loan Amount (Rs.)	(In %)
PUBLIC SECTOR BANKS		
Union Bank of India	6.80-7.60	6.90-7.65
Bank of India	6.85-7.75	6.85-7.75
Central Bank of India	6.85-7.30	6.85-7.30
Canara Bank	6.90-8.90	6.90-8.90
Punjab & Sind Bank	6.90-7.60	6.90-7.60
State Bank of India*	6.95-7.70	7.20-7.85
Bank of Baroda	6.85-8.20	6.85-8.20
Indian Overseas Bank	7.05	7.15
UCO Bank	6.90-7.25	6.90-7.25
Indian Bank**	7.00-7.15	7.10-7.25
IDBI Bank	6.90-10.40	6.90-10.40
Bank of Maharashtra	6.90-8.05	6.90-8.40
PRIVATE SECTOR BANKS		
ICICI Bank^	6.90-7.85	6.90-7.95
Kotak Mahindra Bank ^	6.75-8.45	6.75-8.45
Axis Bank	6.90-11.50</td	

Rahane century puts India in driving seat

Rides his luck, stiches useful partnerships with Jadeja, Pant and Vihari

INDIA IN AUS

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
MELBOURNE

Stand-in skipper Ajinkya Rahane rode his luck to hit a gritty unbeaten century as India built an ominous 82-run lead over Australia on day two of the second Test here on Sunday. Batting at four, he faced 200 balls for his 104 to steer India to 277 for five before rain ended play 15 minutes early. Ravinder Jadeja was batting on 40.

Frustrating day

The hosts took just four wickets during a frustrating day in the field as the match began to slip away with India zeroing in on levelling the series after losing the first Test by eight wickets in Adelaide.

While Rahane was the hero, it was a gutsy team performance, with three 50-plus wicket partnerships. Debutant Shubman Gill chipped in with an impressive 45.

On a steamy day, India resumed on 36 for one. The Australian attack consistently hit its line and length with Pat Cummins bagging Gill then



Rock steady: Ajinkya Rahane stood firm against the world-class Aussie pace attack to bring up his 12th Test century. ■ AFP

Cheteshwar Pujara for 17. That brought Rahane to the crease and – first with Hanuma Vihari, then Rishabh Pant and Jadeja – he built half-century stands to put India in a strong position. He brought up his 12th Test

ton in his 67th game, and his second in Melbourne, with a four off Cummins, but enjoyed some good fortune in

the form of dropped catches.

Starc's 250, Paine's 150

That brought the exuberant Pant to the crease. He scored a breezy 29 before becoming Starc's 250th Test victim, caught by Tim Paine for his 150th dismissal.

SCOREBOARD

AUSTRALIA – 1ST INNINGS: 195

INDIA – 1ST INNINGS

Mayank Agarwal lbw b Starc O (6b), Shubman Gill c Paine b Cummins 45 (65b, 8x4), Cheteshwar Pujara c Paine c Cummins 17 (70b, 1x4), Ajinkya Rahane (batting) 104 (200b, 12x4), Hanuma Vihari c Smith b Lyon 21 (66b, 2x4), Rishabh Pant c Paine b Starc 29 (40b, 3x4), Ravinder Jadeja (batting) 40 (104b, 1x4); Extras (b-12, lb-6, w-1, nb-2); 21; Total (for five wkts, in 91.3 overs): 277.

FALL OF WICKETS

1-0 (Mayank, 0.6 overs), 2-61 (Gill, 21.6), 3-64 (Pujara, 23.4), 4-116 (Vihari, 44.4), 5-173 (Pant, 59.1).

AUSTRALIA BOWLING

Starc 18.3-3-61-2, Cummins 22-7-71-2, Hazlewood 21-6-44-0, Lyon 18-2-52-1, Green 12-1-31-0.

INDIA BOWLING

Pant 18.3-3-61-2, Cummins 22-7-71-2, Hazlewood 21-6-44-0, Lyon 18-2-52-1, Green 12-1-31-0.

Travelling with the team has helped: Gill

S. DIPAK RAGAV

Debutant opener Shubman Gill, who got India off to a steady start on the second day, felt the time he spent with the Indian squad in the last few Test series helped him tackle the Australian pace attack on Sunday.

"I have been travelling with the team for the last four or five Tests series and, it has helped a lot," said Gill.

"I have been able to settle into the team and to play bowlers like Bumrah, Shami bhai, Ishant or Umesh bhai in the nets is a huge confidence-booster for a youngster. So when I went in to bat, it did not feel that I was in a whole new place."

Disappointed

Despite the good start, Gill was disappointed with his dismissal as he got out chasing a wide delivery from Pat Cummins, four runs short of a half-century.

"When I came into bat, the ball was moving. There was something in the pitch and it was lively. I told myself that no matter what is happening on the pitch, I



Shubman Gill. ■ AP

should play my natural game and with intent.

"I am not satisfied with the way I got out. It was the last ball of Cummins' spell and I should have seen it off. It was a loose shot at that moment," he added.

The 21-year-old felt he learnt a lot from the Ajinkya Rahane's innings, especially on how to see off the tough phases.

"This knock was all about patience. The way Ajinkya bhai played, it was a magnificent knock to watch from the outside," said Gill.

Williamson's century takes NZ to 431

PAKISTAN IN NZ

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
MOUNT MAUNGANUI

New Zealand was banking on a deteriorating pitch to defend the Kane Williamson-anchored 431 after reducing Pakistan to 30 for one on day two of the first Test here on Sunday.

New Zealand's innings was headlined by Williamson's 129, his 23rd Test century, with sizeable contributions from B.J. Watling (73) and Henry Nicholls (56) to go with Ross Taylor's 70 on the first day.

The scores: New Zealand 431 in 155 overs (K. Williamson 129, R. Taylor 70, H. Nicholls 56, B.J. Watling 73, K. Jamie-son 32, S. Afridi 4/109, Yasir 3/113) vs Pakistan 30/1.

SA batsmen make merry

SRI LANKA IN SA

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
CENTURION

South Africa's batsmen scored freely against a depleted Sri Lankan bowling attack as the host nation fought back on the second day of the first Test at SuperSport Park on Sunday.

South Africa was 317 for four at the close in reply to Sri Lanka's first innings total of 396. Dean Elgar (95) and Aiden Markram (68) put on 141 for the first wicket, while Faf du Plessis (55 not out) and Temba Bavuma (41 not out) added an unbeaten 97 for the fifth wicket.

The scores: Sri Lanka 396 in 96 overs (D. Chandimal 85, D. de Silva 79 retd. hurt, N. Dickwella 49, D. Shanaka 66 n.o., Sipama 4/76, Mulder 3/69) vs South Africa 317/4 in 72 overs (D. Elgar 95, A. Markram 68, F. du Plessis 55 bat-ting, T. Bavuma 41 batting).

ICC's teams-of-the-decade in Indian hands

Dhoni in charge of one-dayers and T20Is, Kohli's domain is Tests

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA DUBAI

Australia v India: Second Test, Sony Ten 1, Ten 3 & Six (SD & HD), 5 a.m.

South Africa v Sri Lanka: First Test, Star Sports 1 (SD & HD), 1.30 p.m.

ISL: Star Sports 2 (SD & HD) & Star Sports 3, 7.30 p.m.

Premier League: SS Select 1 (SD & HD), 8.30 p.m., 11 p.m. & 1.30 a.m. (Tuesday)

IN BRIEF

Nagal gets Australian Open wild card

BENGALURU

Sumit Nagal has been awarded a singles main draw wild card for the 2021 Australian Open which will begin on February 8.

Arsenal beats the Blues

City moves up to fifth while Everton rises to second

PREMIER LEAGUE

REUTERS
MANCHESTER

Arsenal ended its seven match winless run in the Premier League with a surprise 3-1 London derby victory over Chelsea at the Emirates Stadium on Saturday.

Everton moved into second spot with a late winner in a 1-0 defeat of bottom club Sheffield United while Manchester City moved fifth thanks to a 2-0 win over Newcastle United. Chelsea's third defeat in four games drops it to seventh.

The Gunners took the lead in the 35th minute through an Alexandre Lacazette penalty. Nine minutes later, Granit Xhaka's unstoppable freekick past Edouard



Sublime: Granit Xhaka's peach of a freekick beat the Chelsea wall and left Edouard Mendy flailing under the posts. ■ AFP

Mendy made it 2-0.

Arsenal sealed a timely win in the 56th minute when Bukayo Saka's cross floated over Mendy and the ball went in off the post.

The results: Leeds 1 (Bamford 5-pen) bt Burnley 0.

Saturday: Aston Villa 3 (Traore

5, Hause 66, El Ghazi 76) bt Crystal Palace 0; Fulham 0 drew with Southampton 0.

Arsenal 3 (Lacazette 34-pen, Xhaka 44, Saka 56) bt Chelsea 1 (Abraham 85); Manchester City 2 (Gundogan 14, Torres 55) bt Newcastle 0; Sheffield United 0 lost to Everton 1 (Sigurdsson 80).

Blasters get off the mark

End a six-match winless streak

ISL 2020-21

SPORTS BUREAU

Kerala Blasters' wait is finally over after the Kochi team posted its first win of the Indian Super League season at the GMC Stadium, Bambolim (Goa), on Sunday night, at the expense of Hyderabad FC. The 2-0 victory marked the end of an agonising streak of six matches without a win. Central defender Abdul Hakku and Australian striker Jordan Murray were the scorers.

Hakku, starting a game for the first time this season, and Murray were two of the five changes effected by coach Kibu Vicuna, as Sahal Abdul Samad, Jeakson Singh and Sandeep Singh also marched on to the field in a

match.

The result: Kerala Blasters 2 (Abdul Hakku 29, Jordan Murray 88) bt Hyderabad FC 0.

Monday's match:

Bengaluru FC vs Jamshedpur FC, 7.30 p.m.

new-look Blasters team. Blasters has doubled its tally to six points, while Hyderabad is on nine.

Though it was Hyderabad that threatened more in the early part, winning a corner in the eighth minute, the rebuilt Blasters' defence stood firm. Hakku, put his team ahead with a superb header off a well-taken corner-kick by Facundo Pereyra.

The second half opened with Blasters creating several chances, but it had to wait for a long time for its second goal, which came off a fine move down the left by Rohit Kumar.

The result: Kerala Blasters 2 (Abdul Hakku 29, Jordan Murray 88) bt Hyderabad FC 0.

Monday's match:

Bengaluru FC vs Jamshedpur FC, 7.30 p.m.

Conscious Gift obliges in feature

HYDERABAD: Conscious Gift, ridden by Akshay Kumar, won the Crack Regiment Plate, the main event of Sunday's (Dec. 27) races.

The winner is owned by Mr. M. Ramakrishna Reddy & Miss Ameeta Mehra. L. D' Silva trains the winner, Akshay Kumar rode two more winners on the day.

1. GALACTICA PLATE (1,200m), Maiden, 2-y-o only (Cat. II): ASHWA RADEE (Trevor) 1, Galwan (Suraj Narredu) 2, Baudelaire (Zervan) 3 and Lifes Song (Akshay Kumar) 4. Not run: Ashwa Pushkin 2-3/4, 1 and 4-3/4, 1m, 13.92s. 22 (w), 7, 7 and 5 (p). SHP: 14, THP: 20, FP: 82; Q: 40; Tanala: 206. Favourite: Galwan. Owner: Mr. Ravinder Pal Singh Chauhan. Trainer: M. Srinivas Reddy.

2. ZURBARAN PLATE (DIV. I) (1,400m), Maiden, 3-y-o & upward, rated 20 to 45 (Cat. III): SAFFRON ART (Suraj Narredu) 1, Crazy Horse (A.A. Vikrant) 2, Look Of Love (Gaurav Singh) 3 and Forever Bond (Ajeeth Kumar) 4. 3/4, NK and 1m, 27.70s. 79 (w), 5, 10 and 10 (p). SHP: 21, THP: 40, FP: 71, Q: 50, Tanala: 138. Favourite: Saffron Art. Owner: Mr. S. Pathy. Trainer: Laxman Singh.

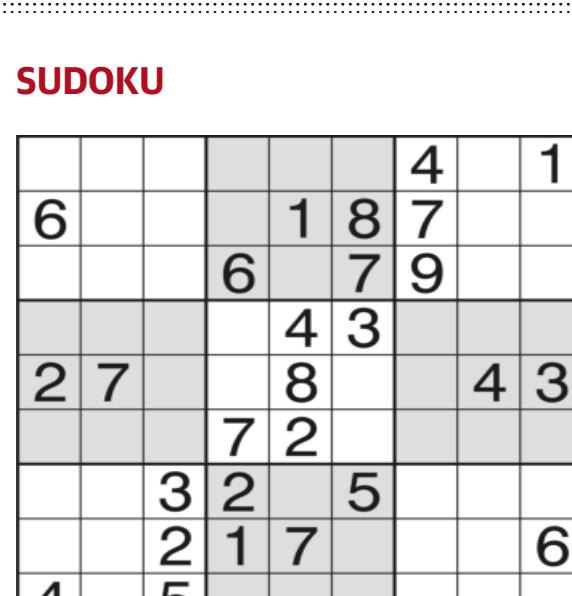
3. SOLITAIRE PLATE (DIV. II) (1,600m), rated 20 to 45 (Cat. III): INDIAN SPLENDOUR (Trevor) 1, Super Angel (Gaurav Singh) 2, Explosive (Irvan Singh) 3 and That's My Star (Md. Ismail) 4. 3-3/4, 6-1/4 and NK, Im, 40.62s. 75 (w), 5, 5 and 5 (p). SHP: 10, THP: 8, FP: 11, Q: 12, Tanala: 112. Favourite: Forever Splendour. Owners: Mr. Sameer R. Rattonsey & Mr. Zahoor R. Rattonsey. Trainer: R.H. Sequeira.

4. SOLITAIRE PLATE (DIV. I) (1,600m), rated 20 to 45 (Cat. II): CONSCIOUS GIFT (Akshay Kumar) 1, Rhythm Selection (Afroz Khan) 2, Apollo (Ashad Asbar) 3 and Sporting Smile (B.R. Kumar) 4. 1-1/4, HD and 2. Im, 13.57s. 210 (w), 8, 11 and 7 (p). SHP: 242, THP: 31, FP: 520, Q: 256; Tanala: 170, FP: 178. Favourite: Conscious Gift. Owners: Mr. M. Ramakrishna Reddy & Miss Ameeta Mehra. Trainer: L. D' Silva.

5. ZURBARAN PLATE (Div. III) (1,400m), Maiden, 3-y-o & upward, rated 20 to 45 (Cat. III): PEAKY BLINDERS (Akshay Kumar) 1, Beautiful Luv (Afroz Khan) 2, Chuckie (Irvan Singh) 3 and Moring (Surya Prakash) 4. Not run: Queen Blossom, Sh. 1/2 and 2-3/4, Im, 28.73s. 76 (w), 5, 5 and 9 (p). SHP: 71, THP: 46, FP: 145, Q: 143, Tanala: 386. Favourite: Peaky Blinders. Owners: Mr. Marthand Singh Mahindra & Mr. Jatin Laxmikant Trivedi. Trainer: R.H. Sequeira.

Jackpot: 70%; ₹20 (884 tks.) and 30%; 21 (1,537 tks.). Treble: (i) 313 (36 tks.), (ii) 49 (195 tks.). Mini jackpot: (i) 971 (11 tks.), (ii) 62 (107 tks.).

SUDOKU



Solution to puzzle 13129

<h3

