



PEOPLE'S PARLIAMENT, ALWAYS IN SESSION



DMK LAUNCHES
'WEREJECTADMK'
CAMPAIGN IN TN



ALLEGED PEARL KILLER
SAYS HE'S BEEN
MADE A SCAPEGOAT



CHINA, NOT RUSSIA
COULD BE BEHIND
CYBER ATTACK: TRUMP

MESSI EQUALS
PELE'S RECORD



P5

P9

P10

P12

WEATHER

Generally cloudy sky. Mist/shallow fog in the morning. The maximum and minimum temperatures would be around 22 and 05 degrees Celsius respectively.

RAINFALL: Nil

RELATIVE HUMIDITY

Max: 94% Min: 39%

TEMPERATURE

Max: 21.8°C (-1) Min: 3.9°C (-4)

SUN RISES SUN SETS

07:10 hrs 17:19 hrs

MOON RISES MOON SETS

12:17 hrs 23:12 hrs

THUMBNAILS



Prime Minister Narendra Modi visits Gurdwara Rakab Ganj Sahib on the occasion of the 400th Prakash Parv of Guru Teg Bahadur, in New Delhi on Sunday.

TWITTER PHOTOGRAPH

Pakistan allegation: India on Sunday said Pakistan's allegations that Indian troops deliberately targeted a vehicle of the United Nations along the Line of Control were investigated in detail and found to be factually "incorrect and false". The ministry of external affairs said Pakistan should responsibly investigate its lapses instead of repeating "baseless and fabricated" allegations against India to cover up its own failure in ensuring the safety and security of UN personnel in territory under its control. PTI

Cold wave: Cold wave conditions persisted across north India on Sunday, with most places in Jammu and Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh experiencing sub-zero temperatures and Delhi recording the season's lowest temperature so far. Delhi recorded the coldest morning of the season so far at 3.4 degrees Celsius, the India Meteorological Department said. On Saturday, the minimum temperature at the Safdarjung Observatory had settled at 3.9 degrees Celsius. PTI

Nirav Modi's brother indicted for fraud in USA

NEW YORK, 20 DECEMBER

Nehal Modi, the younger brother of fugitive diamantaire Nirav Modi, has been indicted here for fraudulently obtaining diamonds worth over USD 2.6 million from one of the world's biggest diamond companies in Manhattan.

Nehal, 41, is charged in a New York Supreme Court indictment with Grand Larceny in the First Degree, Manhattan District Attorney Cy Vance, Jr. said.

According to the indictment, and court filings between March 2015 and August 2015, Nehal, a former member of Noble Titan Holdings, made false representations to obtain over USD 2.6 million worth of diamonds from LLD Diamonds USA on favourable credit terms and consignment, and then liquidated the diamonds for his own ends. PTI

PAGD denounces ED action against Farooq as political vendetta

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
JAMMU, 20 DECEMBER



The Cupkar Road residence of Farooq Abdullah that is among the properties attached by the Enforcement Directorate. FILE PHOTO

The partners of the Peoples Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD) have hit back at the BJP government, calling attachment of Dr. Farooq Abdullah's assets by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) as "political vendetta and witch hunt".

The ED had on Saturday attached six properties in connection with the J&K Cricket Association (JKCA) scam when Abdullah was president of the cricket body. Abdullah is also chairman of the PAGD that is seeking restoration of the Article 370 that was abrogated by the Modi government in August last year.

Reacting sharply to the action of ED, PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti tweeted: "Attaching Dr Farooq sahab's properties is

sheer political vendetta as was evident from the abuses heaped on PAGD by BJP. People of J&K were least impressed & placed their faith in the alliance. Using agencies like NIA & ED to set traps shows BJPs frustration".

Peoples Conference chief Sajad Lone tweeted: "The ED

action against Dr Farooq Sahib seems unambiguously coercive. The timing is conspicuous. Government should understand that in the context of the hard policy that they're pursuing the dividing line between law of the land and vendetta has vanished".

CPI(M) leader MY Tarigami, stated: "The BJP government must realise the dangers of witch-hunting and intimidation and desist from vindictive designs. It is time for secular democratic forces across the country to raise their voice against such designs of the BJP government".

In a statement, the Jammu and Kashmir National Conference termed the attachment of Dr Farooq Abdullah's property by ED "political vendetta, meant to settle political score". Such acts were nothing but unwarranted and unjustified. "There is no evidence worth the name on record to justify the order of attachment of the property. These ancestral assets had been acquired decades back, and there is no justification why these should be attached," the NC said.

of Representatives, which is the lower house of Parliament, was elected in 2017 for a five-year term. The upper house is the National Assembly.

President Bidya Devi Bhandari dissolved Parliament's House of Representatives at Oli's recommendation and announced mid-term general election in April-May, a decision termed unconstitutional, impulsive and autocratic by the Opposition and dissidents in the Nepal Communist Party (NCP).

Earlier in the day, an emergency meeting of the Cabinet chaired by Oli decided to recommend the President for the dissolution of Parliament, a senior Standing Committee member of the NCP told PTI.

The first phase of the mid-term election will be held on April 30 and May 10 for the second phase, the Rashtrapati Bhawan said. The 275-member House

minister for forest and environment Shakti Basnet and minister for drinking water and sanitation Bina Magar.

The NCP's Standing Committee, which met after the president's announcement, too termed Oli's move as unconstitutional, undemocratic and based on his personal whim, and recommended disciplinary action against the prime minister, standing committee member Ganesh Shah told PTI. The recommendation for action will be forwarded to the Central Committee meeting which will be held on December 27, he said. Of the total 44 members of the Standing Committee, 27 were present at the meeting, Oli and his supporters skipped the meeting.

The Nepali Congress (NC), the main Opposition, said that Oli's recommendation to dissolve the House was against the provisions and spirit of the Constitution, and the party will strongly oppose the move.

Farmers to go on hunger strike today; to halt highway toll collection in Haryana

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 20 DECEMBER

Farmer unions announced a day-long relay hunger strike on Monday at all protest sites to press for the repeal of the Centre's new agri laws, even as the government late on Sunday evening wrote to the protesting farmer unions inviting them for the next round of talks and asked them to choose a convenient date.

Farmers in Punjab and Haryana as well as those protesting on Delhi's borders observed 'Shradhanjali Diwas' on Sunday to pay homage to their brethren who died during the ongoing agitation.

Farmers' bodies have claimed that over 30 farmers

participating in the stir have died due to different reasons including heart attack and road accidents. The farmers performed 'ardaa' (prayer) and in some places they also took out protest marches against the Centre.

The protesters, mostly from Punjab and Haryana, have been continuing their sit-in in several border areas of the national capital for the fourth week amid cold wave conditions, despite repeated attempts by the government and Prime Minister Narendra Modi to convince them about the benefits of the reforms.

On Sunday morning, Prime Minister Modi made a surprise visit to Gurudwara Rakab Ganj, one of the most popu-

lar Sikh shrines, and paid tributes to Guru Teg Bahadur, the ninth Sikh guru, for his supreme sacrifice.

The talks between the farmers and the Centre were stalled on December 9 after five rounds as the farmer unions refused the Centre's proposal to amend the laws and a written assurance on the continuation of minimum support price (MSP).

Union home minister Amit Shah, who was in West Bengal, indicated that talks will resume soon. "I am not exactly aware of the timing but Tomar is likely to meet the representatives of farmers tomorrow or the day after to discuss their demands," Shah told a press conference.

Union home minister Amit Shah, who was in West Bengal, indicated that talks will resume soon. "I am not exactly aware of the timing but Tomar is likely to meet the representatives of farmers tomorrow or the day after to discuss their demands," Shah told a press conference.

The agitating farmer unions have been threatening of intensifying their stir.

"Farmers will begin a day-

long relay hunger strike on Monday at all sites of protest against the new agri laws. It will be started by a team of 11

members at protests sites here," Swaraj India Chief Yogendra Yadav said at a press conference at the Singhu border. He also urged people demonstrating against the laws across the country to observe a day-long hunger strike at their respective protest sites.

Farmer leader Jagjeet Singh Dalewala said farmers will not allow toll collection on highways in Haryana from December 25 to 27.

"From December 25 to 27 all toll booths in Haryana will not be allowed by us to collect toll. We will prevent them from doing so."

"On December 27, our prime minister will say his 'Mann ki baat' and we want

to appeal to people to beat 'thalis' during his address," the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) leader said, referring to the PM's monthly radio address.

Farmer leader Rakesh Tikait said that farmers protesting the new agri laws will observe Kisan Diwas on December 23 and "we request people to not cook lunch for a day".

Amid the deadlock, Bharatiya Kisan Union (Ekta Ugrahan), one of Punjab's largest farmer organisations involved in the stir, said it has been asked by a central agency to submit its registration details which allow it to receive foreign funds, and alleged that it was being targeted by the Centre.

The Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) stipu-

lates mandatory registration of any outfit receiving foreign funds.

A department under the Centre has sent an email which we received through our bank's branch in Punjab. In the e-mail, it was stated that we should give registration details in respect of these donations from abroad, otherwise they will be sent back, the outfit's general secretary Sukhdev Singh.

Questioning the timing of the move, Singh said, they are using all tactics as their sole purpose is to defeat the agitation. Asked how much foreign fund they have received recently, Singh said, "We are yet to calculate the exact amount."



Protesting farmers at Singhu on the Delhi border on Sunday. SNS

The agitating farmer unions have been threatening of intensifying their stir.

"Farmers will begin a day-





The project would be a step towards our commitment to support PM's clarion call for reducing 10 per cent oil import by 2022...

UNION MINISTER DHARMENDRA PRADHAN

Capital's tally of new Covid cases dips further to 1,091

Delhi logs 26 fresh Covid fatalities; positivity rate stands at 1.31 pc; recovery rate rises to 96.68 pc

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, 20 DECEMBER

Delhi today identified 1,091 cases of coronavirus infections (Covid-19), the lowest single-day figure in months, which took its caseload to 6,17,005, according to the Delhi government's latest health bulletin.

These cases came to light after 83,289 tests were conducted, which included 46,001 RTPCR/CBNAAT/ Tneat tests and 37,288 rapid antigen tests, the health bulletin said.

The positivity rate stood at 1.31 per cent.

The national capital logged 26 fresh deaths attributed to Covid-19, which took its coronavirus toll to 10,277, the bulletin stated.

There were 1,275 recovered cases of the deadly, infectious virus over the last 24 hours, which raised the city's cumulative tally of such recoveries to 5,96,580.



The recovery rate rose to 96.68 per cent.

Delhi currently had 10,148 active cases of Covid-19, including 5,907 patients under home isolation and 3,150 hospitalised patients.

The number of containment zones in the city stood at 5,943, the bulletin added.

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal had yesterday asserted

that the third wave of coronavirus outbreak in the city was under control now.

"There was a time in November when the daily cases went up to nearly 8,600. But even then it wasn't a panicky situation in Delhi, and 7,000 beds were available. We fought it all together," the CM had then said while addressing a virtual press conference.

The highest single-day Covid spike in Delhi till date - 8,593 cases - was reported on 11 November.

Delhi had yesterday reported 1,139 Covid cases, which were detected out of 87,330 tests including 47,460 RT-PCR tests. The city had then logged 32 fresh Covid fatalities.

The CM had pointed out that the Covid pandemic situation in Delhi has improved significantly as the positivity rate, which had gone up to 15.26 per cent in early November, was yesterday down to 1.3 per cent - one of the lowest so far in Delhi and nationally too.

He said that on 19 November Delhi had recorded 131 coronavirus-linked deaths - the highest single-day Covid fatality count so far - and that now it has also come down and should dip further.

"It seems, together all of us have brought the third wave of pandemic in Delhi under control," Kejriwal had said, pointing

out that the city's recovery rate was currently more than 96 percent. Delhi's active cases tally, which was around 45,000 in November, was now down to about 12,000, he said. This tally yesterday dropped to 10,358.

Kejriwal had however pointed out that since there is no vaccine yet, people could not afford to be complacent about the Covid situation, even as he advised them to "still be vigilant, observe safety norms like wearing masks and observing social distancing".

The CM also said that "With the efforts of the people of Delhi, we have effectively and successfully surpassed the third wave of Corona."

On 18 December, Delhi had recorded 1,418 Covid cases detected out of 88,400 tests with the positivity rate being 1.6 per cent.

Delhi's Covid positivity rate was 1.51 percent on 17 December, 1.96 percent on 16 December and 1.9 per cent on 15 December.

BJP to launch campaign to press for release of MCDs' dues by Delhi govt

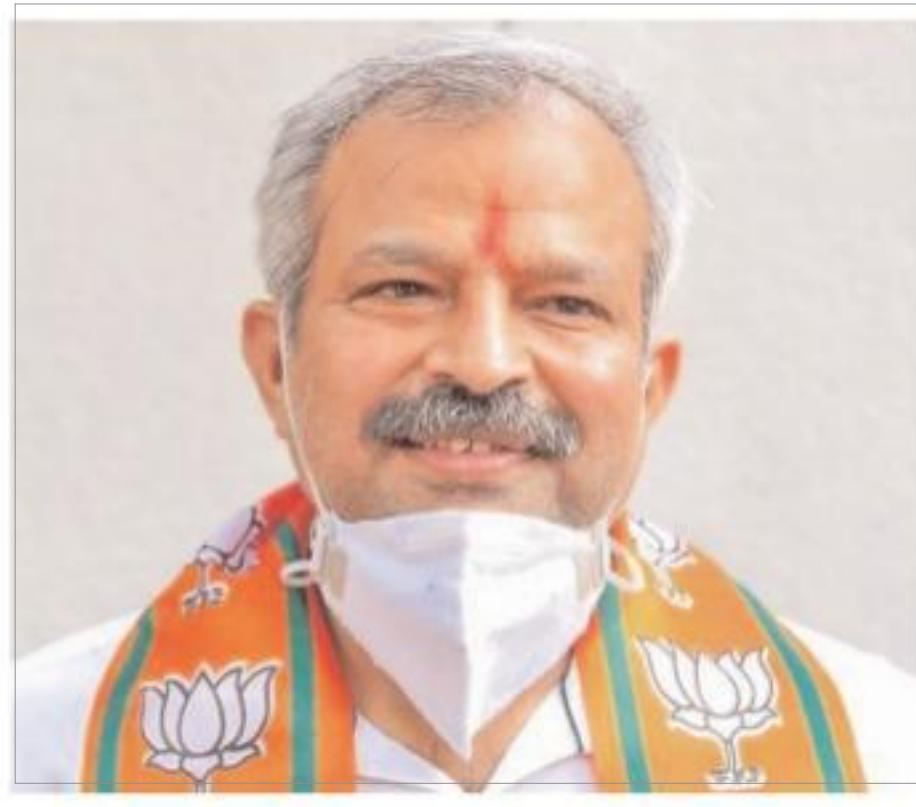
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 20 DECEMBER

Even as the protest held by the BJP mayors of the Municipal Corporations of Delhi (MCDs) demanding the release of MCDs' dues by the AAP-led Delhi government was called off yesterday after 13 days allegedly without any response from chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, the Delhi BJP has now announced that it would run a public campaign to press for release of these outstanding funds.

The three mayors had held their sit-in protest outside Delhi CM's residence for over two weeks.

They called it off yesterday with Union minister Hardeep Singh Puri offering fruit juice to them for ending their hunger strike.

Delhi BJP president Adesh Gupta today said that from 25 December the BJP workers would go door-to-door to connect to the people of Delhi in order to raise the demand for release of "Rs 13,000 crore MCDs' dues by the Kejriwal government".



"We will connect Delhites with this movement."

This fight is in the interest of the corporation employees as well as the people of Delhi," said Gupta.

He said that:

"The BJP has always been fighting for the interests of the people and will continue to fight for the people of Delhi demanding the payment of dues of the corporations by the Kejriwal government."

overnment".

The Delhi BJP chief charged,

"In view of the corporation elections, the Kejriwal government is trying its best to cripple the municipal corporations and by doing so chief minister Kejriwal wants to deprive Delhi's basic amenities in his arrogance of power..."

Kejriwal is forgetting that the public is watching."

Harish Rawat joins farmers protest at Ghazipur border, demands withdrawal of agri laws

PTI

GAZIABAD (UP), 20 DECEMBER

Senior Congress leader Harish Rawat joined farmers protesting against the Centre's agricultural reform laws at the Ghazipur border here on Sunday and demanded the government take back the

"anti-farmer" legislations.

The former Uttarakhand chief minister also paid homage to farmers who have died during the agitation.

AICC member Narendra Rathi said Rawat was accompanied by several Congress office-bearers and workers.

Farmers from different

parts of the country, including Haryana, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, have been camping at different border points of Delhi for four weeks now to demand the repeal of the three farm laws, which were voted through in Parliament in September amid strong protests by opposition parties.

"I am the son of a farmer and very well understand the problems of farmers. I demand that the central government withdraw the three anti-farmer agricultural laws," Rawat said.

He paid tributes to farmers who lost their lives during the protest due to different reasons including heart attack.

The former Uttarakhand chief minister also paid homage to farmers who have died during the agitation.

Farmers in different parts of the country observed Shrad-

hanjali Diwas' on Sunday to pay homage to their brethren who died during the agitation.

Farmers' bodies have claimed that over 30 farmers participating in the stir have died so far.

The three farm laws have been projected by the government as major reforms in

the agriculture sector that will remove the middlemen and allow farmers to sell their produce anywhere in the country.

While the government has offered to amend the laws and give a written assurance to farmers that the MSP regime will continue, the farmers have stuck to their demand for the withdrawal of the farm laws.

Classified

LEGAL NOTICES

IN THE COURT OF
MS. PREETI PARWAA
L.D. ACJ/CCJ/ARC
Room No. 03, Patiala House
Courts
New Delhi
Petition No. SC-66/2020

To,
Rohan Bilaria
Versus
State & Anr.
—(Petitioner)
FOR SUCCESSION
CERTIFICATE UNDER INDIAN
SUCCESSION ACT, 1925
To,

All concerned.
Where in the abovenoted petition, the applicant/petitioner has applied for Succession Certificate under the Hindu Code Under Section 372 of the Indian Succession Act, 1925 in respect of the debt and securities any person having a claim against or an interest in the Estate of the deceased Late Sh. Ram Bilaria, S/o Late Sh. Daya Ram Bilaria, DT 26-09-2020 at Hospital (SVP Covid-19 Hospital). Are required to send particulars thereof in writing to the undersigned Court to be standing in the name of deceased.
Whereas the 25-02-2021at 10

(Ten) O'Clock in the forenoon has been fixed for hearing and the application notice is hereby given to all concerned.

Given under my hand and the Seal of the Court this 28-12-2020
L.D. ACJ/CCJ/ARC
Patiala House Courts
New Delhi
Seal of the Court

IN THE COURT OF
SH. H.S JAGGI
ADJ, South West-02
Court No. 605, 6th Floor
District Court Complex
Dwarka, New Delhi.
PC 18/28/2019
Amritjeet Singh Chhabra
Versus

Given under my hand and the Seal of this Court on this 18-12-2020
ADJ, South West-02
District Court Complex
Dwarka, New Delhi.
Seal of the Court

PUBLIC NOTIFICATIONS

PUBLIC NOTICE

To whom so ever it may concern.

The General Public is hereby notified by this present public notice that our client namely Mrs. Archana Sachdev, wife of Sh. Anil Sachdev, resident of M-67, 2nd Floor, Block-F, Arjun Apartment, Vikas Puri, New Delhi, in R/o the immovable property bearing No. (1) M-4C, Second Floor, Block-F, Arjun Apartment

Tel: 0177-2815000
Email:
delhistaesman@gmail.com
shimla@thestaesmangroup.com

HYDERABAD

The Statesman Limited, 2nd Floor, UNI Building,

A.C. Guards, Hyderabad-500004,

Ph.: 040-2339 1739

Email:

delhistaesman@gmail.com
hyderabad@thestaesmangroup.com

BANGALORE

No. 68, First Floor, Gold Tower,

50 Residency Road, Bangalore-560025.

Tel.: 080-2229129, 080-2234813

Email:

delhistaesman@gmail.com
bangalore@thestaesmangroup.com

MUMBAI

5, Kasturi Buildings, Jamshedji Tata Road, Mumbai-400 020

Tel: (022) 2202 1045,

Email:

delhistaesman@gmail.com
mumbai@thestaesmangroup.com
manuelfrancis@thestaesman.com

CHENNAI

Fagun Mansion (4th floor), 26, Ethiraj

Road, Chennai-600 008, Tel: (044)

28278037, 28224800

Email:

delhistaesman@gmail.com
chennai@thestaesmangroup.com

LUCKNOW

2/2, Butler Palace (Near Jopling Road),

Lucknow-226 001,

Ph.: (0522) 2206705

Email:

delhistaesman@gmail.com
lucknow@thestaesmangroup.com

RANCHI

11/C, Road#1, Ashoknagar, Ranchi - 834

002

Fax: (0651) 2247054

Email:

delhistaesman@gmail.com
ranchi@thestaesmangroup.com

Air quality 'very poor' in Ghaziabad, 'poor' in Gurgaon, Faridabad

NOIDA (UP), 20 DECEMBER

The average air quality deteriorated and was recorded "very poor" in Noida, Greater Noida and Ghaziabad, while it was "poor" in Gurgaon and Faridabad, according to a 24-hour data issued by a government agency on Sunday.

Presence of pollutant PM 2.5 and PM 10 also remained high in the five immediate neighbours of Delhi, according to the air quality index (AQI) maintained by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB).

According to the index, an AQI between zero and 50 is considered 'good', 51 and 100 'satisfactory', 101 and 200 'moderate', 201 and 300 'poor', 301 and 400 'very poor', and 401 and 500 'severe'.

The General Public is also forewarned/cautioned here-with for not to enter upon any kind of dealing/agreement/ transaction regarding any document on which the signature of our client Archana Sachdev is affixed already, or not affixed in person and that whatsoever manner, it shall therefore, be at sole own risk and cost of the person concerned.

SD-
(Ritesh Khatri) Kulbir Singh
Advocates
D/564/2004 D/6474/2017
For M/s. Peti Juris, 150,
Lawyers Chambers, Patiala
House, New Delhi-110011,
Phone 9899891989
email:khatr@petijuris.c
om
New Delhi

LOST & FOUND

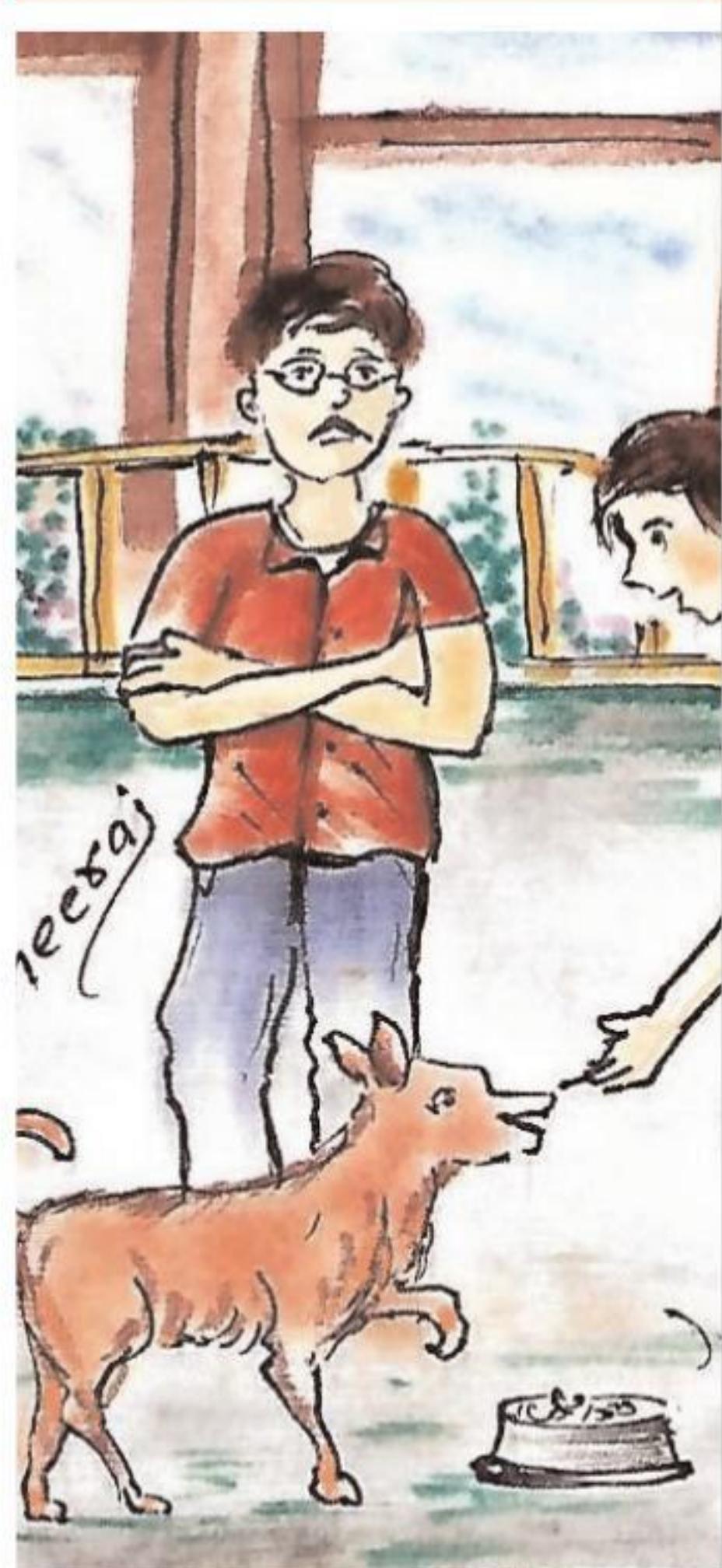
Notice is hereby given that the Certificate(s) for 160 Equity Shares under Folio No 01103407 Certificate No/s having Distinctive Nos. 259671-259830 (Name of the Company) Hoxaware Technologies Limited, standing in the name(s) of N.R. Kukreja, has/have been lost or mislaid and the undersigned has/have applied to be compensated for issued duplicate Certificate(s) for the aforesaid shares. Any person who has claim in respect of the said shares should lodge such claim with the company at its e

Registered Office Hexaware Technologies Limited, Bldg. L-44/B, Malviya Nagar, New Delhi-110017, Date 21-12-2020 Place New Delhi
Name(s) of Shareholder(s)
N. R. Kukreja
L-44/B, Malviya Nagar, New Delhi-110017, Date 21-12-2020 Place New Delhi

TENDERS

CONSUMABLE purchase,
Dept. of Zoology, Panjab
University, Chandigarh<br

TRAINING A PET



It was the re-enactment of Pavlov's experiment on reflex action for a young couple, who last month adopted a puppy. Russian physiologist Ivan Pavlov conditioned a dog to salivate by serving food when a bell was rung. In time, whenever a bell was rung, even if no food was served, the dog would drool. In a throwback to this experiment, the young couple tried to train the little one by ringing a spoon against the dog's steel food bowl to indicate food was being served. The puppy soon learnt to respond to

the signal. However, to the owners' consternation, when the maid began washing the vessels, the clattering sound led the pup to believe food was being served and would get agitated. Changing the signal, the duo rang a hand bell to indicate food was being served. This too eventually met with confusion when the young man's visiting mother rang the bell during her morning prayers. The pup began circling the mother, whining for food. Finally, the couple decided that voice-call was the best method!

A WEDDING TO REMEMBER

The waiter cursed as he almost spilled some coke on to his dress. In any case, this was the fourth time in the week that he had to do his duty as wedding seasons are always busy. It was not the catering job which he was annoyed at - it was the point that people were getting married everywhere without even considering how unsafe the times were! No one wore a mask, no one cared about the limit of guests for a wedding, and indeed for this one in particular, no one even cared that the government had banned the noisy fireworks! As another shell (he had lost count of how many) split the dark sky with its signature colours and the deafening blast, he noticed another man about his age sitting quietly at a corner table, sipping a glass of water. The waiter was bored, because there was still time before the food was to be served and his fellow colleagues were off somewhere discreet for a puff of some stuff that he knew wouldn't be just cigarettes. The guy seemed equally bored and the waiter

thought that maybe he was some distant relative who had come for the food but, like him, was brooding about his harping parents insisting him to get married. "Would you care for any drink, sir?" the waiter asked politely. The man looked up at him and with a slight smile, said, "Not yet. Why don't you help yourself to one?" This gave the waiter some confidence and he pulled up a chair in front of him, saying, "Well you know sir, we waiters aren't exactly allowed to do so. But tell me, are you related to the bride or the groom?" "Well, not particularly to either," he said vaguely. "Ah," the relieved waiter said, now positive that his guess about the man was right. "Can I be candid then, sir?" he asked. The man, who had opened his mouth to say something, stopped himself and asked the waiter to go ahead instead. "Well, I think these people are insensitive," the waiter said in a low voice. "Oh?" You see, this is the time of the pandemic, and these fools do not wear any masks, hugging and celebrating without a care in the world! People like these are the cause of such a rapid spread

of the virus!" "I see." "I have aged parents at home, and I need to feed them. I cannot say no to this job either. But what if I give them the disease?" "Hm." "Plus, the groom's family are a bunch of show-offs, if you ask me! I have seen their type! What with the firecrackers and all! It is just their way of showing how cool they are with their riches, but they are just a typical lower middle-class family." "Interesting." "I heard the groom works in the IT sector, and that's a glorified name for a call centre! What a sad life! No wonder it is an arranged marriage; I mean who could fall in love with that kind of a bloke." The man wanted to say something here, but it was evident that the waiter was on a roll with his rant. "It is even beneath me to serve people of this kind, but desperate measures call for desperate measures, eh?" Just then, the waiter saw an elderly man making his way towards them, and he stopped in his tracks. "I better get back to work," he said, getting up. "I don't think that would be necessary," the man said coldly. "Oh, I am sorry, but did I offend you in any way sir?" By that time, the elderly man

had reached them and looking gleefully at the man sitting on the chair and staring at the waiter with a murderous expression, asked, "Why is the bridegroom away from the party? Come on, your bride-to-be has arrived!"

INDOOR FARMING

Imagine growing plants in your own drawing room, without soil and without even having the expertise of a gardener. A new technology is there for urban, not-so-informed gardeners who are always struggling to keep plants alive at their homes. The technology combines hydroponics, that is growing plants without soil, and automation. And there are a whole lot of plants that can be grown - herbs, veggies, medicinal plants and flowers. People can grow their own herbs like mint, coriander, basil and oregano, greens like lettuce and spinach, veggies like bell pepper, cherry tomatoes and chillies, besides ornamental flowers like marigold. Currently, 50 different types of plants could be grown in this smart garden. "Even strawberries

can be grown," says Yash Vyas, founder of Agro2O, the startup which has introduced the technology. The system can be kept anywhere in a house - on a dining table, kitchen or living room. "We wanted to let people who have no time, space, or knowledge of farming, grow plants," he says. With this it is possible for everyone to experience growing "freshest, healthiest and chemical-free" herbs, veggies, flowers, medicinal plants automatically in the comfort of their home. The produce is very much organic and much healthier and nutritious, besides being pesticide free. One needs to add only water, nutrients and light. However, even this information is built in the system - a smart phone-controlled oval-shaped device which has a water tank space for nutrients and 12 pre-seed chambers. That means 12 kinds of plants could be grown in a device. Plants in this system grow four-five times faster than those grown conventionally, says Vyas. For example, tomatoes will be ready for harvest in about eight weeks. Light is provided through a beam which has those spectra which are needed by the plants to grow. The touch panel on the device will alert the users when to add water or nutrients and even the time when the plants are ready for harvest. Agro2O has already launched Renaissance, its first patented indoor Smart Garden. Depending on the plant being grown, Agro2O's system can understand how much water, light and nutrients are required and all these factors are customised according to the plant. Yash says big groups such as Amazon and Microsoft are also investing in this technology.

TAILPIECE

"During the UPA rule, nobody listened to the Prime Minister; in the NDA regime, the Prime Minister listens to nobody," a peasant from Punjab was heard complaining during the farmers' protest.

Contributed by: Bhaskar Roy, Asha Ramachandran, Nakshatra Pain, Savita Verma and Ashok Tuteja

India

Domestic violence against women on the rise in HP

According to the National Family Health Survey 2019-20, 8.3 pc women in the age group of 18-49 years had suffered violence at hands of their spouses with maximum number of cases reported from rural areas of Himachal Pradesh

SANJEEV KUMAR
SHIMLA, 20 DECEMBER

The cases of domestic violence are on the rise in Himachal Pradesh, with the state recording 8.3 per cent cases of domestic violence as per the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) 2019-20 as compared to 5.9 per cent cases recorded in NFHS 2015-16 report.

The NFHS 2019-20, which was recently released by the Union government, pointed out towards the rise in cases of physical or sexual violence that was faced by women at the hands of their

spouses in Himachal Pradesh. According to this latest NFHS report, 8.3 per cent women in the age group of 18 to 49 years had suffered violence at hands of their spouses with maximum number of cases reported from rural areas in HP.

The percentage of domestic violence in rural areas stood at 8.7 while it was 6 per cent in urban areas of the hill state.

However, the cases of domestic violence against pregnant women had reduced in Himachal with the state recording only 0.6 per cent cases as compared to 1.5 per cent in 2015-16 and



REPRESENTATIONAL IMAGE

that urban areas of the state did not record any such case. The NFHS 2019-20

has linked the cases of domestic violence with use of alcohol, among other fac-

tors, in the country as experience of spousal physical or sexual violence varied greatly with the level of the husband's alcohol consumption.

As per the survey, at the national level 71 per cent of women whose husbands often get drunk have experienced spousal physical or sexual violence, compared with 22 per cent of women whose husbands do not drink alcohol.

The survey has pointed towards use of alcohol by over 32 per cent population over the age of 15 years in HP and its use was more prevalent in rural areas as compared

to urban areas of the state. Over 32 per cent men in rural areas consume alcohol as compared to 30 per cent in urban areas of the state.

The latest NFHS report also states that 32 per cent men use tobacco products with rural areas recording its consumption at 33.4 per cent while it was 25.4 per cent in urban areas of the state.

According to this report, the women were also found to be indulging in alcohol consumption (1.7 cent) and tobacco consumption (0.6 per cent) but their number is quite negligible as compared to men on these scores in the state.

WINTER DELIGHT



With the night temperature plummeting in the hills, water drops turn into icicles, at Sanjauli-Dhali bypass in Shimla on Saturday morning.

LALIT KUMAR

HP signs MoU with Dept of Posts for sending TB samples to labs

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
SHIMLA, 20 DECEMBER

The Himachal Pradesh government on Sunday signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Department of Posts to transport samples of TB patients to laboratories.

National Mission Director National Health Mission, Dr Nipun Jindal said it will help the state Health Department to speed up the investigation of sputum of patients for Tuberculosis.

"A MoU has been signed between the National Health Mission and the Department of Posts in this regard," he said, adding Tuberculosis Officer Dr Gopal Beri signed the MoU on behalf of the Health department.

Dr Jindal said now the sputum samples for investigation of tuberculosis shall be submitted by the health staff to the nearest Post office, well packed as per the Biomedical Protocol and delivered to the intended lab within the stipulated time.

State Mission Director National Health Mission, Dr Nipun Jindal said the MoU will help the state Health Department to speed up the investigation of sputum of patients for Tuberculosis.

Earlier samples transport from designated microscopic centers to molecular testing sites and drug susceptibility test-

ing sites was being performed through human couriers who are local Asha workers, any other community worker or hospital working staff, he said.

He further stated that it was a major milestone for timely and streamlined delivery of the sputum samples, especially keeping in view the anticipated increase during the ongoing active case finding campaign 'Him Suraksha'.

The diagnosis of Tuberculosis is paramount for notification, treatment and breaking the chain of transmission.

Himachal has also expanded the diagnostic net with operationalisation of ten designated microscopic centres in the Ayurvedic institutions of the state and four DMCs (Designated Microscopic Centres) in various jails across the state in the last six months, in addition to 218 DMCs already functional," he added.

Dr Jindal informed that in a recent rating released by the Central government for the time period between January-July, 2020, the state had topped the country in rating on a

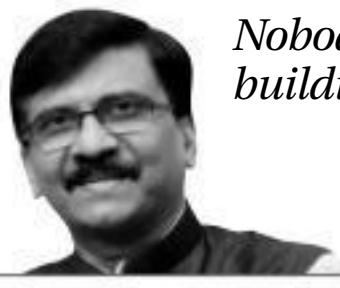
whole under the program.

The Union government assesses the performance of the state on nine indicators like Tuberculosis notification, universal drug susceptibility testing, treatment success rate, chemoprophylaxis to children and people living with HIV, etc.

"Himachal Pradesh has been a consistent performer in the National Tuberculosis Elimination Program and it is leading the country as far as various parameters under the program are concerned," he added.



COLIN



Nobody thinks that destroying the legacy and memories of earlier leaders and building new structures to build your own image was too much democracy

SHIV SENAS MP SANJAY RAUT

CITICISING THE CENTRE OVER CONSTRUCTION OF THE NEW PARLIAMENT BUILDING

India



A girl plays ice hockey in Shimla on Sunday. ■ IANS

Pak fisherman arrested: A Pakistani fisherman has been apprehended with his boat after he intruded into the Indian territory off the Gujarat coast, the Border Security Force said on Sunday. The intruder was held in the Sir Creek area on Saturday evening during a patrolling by the personnel of the Gujarat Frontier of the BSF, it said. ■ PTI

Traffic restored on Jammu-Srinagar NH: Traffic on the 270-km-long Jammu-Srinagar National Highway was restored on Sunday morning after remaining suspended for over 14 hours due to a massive landslide in Ramban district, officials said. The landslide struck the highway near Bhoomi in Chanderkote area around 7 p.m. on Saturday, leaving over 2,000 vehicles stranded. ■ PTI

Maharashtra cop killed: A 31-year-old constable was killed in Bhiwandi area of Thane district after a speeding vehicle knocked down his motorcycle, police said on Sunday. Satish Chavan, attached to Bhiwandi taluka police station, was on his way to his home in Kharigaon at around 11:30 p.m. on Saturday when the accident happened at Mankholi bridge on Mumbai-Nashik highway, SB Ganeshkar of Narpoli PS said. ■ PTI

Sex racket busted: Four women were rescued and one person arrested after a sex racket was busted in Kalyan area of Thane district, police said on Sunday. A raid was conducted in Kolshewadi on Saturday evening after a tip off and one Mohan Barman was arrested for forcing the four women, all in their 20s, into the racket, said police. ■ PTI

Leopardess found dead: A leopardess has allegedly died of electrocution at the Pench Tiger Reserve (PTR) in Madhya Pradesh's Seoni district, an official said on Sunday. The carcass was found on Saturday in Gondatola beat of the Rukhad buffer zone, an official said. ■ PTI

Maha soldier cremated: An Army jawan who lost his life in a snowstorm while on duty in Ladakh region was cremated on Sunday with full state honours in his native Palashkot village in Maharashtra's Buldana district. ■ PTI

Farmers' protest fallout of BJP's politics of 'lies and deceit': UP Cong

Lallu says PM Narendra Modi cannot be trusted as, till now, he has not fulfilled any of his electoral promises

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
BAREILLY/NEW DELHI,
20 DECEMBER

The ongoing farmers' protest against the Centre's new agrilaws is a fallout of BJP's politics of "lies and deceit", the Congress said on Sunday.

Speaking to reporters here, Uttar Pradesh Congress chief Ajay Kumar Lallu also said that the party will continue its fight for farmers until the laws are withdrawn. Thousands of farmers are protesting against the laws for the last four weeks at various border points of Delhi.

"The agitation by the farmers against the farm laws is a fallout of BJP's politics of lies (jhoon) and deceit (fareb). The Congress will continue to fight for the farmers until the farm laws are withdrawn," Lallu said. "Prime Minister Narendra Modi cannot be trusted as till now he has not fulfilled any of his electoral promises," he alleged.

The Uttar Pradesh Congress chief also alleged that today if people raise their voice against the wrong policies of the government, then false cases are registered against them. "The farmers are fighting for their legitimate rights, and their protests are getting support from every section of society. Prime Minister Modi has time to meet industrialists, but not farmers," Lallu said.

Farmers are protesting against the Farmers' (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020, the Farmers Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020, and The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act 2020.

The three farm laws enacted in September have been projected by the government as major reforms in the agriculture sector that will remove

middlemen and allow farmers to sell anywhere in the country.

However, the protesting farmers have expressed apprehension that the new laws would pave the way for eliminating the safety cushion of Minimum Support Price and do away with the mandis, leaving them at the mercy of big corporates. The Centre has repeatedly asserted that these mechanisms will remain.

Eye-examination camp for protesting farmers

A team of nine doctors from Punjab's Garhshankar set up a two-day medical camp at the Singhu border here on Sunday to attend to the protesting farmers who are suffering from eye-related problems.

A group of doctors, including ophthalmologists, physiotherapists and general physicians, arrived at the Singhu border on Saturday evening after attending to their duties.

Due to the excessive cold, dust and pollution, many protesting farmers, who have been staying put at the Singhu border for nearly a month now, have been complaining of the dry-eye syndrome, watery eyes and other eye-related problems. The makeshift camp has medicines and equipment worth over Rs 70,000, including eye-examination devices, lubricants, antibodies and anti-allergic eye drops, said the doctors, adding that these medicines could give a temporary relief to the protesters complaining of eye-related problems in this chilling weather.

As several protesters in the camp were complaining of a burning sensation due to dry eyes or weakness in the eyesight, Dr Rajdeep Singh (27), one of the ophthalmologists in the team, said, they realised that there was a need for a separate eye camp.



24-hour ultimatum to farmers administration on Ghazipur border, solve problems soon. ■ IANS

Parl session cancelled to avoid debate on farmers' stir: Raut

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI, 20 DECEMBER

Shiv Sena MP Sanjay Raut on Sunday claimed the winter session of Parliament was cancelled to avoid a debate on the ongoing farmers' protest against the Centre's new farm laws.

In his weekly column 'Rokhthok' in the Sena mouthpiece 'Saamana', Raut also questioned the need for spending "Rs 1,000 crore" on the Central Vista project when the Narendra Modi government was not interested in holding debates and Parliament sessions.

"The winter session of Parliament has been cancelled so that there can be no debate on the ongoing farmers' protest near Delhi," Raut said.

PM Narendra Modi on 10 December laid the foundation stone of the new Parliament building and described the event as a "milestone in India's democratic history".

The revamp envisages a new triangular Parliament building, with seating capacity for 900 to 1,200 MPs, that is targeted to be constructed by August, 2022 when the country will be celebrating its 75th Independence Day.

Criticising the Centre, Raut said the existing Parliament building was fine and could have functioned well for another 50 to 75 years. "Nobody thinks that destroying the legacy and memories of earlier leaders and building new structures to build your own image was too much democracy," Raut said.

The Supreme Court on 7 December allowed the Centre to go ahead with the foundation stone-laying ceremony for the Central Vista project after the government assured it that no construction or demolition work would commence till the apex court decides the pending pleas on the issue.

"It was said that Parliament is supreme and court had no power to interfere in Parliament. But the Supreme Court has given an order directly interfering with the proceedings of the Maharashtra legislature in a breach of privilege case against journalist Arun Goswami," Raut said.

On November 6, the SC issued a show cause notice to an assistant secretary of Maharashtra Assembly asking him to explain why contempt proceedings not be initiated against him for his letter to Goswami which seems to "intimidate" him for approaching the apex court on the issue of alleged breach of privilege motion.

Raut also said former UK prime minister Winston Churchill worked to defeat his political rivals with all his might, but always treated his defeated opponents with dignity.

'Farmers' stir more political in nature'

THANjavur (TN),
20 DECEMBER

Union Minister VK Singh on Sunday said the on-going protests by farmers against the three Central farm laws was "more political" in nature and underlined the NDA government's intent to ensure the welfare of the rioters.

Speaking to reporters here ahead of his interaction with farmers, the minister of state for road transport and highways claimed that "actual farmers are very happy with what has been done in last six months."

"We have set up a 'neki ki divar' today. The idea is to ensure all our farmer brothers and sisters are well equipped to be a part of the protest and keep themselves warm in Delhi's harsh weather," Surinder Kisan, one of the protesters at Ghazipur border, said.

Two kiosks have been attached to the roadside wall at the protest site. "At one place people can leave what they want to donate and the other side is for protesters who can collect things as per their needs from the existing stock," he said. "If what they need is not available, they can write it on the wall and it will be provided to them," Surinder Kisan, one of the protesters at the Ghazipur border said.

Space has been left on the wall and chalks have been kept, so that people can leave messages about their needs, he said, adding a register will also be maintained.

They are providing masks, sanitisers, medicines, toiletries, beddings, woollen clothes. "We will add more items. Food is already being served at langars, Surinder Kisan, one of the protesters at the Ghazipur border said.

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"We are paying homage to the farmers who lost their lives during agitation. It will be a pity if we let go of their sacrifices without getting our demands met," said Ratan Jhadola, a protester. ■ PTI

India denies Pak charge on targeting UN military group observers, vehicles

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 20 DECEMBER:

ing baseless and fabricated allegations against India to cover up its own failure in ensuring the safety and security of UN personnel in territory under its control, Pakistan should responsibly investigate its lapses. India has conveyed its findings and views on these misrepresentations to the Pakistani side."

Earlier in the day, Pakistan said it has taken up the "attack" by India on the UNMOGIP observers and their vehicle with the UN, urging it to initiate a transparent investigation into the incident.

In a letter addressed to the

UN Secretary General and the President of the Security Council, Pakistan's Permanent Representative to the UN, alleged that the targeting of the UN observers and their vehicle appeared to be a "new coercive and reckless ploy" by India to hinder UNMOGIP's work, and facilitate another Indian military "misadventure" against Pakistan.

He said, "Instead of repeat-

Govt cancelled Parl winter session to avoid questions on its failures: CPM

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 20 DECEMBER

The CPI(M) Sunday hit out at the government for scrapping the winter session of Parliament over the Covid-19 situation, and said the pandemic is being used as an excuse by the Centre to avoid being held accountable on its "all round failures".

In a statement issued here after a meeting of its Politburo, the Left party also demanded the cancellation of the Central Vista project and said the money allocated for this purpose be used to provide "free food and cash transfers to our beleaguered people".

The Politburo strongly denounced the unprecedented cancellation of the Winter Session of Parliament using the pretext of the Covid pandemic," it said.

The pandemic is not any problem for the BJP to organise its election campaign and rallies but it has chosen to "avoid being answerable to the parliament", it added.

"It is thus abandoning its constitutional responsibility of being accountable in the

parliament."

The Centre has said there will be no Winter Session of Parliament this time because of the coronavirus crisis.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi conveyed the government's decision to Congress MP and its Leader in Lok Sabha Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury through a letter. Chowdhury had demanded a short winter session to discuss the three new farm laws, which have triggered protests across the country.

The CPI(M) statement added, "Clearly, the Modi government is escaping answering questions over its all-round failure in tackling the pandemic effectively and the economic recession while mercilessly attacking the livelihood of the people and destroying the rights of the working people and the peasantry. The people shall make the government answer."

The statement also questioned the need for the Central Vista project at a time when the country is battling a raging pandemic and demanded it be scrapped.

"Instead of using the avail-

able resources to feed our people and provide them with some means of livelihood, this central government is squandering our country's resources in constructing new buildings and the Central Vista including a new parliament. In the midst of this pandemic and mounting people's woes, the Prime Minister laid the foundation for the construction of the new parliament.

"The CPI (M) demands that this project of the Central Vista be scrapped. The money allocated for this must be transferred to provide free food and cash transfers to our beleaguered people," it said.

The party also reiterated its demand for the repeal of the three farm laws and hailed the protest of the farmers against them.

The Politburo also called on all its units to organise solidarity actions with the ongoing farm struggles demanding repeal of the agri laws.

It also asked its units to support the actions of the working class in the ongoing struggles against "large-scale privatisation".

Elected DDC representatives will take J&K to new heights of development: LG Manoj Sinha

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
JAMMU, 20 DECEMBER

A day after the successful completion of the eight-phased maiden DDC polls in Jammu and Kashmir, Lt Governor Manoj Sinha on Sunday hoped the grassroots-level elected representatives would help the Union Territory scale new heights of development.

Thanking voters, the election machinery and security agencies besides political parties and independent candidates for their participation in the festival of democracy, Sinha said he kept his promise of ensuring free and fair polls.

The festival of democracy ended yesterday (Saturday) and I am hopeful that this will prove a milestone in the development of J&K. The turnout of electorate's (in all eight phases of the DDC polls) makes one thing clear that everyone participated enthusiastically to strengthen the Pancharati Raj System.

The DDC elections were held for the first time in J&K I want to thank all political parties and independent candidates who reposed their faith in the constitution of the country and accepted the constitutional changes, the Lt Governor said.

Nyoma Sub-Division and interacted with the villagers and elected representatives of Tsaga, Muth, Dumti, Koyul, Chumur and Demjok villages. He also met the Sarpanches, Councillors of Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC), various departmental officers and officers of the Army, Indo Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) and the UT Police.

He ordered that the Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM), Nyoma, will be the Nodal Officer for management of the movement of nomadic tribes to the winter pasture lands.

Sarpanches of 13 Gram Panchayats of Nyoma Sub-Division put forth various issues confronted by the villagers especially during the winter months.

China builds temporary houses for soldiers in Demchok across LAC

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
JAMMU, 20 DECEMBER

After incursions in Ladakh, the Chinese have built double storey houses for its shepherds near the pastures of Demchok just across the Line of Actual Control (LAC). These houses visible from the Indian side have been provided with 24x7 electric supply and 4G network.

Pictures of the newly built housing colony have been shared on the social media by Konchok Stanzin, councillor of the Chuhsul constituency and former executive councillor of the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC) of Leh.

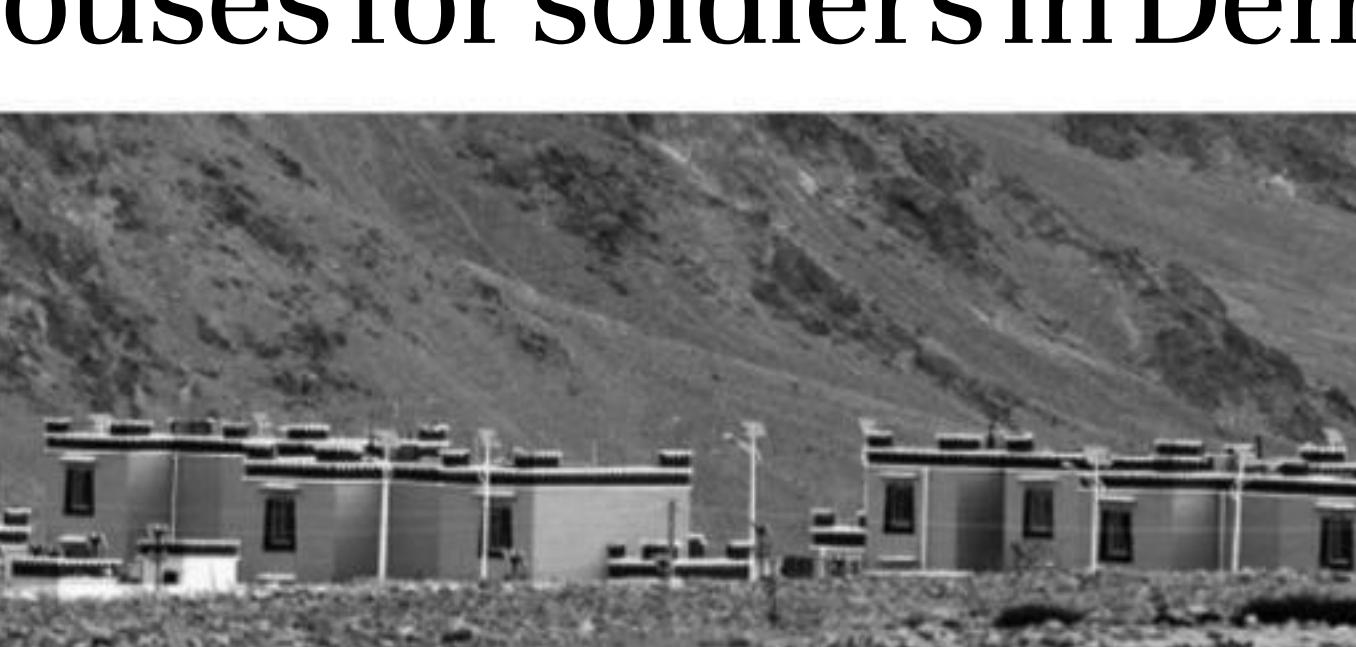
"China has built double story for their nomads at Demchok with planned man-

ner. Nomads are always encouraged by providing all facilities, like 24x7 light, 4G network & infrastructure that I am requesting #GOI for same to residents of border".

China's move is being seen as an act of dominance in the area in wake of recent skirmishes between Indian and Chinese troops over territory in the region.

The Divisional Commissioner of Ladakh Union Territory (UT), Saugat Biswas, recently made an aerial survey of the Khakjung pastures for a better understanding of the issues of the nomadic tribes.

The Sarpanch of Nyoma, Tashi Dawa, recently told The Statesman over the phone that the nomads were facing problems as they were not being allowed to go beyond Point 36 that is far behind



the pastures. Before the Chinese incursion, they used to go beyond the point 37 to graze their cattle.

The Chinese Army is reported to have occupied about 2 acres of cultivable and pasture land in Chumur and also

intruded upon vast areas of the traditional pastures in Demchok.

Dawa said that the Chinese

I have suddenly reminded them of MGR...this is childish behaviour (by AIADMK). Why do you get angry if I say I am walking his path.



MAKKAL NEEDHI MAIAM (MNM) FOUNDER KAMAL HAASAN

ACCUSING THE RULING PARTY OF HAVING FORGOTTEN THEIR LATE FOUNDER ALL THESE DAYS

The Statesman
NEW DELHI, MONDAY 21 DECEMBER 2020

05

THUMBNAILS



TN students win top award for sustainable building material project. ■ IANS

Man flees after marrying 2 women in 5 days: A 26-year-old software engineer allegedly married two women in five days in Madhya Pradesh and then fled, police said on Sunday. Based on a cheating complaint filed by a woman's family in Khandwa on Saturday, the police are conducting a probe. ■ PTI

Tansen music festival: The five-day Tansen Sangeet Samarth will be organised in the presence of a limited audience in Gwalior from 26 December, an official said on Sunday. Entry, for the first time, will be on the basis of passes due to Covid outbreak. ■ PTI

Most historic rally of my life: Amit Shah



Union Home Minister Amit Shah and others at a traditional Baul performance at Birbhum on Sunday. ■ RAJA BHAKAT

DEBAJYOTI CHAKRABORTY
BIRBHAM, 20 DECEMBER

In his last physical political activity in this pandemic year in this poll-bound state, Union home minister Amit Shah, visibly overwhelmed by the huge crowds on both sides of his one-kilometre road show from Dak Bungalow More to Chowrasta in Birbhum town today claimed that it was the most historic rally held of his life and the people of Bengal have taken a decision for change to end the political violence, Bangladeshi infiltration and extortion.

However, for the most part of his packed schedule in Birbhum today, Mr Shah was not wearing a mask, despite the tweet by Prashant Bhushan yesterday attacking him for cancelling the Winter session of parliament allegedly on account of Covid-19 spread in the country.

The road show ended at around 4 p.m. and in his speech to the gathering, he said that the people of Bengal love PM Modi and have shown their support today and the BJP will fulfil the dream of Subhas Chandra Bose in making a new Bengal. "People of Bengal have shown their full trust in Modiji and vented their anger on Didi," he said. "The Congress has ruled the state for over 30 years since Independence, then the Left Front for over 34 years and the Trinamul Congress for over 10 years. Now you give us a chance to serve you and we will bring our bangla," he added.

Mr Shah claimed after his high voltage roadshow that the people of Bengal wanted that Didi should immediately enter the election battlefield. They want a change, he added.

At around 11.40 a.m. Mr Shah's helicopter touched the ground at the helipad at Shantiniketan. He went straight to Visva Bharati University and paid floral tributes to Rabindra Nath Tagore.

"Paid tributes to Rabindra Nath Tagore, country's greatest thinker at Rabindra Bhawan, he is the only person in the world who has written the national anthems of two countries. His contribution in India's freedom movement will forever be remembered and will inspire generations to come," Mr Shah tweeted. He also went to Bangladesh Bhawan and visited the house where Mahatma Gandhi once stayed. "The main reason to visit VBU

DMK launches 'werejectadm' campaign in TN

Stalin sets target of winning 200 seats for party office-bearers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
CHENNAI, 20 DECEMBER



Months ahead of Assembly elections in Tamil Nadu, Opposition DMK on Sunday launched a campaign against arch-rival AIADMK on what it called "lack of governance" by the Palaniswami government and touching sensitive issues such as the NEET-related suicides.

The party's campaign launched on Sunday is titled "werejectadm" and the DMK released a video, flagging issues in sectors like agriculture and education as it urged people to defeat the AIADMK in the elections, likely in coming April-May.

In the video, released during a meeting of DMK's key office-bearers, including district secretaries, party chief M K Stalin said senior party functionaries will visit over 16,000 villages and wards to conduct "gram sabhas" where resolutions will be adopted against the AIADMK government as part of the campaign.

At the meeting, Stalin set a target of winning 200 seats for his party office-bearers and claimed DMK was facing attacks from many fronts, including "some being forced" to start their own political ventures as part of a "conspiracy."

The Opposition party will highlight issues such as the National-Entrance-cum-Eli-

gibility Test related suicides of Anitha of Ariyalur, which triggered an outrage against the exam, and some other medical aspirants, allegations of corruption against the AIADMK, issues faced by farmers and unemployed youth and the law and order situation.

DMK leaders, including Udhayanidhi Stalin and Kanimozhi, have already hit the campaign trail while Stalin has been addressing virtual meetings ahead of the state polls, the first after the demise of party patriarch M Karunanidhi and AIADMK supremo and late chief minister J Jayalalithaa.

Jayalalithaa died on 5 December, 2016 and Karunanidhi on 7 August, 2018 after helming their respective parties and holding sway over masses for decades.

Later, in his address at the gathering at the party headquarters here, Stalin exhorted the functionaries to work with a zeal to achieve "mission 200," implying DMK should return at least 200 MLAs in the 234-member state Assembly. He alleged that with BJP's "muscle" and AIADMK's "money," the media was supportive of the two ruling parties, but added "such things are not new to us."

Stalin said he might launch his poll campaign from the first week of January.

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STAR OF BETHLEHEM



A Christmas star shines bright in Andhra's Godavari district. ■ IANS

Kamal Haasan once again takes on AIADMK over MGR's legacy

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
CHENNAI, 20 DECEMBER

Makkal Needhi Maiam (MNM) founder Kamal Haasan on Sunday yet again joined issue with the ruling AIADMK over late chief minister M G Ramachandran's (MGR) legacy, saying anyone who had ideals like the stalwart could be his "heir".

His party had ideals like him and, therefore, "we are his extension," Haasan said at a poll rally here, days after chief minister and AIADMK co-coordinator K Palaniswami said no one other than the ruling party can lay claim to MGR's legacy.

Incidentally, the MNM's very slogan "Naalai Namadey" (Tomorrow belongs to us) has a connect to MGR, Haasan said in an obvious reference to a movie featuring the late matinee idol in the lead role, with a titular song from the same film being a hit number.

Assembly elections in Tamil Nadu are expected to be held in April-May 2021.

Hassan said questions were being asked if he was taking MGR's name with an eye on polls but "it means you have not seen or heard anything." Our first slogan is Naalai Namadey. We are not the ones making money by

repeatedly taking that name (of MGR). We are taking the name of (Mahatma) Gandhia as well as that of MGR, (EVR) Periyar and (BR) Ambedkar," he said at his campaign at Porur.

We believe in all their good intentions becoming our intentions. We have that compassion of MGR who wanted poor students to come to school and have food (and so) we are his extension," Haasan added.

In fact, all those who think on the lines of MGR "are his heirs," he said. "Therefore I am also that. You can't claim sole credit to MGR's legacy," Haasan asserted.

ASI removes cap on number of visitors to monuments

NEW DELHI, 20 DECEMBER

The Archeological Survey of India has removed the cap on the number of visitors to its Centrally Protected Monuments or sites. However, the ministry of Culture mentioned that the total number of visitors to be allowed per day may be decided by the concerned Superintending Archaeologist/SA (I/c) with the concurrence of the respective DM, who is the chairman of the District Disaster Management Committee of the district.

While Adampur was the coldest place in Punjab, Amritsar too reeled under an intense chill, recording a low of one degree Celsius.

In Haryana, Narnaul was the coldest, recording a low of 2.4 degrees C. Cold wave prevailed in Rajasthan too, with the state's only hill station, Mount Abu, recording a low of minus 1.5 degrees C.

Cold-day conditions were witnessed at a few places in Uttar Pradesh.

Muzaffarnagar was the coldest place in the state at 2 degrees C. Lucknow recorded a low of 4 degrees C, while Allahabad's minimum temperature settled at 6.2 degrees C.

Bareilly recorded 3.3 degrees Celsius, while Chark (Sambhadra) recorded a low of three degrees Celsius. Kanpur recorded a low of 4.2 degrees C.

The Press Trust of India reported that selling of physical tickets may be resumed where there are problems in QR code and network. Sound and light show may be resumed.

"Except the above modifications, all other provisions specified in SOP dated 2 July (w.e.f. 6.7.2020) shall be in effect until further order," reads the Press release.

The SOP further states that selling of physical tickets may be resumed where there are problems in QR code and network. Sound and light show may be resumed. "Except the above modifications, all other provisions specified in SOP dated 2 July (w.e.f. 6.7.2020) shall be in effect until further order," reads the Press release.

Communication states all centrally protected monuments and sites shall continue to be bound by the Covid-related protocols.

PM to address AMU centenary celebration, release postal stamp

NEW DELHI, 20 DECEMBER

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will address the centenary celebrations of Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) on Tuesday and also release a postal stamp during the event.

In a Press statement the PM today said the Prime Minister will participate in the event at 11 a.m. via video conferencing. He will later release a postal stamp during the event in which Chancellor of the University Syedna Mufaddal Saifuddin and Union education minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank will also be present.

AMU became a University in 1920, through an Act of Indian Legislative Council by elevating the Mohammedan Anglo Oriental (MAO) College to the status of a Central University. MAO College was set up in 1877 by Syed Ahmad Khan.

The university has a campus spread over 467.6 hectares of land in the city of Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh. It also has three off-campus centres in Malappuram (Kerala), Murshidabad-Jangipur (West Bengal) and Kishanganj (Bihar).

PM offers prayers at Gurudwara Rakab Ganj

Prime Minister Modi made a surprise visit to Gurudwara Rakab Ganj on Sunday and paid tributes to Guru Teg Bahadur, the ninth Sikh guru, for his supreme sacrifice.

Guru Teg Bahadur, whose death anniversary was observed on Saturday, was cremated at Gurudwara Rakab Ganj. Modi offered prayers during his visit to the gurdwara for which no police bandobast or traffic barriers were put in place to restrict movement of the common man, official sources said.

The Prime Minister's visit to one of the most popular gurdwaras among the devotees in the national capital assumes significance as it comes amid intense protests by farmers, especially from Punjab, against the three farm laws enacted by his government.

Pradhan dedicates Bengal's first oil & gas reserve to nation

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
ASHOKNAGAR, 20 DECEMBER

West Bengal found a place in the oil map of India as Union minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Sunday dedicated an oil and gas producing field in North 24 Parganas district to the nation.

He said production from the petroleum reserve here, about 47 km from Kolkata, has started with extracted oil being sent to Haldia refinery of Indian Oil Corporation. The Ashoknagar field, which falls under the Mahanadi-Bengal-Andaman basin, has been proved to be commercially viable, he said.

He said crude oil discovered at the Ashoknagar reserve is of high quality. He said commercial production from the oilfield will increase West Bengal's revenue and create job opportunities in the state.

"The project would be a step towards our commitment to support PM's clarion call for reducing 10 per cent oil import by 2022," he said.

BEFORE DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL-II, DELHI

4TH FLOOR JEEVAN TARA BUILDING

PARLIAMENT STREET NEW DELHI - 110001.

OA. No. 358/19

SYNDICATE BANK

DATE: 29.10.2020

APPLICANT

VERSUS

M/S VED VATI TEXTILES & ORS.

RESPONDENT

To,

DEFENDANT

1. M/S VED VATI TEXTILE

(APPROPRIETORSHIP CONCERN OF MR. VIPIN YADAV)
P-82, VIJAY VIHAR UTTAM NAGAR DELHI - 59

2. MR. VIPIN YADAV S/O SH. B.L. YADAV

A-17, SECT-15 DISTT. GAUTAM BUDH NAGAR NOIDA - 201001
ALSO AT: 98, SUKHDEV VIHAR DELHI - 25

3. MR. DHIRENDRA KUMAR S/O SH. B.L. YADAV

A-17, SECT-15 DISTT. GAUTAM BUDH NAGAR NOIDA - 201001

Whereas the above named applicant(s) has/have instituted a case for recovery of Rs 20,30,473/- (RUPEE TWENTY LAKH THIRTY THOUSAND FOUR HUNDRED AND SEVENTY THREE ONLY) against you and where it has been shown to the satisfaction of the Tribunal that it is not possible to serve you in the ordinary way therefore, this notice is given by advertisement directing you to make appearance in the Tribunal on 25.02.2021 At 10.30 AM.

Take notice that in default of your appearance on the day before the mentioned, the case will be heard and determined in your absence.

BY ORDER OF THE TRIBUNAL,
FOR REGISTRAR, DRT-II, DELHI

North India reels under cold wave

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 20 DECEMBER



Winter garments being sold in Kolkata on Sunday. ■ SNS

Cold wave conditions continued across north India on Sunday, with most places in Jammu and Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh experiencing sub-zero temperatures and Delhi recording the season's lowest temperature so far at 3.4 degrees Celsius, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said.

On Saturday, the minimum temperature at the Safdarjung Observatory, which provides representative data for the city, had settled at 3.9 degrees Celsius.

The mercury dipped to 3.3 degrees Celsius at Lodhi Road as icy winds from the snow-laden Western Himalayas barrelled through the city.

There was some improvement in the minimum temperatures across Kashmir on Sunday but the Valley continued to experience sub-zero nights,

even as the 40-day harsh-winter period - "Chillai-Kalan" - starts from Monday, Met officials said.

The tribal district of Lahaul-Spiti's administrative centre, Keylong, continued to be the coldest place in the state at minus 11 degrees Celsius, Met centre, Shimla Director Manmohan Singh said.

Keylong

LDF Triumphs

Amidst a plethora of probes of officials close to the Chief Minister, Pinarayi Vijayan, by Central agencies like the National Investigating Agency and the Enforcement Directorate, the Left Democratic Front has put up an impressive show in the just concluded local body elections in Kerala and revived hopes of winning a consecutive second term in the coming Assembly election. The people of Kerala are known to change governments every five years. The Congress-led United Democratic Front trailed far behind the LDF and the BJP. Ploughing a lonely furrow, it came third. The CPI(M)-led LDF and the UDF have been ruling Kerala alternatively for almost half a century now. The CPI(M) secretariat and the LDF State Committee which met in Thiruvananthapuram on Friday observed that with the local body poll verdict, the Left's chances of continuing in office have improved. Just before the local body elections, image of the LDF had touched the nadir with several charges of corruption, impropriety and scandals. M Sivsankar, then principal secretary to the Chief Minister, was sent to jail for his association with a gold smuggling ring having links with UAE Consulate; CM Raveendran, additional private secretary to the Chief Minister was being investigated by the Enforcement Directorate and the Speaker of the Assembly, P Seeramakrishnan, had to convene a press conference to deny any links with the gold smuggling ring. Denied bail, Sivsankar is still in jail. Kodiyeri Balakrishnan, CPI(M) secretary in charge of Kerala, had to step down following the arrest of his son Binish on charges of drug trafficking and money laundering. Riding on the wave of victory amidst these vicissitudes, Vijayan is embarking on a tour of the State on Tuesday. The welfare measures initiated by the LDF government like service pension, free food kit and Covid-related programmes played a major role in the poll outcome. The BJP's constant efforts to dent the image of Vijayan only refurbished it with the electorate.

The Political Affairs Committee of the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee blamed lack of dynamic leadership, inadequate election preparedness, scarcity of funds and ill-informed selection for its humiliating defeat. Despite the government being mired in scandal, the UDF failed to take advantage of the situation. Clamour for leadership change in the KPCC is getting louder by the day. The party cannot survive without a strategy and vibrant leadership. According to PJ Kurien, veteran Congress leader and former Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, the party has been granting posts based on group equations and not on merit. The Congress is not a cadre-based party. It draws strength from committees at the grassroots level. If the Congress fails to put its house in order, the UDF may cease to be the alternative to the LDF and yield place to the BJP which has been growing steadily in Kerala. In 2016 it made its entry into the Kerala Assembly through veteran leader O Rajagopal. The party is poised to increase its numbers significantly in the coming Assembly election.

Over the moon

One could argue that it is yet another feather in President Xi Jinping's cap. China, amidst the season of a pandemic which originated from its shores, has achieved the spectacular in its space programme. The moon rocks have returned to Earth and the country thus becomes the third to earn the distinction, the first in more than 40 years. The country's re-entry module of Chang'e-5, the latest lunar probe, landed in the grasslands of Inner Mongolia last Wednesday. China's lunar exploration programme envisages that the government in Beijing will have astronauts on the moon within the next decade. On the anvil too is a research station on the moon and eventually plans to send people to Mars. Reports on the space programme, unveiled this week, also suggest that China's Mars probe, launched in July, is now travelling through space towards the "red planet". It is scheduled to reach in April 2021 and then release a rover for landing. This will mark another first for China and is overall testament to the country's vigorous space programme. Generally considered to be a "late-comer" in space exploration, the country has taken phenomenal strides in the daunting sphere not the least because President Xi is seemingly determined to challenge the domination of the United States of America in more spheres than one. It would be pertinent to recall that China had sent its first astronauts to space in 2003 and had embarked on its first moon mission the following year. In 2007, the country had launched Chang'e-1, its first lunar probe, named after a Chinese mythical figure who is revered as the goddess of the moon. Chang'e-5 was launched on 23 November. It had landed on the moon eight days later, digging up samples from the surface. Indeed, Zhou Chengyu, the 24-year-old member of the mission control team, has over the past month become an internet sensation in the context of her television appearance during the launch.

While moon rock samples are not new ~ the Americans had brought them decades ago ~ China has some justification in claiming the achievement as a "giant leap forward" for its space programme. Experts say earlier missions had brought back small quantities of samples, all of them from a part of the Moon that is dotted with craters. The Chinese space mission was planned to collect samples from a region with fewer craters. The mission has happened exactly a year after the initial case of coronavirus was detected in Wuhan. The controversy over China's alleged "culpability", the reported hedging by the World Health Organization ~ pre-eminently the man at the helm ~ persists to this day. To have pulled off a successful space mission against this backdrop is creditable and will buttress efforts of its space programme.

Healing Healthcare

Healthy families are the foundation for healthy communities. When people are healthy, humanity moves forward. There is nothing more important than good health, and reliable healthcare for the family



India's healthcare remains an Achilles' heel and continues to undermine economic progress. This is largely on account of the abysmal and chaotic healthcare system. India ranks close to the bottom in international rankings in most health indices. The Covid-19 pandemic has exposed the fundamental problems plaguing the healthcare system, be it physical infrastructure, manpower or health management.

Beyond the crisis unleashed by the pandemic, the critical solutions that developed in its aftermath could help reframe the future of health care for the better. The government needs to spend more to create a more robust and all-encompassing public healthcare system. The country needs more public hospitals and the focus needs to shift from disease management to health management, patient education and prevention.

India's health system performs poorly on multiple dimensions. India ranks 145th among 195 countries listed on the Healthcare Access and Quality Index (HAQ). India's healthcare spending at 3.5 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is significantly lower than peers such as China (5 per cent), Vietnam (5.5 per cent), South Africa (8.1 per cent), and Japan (10.9 per cent). The Covid-19 situation has laid bare these realities and brought to the forefront the weak health infrastructure in the country.

Almost 122 Indians per 100,000 die due to poor quality care each year. This is much higher when compared to countries such as Brazil (74), Russia (91), China (46), and South Africa (93). Our neighbours Pakistan (119), Nepal (93), Bangladesh (57) and Sri Lanka (51) also fare much better than us. While India has taken initiatives to improve access to healthcare through various public health schemes, the quality of care remains low due to poor infrastructure, unskilled staff, and limited coordination among healthcare service providers (HSPs). For example, only 11 per cent of sub-centres and 13 per cent of PHCs meet the norms set by the Indian Public Health Standards (IPHS).

Healthy families are the foundation for healthy communities. When people are healthy, humanity moves forward. There is nothing more important than good health, and reliable healthcare for the family. Universal health coverage, which aims to ensure that all people receive quality and adequate healthcare without suffering financial hardship, is an integral part of achieving the UN-mandated Sustainable Development Goals.

A sound health system enables countries to make the most of their strongest asset: human capital. Physical and mental well-being is at the core of creating communities that thrive. Poor access to healthcare is the main impediment to poverty reduction and drives inequality. Health is, therefore, a foundational investment in human capital and in economic growth ~ without good health, children are unable to go to school and adults are unable to go to work. That health is a clear priority for present and future generations underpins the objective of achieving universal health coverage.

able Development Goals.

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Healthcare has now become a critical leverage point where government action could have the maximum impact. The government's development wisdom is now focused on identifying the strategic leverage points where successful action could trigger many supportive reactions.

India must revitalise the public health system to ensure access, outcome, quality and affordability. The focus must be on finding solutions which are affordable, scalable and yet high-quality. The government needs to supplement curative services with preventive measures by strengthening ancillary civic services like insect management, water purification systems, sewage systems and plants for treatment of industrial effluents and waste. Due to poor hygiene and sanitation, people are suffering from pneumonia, malnutrition, malaria and tuberculosis across the country.

Healthcare expenses are a major cause of impoverishment for working families. Private healthcare has catastrophic costs that shave off hard-earned savings of patients and their families, thereby becoming a primary route to bankruptcy. Historically, out-of-pocket expenditure has been a major source of financing healthcare in India. It still contributes to 70 per cent of all healthcare spending. No surprise then that 3.7 per cent of the country's population is pushed into poverty every year merely due to unexpected healthcare outlays. All these have spillover consequences for families, resulting in less money being available to households for food, education, housing and long-term plans. A health event is a bigger risk to

farmers than an unsuccessful crop. Once they sell their land or livestock, they become indentured labourers and that takes a generation or more to fix.

Health insurance is emerging as an important financing tool in meeting the healthcare needs of the poor. Life is a tough ordeal for families hit by "health shocks". Poor families have long suffered the triple curse of sudden illness ~ the trauma associated with sickness, the financial burden of intensive healthcare and the loss of wages. By managing risks and avoiding debt, those who have micro-insurance policies are in a position to protect the meagre wealth they accumulate, generate more income and even get a fair chance to rescue themselves and their families out of the mire of poverty.

The poor prefer health insurance to life insurance, as they say, "We die once but go to the doctor many times each year." Community-based health insurance, rather than market-mediated or government-provided insurance, is widely considered an appropriate way of reaching and protecting the poor. The development of private health insurance has potential risks and benefits in terms of healthcare access for the poor. It could result in substantial long-term welfare benefits but it is unaffordable for most low-income families.

The biggest disease burden sits on the bottom pyramid of 500 million people. They don't have access to reliable diagnosis or proper treatment. If they get diagnosed, they find it hard to get treatment. Government-run hospitals are free for everyone but access is difficult, quality is abysmal and corruption is endemic. Another challenge for the health sector is the lack of provisions to deal with non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, cancer, chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes.

Unlike the short-term effects of communicable diseases, the dual health and economic impacts of non-communicable diseases on individuals, families and households are devastating and long-lasting. Changing this would mean providing a clean environment and potable water so that infectious diseases are contained to the minimum and a stress-free and healthy lifestyle to ward off the growing threat of non-communicable diseases.

So long, all publicity media, press and Cable TV were under the direct control of the Ministry. But now, the international Over the Top (OTT) streaming material, that was coming to viewers via the internet, without any censorship or threat of a ban, has been brought under control. The argument is that the government wants to control violent and lewd material. But in that guise, the main objective, as usual, is to censor free political news blogs and material that makes the Government uncomfortable, especially movies it finds unpalatable. This is simply awful and alarming.

Yours, etc., A R Sengupta
Kolkata, 16 December.

UGLY INCIDENT

SIR, The ransacking of the Wistron factory facility, situated in Kolar district of Kar-

All stakeholders now agree that increasing penetration in care delivery for chronic non-communicable diseases will require us to move away from the West's physician-based models of healthcare delivery, which favour the relatively privileged. The democratisation of this process requires us to identify resources in the community and co-opt them to improve efficiency. Programmes have to be transparent to the people to ensure fairness. To make health services more available and effective, policies should remove user fees, tackle discrimination, foster innovations in service delivery, and break down public expenditure by quintiles.

Universal health coverage will become a reality only if individuals, families, and communities are empowered to identify their own health needs ~ taking action to address the diseases that increase cost of care and contribute to the burden on our health systems. It is the government's primary job to invest in a dependable state-run system and also devise regulation that keeps players, public and private, moving in a direction that serves the national interest. Several innovative efforts in community-based health services in rural India have given people living in remote communities' access to affordable preventive and primary healthcare. Village health workers provide prenatal care, monitored child immunisations, and initiate self-help groups to fund cooperative business enterprises. Any visitor to a village where these community healthcare models are the primary drivers of health awareness will marvel at the ability of the health workers to connect with and explain things to women. Their lack of a degree is not a handicap, it is an advantage. They understand how to reach the people who most need reaching: illiterate, vulnerable and poor village women. They know how they think and live, because they are one of them.

Co-designing, co-creating, and co-owning health services are an increasingly effective and scalable path to achieving inclusive and sustainable health outcomes. Putting people and communities in charge of their own healthcare also leads to better outcomes and increased effectiveness through the use of traditional knowledge and local healing flora and fauna.

Several laudable policies are already in place. Yet, for reforms to be successful we need hard-coded timelines. It is now for the policy doctors to collaborate with the real doctors to come up with radical solutions that can build a healthier world for everyone.

A MEMBER OF THE **ANN**
ASIAN VOICES

Pandemic and gender inequality

The COVID-19 pandemic has required almost all events to go virtual, including in Indonesia. Information about conferences and seminars has been disseminated through digital posters containing the speakers' photographs.

One cannot close one's eyes to the male favoritism in Indonesia's institutions. It is a rarity to find a conference or seminar in Indonesia with an equal number of men and women. Most strikingly, even those that do include women put them into gender-dictated roles, such as a chairperson. Why is this the case? Indonesia may have fewer problems than other countries with equal pay between genders, but the problem we currently have is no less systemic than the wage issue.

Women need to receive the same acknowledgement for their leadership capacity and their understanding of issues within their field. Some might argue that speakers are selected based on their knowledge ~ that these men are the brightest individuals in their respective fields. However, we must realize that in cases of high-level conversations, the speakers are almost always leaders in their institutions. So, it is not merely a "who to invite" issue; it is a leadership issue ~ something that is entrenched in our institutions.

Systemic gender inequality requires the attention of everyone ~ both men and women, regardless of their occupations or backgrounds. The argument that the central government and regional administrations have adopted

The Jakarta Post

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which aim to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment, might counter this critique by maintaining that we are actually progressing toward reducing gender inequality. But how can one claim that progress has been made when male favoritism in leadership, as the most critical and systemic gender issue, has not been addressed? In promoting women in leadership, developing countries mainly appreciate empowerment in terms of their ability to run their own small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). That matters.

However, gender inequality also persists in the formal sector ~ a sector that upholds the highest standards of giving decent wages and protections to its workers but does not actually have a clear vision when it comes to gender inequality in leadership. In 1999, Amartya Sen wrote about "missing women". Healthcare neglect caused 100 million women to die at birth or shortly thereafter. But newer findings have contributed to this debate and have concluded that the women were missing not simply because of health care. Building upon Sen's work, Elisabeth Croll (2010) showed that cultural and economic factors contributed to female mortality. The missing women epitomize the inequality of opportunity between women and men and the reality of male favoritism. One might wonder what the cost of neglecting of women's leadership will be. What will be the cost of stopping women from speaking their minds? Sylvia Chant (2012) wrote that the current pursuit of gender equality through SME development might very well be the way to achieve "development on the cheap".

In a way, it is true. The linkage between women and development is always made through the growth narrative ~ that giving more opportunities to women in the labor force can elevate economic growth. The refusal to look at systemic gender inequality will do justice to women.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR editor@thestatesman.com

Alarming move

SIR, A recent study showed that since 2014, under the present regime, 86 per cent Bills were passed through both houses of Parliament without proper discussion, debate or deliberations. Nobody can assert, for sure, how many orders, amendments, notifications have been issued on how any subjects and topics. This may be deemed to be a sure sign of an "active" and "strong government" which leaves its mark everywhere. But it is simply confusing and disturbing too, as also a sign of a hectic frenzy. One such order has been issued by the Union Government very recently, by a simple Gazette notification, whereby all internet materials in the shapes of news, audio-visual presentations, movies, music and current affairs have been brought under the direct control of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. For this, the second schedule of the Constitution has been amended without consultation with

and machinery ~ which includes labour inspectors ~ failed to detect the problem. Since the purpose behind the Union government amending labour laws recently to allow fixed-term contract was to encourage firms to hire workers on their rolls instead of using contractors ~ whose operations are difficult to supervise ~ this would suggest the laws have little impact. India had a reputa-

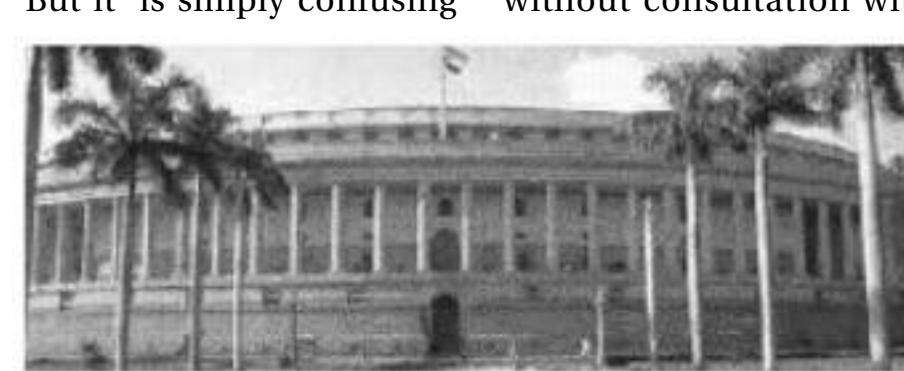
tion for labour laws that were anti-industry; The Wistron episode suggests India has labour laws that allow workers to be exploited. Neither reputation is desirable for a country that is hoping to significantly increase its manufacturing capacity so as to provide more jobs for its citizens.

Yours, etc., N Sadhasiva Reddy, Bengaluru, 17 December.

OBDURATE

SIR, The obdurate attitude of the Union Government towards concerns of the farmers is a clear indication of some ulterior motive. Despite the provocations, the protesting farmers have been peaceful. The way they are managing the gathering is incredible with all activities of daily routine taken into consideration. In fact, it is proving to be a paradigm shift in public protest. Now, it is to be seen how the dispensation responds to a mass movement that calls upon its conscience in a democratic and peaceful way.

Yours, etc., Chandan Kr Nath, Guwahati, 17 December.



SUNIL SHARAN

Just a few months ago it seemed that the streets of Washington, D.C. were choc a bloc with Black Lives Matter protesters. They were agitating for a just cause, a rightful cause, the inhuman slaying of an innocent black man, George Floyd, by Derek Chauvin, a ruthless white cop. They were tear gassed, battered and bruised. Even the army was called in against them.

Today the streets of DC are full of the kind of people that the BLM protesters were protesting against: right-wing white supremacists. The protesters of today are protesting for an ignoble cause. They want to keep the deposed president, the tyrant Donald Trump, who will rest in infamy as the worst ruler America has ever had and will ever have, in power, by hook or by crook. America today stands shamed before the world, more than ever before.

We always get had by the whites, railed a black commentator on TV. Slavery ended in 1865, to be followed by a brief period of black renaissance called Reconstruction. Whites in America hated Reconstruction so much that they founded the Ku Klux Klan to terrorize blacks. They framed segregationist Jim Crow laws, which lasted a century or so, to oppress blacks.

Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in 1968, which event was followed by widespread rioting. And then in 2020, the worst black riots since 1968 broke out in the country in protest against the killing of Floyd and Breonna Taylor and other innocent black people at the hands of white cops. Joe Biden seized the initiative. He promised to reform the police. Trump's mishandling of the pandemic was the first major reason why Biden won. Reforming the police was the second.

Now Biden is weaseling out. He says that he cannot reform the police with an executive order (similar to a government ordinance in India) alone. He says he needs Congressional approval. But the US Congress is divided. The Senate is probably going to remain in the hands of the Republicans, who are against police reform of any kind. Even moderate Democratic Congressmen and women are against police reform.

So it will not happen. Biden used it as a plank to win, and once he's won, he's ditched the plank. The aforementioned black TV commentator was right. Blacks have always been had in America. Say goodbye to police reform. Say welcome to Joe

The Blackwashing of America



Biden.

I admit that I am a copious watcher of American TV. I have noticed in the last few months a curious, disturbing trend. Almost every TV ad, yes almost every TV ad, features one or more black persons. If I was a Martian descended on planet earth with no idea of the realities of this place, I would think that blacks were the richest, happiest, best looking people on this planet.

Yes, Madison Avenue, which is overwhelmingly white, has done its black makeover, its blackwashing. You have blacks pitching everything from cosmetics and health care products to cars and food on TV now. At the height of the Floyd riots, one sensible black TV commentator pleaded with whites: Ok, we get that you don't like the way we look, but why are you killing us?

You see stuff on TV now pushing

the boundaries of imagination, stuff that you seldom see in American society. The forbidden fruit in America has always been the coupling between the white woman and the black man. And some of that was shown on TV and film before. But the black woman? She rests even today at the bottom of the American totem pole.

Relationships between white men and black women have always been uncommon in American history. Not so on American TV today. A white man-black woman pairing is to be found a dime a dozen there. Just what is going on in America? Some people say that black people are killed only because of how they look, but now whites seem to find blacks so attractive that they are ready to buy anything plugged by black people.

And then there has been the

historically frosty relationship in America between white women and black women. Once again it's a different story on TV. White and black women mix happily, arm in arm, sisters all.

So there goes reform of the police or of systemic racism as Biden had promised. Madison Avenue has cured America of its systemic racism. Madison Avenue has policed the police. Here's another one of the hypocrisies in which America abounds. In any other country, a liberal or illiberal democracy or even a dictatorship, if a tyrant had been deposed and he did not leave in short order, the streets would be full of protestors forcing him to quit.

Not so in America. A tyrannical ruler has been displaced by the cleanest election possible. Here the tyrant is being implored to stay by his supporters on the streets. No

tear-gassing happens against them. No army is called in. The despot is clinging on to power in order to delegitimize the next government so he can plan his own comeback in a few years. Why doesn't he bow out gracefully? All the TV pundits are watching his next move, guessing which court he will move next, wondering whether he will attend the inaugural of the next president.

Only in America. Only in America can this spectacle happen. Americans need to get their house in order before they hector the world on how to behave. Like undertaking effective police reform. Like eradicating systemic racism. Just like Biden promised. And not the way Madison Avenue is trying to shove America's dirt under the carpet.

The writer is an expert on energy and contributes regularly to publications in India and overseas.

100 YEARS AGO

OCCASIONAL NOTE

Two interesting developments have recently taken place in connection with the movement among missionary societies for providing sanatoriums for the treatment of consumption. For some years the missionary societies in South India have co-operated in maintaining the Mysore plateau, which has proved a very real boon. The results have been so satisfactory that the Madras Government have resolved to institute a sanatorium for prisoners at the same place, on the same lines, and under the same management. Already accommodation has been provided for 300 prisoners who are attended to, medically, by the Superintendent of the Mission Sanatorium. It is the Government's intention to provide ultimately for 800 prisoners. In North India the American Methodist Episcopal Mission some years ago founded a sanatorium at Tilaukia, in Rajputana, for women and girls. This, too, has been the means of doing so much good that the same Mission resolved to found a second institution of the same kind for men. Dr. W.W. Asne, returning from furlough in America, was commissioned to prospect for a suitable site in the same neighbourhood. He now reports that the military authorities have handed over to him the buildings which they erected as a military sanatorium on Taragarh, the old hill fortress overlooking Ajmere. These buildings cost over a lakh of rupees when they were erected about thirty years ago, and would cost at least double that sum now.

NEWS ITEMS

SOME ANGLO-INDIAN HANDICAPS

At a meeting of the Literary and Debating Society of the Wellington Branch of the Y.M.C.A., last night Mr. John J. Clarke, Secretary, gave an interesting lecture on "Some Anglo-Indian Handicaps." He said the object of his lecture was to stimulate thought and action amongst the members of the community by pointing out some of the difficulties which the community had to face. He went on to deal with the subject under three heads: (1) Those handicaps for which the community is not responsible - which it cannot avoid - which can only be overcome by time, development, and patient effort; (2) those handicaps which the community can take steps to remove within one or two generations and (3) those handicaps which are self-imposed and which will be a discredit to the community as long as they exist.

INDIAN CHRISTIANS IN CONFERENCE

The seventh All-India Conference of Indian Christians will be held at Bishop's College, Calcutta, on December 28, 29 and 30, under the Presidency of Dewan Bahadur W.L. Venkataramiah. The Political Confederation of Catholics and Protestants to be introduced by the Rev. P.A. Anthony Nader. The constituent elements of Nationalism and their application to Indian Christians to be introduced by Professor S.L. Joshi. The Village Education Commission Report to be introduced by Messrs. J.P. Cotelingan and S.K. Roy. The inauguration of a studentship fund to enable our young men to go to a foreign country to be introduced by Principal S.K. Tarafdar. The possibility of the disbandment of the Indian Christian Regiments to be introduced by Mr. Hakam Din, Head Master, Christian Training Institute, Sialkot.

DOMINION POWERS DEMANDED

At the Trade Union Congress, the National Union of Railwaymen moved a resolution declaring that the state of Ireland was due to the failure to recognise Irish claims, and also to the failure of the British Government to deal with those who had defied law and order and had supported open rebellion, whose example was followed by others. The resolution also called for a truce among all the parties, the Government forthwith to open an Irish Parliament with full dominion powers in Irish affairs, and with adequate protection for minorities. A Post Office amendment demanding the withdrawal of the Army of Occupation, and the immediate application of the principle of self-determination, was negative by 2,676,000 votes to 1,916,000 and the Railwaymen's resolution was adopted by 1,953,000 to 1,759,000.

FORESTRY COMMISSION

The delegates of the Empire Forestry Commission attended Buckingham Palace today. Mr. Mackay, Victoria, presented an address to His Majesty, who, replying, specially welcomed the Oversea delegates. His Majesty congratulated the Home Forest authority in joining hands with the Empire Forest authorities so soon after the war. His Majesty expressed satisfaction that India and the other Dominions, where forest science was already part of the national life, were placing their experience at the disposal of those parts of the Empire to which the importance of the subject had been brought home for the first time in their experience during the war.

The Statesman

07

NEW DELHI, MONDAY 21 DECEMBER 2020

IT CAME TO MIND | MANISH NANDY

A Prodigal Quality

It was my first job interview. A major company had set up an obstacle course for candidates: interviews, essays, problem solving, tsunami of questions. The last ordeal was an extempore speech. You put your hand in a large bowl, pick up a card, and give a five-minute discourse on the single word on it. For me the word was Democracy.

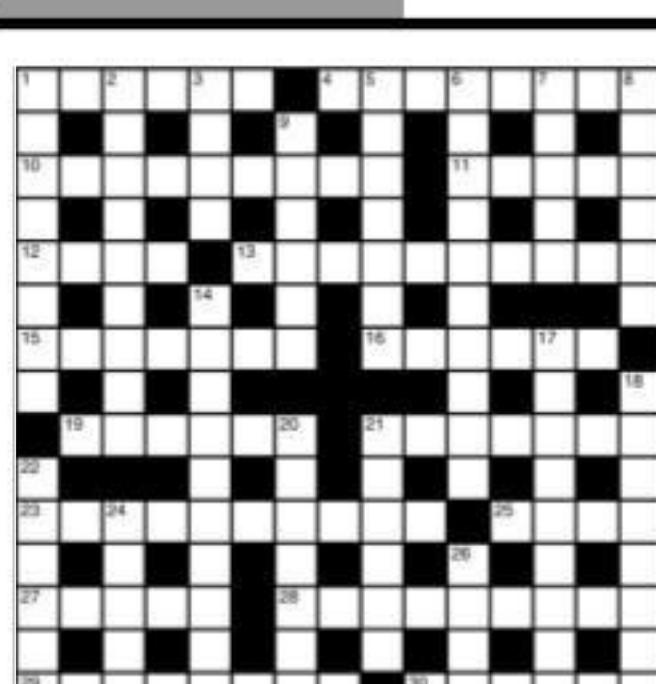
I began with a reference to the familiar reproach of democracy as a talking shop and argued that I liked it because it was a talking shop. I said when people talk, they seldom fight; and the more they talk, the better they understand each other. In divided Germany, I ended by saying, a dog had crossed over from the Communist east to the western sector and was asked by local dogs his reason for making the risky transition, since he looked well-fed and well-cared, and the fleeing dog's terse reply was, "Just to bark."

My talk went down well; the judges looked pleased. The moment they retired from the room for mutual consultation, a strange thing happened. Another candidate walked over, hugged me and kissed me on the temple, "You were wonderful."

He was articulate and good-looking, and my bet would have been on him to be chosen. If I did well, I was in effect dimming his prospects and I expected him to be resentful. On the contrary, he was happy at my success and expressed his admiration in an instinctive if unusual gesture. In time I was to find that was characteristic of Subroto: he felt things keenly and expressed his feelings candidly, no matter how offbeat he appeared to others. There was a wondrous prodigal quality to his friendship.

We were both accepted as interns and we started work together. Our bosses decided that our initiation into work culture should begin with an immersion into the manufacturing process of their largest factory. We were to live in adjacent rooms in their industrial estate and

CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1 Ghost is one consumed by rage (6)
- 4 Husband having no weapons in safe (8)
- 10 Salad ingredient two hundred welcome during broadcast (9)
- 11 Search scrub (5)
- 12 Little piggies returned holding wolf skin? (4)
- 13 Respect valuation opinion (10)
- 15 As a rule Sun has nice characters upset (7)
- 16 Vegetation right outside church (6)
- 19 Time to get permit for rendered fat (6)
- 21 Ecstasy in heart perhaps before love leaves (7)
- 23 A slug on our ground is lethargic (10)
- 25 Brownies regularly dropped anvil perhaps (4)
- 27 Nick losing head following unknown love (5)
- 28 Backward arrow on e-book brand (9)
- 29 Call team to edge of fighting area (8)
- 30 Opine about gripping head of game bird (6)

DOWN

- 1 Promise drama and witty repartee (8)
- 2 A sundial fixed by artisan initially in part of Spain (9)
- 3 Heads of the army caught knight in course of action (4)
- 5 Disinclined to mix in a party (7)
- 6 Mad chemist raging and discordant (10)
- 7 Half of line covered by green bacteria (1,4)
- 8 Swindle involving river train (6)
- 9 Something healing scientist drops first (6)
- 14 Last shogun organised attacks (10)
- 17 Pack up before lecture becomes complicated (9)
- 18 12 spots family (8)
- 20 Got the best of fine fabric (7)
- 21 Compose carol about start of unity of vision (6)
- 22 Fire republican in jacket (6)
- 24 Material held by many longshoremen (5)
- 26 Mythical beast besides setter (4)

NOTE: Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required. (By arrangement with The Independent, London)

NO 28171



long it takes us to discover what really matters. Sitting at my desk in Washington one day, I suddenly decided I must see Subroto, a friend the memory of whose affection still flowed in my veins. So, weeks later, as a car wound through south Kolkata, I peered at the home where we used to meet years earlier. As the car door opened, a familiar voice rang out, "You have made me so happy!"

In a flash, years dissolved, space evaporated. All that remained was his radiant face, his outstretched arms, a time-obliterating embrace, and a thousand unforgettable memories: shared pain and joy, working together, fighting together, and staying together through rainy days and starry nights.

When I was leaving, in the impulsive act of

generosity so typical of him, Subroto gave me a beautiful bound volume of Somerset Maugham's stories. He knew my habit of asking special friends for a small item as a memento. A dear colleague, Rupen, left with me an old pen that did not work; it did work, however, to remind me of our golden hours together. I don't even know the wristwatch mother left me works or not, for I never replaced the defunct battery: it tells not time, but her abundant love.

I cherish Subroto's spontaneous gift, but I could have told him that he didn't need to give me a memento. From him, I already had a million of them.

The writer is a Washington-based international development advisor and had worked with the World Bank. He can be reached at mnandy@gmail.com



India's decision to pull out of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) is a mistake

MONTEK SINGH AHLUWALIA
FORMER DEPUTY CHAIRMAN, PLANNING COMMISSION (NOW DEFUNCT)

THUMBNAILS

Sugar exports: The government has permitted export of 8,424 tons raw sugar under its tariff-rate quota (TRQ) to the US, which enables shipments to enjoy relatively low tariff. TRQ is a quota for a volume of exports that enter the US at relatively low tariffs. "The quantity of raw sugar 8,424 MTRV (metric ton raw value) to be exported to the US under TRQ up to 30 September 2021 is notified," the directorate general of foreign trade (DGFT) said in a public notice. PTI

Flipkart sellers rise: Walmart-owned Flipkart said it has registered close to 35 per cent increase in sellers onboarded in 2020 as compared to last year, and has seen strong adoption of its platform by sellers as well as customers from tier II regions and beyond. With the need for social distancing and prioritising safety, the pandemic has led to millions of people turning to e-commerce this past year, not only in metros but also in tier III regions and beyond, Flipkart said in a statement. PTI

Borosil Renewables QIP: Solar glass maker Borosil Renewables said it has raised Rs 200 crore by issuing 1.58 crore shares through qualified institutional placement. The issue opened on 14 December 2020 and closed on 17 December, the company added. Borosil Renewables Ltd (BRL) has successfully completed fundraising of Rs 200 crore through a qualified institutions placement (issue), a company statement said. PTI

NFCSF president: National Federation of Cooperative Sugar Factories Ltd (NFCSF) said Jaiprakash R Salunke Dandgaonkar has been unanimously elected as president of the sugar cooperatives' body. Dandgaonkar succeeds Dilip Walse Patil, who had resigned as NFCSF president on becoming the Cabinet minister in the Maharashtra government. PTI

Retail inflation likely to stay elevated in short term

For most part of this year, pricier food items pushed retail inflation higher in the range of 6.58-7.61%

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 20 DECEMBER

After unseasonal rains, supply disruptions and pandemic-induced woes pushed retail inflation well over the Reserve Bank's comfort zone in 2020, the scenario is likely to stay that way at least in the short term as economic recovery slowly gains foothold.

For most part of this year, pricier food items pushed the retail inflation, based on Consumer Price Index (CPI), higher in the range of 6.58-7.61 per cent, except for March when the reading was 5.91 per cent.

Experts believe retail inflation is likely to average around 6.3 per cent this fiscal and mostly will remain sticky going forward owing to pickup in demand across sectors.

In indications of supply chain bottlenecks, wholesale price-based inflation was mostly benign this year, touching a low of (-) 3.37 per cent in May and a maximum of 3.1 per cent in January.

The RBI expects retail inflation to be at around 5.8 per cent by the end of March 2021, and will further ease to 5.2-4.6 per cent by September next year, not a very uncomfortable position vis-a-vis its mandate of 4 per cent with a bias of 2 per cent on either side (+/-2 per cent).



The economic recovery is witnessing early signs of reviving after being ravaged by the coronavirus pandemic and a historic nationwide lockdown for a few months that began in late March to curb Covid-19.

In a rare instance, no retail inflation data was published by the government in April and May as field visits by officials could not happen during the lockdown.

Consumers shelled out more to buy "tomato, onion and potato" or the TOP. The trio is also the focus of the Central government's Operation Greens initiative announced two years ago to ensure their adequate supplies throughout the year without any price shocks.

TOP ruled as high as Rs 60-80 per kilogram (kg) at some or the other point of time during the year as unseasonal rains affected output and coronavirus-induced lockdown caused supply disruptions, among other factors.

"Our paramount objective is to support growth while ensuring that financial stability is maintained and preserved at all times," Das said on 4 December.

food prices are expected to remain elevated, according to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

Also, crude oil prices have started to gain momentum after a lull as economic activities have started getting back to normal, though slowly.

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At the policy review earlier this month, RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das said the monetary policy committee (MPC) was of the view that inflation is likely to remain elevated, barring transient relief in winter months from prices of perishables.

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During the year, retail inflation was highest at 7.61 per cent in October, before softening down to 6.93 per cent in November. The inflation print for December will be known in mid-January.

Meanwhile, the wholesale inflation print in November at 1.55 per cent was the highest in nine months due to costlier manufactured items, even as food prices cooled, indicating improving economic activity. It was 1.48 per cent in October.

Icra upgrades outlook for steel sector to stable

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 20 DECEMBER

automobile sector, especially from tractors, passenger vehicles and two-wheelers.

The momentum has strengthened further in December quarter. The cumulative domestic steel demand in October-November has already surpassed the pre-Covid-19 levels, it said.

"We are gradually seeing a more broad-based pick-up in economic activity with every passing quarter, which makes us believe that the recovery in domestic steel demand would sustain in the near term at least.

"The revival in demand has been surprising, and the steel industry's ability to claw back to the pre-Covid-19 levels of demand within six months of a global pandemic outbreak has been remarkable," Jayanta Roy, senior vice-president

& group head, corporate sector ratings, Icra, said.

Consequently, Icra is revising its 2020-21 steel demand forecast to a contraction of around 12 per cent, compared to initial forecast of 23 per cent contraction made in April 2020.

The sector outlook is also revised to stable from negative, he said.

On production, Icra said the share of top six steel producers in total crude steel production, which remained at about 55 per cent historically, has also risen to about 65 per cent in recent months.

It further said domestic hot-rolled coil (HRC) prices have been revised upwards multiple times in recent months and are ruling at a multi-year high level of Rs 49,000 a ton.

Bank credit up by 5.73%, deposits rise by 11.34%

MUMBAI, 20 DECEMBER

Bank credit grew by 5.73 per cent to Rs 105.04 lakh crore while deposits increased by 11.34 per cent to Rs 145.92 lakh crore in the fortnight ended 4 December, the RBI data showed.

In the fortnight ended 6 December 2019, bank credit had stood at Rs 99.35 lakh crore and deposits at Rs 131.06 lakh crore.

In the previous fortnight ended 20 November, credit grew by 5.82 per cent to Rs 104.34 lakh crore and deposits by 10.89 per cent to Rs 143.70 lakh crore.

In October, non-food credit growth decelerated to 5.6 per cent compared to a growth of 8.3 per cent in the same month of the previous year.

Growth in loans to agriculture and allied activities accelerated to 7.4 per cent in the month from a growth rate of 7.1 per cent last year.

PTI

NBFCs expect higher credit loss on Covid-19 woes

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 20 DECEMBER

Non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) are expecting higher credit loss as well as an increase in provision coverage rates, mainly due to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, according to a study.

The study by leading consultancy EY is based on an analysis of the standalone financial statements of 42 NBFCs, including 14 housing finance companies (HFCs), for the year ended 31 March 2020.

The companies have reported an "increase in expected credit loss (ECL) allowance by 33 per cent and an overall increase in provision coverage rate by 26 per cent as on 31 March 2020.

PTI

compared to the year ended 31 March 2019".

Further, Covid-19 impact accounted for 19 per cent of the ECL allowance as on 31 March this year.

As per the study titled "Expected credit loss analysis for non-banking financial companies" released recently, there has been an overall increase in gross loans of NBFCs by 7.63 per cent and HFCs by 2.44 per cent.

There was an increase in ECL allowance on stage 1 and stage 2 by 56 per cent as against 25 per cent increase in ECL allowance on stage 3 assets.

"ECL expense has increased by 219 per cent for the year ended 31 March 2020 as compared to year ended 31 March 2019. Also, the

companies reported a Covid-19 impact of 32 per cent of the ECL expense for the year ended 31 March 2020. The cost of risk ratio has increased by 202 per cent," EY said.

Stage 1 refers to loans with no significant increase in credit risk while stage 2 indicates loans with significant rise in credit risk. Stage 3 refers to credit impaired loans.

NBFCs analyse co-relation of a wide range of factors with their default patterns and shortlist the factors relevant to their respective businesses to take into account the impact of forward-looking information. ECL estimates are then adjusted to consider the impact of these short-listed factors.

SIP inflows hit 31-month low

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 20 DECEMBER

Investment in mutual funds through systematic investment plans dropped to a 31-month low of Rs 7,302 crore in November amid challenging economic environment.

However, investment through the systematic investment plans (SIPs) route had risen in October after six months of continuous decline.

The 44-player mutual fund industry witnessed an inflow to the tune of Rs 7,302 crore through SIPs in November as compared to Rs 7,800 crore in the preceding month, data from the Association of Mutual Funds in India (Amfi) showed.

Fund collection through SIP was Rs 7,788 crore in September, Rs 7,791 crore in August and Rs 7,831 crore in July. It dropped below the Rs 8,000 crore mark in June to Rs 7,917 crore. It was at Rs 8,123 crore in May, Rs 8,376 crore in

April and Rs 8,641 crore in March.

Marketmen said investment through SIPs has fallen because investors want to maintain some kind of liquidity at their end as the current situation is uncertain when it comes to their jobs and businesses.

They further said SIP inflows still remain lacklustre as many retail investors paused such investments during the lock-

down. High market levels have also meant that those who stopped hesitate to start now, expecting a correction.

Besides, equity mutual funds, which mainly depends on SIP for flows, saw an outflow of Rs 12,917 crore in November, making it the fifth straight month of withdrawal as investors booked profit amid higher market valuations.

Currently, mutual funds have over 3.41 crore SIP accounts through which investors regularly invest in Indian mutual fund schemes.

SIP is an investment plan offered by mutual funds, wherein one can invest a fixed amount in a mutual fund scheme periodically at fixed intervals, once a month, instead of making a lump sum investment.

It is similar to a recurring deposit where an investor deposits a fixed amount every month.

Info Edge gets ₹375 crore commitment from Temasek

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 20 DECEMBER

Info Edge Ventures said Temasek has committed Rs 375 crore (about \$50 million) to the fund. Info Edge Ventures is a Rs 750 crore early-stage venture capital fund backed by Info Edge, parent company of Naukri. The fund was launched in January this year.

Temasek, having partnered with them at Info Edge, as well as for investments such as Policybazaar and Zomato," said Sanjeev Bikhchandani, founder and executive vice-chairman of Info Edge.

He added that the two share a common vision and values and look forward to backing great entrepreneurs in India together.

"With Info Edge and Temasek as LPs, we have patient capital and a global network to back tech entrepreneurs who are building

innovative businesses. We look forward to leveraging their decades of experience in building large technology companies that have fundamentally changed industries," said Kitty Agarwal, partner, Info Edge Ventures.

"This decade shall be an exciting time for startups as the pace of technology adoption increases dramatically in India. As a founder-first firm, Info Edge has been steadfast in supporting its portfolio companies, and at Info Edge Ventures the yardstick we would like to be measured by is the growth and the success of our portfolio companies. We look forward to partnering with talented founders and like-minded investors to create world class businesses," said Amit Behl, partner, Info Edge Ventures.

PTI

Route Mobile appoints Pathak as chief biz officer

NEW DELHI, 20 DECEMBER

Route Mobile, a cloud communication service provider to enterprises, over-the-top players and mobile network operators, has named Milind Pathak as chief business officer. With the appointment, effective 17 December, Pathak will drive new product development, and support Route Mobile's next phase of growth as the company continues to expand globally, drive product innovation and enter new markets, a company release said.

A senior leader with over 20 years of experience in blue-chip organisations across domestic and global markets, Pathak has held several key positions, especially in sales and marketing, new product development, involving both startups and growth organisations.

PTI

OUTLOOK POSITIVE FOR NEXT YEAR

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI, 20 DECEMBER

Strong markets led to a 2.25 times jump in the initial public offerings in 2020 to Rs 45,000 crore, and a strong pipeline of issuances may help the figure to exceed Rs 50,000 crore next year, a leading merchant bank has said.

The companies had raised Rs 20,300 crore through IPO route in 2019.

Kotak Investment Banking (KIB) head of equity capital markets V Jayasankar said the amount may exceed Rs 50,000 crore as well if the government launches life insurance behemoth LIC's IPO next year.

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4 months for clarity to emerge on the issue, he added.

Jayasankar said the strong IPO issuances, coupled with rights issues like Reliance Industries' or the deals into the leading corporate telecom and retail ventures, and

Covid capital raising by banks helped the merchant banking fees grow by over 30 per cent to \$800 million.

It can be noted that many watchers have expressed concern over a disconnect between the real economy and

The company estimated the overall yearly deal pie will exceed \$1 billion in the next two years, despite the economic climate being very challenging because of the pandemic.

Equity capital market activity like IPOs and rights issues accounted for 37 per cent of the total fee pool as against 35 per cent in 2019, followed by private equity that accounted for close to 37 per cent compared to last year's 43 per cent, while merger and acquisition were at 26 per cent, up from 22 per cent.

When asked about pricing of IPOs, considering the doubling of scrips on debut like Burger King's on Monday, Jayasankar defended the pricing strategies saying they are

based on fundamental calls, while it is technical which drive interest in a stock to such level.

Despite the \$16.3 billion fundraise by Mukesh Ambani's ventures, the overall activity stood at \$33 billion, a shade lower than the \$35.8 billion in 2019, KIB said.

Officials explained that private equity investors take a long-term view of the country and concentrated on investee companies over newer deals in 2020.

<p



We are working to address the crisis from an economic standpoint and with a bold decision to overcome the obstacles of corruption and money

IRAQI PRIME MINISTER MUSTAFA AL-KADHIMI

WARNING OF STATE COLLAPSE WITHOUT FINANCIAL REFORM

The Statesman

NEW DELHI, MONDAY 21 DECEMBER 2020

09

Muslims worry over halal Covid vaccine

Use of pork products banned by some religious groups has raised concerns about disruption in immunisation campaigns

ASSOCIATED PRESS
JAKARTA, 20 DECEMBER

In October, Indonesian diplomats and Muslim clerics stepped off a plane in China. While the diplomats were there to finalise deals to ensure millions of doses reached Indonesian citizens, the clerics had a much different concern: Whether the Covid-19 vaccine was permissible for use under Islamic law.

As companies race to develop a Covid-19 vaccine and countries scramble to secure doses, questions about the use of pork products banned by some religious groups has raised concerns about the possibility of disrupted immunisation campaigns.

Pork-derived gelatin has been widely used as a stabilizer to ensure vaccines remain safe and effective during stor-

age and transport. Some companies have worked for years to develop pork-free vaccines: Swiss pharmaceutical company Novartis has produced a pork-free meningitis vaccine, while Saudi- and Malaysia-based Al Pharma is currently working on one of their own.

But demand, existing supply chains, cost and the shorter shelf life of vaccines not containing porcine gelatin means the ingredient is likely to continue to be used in a majority of vaccines for years, said Dr Salman Waqar, general secretary of the British Islamic Medical Association.

Spokespeople for Pfizer, Moderna and AstraZeneca have said that pork products are not part of their COVID-19 vaccines. But limited supply and preexisting deals worth millions of dollars with other companies means that

some countries with large Muslim populations, such as Indonesia, will receive vaccines that have not yet been certified to be gelatin-free.

This presents a dilemma for religious communities, including Orthodox Jews and Muslims, where the consumption of pork products is deemed religiously unclean, and how the ban is applied to medicine, he said.

There's a difference of opinion amongst Islamic scholars as to whether you take something like pork gelatin and make it undergo a rigorous chemical transformation," Waqar said.

Is that still considered to be religiously impure for you to take? The majority consensus from past debates over pork gelatin use in vaccines is that it is permissible under Islamic law, as greater harm

would occur if the vaccines weren't used, said Dr Harunor Rashid, an associate professor at the University of Sydney. There's a similar assessment by a broad consensus of religious leaders in the Orthodox Jewish community as well.

According to the Jewish law, the prohibition on eating pork or using pork is only forbidden when it's a natural way of eating it, said Rabbi David Stav, chairman of Tzohar, a rabbinical organization in Israel.

If "it's injected into the body, not (eaten) through the mouth", then there is no prohibition and no problem, especially when we are concerned about sicknesses, he said.

Yet there have been dissenting opinions on the issue, some with serious health consequences for Indonesia,

which has the world's largest Muslim population, some 225 million.

In 2018, the Indonesian Ulema Council, the Muslim clerical body that issues certifications that a product is halal, or permissible under Islamic law, decreed that the measles and rubella vaccines were haram, or unlawful, because of the gelatin. Religious and community leaders began to urge parents to not allow their children to be vaccinated.

Measles cases subsequently spiked, giving Indonesia the third-highest rate of measles in the world, said Rachel Howard, director of the health care market research group Research Partnership.

A decree was later issued by the Muslim clerical body saying it was permissible to receive the vaccine, but cul-

tural taboos still led to continued low vaccination rates, Howard said.

Governments have taken steps to address the issue. In Malaysia, where the halal status of vaccines has been identified as the biggest issue among Muslim parents, stricter laws have been enacted so that parents must vaccinate their children or face fines and jail time.

In Pakistan, where there has been waning vaccine confidence for religious and political reasons, parents have been jailed for refusing to vaccinate their children against polio.

But with rising vaccine hesitancy and misinformation spreading around the globe, including in religious communities, Rashid said community engagement is absolutely necessary.

Israel begins virus inoculation drive as infections surge



ASSOCIATED PRESS
TEL AVIV, 20 DECEMBER

Israel has an agreement with Pfizer to secure 8 million doses of the US pharmaceutical company's vaccine enough to cover nearly half of Israel's population since each person requires two doses. Israel reached a separate agreement with Moderna earlier this month to purchase 6 million doses of its vaccine enough for another 3 million Israelis.

With daily infection numbers trending upward and currently notching just under 3,000 a day, Israeli leaders are again debating whether to impose a third national lockdown since the pandemic began.

Many restrictions remain in place from the country's second lockdown in the fall, with most hotels still shuttered and restaurants open only for delivery and takeout. Unemployment remains in the double digits.

Israel has had mixed results in its fight against the virus. Netanyahu was lauded in the spring for sealing borders and locking down the country swiftly, a move that battered the economy but drove down infection rates. But a hasty and erratic reopening sent confirmed cases soaring in late summer, leading to what at the time was one of the world's worst outbreaks.

Thousands line up for tests amidst Thailand virus outbreak

SAMUT SAKHON, 20 DECEMBER

Thousands of people lined up for coronavirus tests in a province near Bangkok on Sunday, as Thai authorities scrambled to contain an outbreak of the virus that has infected nearly 700 people.

Triple lines of mainly migrant workers stretched for around 100 metres in one location alone, at Mahachai in Samut Sakhon province, as health officials in mobile units methodically took nasal swabs. There were three locations in total in the area.

Nearby, razor wire and police guards blocked access to the Klang Koong, or Central Shrimp, seafood market -- one of Thailand's largest -- and its associated housing, the epicentre of the new cluster. Thailand's Disease Control Department said on Sunday that they found 141 more cases linked to the market outbreak.

On Saturday, the department reported 548 cases, Thailand's biggest daily spike, sending shockwaves through a country that has seen only a small number of infections over the past several months due to strict border and quarantine controls.

The new outbreak has been traced to a 67-year-old shrimp vendor at the seafood market. Health officials say most of those who have been infected are migrant workers from Myanmar.

The workers live close to the market in crowded accommodations, raising fears that the virus could spread exponentially.

Pakistan govt cancels licences of 50 pilots

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
ISLAMABAD, 20 DECEMBER

edin exams. Their names were made public to avoid any negative impression about other pilots, including those working in the country.

Dawn newspaper reported that authorities told the Islamabad high court that under the requirements of the International Civil Aviation Organisation, they have reviewed licences of 860 commercial pilots and cancelled 50 of them after a thorough scrutiny.

The pilots were working for the national flag carrier PIA as well as other Pakistani private and foreign airlines, said a report filed by Additional Attorney General Tariq Mehmood Khokhar.

A lawyer representing the parents of slain US journalist Daniel Pearl has produced a handwritten letter in Pakistan's Supreme Court in which the key accused in the case claimed that he was a "scapegoat" arrested under "US pressure" and the real mastermind was a Karachi-based terrorist.

Pearl, the 38-year-old South Asia bureau chief for The Wall Street Journal, was abducted and beheaded while he was in Pakistan investigating a story in 2002 on the links between the country's powerful spy agency ISI and al-Qaeda. British-born al-Qaeda leader Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh and his three aides were

Large car bomb kills nine in Kabul

ASSOCIATED PRESS
KABUL, 20 DECEMBER

A car bomb blast that rocked Afghanistan's capital Sunday morning killed at least nine people, according to the Afghan Interior Ministry.

Interior Minister Masoud Andarabi told reporters at the site of the attack that the attack wounded around 20 others, including a member of parliament, Khan Mohammad Wardak. Andarabi said the lawmaker was in good condition. The interior minister added that the casualty toll could rise further.

The attack happened while the lawmaker's convoy was passing through an intersection in Kabul's Khoshal Khan neighborhood. The blast set afire surrounding civil-

ian vehicles, as well as damaging nearby buildings and shops. No one immediately claimed responsibility for the attack.

In a statement condemning the attack, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani said that the Taliban should stop violence against civilians and accept a ceasefire, to facilitate the current peace process.

Ghani's statement did not directly lay blame on the Taliban for the car bombing or offer evidence that the group was responsible for it.

The Islamic State group has claimed responsibility for multiple attacks in the capital of Kabul in recent months, including on educational institutions that killed 50 people, most of them students. IS also claimed responsi-

bility for Saturday's rocket attacks at the major U.S. base in Afghanistan. There were no casualties in that assault, according to NATO and provincial officials.

An NATO official confirmed the attack and said initial reports indicated that the airfield was not damaged.

In another report from the southern Helmand province, the Afghan Defense Ministry in a statement confirmed that a suicide car bomber tried to attack an army checkpoint, but was

Two soldiers were slightly wounded in the attempted assault in Nawa district, the ministry said.

No one claimed responsibility for the attack in Helmand.

Pearl murder: 'Accused claims he was made scapegoat, arrested under US pressure'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
ISLAMABAD, 20 DECEMBER

convicted and sentenced in the abduction and murder case of Pearl. In April, they were exonerated by the Sindh High Court and an appeal against their acquittal is being heard in the Supreme Court.

According to a Express Tribune report on Sunday, Faisal Siddiqui, counsel for Pearl's parents, has produced the handwritten letter in the Supreme Court in which Sheikh claimed that the real culprit was a militant, Attaur Rehman, from Karachi.

Siddiqui told the apex court that the letter was submitted to the Sindh High Court on July 19, 2019.

In the letter, Sheikh claimed that he was a scapegoat arrested on the US pressure and that the real culprit was Rehman.

The letter was produced

during a hearing of the appeals against the acquittal of the four accused in the Pearl murder case. A three-judge special bench led by Justice Mushir Alam heard the appeals of the Sindh government and Pearl's

parents, Ruth and Judie Pearl, against the high court ruling.

Siddiqui contended that the bench must consider it. However, the apex court will decide on it on the next date of hearing on January 4, the report

said. Sheikh further said in his letter that he had been in prison under the death sentence since 2002, charged and convicted for the abduction and murder of Pearl.

However, it was on public record that neither did he abduct Pearl nor did he murder him and it had been acknowledged by the US government and by Pakistan's former president Pervez Musharraf in his book.

Sheikh said his role in this case was a relatively minor one, which did not warrant the death sentence, adding that he had already served in prison -- most of which has been in illegal solitary confinement.

According to the letter, the pressure on the Pakistan government at the time (in 2002) by the US was so intense that

Sheikh was used as a "scapegoat" to lessen that pressure. Therefore, evidence was fabricated against me to convict me of the abduction and murder of Pearl, Sheikh claimed.

Later, when the person (Rehman alias Naeem Bukhari) who actually abducted Daniel was arrested, he was not charged with the case because to do so would have exposed the lies and perjured evidence that the Musharraf government used to convict me, he added.

The letter claimed that despite Rs 1 million reward money on Rehman -- because of his role in the case -- he was not produced in court but was kept in secret illegal custody of the Rangers for five years, then in Sukkur jail for two years and charged only

with a fabricated case of pos-

LEISURE

10 MINUTE CROSSWORD



ACROSS
1 Sea mist (4)
3 Avian creature (4)
8 Infer (7)
9 Layabout (5)
10 Distribute (5)
11 Withdraw (7)
12 Hand tool (11)
16 Type of pasta (7)
18 Bedlinen item (5)
20 Fatigued (5)
21 Claimed (7)
22 Goad (4)
23 Optimal device (4)

DOWN
1 Cavalryman (6)
2 Month (5)
3 Constructed (5)
4 Set free (7)
5 Admirable quality (6)
6 Naval officer (4,7)
7 Court order (4)
13 Attempt to conceal the truth (5-2)
14 Shoe part (6)
15 In disagreement (2,4)
16 Pace (4)
17 Sequence (5)
19 Bird of prey (5)

SOLUTIONS TO YESTERDAY'S CROSSWORD

ACROSS
1 Bray, 17 Cheddar,
19 Shame, 3 Cough (Break off),
21 Obese, 22 Termite,
23 Legal, 24 Text.
9 Sober, 10 Tress,
11 Eyeball,

DOWN
1 Dolted, 1 Berrie,
3 Acute, 15 Scroll,
16 Defect, 18 Dwell,
19 Deteriorate,

CLUES
13 Ichberg,
14 Absurd,
15 Scorn,
16 Dolted,
17 Deteriorate,

Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required

By arrangement with The Independent

Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required

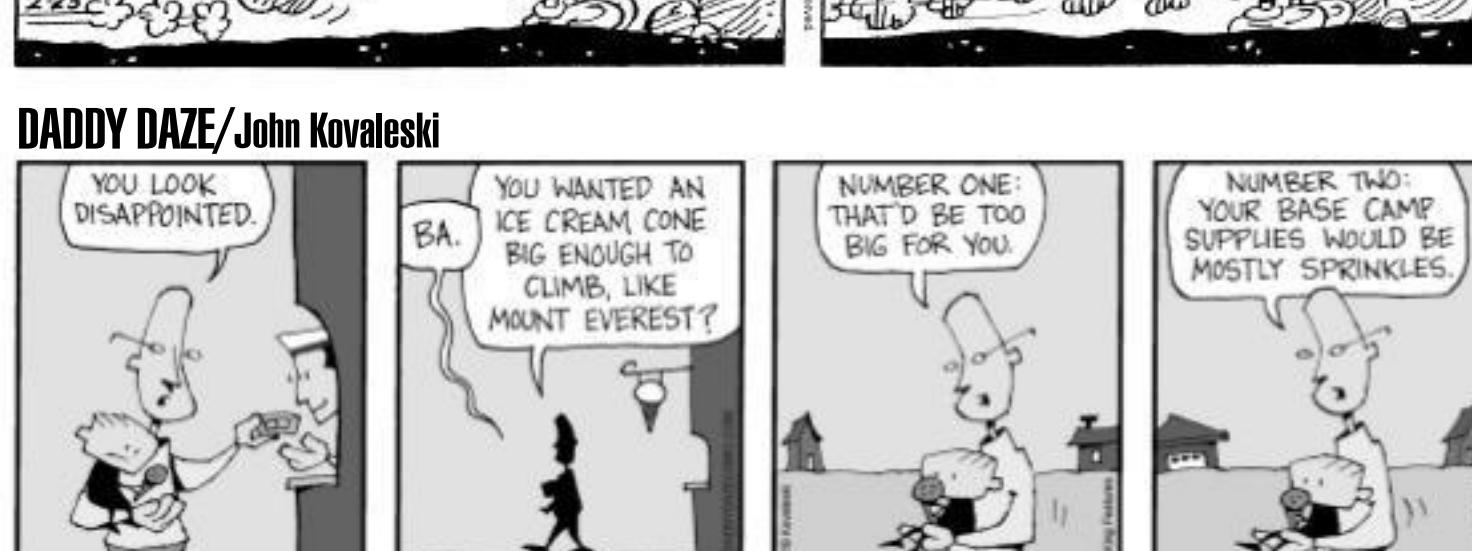
BEETLE BAILEY/Mort Walker



RED EYE/Bill Yates & Mel Casson



DADDY DAZE/John Kovaleski



NEED TO KNOW

HOSPITALS

- AIIMS 2658500, 2658900
- Moolchand Medcity (formerly Hospital) 4200000 & 24-hour Chemist Shop 42000447
- Vidyasagar Institute for Mental and Neuro-Sciences 26924300, 26924304
- Batra Hospital & Medical Research Centre 29051280, 29958747
- Deen Dayal Upadhyay 25496320, 25494403
- Guru Tegh Bahadur 23717473, 23325320

RAILWAY INQUIRY

- General Inquiry 139
- Toll Free Nos. 1800112511
- SMS Inquiry Nos. 57886, 54959, 5676747

ROADWAYS INQUIRY

- AIR INDIA Flight Inquiry and Reservation 18001801407
- INDIGO AIRLINES New Delhi City Office 43513185, Call Centre 09910383383, 18001803838, Reservation 43513186; Indigo Airlines Airline 23354373
- Air Canada Flight Inquiry and Reservation 41528181
- Air France Flight Inquiry and Reservation 23466262 (City)
- Kuwait Airways Flight Inquiry and Reservation 23354373

FLIGHT INQUIRY

- Port 011-25671580; Terminal I B 25671576, Palam Road 25671579, 18001803838
- JET AIRWAYS Flight Inquiry and Reservation 39841111
- EMIRATES Flight Inquiry and Reservation 33773377
- U.P. Roadways 23868709

FOUR RACK TOTAL TIME LIMIT: 20

Such incidents will not break the bond between our two countries as we always use dialogue to resolve issues



ON THE RECENT BORDER SKIRMISHES ALONG THE ETHIOPIA-SUDAN BORDER AREAS

WEATHER

CITY	MAX(°C)	MIN(°C)
SINGAPORE	30	25 H
HONG KONG	19	14 CL
TOKYO	10	02 CL
LONDON	14	09 R
DUBAI	26	18 S
SAN FRANCISCO	14	08 S
NEW YORK	05	02 CL
MOSCOW	01	-3 CL

S= sunny, CL= clear,
H=hazy, R= rainy...

THUMBNAILS



A child begs for money at a traffic light in Amman, Jordan, on Sunday. IANS

Sydney outbreak grows: The outbreak in Sydney's northern beach suburbs has grown to 70 cases with an additional 30 in the last 24 hours, and authorities say they may never be able to trace the source. AP

Fiji cyclone toll rises: The death toll from a powerful cyclone that battered the Pacific island nation of Fiji last week has risen to four with one missing, an official said Sunday. Cyclone Yasa on Thursday spared the capital city, Suva, and the major tourist hub of Nadi on Fiji's largest island, Viti Levu. AP

Germany brings home refugees from Syria: Germany has organised the return of three women and 12 children from camps in northeastern Syria for humanitarian reasons. Foreign Minister Heiko Maas did not further identify the returnees. AP

Egyptian Prez discusses M-E peace with Jordanian, Palestinian FMs

CAIRO, 20 DECEMBER

Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi discussed efforts to resume the Middle East peace process with Foreign Ministers of Jordan and Palestine.

During a meeting in Cairo on Saturday, Sisi affirmed to the Jordanian and Palestinian foreign ministers that his country will continue its tireless efforts to solve the Palestinian cause, Egyptian Presidential spokesman Bassem Rady said in a statement.

Sisi also stressed the importance of uniting Arab and international efforts to revitalise peace negotiations between the Palestinian and Israeli sides, in parallel with efforts to achieve national Palestinian reconciliation, in order to promote the path of achieving the desired peace, Xinhua news agency reported.

Meanwhile, the Jordanian and Palestinian top diplomats appreciated Egypt's relentless efforts to solve the Palestinian cause and establish an independent Palestinian cause, the statement said.

Earlier in the day, Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry and his Jordanian and Palestinian counterparts Ayman Safadi and Riyad al-Maliki met in Cairo where they discussed methods of reviving the Middle East peace process and resuming negotiations between the Palestinian and the Israeli sides.

The Ministers also stressed the necessity of urging Israel to return to the negotiation table in order to reach a settlement based on the UN-proposed two-state solution, including the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Negotiations between the Palestinians and Israelis have been stalled since March 2014, after nine months of US-sponsored talks that failed to make a breakthrough. AP

Fresh curbs in UK as corona variant surges

Christmas bubble of relaxed rules cancelled in favour of a new Tier 4 level to control surge in cases being caused by mutation of deadly virus

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LONDON, 20 DECEMBER

A surge in the infection rate caused by a new variant of coronavirus has led to millions entering a stringent new stay-at-home lockdown in the UK from Sunday, with non-essential shops and businesses now closed.

UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced the new rules at a briefing from 10 Downing Street on Saturday evening, which means a planned five-day Christmas bubble of relaxed rules has been cancelled in favour of a new Tier 4 level to the current three-tier lockdown system to try and control the surge in infections being caused by the new mutation of the deadly virus.

"It seems that the spread is now being driven by the new variant of the virus," Johnson said. "We have alerted the World Health Organisation and are continuing to analyse the available data to improve our understanding," said Professor Chris Whitty, the Chief Medical Officer for England.



It seems that the spread is now being driven by the new variant of the virus. We are sacrificing the chance to see our loved ones this Christmas so we have a better chance of protecting lives so that we can see them at future Xmassees."

Under the new Tier 4, people would be banned from mixing with anyone outside of their household, including on Christmas Day, and for the other tiers, Christmas rules allowing up to three households will now be limited to Christmas Day of December 25 only, rather than five days. The changes will last for two weeks with the first review now due on 30 December.

The state-funded National Health Service (NHS) is set to vaccinate people against the coronavirus on Christmas Day as part of a drive to accelerate the number of inoculations nationally, according to *The Sunday Times*. More than 100,000 Pfizer jabs have been booked at general practitioner (GP) surgeries and hospital

hubs across the country for the coming week.

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The new restrictions similar to the second national lockdown which ended in November applies to all areas in the South East which were in tier

The Netherlands and Belgium on Sunday banned flights from the UK and Germany considered limiting such flights in attempt to ensure that a new strain of coronavirus sweeping across southern England does not establish a strong foothold on the continent.

The Netherlands banned flights from the UK for at least the rest of the year while Belgium issued a flight ban for 24 hours starting at midnight and also halted train links to Britain.

German officials were considering serious options

three, covering Kent, Buckinghamshire, Berkshire, Surrey (excluding Waverley), Gospot, Havant, Portsmouth, Rother and Hastings. It also applies in London

regarding incoming flights from the UK, but have not yet taken action.

The Netherlands said it will assess with other European Union nations the possibilities to contain the import of the virus from the United Kingdom. The three EU governments say their response comes in reaction to tougher measures imposed Saturday in London and surrounding areas by British PM Boris Johnson.

There's no evidence to suggest it is more lethal or causes more severe illness, the Boris stressed, or that vaccines will be less effective against it.

and the East of England Bedford, Central Bedford, Milton Keynes, Luton, Peterborough, Hertfordshire and Essex. In Wales, the restrictions were brought forward pre-Christ-

mas to also begin right away.

"We are sacrificing the chance to see our loved ones this Christmas so we have a better chance of protecting their lives so that we can see them at future Christmases," he said, adding that he bitterly regretted have to make these changes.

The UKPM said there is no evidence to suggest vaccines would be any less effective against the new variant but that it was required to act fast to try and control its acceleration.

"Our advisers on the New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group (Nervtag) have spent the last few days analysing this new variant there's no evidence that it causes more severe illness or higher mortality but it does appear to be passed on significantly more quickly," he said.

Non-essential shops, gyms, cinemas, hairdressers and bowling alleys will be forced to close for two weeks, while people will be restricted to meeting one other person from another household in an

outdoor public space. Johnson added: "I know how much emotion people invest in this time of year, and how important it is, for instance, for grandparents to see their grandchildren, for families to be together.

"So I know how disappointing this will be. But we have said throughout this pandemic that we must and we will be guided by the science. When the science changes, we must change our response."

The Opposition Labour Party of causing heartbreak for millions by not acting in time. I think the Prime Minister should apologise. This is not just one mistake when he has otherwise got things right. It is the same mistake over and over again, said Sir Keir Starmer, the Leader of the Opposition.

At the heart of the problem here is a Prime Minister who simply doesn't want to be unpopular and therefore won't take the tough decisions that are necessary, until he is forced into them at the 11th hour. We can't go on like that, he said.

EU-UK trade talks floundering over fish as cutoff day nears

ASSOCIATED PRESS
BRUSSELS, 20 DECEMBER

With hundreds of thousands of jobs at stake throughout the economy, the tiny sector of fisheries continued to drive a wedge between the 27-nation bloc and the UK highlighting the animosity that drove them to a Brexit divorce over the past four years

on December 31. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's office said on Sunday that the EU is continuing to make demands that are incompatible with our independence. We cannot accept a deal that doesn't leave us in control of our own laws or waters".

The almost mythical sense of Britain's rights to rule its waves was an essential part of what drove Brexiteers to victory in the 2016 referendum.

Johnson is seeking to make sure that as much as possible

of the shared British waters are now returned to UK vessels only.

The EU has always maintained that those waters have been shared for decades, if not centuries, and insists if too many fishing rights are taken away, it will punish Britain by imposing hefty import fees to the mainland market, which is essential to the UK seafood industry.

The stalemate has left the overall talks inconclusive with businesses on both sides clamouring for a deal that

would save tens of billions in costs. Johnson, though, could not be budged.

We need to get any deal right and based on terms which respect what the British people voted for," his office said. The EU parliament needs to approve any deal before the end of the year and had set a Sunday night deadline so it could have a cursory vetting of the deal and approve it before New Year's Day.

Negotiators, however, seemed little impressed by yet another deadline when so many had already been missed during the four-year departure process.

One official from an EU coastal nation said the EU was refusing to yield more than a quarter of the fishing quotas the bloc stands to lose now that

Britain is regaining full control of its waters due to Brexit.

Britain is also steadfast that a three-year transition period would be long enough for EU fishermen to adapt to the new rules, while the EU wants at least six years.

The official spoke on condition of anonymity because the talks were still ongoing.

A failure to reach a post-Brexit deal would lead to more chaos on Britain's borders with the EU at the start of 2021, when new tariffs would add to other impediments to trade enacted by both sides.

The talks have bogged down on two main issues over the past days - the EU's access to UK fishing waters and assurances of fair competition between businesses.

China, not Russia may be behind cyberattack on US, suggests Trump

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON, 20 DECEMBER

Contradicting his secretary of state and other top officials, President Donald Trump on Saturday suggested without evidence that China not Russia may be behind the cyberattack against the United States and tried to minimize its impact.

In his first comments on the breach, Trump scoffed at the focus on the Kremlin and downplayed the intrusions, which the nation's cybersecurity agency has said posed a "grave" risk to government and private networks.

"The Cyber Hack is far greater in the Fake News Media than in actuality. I have been fully briefed and everything is well under control," Trump tweeted. He also claimed the media are "petrified" of discussing the possibility that it may be China (it may). "There is no evidence to suggest that is the case."

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said late Friday that Russia was "pretty clearly" behind the cyberattack against the United States.

"This was a very significant effort and I think it's the case that now we can say pretty clearly that it was the Russians that engaged in this activity," Pompeo said in the interview with radio talk show host Mark Levin.

Officials at the White House

had been prepared to put out a statement Friday afternoon that accused Russia of being "the main actor" in the hack, but were told at the last minute to stand down, according to one US official who spoke on condition of anonymity.

"But suffice it to say there was a significant effort to use a piece of third-party software to essentially embed code inside of US government systems and it now appears systems of private companies and governments across the world as well," he said.

GRIM SCENARIO



A nurse talks with people outside test-screening tent in Paris as Covid cases spike again signalling tough months ahead. IANS

Trump floats Sidney Powell as special counsel

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON, 20 DECEMBER

President Donald Trump floated naming lawyer Sidney Powell, who was booted from his campaign's legal team after pushing unfounded conspiracy theories, as a special counsel investigating allegations of voter fraud.

During a Friday meeting at the White House, Trump went as far as discussing getting Powell security clearance, according to two people familiar with the meeting, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss private conversations.

It is unclear whether Trump intends to move forward with the effort. Under federal law, the US attorney general, not the president, is responsible for appointing special counsels. And numerous Republicans, from outgoing Attorney General William Barr to governors and state election

officials, have said again and again that there is no evidence of the kind of mass voter fraud Trump has been alleging since he lost the November 3 election to Joe Biden. That Trump recently pardoned for lying to the FBI, went even further, discussing the idea of imposing martial law and using the military to re-run the election. Trump's chief of staff, Mark Meadows, and White House counsel Pat Cipollone voiced their objections. Powell and the White House did not respond to requests for comment.

Flynn, whom Trump recently pardoned for lying to the FBI, went even further, discussing the idea of imposing martial law and using the military to re-run the election. Trump's chief of staff, Mark Meadows, and White House counsel Pat Cipollone voiced their objections. Powell and the White House did not respond to requests for comment.

Pandemic exposes Italy's new poor

ASSOCIATED PRESS
MILAN, 20 DECEMBER



itas. Her eligibility covers her through January, and she hopes to be off the charity rolls by then "to make room for people who need it even more". The charity serving more than five million people in the Milan archdiocese, Caritas Ambrosiana, says the pandemic is revealing for the first time the depths of economic insecurity in Italy's northern Lombardy region, which generates 20 per cent

of the country's gross domestic product. Simone, who has two adult children and a 10-year-old son at home, is typical of Italy's new poor.

These are people who managed to get by after the 2008 financial crisis, staying off the radar of Italy's welfare system by relying on informal, gray-market jobs and the help of friends and family.

But between Italy's near-total spring lockdown, the introduction of a partial lockdown when the virus surged again in the fall and the continued toll the pandemic is taking on Italy's economy, the slim threads that allowed people to weave together employment have snapped. Nowhere in Italy is this more evident than in Lombardy, where Covid-19 first exploded in Europe.

Italian agriculture lobby Coldiretti estimates that the virus has created 300,000 newly poor people, based on surveys of the dozens of charity groups operating in the region. Caritas Ambrosiana provided help to 9,000 people during the spring lockdown, 20 percent of whom reported that the heaviest price for virus curbs.

their financial situation had "drastically" worsened over the 10-week closure. In October, nearly 700 families requested food aid for the first time.

Nationally, one-third of all people seeking help from Caritas during the pandemic are first-time recipients, and in a reversal of usual trends, most are Italians and not foreign residents. More than 40 organisations provide food on a daily basis in Milan, Italy's financial capital. One of the largest, Pane Quotidiano, serves some 3,500 meals a day.

Many of those in need once worked in restaurants and hotels, which have been particularly penalised by the coronavirus restrictions, or as domestic help.

"It is even more widespread than we knew, especially for a rich city like Milan," Caritas Ambrosiana spokeswoman Francesco Chiavarini said. Researchers at Milan's Bocconi University said in a working paper for the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development that blue-collar workers without college degrees paid the heaviest price for virus curbs.

Pfizer's shots were first shipped out a week ago and started being used the next day, kicking off the nation's biggest vaccination drive.

Public health experts say

Workers on Sunday began packaging shipments of the second Covid-19 vaccine authorised in the US, a desperately needed boost to efforts to bring the coronavirus pandemic under control.



From sharing to accumulation

JELLE JP WOUTERS

During the colonial epoch, the highland Naga became among the best-known communities in British India with both administrators and early anthropologists documenting their cultural traditions and lifeways, often so in meticulous detail. In this process, the Naga came to be popularly associated, in the world around, with two traits – namely, headhunting and communal feasting, dubbed as the Naga feast of merit.

Colonial reports abound with episodes of headhunting warfare, eerie "head-trees" on which decapitated and decomposed heads dangled, and ritual warrior dances following a successful "hunt". Speculative theories about the origins of headhunting are many. Yet, a dispassionate understanding, including of its political, ritual and relic, and cosmic causations and consequences still awaits definite scholarship.

Here, I focus on the second popular trait – the Naga feast of merit, which I present as expressive of a communitarian philosophy that guided the constitutive connections between Naga economy and society, between generosity and merit, and between person, family, and village community. Until, alas, such feasts were abolished by overtly orthodox and zealous American Baptist missionaries. At considerable social and moral costs as that paved the way for the emergence of a Naga capitalist/elite class invested in unrestrained accumulation.

Researching the Naga in the 1930s, the Austrian ethnologist Christoph von Füller-Haimendorf witnessed how the Naga highlands were dotted with thousands of monoliths. Upon inquiry, he found that each of them was erected to commemorate the fame and generosity of a feast-giver following him serving all villagers with as much rice, meat, and rice-beer as anyone could ingest. And not just once. To earn repute as a feast-giver required hosting multiple such feasts, usually spread out years apart. To be sure: to host a community feast required years of planning and preparation, including saving up paddy, and the acquisition and fattening of livestock.

Most of those monoliths were grand in size, and had been dragged from the jungle with sledges, canes, creepers, and the sweat of the village strong. Once erected, the monolith came to inhabit the merits and virtues of the feast-giver, in a way engraving his glory and generosity in the landscape, there for everybody to see and for generations to remember.

Inquiring further still, Füller-Haimendorf learned that, among Nagas, one's social status and standing did not derive from any mindless accumulation of wealth. Instead, one way in which social hierarchies formed was according to differential achievements of generosity; through ambitious villagers, that is, successfully acting as material providers and repositories of social life.

Actually, back then a barn overflowing with idle paddy was the epitome of immoral accu-

mulation. Such wealth, and sheer wealth it was, had to be absolved at the altar of community, in return of which the feast-giver was bestowed with material symbols, such as specifically embroidered shawls, house carvings, and ultimately, with monoliths erected in his and his family's name. Observed Füller-Haimendorf, "The wealth of the ambitious was employed to provide food and enjoyment for the less prosperous members of the community, for at a Feast of Merit there was meat, rice and rice-beer for every man, woman and child in the village".

Arriving at a particular village, he observed further, "Cross barge-boards rose from the gables of one of the houses, like the enormous antlers of some proud stag. Proud, too, must have been the owner of these wooden horns, for they showed that he had given several of those expensive Feasts of Merit whereby the Naga rises in social prestige and in the esteem of his neighbours."

Seen as a historical and social institution, the feast of merit seemingly invoked contradictory principles, combining tendencies of economic redistribution and social differentiation, of both socialism and snobbery. More broadly, the feast of merit was, in part, constitutive of the Naga mode of production, which had two distinct dimensions – a material aspect founded on the effort to reap riches from the fields through stamina, strength, and skill in agriculture, and an ethical aspect grounded in a moral economy that successfully broke the spiral of

The Naga tradition of communal feasting was a significant representation of an agrarian economy based on generosity

accumulation by culturally enforcing redistribution through community feasting.

This breaking of the cycle of accumulation and the deflection of wealth was why the Naga feast of merit attracted such widespread attention, and caused fascination, especially in Europe. It offered a counter-thesis, another way of thinking, talking and doing economics, in a global context of rising disenchantment with the capitalist market in which success and status were measured, significantly so, in terms of socially detached and unrestrained individual accumulation. In such an economy, assets and wealth thus collected, usually represented either the end of the economic cycle or the basis for fresh investments directed at further material accumulation, not the launch, as it for long did among the Naga, of communitarian sharing and social indexing based on the cornerstone cultural value of generosity.

The feast of merit was among the first sacrifices foreign missionaries demanded from new Naga converts, interpreting them as an ostentatious wastage of wealth and its free-flowing rice-beer as inducing immorality of sorts. Today, feasting continues to be part of village life, but its guiding principles and occasions have changed with it now being confined to designated marriage and Christmas feasts.

Visit a Naga village today and one is likely to find granaries stored with barns of paddy, some of which are rotting and smell musky. Rats, mice, and other small lives gnaw through the plaited bamboo and siphon off grains daily. It doesn't worry the owners. Most of the paddy is too old to eat anyway, brought in several harvests ago. This paddy, indeed, is no longer for eating but for storing and displaying. In the set-up of contemporary economy life, to own paddy gone bad, to possess more than can possibly be eaten, communicates wealth and prosperity, and draws societal admiration.

This is a stark difference with the economic principles and moralities of the village past in which "excess paddy" was not permitted to rot, even less so was paddy gone bad worthy of praise, admiration and social ascendency. *Per contra*, the very purpose of accruing paddy was to redistribute it during a communal feast, and to so acquire merit and status.

Perhaps, then, it is in the disappearance of the Naga feast of merit that we find the cultural undergrowth for the wider societal shift from a traditional Naga economy that was significantly communitarian and steered by a moral consideration of sharing and generosity to a present-day economy of culturally blind accumulation, stark and rising inequalities, and competitive consumption.

Perhaps, too, it is in the abolishment and alteration of traditional and socio-moral principles and practices, and of which the feast of merit presents an important case, that we can trace and place the genesis and growth of capitalist values and relations in the hills.

The writer is a social anthropologist and teaches in the department of social sciences at Royal Thimphu College, Bhutan

PLUS POINTS

Fourth BTC constituted



The fourth Bodoland Territorial Council was constituted last week with the swearing-in of five members of the Bharatiya Janata Party-United People's Party-Liberals-Gana Suraksha Party combine and UPPL's Pramod Boro assuming charge as the chief executive member of the autonomous body, says a report in the Guwahati-based Assam Tribune. The members were administered the oath of office by Assam chief secretary Jishnu Barua at the Green Field Ground in Bodofa Ngwir, the headquarters of BTC.

Besides Boro, the second person to be sworn in as BTC chief, the others who took oaths were deputy CEM Gobinda Basumatary of the UPPL, and executive members Gautam Das and Diganta Barua (both from the BJP) and Ganashyam Das of the GSP. Boro took oath in the Bodo language while the others did it in Assamese.

Chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal, state ministers Himanta Biswa Sarma and Bhabesh Kalita, Lok Sabha members Dilip Saikia, who is also the BJP's national general secretary, Pallab Lochan Das and Nabu Sarania, and Rajya Sabha members Bhubaneswar Kalita and UG Brahma were present at the swearing-in ceremony. CEMs of Karbi, Dimasa and Mising autonomous councils, Bodo Sahitya Sabha president Taren Boro and a host of other dignitaries were also present. The outgoing BTC CEM Hagrama Mohilary of the Bodo People's Front was conspicuous by his absence on the occasion.

Earlier in the morning, Boro paid homage to the "Father of the Bodo" Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma, a former president of the All Bodoland Students' Union, before taking oath as the new BTC chief. Speaking on the occasion, Sonowal exuded confidence that the Boro-led council would script "never seen before success" in socioeconomic development of the BTR areas. Paying rich tributes to the Bodofa, Sonowal said this great personality discovered the hidden potential of the Bodos.

Speaking on the occasion, health minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said that the present state government has taken a series of steps for the development of the BTR. He announced that in the coming days, steps would be taken to set up new educational institutions, a new stadium, a campus of Bodoland University at Udaguri, a medical college at Tamulpur and colleges in each of the 40 constituencies in the BTR.

ID for visiting Meghalaya



LOOKING TO PROFIT FROM DISTORTED HISTORY?

The construction of a 'historical' park in south Manipur has drawn the ire of the local population

NINGLUN HANGHAL

A few months after the formation of his government, Manipur chief minister N Biren Singh laid the foundation stone of a "historical" park, to be named "Chandrakirti Memorial Park", at Tonjang village of Churachandpur district in south Manipur.

But the park, named after Manipur king Maharaja Chandrakirti Singh, did not go down well with local people in the district, village chiefs, scholars and intellectuals from Manipur and even Mizoram. Several representations as opposition to setting up the "historical" tourist park have been sent to the authorities concerned. Tribal people from the Kuki-Zo groups, who inhabit the site, say that the claim of Meitei king Chandrakirti to have "conquered" the area and their village chiefs is not authentic.

Tonjang village is close to the Indo-Myanmar border and the park is purportedly aimed at tourism promotion. A salt lake, locally called "Chivu" ("chi" meaning salt and "vu" meaning ashes), lies in this village. It was a source of edible salt in the pre-Independence era for people inhabiting the area. A stone inscription claims that a slab at the site was laid by Maharaja Chandrakirti during his reign from 1850 to 1886. It marked his victory over the Lushai chiefs during the Lushai expedition. A footprint of the Maharaja was also said to be preserved there.

The preserved area is around

607.50 square metres and the site is protected under the Manipur Ancient and Historical Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1976. It is also listed by the Archaeological Survey of India.

It warrants mention here that strong objections have been raised by historians from Mizoram. In a letter to the director general, Archaeological Survey of India, the Mizo History Association stated that the record of the "Chibu" (locally called "chivu") stone inscription is erroneous and false. "Since the significance of the monument lies in the credibility of the message it bears, and since this inscription is based on false claims, we believe that the Chibu stone inscription cannot not be recognised as a historical monument" the letter said. They also stated that such a move by a reputed body like the ASI could harm its reputation.

On the other hand, a group of concerned citizens under the banner, "Research and Preservation of Zo Identities", has launched a campaign to stop the park being completed. They said that the park is against the wishes of the local indigenous population and claimed that history is being distorted to suit the majority Meiteis' hegemony over the hill tribes. The group has appealed to de-notify the proposed "historical" park and claims of the stone inscription.

In its latest letter to The Kangla Fort Board & State Archaeology, Kangla Fort, Imphal, the RPZI re-asserted its demand to derecognise the stone inscription. The group also warned



Chief minister N Biren Singh (centre) at the foundation stone laying ceremony of the park

that if the government went ahead and completed construction at the site without any acceptable response or clarification, a wrong message would be sent to the public and lead to "unwanted incidents".

The Manipur government also plans to build a mega international trade centre in Behiang, two kilometres away from the said "historical" site. It will be part of a trading corridor to connect Manipur with its South-east Asian neighbours under the much-celebrated Act East Policy. It has been visualised as the second corridor of Manipur, after Moreh, to the South-east Asian nations. Though Behiang is close to the border, not much trade activity of note happens there. On the other hand, border trade in Moreh has been developed and a huge amount of economic activity is underway there for a long time.

On border trade in general, one may say that Manipur and the Northeast have a huge advantage. In fact, a

lot of economic activity is taking place. However, even casual observers will know that imports exceed exports. It is also amply apparent that low quality and cheap foreign goods are flooding the markets of Manipur and the North-east. Besides, the region is not far from the infamous Golden Triangle. Although its geo-strategic location is an advantage, it comes with a heavy price.

The "historical" park will convert hitherto undisturbed heritage into a tourist site and trade centre for generating revenue for the state's coffers. The local people, who are mainly unskilled and unlettered, will get menial jobs. Also, the Inner Line Permit system has been implemented in the state from this year. Given that, can tourism and trade really flourish?

A revenue of Rs one crore was generated within three months, since January this year, from ILP applications in Manipur. Is it a plan to generate income through ILP from those

who visit these tourist places? Wouldn't it be shameful to say that Manipur's revenue comes from the ILP? In a post-Covid-19 world, moreover, it is unlikely that a place in the far corner of Manipur would attract any visitors. At the most they will be a handful of domestic/local visitors. In that case, how much revenue would they generate?

It is doubtful how worthwhile investment in the "historical" park at Tonjang and the trade centre at Behiang would be. There are several border haats/stalls dotting the North-east without any economic value or activity.

Economy or economic activity cannot thrive in an environment of social unrest. Manipur has had enough socio-political strife and bloodshed. Surely, the common people do not want yet another crisis cropping up soon.

The writer is a freelance contributor based in Imphal

Visitors to Meghalaya will have to register or produce identification documents at the entry point at Umling in Ri-Bhoi district from today, says a report in The Assam Tribune. Documents of those entering the state will be checked at the facilitation centre. Visitors can also register online and upload necessary documents to prove their identity.

The system that will be put in place is similar to the Inner Line Permit system, which the state is seeking to implement. However, the Central government is yet to give its approval despite the state legislature adopting a resolution to implement the ILP regime. Chief minister Conrad Sangma is slated to inaugurate the facilitation centre today. It has been constructed on government land with prefabricated materials to expedite the establishment process.

The Meghalaya government has been under pressure from NGOs to implement the ILP system in the state. However, in the absence of approval from the Central government, the state government is going ahead with the facilitation centres. The latter has already identified at least 18 areas across the state where such centres will be established. Works in the identified areas are at different stages of completion.

The Meghalaya government is pushing for the growth of the tourism sector. It will reopen the state for tourist visits from today ahead of the festive season. As part of the state's policy to woo tourists, a direct flight between Shillong-New Delhi-Shillong will begin today, Sangma said, adding that the state government is trying to make the flight operational at least twice a week. It is a 72-seater Q400 aircraft.



For more updates

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THUMBNAILS

ICC Ranking: Despite India's defeat in the series-opener against Australia but its skipper Virat Kohli fractionally closed the gap with top-ranked Test batsman Steve Smith, following his 74-run knock in the first innings in Adelaide. Kohli gained two points for his half-century to get to 888 while Smith (911) lost 10 points in the table.

DCA coach: India captain Virat Kohli's childhood mentor Raj Kumar Sharma was on Sunday named the head coach of the Delhi Ranji team for the upcoming 2020-21 domestic season. A former Delhi first-class player, 55-year-old Sharma was the bowling coach of the team last season, when KP Bhaskar was the head coach.

Gill wins: Three-time APRC champion Gaurav Gill claimed the Arunachal leg of the Champions Yacht Club-FMSC Indian National Rally Championship 2020, winning the round 2 comfortably here on Sunday. The JK Tyre driver with Musa Sherif posted a total time of 42:15.00 minutes to win the round 2 race.

Amir's grudge: Pacer Mohammad Amir has held the Pakistan team management responsible for his decision to quit international cricket at 28 and slammed coach Misbah-ul-Haq and bowling coach Waqar Younis for "spoiling" his image.

Messi equals Pele's record, Barcelona held by Valencia

AGENCIES
BARCELONA, 20 DECEMBER

Lionel Messi has another individual scoring milestone, but he sure doesn't have a team that looks like a champion.

Messi equalled Pele's all-time club scoring tally on Saturday in a 2-2 draw with Valencia. His 643rd career goal for Barcelona since his 2004 debut matched Pele's tally for Santos from 1957-74.

Messi is Barcelona's and the Spanish league's all-time leading scorer.

In January 2018, he became the most prolific scorer among Europe's top leagues when he reached 366 league goals, surpassing Gerd Mueller's Bundesliga mark of 365. Messi had already surpassed Gerd Mueller's single-year goal mark by scoring 86 times in 2012.

Pele congratulated the Argentina forward on social media: "Like you, I know what it's like to love wearing the same shirt everyday. Like you, I know that there is nothing better than the place we feel at home."

"Congratulations on your historic record, Lionel," Pele added.

"But above all, congratulations on your beautiful career at Barcelona. Stories like ours, of loving the same club for so long, unfortunately will be increasingly rare in football."

Pele's comments went right



to the heart of Messi's uncertain situation at Barcelona. Messi has yet to recant on his announcement last summer that he wanted to leave the club which is no longer the dominant force that he had done so much to forge over the past two decades.

His contract expires in June, and he will be free to negotiate with other clubs come January.

The latest setback by Barcelona left Ronald Koeman's team in fifth place and eight points adrift of league leader Atletico Madrid, which got two goals by Luis Suarez to beat Elche 3-1.

Messi cancelled out Moutinho's opener for Valencia when he scored in first half injury time moments after Jaume Domenech saved his penalty shot.

Jordi Alba recovered the rebound of Domenech's save and crossed it to the far post where Messi headed it in.

Central defender Ronald Arajo scored his first career goal for Barcelona with an acrobatic kick for 2-1 at Camp Nou in the 53rd.

"We don't have many tall players to defend their tallest ones but we cannot leave anyone wide open," Koeman said.

"We have to at least be there, be engaged."

SUREZ SCORES

Surez's goals were his first since he recovered from the coronavirus. He isn't the voracious scorer he used to be at Barcelona before changing clubs this summer, but he is still a world-class finisher when his teammates get him the ball in scoring position.

Substitute Diego Costa, who replaced Joo Flix after he took a hard knock, put the result beyond doubt for Atletico when he earned and converted a penalty with 10 minutes remaining in his first appearance after missing seven games due to injury.

The league leaders moved three points clear of Real Madrid and Real Sociedad.

sistency comes from playing together for a long time," Koeman said.

"We lacked control and lost too many balls in defense sometimes. I saw my team have doubts."

An botched marking scheme made it easier for Diakhaby to head in Valencia's opener in the 29th when Antoine Griezmann -- who is significantly shorter than the center back -- lost his mark of him during a corner kick.

"We don't have many tall players to defend their tallest ones but we cannot leave anyone wide open," Koeman said.

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Liverpool and Everton back on top

AGENCIES
LONDON, 20 DECEMBER

It's like the clock has been wound back 35 years with Liverpool and Everton as the English league frontrunners.

Seeing Liverpool at the top of the Premier League is a more familiar sight. A 7-0 rout of Crystal Palace on Saturday was the type of ruthless attacking display that helped Jürgen Klopp end the team's 30-year title drought last season.

Everton hasn't won the league since 1985 and 1987 when they sandwiched a runner-up season to its neighbor. A 2-1 victory over Arsenal was Everton's third success in eight days, taking Carlo Ancelotti's side up to second, five points behind the champions.

a place and a point ahead of Pep Guardiola's expensively assembled City side that won the 2018 and 2019 titles.

SAHIL, FIRMINO DOUBLES

An emphatic victory at Palace was a stylish way to end a five-game winless for Liverpool, which could even start with Mohamed Salah (in photo) on the bench.

Staying in the top four would be significant not only as a sporting achievement but also financially for Everton, given the club reported losses of £40 million pounds (USD 185 million) in the last financial year in part due to the pandemic.

"We are not in this moment

playing fantastic attacking football," Ancelotti said.

"But the spirit of the team is really strong."

Liverpool and Everton are among only four of the 20 Premier League clubs allowed fans albeit only 2,000 - due to coronavirus restrictions. Southampton was also allowed a crowd on Saturday but still lost to Manchester City 1-0.

Surprisingly, though, it is

Southampton in fifth place

that has had the best transfer was announced.

Firmino set up Mane to net on the turn in the 35th before scoring himself before halftime after being released by Andy Robertson.

Henderson curled the fourth into the top corner seven minutes into the second half after meeting Trent Alexander-Arnold's cutback.

Salah's entry from the bench was a rare spot for the striker started with an assist for Firmino to chip goalkeeper Vicente Guaita in the 68th.

Salah had to wait until the 81st to score himself, nodding in after Joel Matip headed on a corner.

The Egyptian curled his 13th of the league into the top left after being set up by Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain, who made his first appearance since July following a knee injury.

ARTETA WOES

Arsenal is in an even worse state than it was when Mikel Arteta took charge last December. The London club is five places worse off in 15th.

It's seven games without a win in the league for Arteta, who played for Everton as well as Arsenal.

Yerry Mina's header on the stroke of halftime was Everton's only shot on target but it was enough to seal the victory after Rob Holding's own goal opener was canceled out by Nicolas Pepe's penalty.

Ronaldo nets 2 as Juventus win

AGENCIES
MILAN, 20 DECEMBER

Cristiano Ronaldo responded to recent criticism with two goals to help Juventus win at Parma 4-0 in Serie A.

Dejan Kulusevski scored Juve's opener against his old club as the nine-time defending champion moved level with Inter Milan, a point behind leader AC Milan.

Both Milan sides play on Sunday, when the Rossoneri travel to Sassuolo and Inter hosts Spezia.

Juve has drawn half of its 12 Serie A matches. In the last stalemate midweek against Atalanta, Ronaldo had an unusually sub-par performance and a penalty saved.

"Ronaldo was angry for having missed the penalty, but we had a few days to think about it and he showed how much he cares about scoring goals, even better when during open play," Juventus coach Andrea Pirlo said.

"We weren't happy with Wednesday's result, but the performance was good. We had to get back the points we lost against Atalanta and we did in the best way."

Kulusevski was given a start against his old club. The 20-year-old midfielder spent last season on loan at Parma, during which he completed a



permanent transfer from Atalanta to Juventus.

Kulusevski was quickest to react to a low cross from Alex Sandro from the left, knocking it into the far bottom corner in the 23rd minute.

Juve doubled its lead just three minutes later when Ivaro Morata floated in a cross from the right and Ronaldo leapt up high to head it in.

Ronaldo had his second three minutes into the second half with an angled drive past Luigi Sepe after being picked out by Aaron Ramsey.

Crotone slipped five points from safety after Fiorentina drew against Hellas Verona 1-1. Both teams netted penalties early in the first half.

MORE MISERY Bottom

Kerala salvage a point against SC East Bengal

AGENCIES
VASCO, 20 DECEMBER

A dramatic equaliser in stoppage time helped Kerala Blasters rescue a point against SC East Bengal in the Hero Indian Super League Season 7 at the GMC Stadium, here on Sunday.

Earlier, Bakary Kone's own goal (13') saw SC East Bengal take the lead but substitute Jeakson Singh (90+5') found the net in injury time to deny SC East Bengal their first win.

Both Kerala and SC East Bengal, targeting a first win, made four changes apiece to their starting eleven. The contest got off to an electric start with both sides keen to grab the opener from the first whistle. Although Kerala had possession in the first half, it was SC East Bengal who created better opportunities and deservedly grabbed the lead, heading into the break.

The first big chance of the game came SC East Bengal's way during the ninth minute as Albino Gomes was called into action early on. Haobam Singh, making his debut, received the ball outside the box and attempted to place his shot towards the far corner. But his shot was saved by Gomes.

Two minutes later, Kerala missed a great opportunity to grab the lead via a set-piece. Facundo Pereyra whipped in a fine cross from a corner and the ball fell towards an onrushing

Costa Nhamoinesu, whose header clipped the top of the crossbar.

However, SC East Bengal soon made amends for the early missed opportunity as they broke the deadlock first.

Jacques Maghoma threaded a ball for Mohammad Rafique in the box. The latter attempted to square the ball for Anthony Pilkington at the far post. However, the ball trickled into the back of the net after striking Bakary Kone, who had put in a dive to clear it out.

Kerala made three substitutions at the break with Sahal Abdul Samad among those brought on. The changes proved effective as Kerala started the second half strong.

Kibu Vicuna's men nearly drew parity in the 51st minute when another big chance went

begging. Kone leapt high to meet Pereyra's cross but his header only managed to find the side netting.

Kerala thought they had grabbed the lead in the 70th minute but were denied by SC East Bengal keeper Debjit Majumder. Sahal pounced on a loose ball that was cleared away and headed it towards substitute Jordan Murray. The striker displayed great control and struck it on the volley but Majumder pulled off a stellar save to keep his side in the game.

Kerala made three substitutions at the break with Sahal Abdul Samad among those brought on. The changes proved effective as Kerala started the second half strong.

Maghoma had the chance to put the game to bed during the dying minutes but saw his effort saved by Gomes. It would come back to haunt them as Kerala popped up with a late equaliser. Jeakson headed in Sahal's cross to save his side the blushes.

SCG remains our preference, says Hockley after reports that CA mulling swapping 3rd and 4th Tests

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
ADELAIDE, 20 DECEMBER

Cricket Australia on Sunday said the SCG remains its preferred venue for the third Test against India after reports emerged that the governing body is contemplating swapping the last two games of the four-Test series due to growing COVID-19 cases in Sydney.

Australian cricket officials were put on high alert last week after an outbreak of the virus in the northern beaches in Sydney, which will host the Boxing day Test from December 26.

The governing body's coronavirus working group was also due to meet on Sunday to take stock of the impact of Sydney's northern beaches virus cluster on the third Test.

With the number of cases shooting to 71, Victoria and South Australia have already announced tighter border controls, while the New South Wales state government have also imposed fresh restrictions.

Under the current circumstances, there are concerns that Queensland state may close its border with New South Wales, which will mean players and broadcasting crews will not be able to travel from Sydney to Brisbane between the third and fourth Tests.

continue to make appropriate and proportionate decisions in consultation with our biosecurity team, governments, state and territory associations, the Australian Cricketers' Association, our partners and venues."

With cases growing, star Australia opener David Warner and pacer Sean Abbott -- both recovering from injuries -- were on Saturday flown from Sydney to Melbourne, which will host the Boxing day Test from December 26.

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Gill, Rahal and Pant get ready for Boxing Day; Saha and Shaw set to be benched

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 20 DECEMBER

those would be forced changes due to the absence of skipper Virat Kohli and senior pacer Mohammed Shami, who is out with a fractured wrist.

The 36-year-old Rishabh Pant will be running the last lap of his international career as young and feisty Pant is set to be preferred by the team management over the next three Tests, Prasad said.

Shaw might have to go back to the drawing board:

As far as Saha is concerned, everything that can go wrong has gone for the 21-year-old Mumbaikar, whose technique, temperament and overall attitude towards the game has raised some serious question marks in the corridors of Indian cricket.

"Look, our committee was clear that Rishabh Pant will be our first choice keeper in places like England and Australia. Only when we are looking at matches in India where you don't need batting after numbers six most times, you can have

Since he has wasted his chances, it's time for him to cool his heels before going back to the drawing board.