

NEW DELHI SUNDAY 29 NOVEMBER 2020

**TABLOID | 11**

Actor Varun Dhawan hopes that his upcoming film *Coolie No. 1* will prove to be miracle

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SHORT TAKES

2 men arrested for duping people

New Delhi: The Delhi police has arrested two men from Southeast Delhi for allegedly posing as employees of a finance company and taking away motorcycles from people on the pretext of non-payment of instalments of their loan. The accused, identified as Vijay Kumar (22) and Satpal Singh (28), worked briefly for a finance company but around six months ago they quit their jobs. However, the duo planned to dupe the customers of the company they worked for to make easy money. They misused the data of the customers and targeted those who had failed to pay some of their loan instalments. According to DCP (South district) Atul Kumar Thakur, the matter came to light after 21-year-old Deepak Kumar, a resident of Sangam Vihar, approached the police on Friday after getting duped by the two. "Based on the complaint, a case was registered at Malviya Nagar police station and both the accused were arrested from Meethapur village in Badarpur. The bike of the complainant, along with two other two-wheelers, was also recovered from them," said the DCP.

Recruitment exam racket busted, 9 held

Noida: Nine people, including two Delhi Police constables, were arrested on Saturday for allegedly being part of a racket involving impersonators of candidates for various government recruitment exams, officials said. The gang was busted after three persons were detained while trying to enter a Delhi Police recruitment examination centre at Sector 62 in Noida in the morning. The suspects were handed over to the Sector 58 police, which uncovered the bigger network, officials said. Citing preliminary probe, the Noida Police said the gang had been involved in at least 100 such cases of fraud and made money running into "crores of rupees". "The gang would basically provide solvers for any sort of examination, be it SSC (staff selection commission), Railways, ASO (assistant section officer in government departments)," additional CP (Law and Order) Love Kumar said. — PTI

23-year-old man shot at in Janakpuri

New Delhi: A 23-year-old man was injured when three unidentified men allegedly fired at him after a scuffle broke out between them on a petty issue in west Delhi's Janakpuri area on Saturday, police said. The man has been identified as Raja Alam, a resident of Mahavir Enclave in west Delhi, they said. On Saturday afternoon, when Alam was sitting on a bench in a park near a temple in Janakpuri, a man came and asked him to keep his foot down. When he refused to do so, he abused him and left the place, a senior police officer said. However, after some time, the man again came there along with two more men. They got engaged in a scuffle with Alam during which one of them took out a gun and fired at the victim, he said.

Doctors perform rare robotic surgery

New Delhi: Doctors at a leading hospital successfully performed a complex robotic surgery on a 48-year-old patient from Mauritius to remove a pancreatic tail tumour. The patient underwent a 'robotic distal pancreatectomy with splenectomy' to remove the tumour which was four centimetre in size. The hospital, in a statement, claimed it as the first of its kind surgery in the NCR region. According to doctors, a whole-body PET CT scan was conducted and it was revealed that in addition to large uterine fibroids (eight centimetres in size) there was a mass on the tail of the pancreas—an uncommon and rare occurrence. An endoscopic ultrasound guided needle biopsy confirmed that the tumour was benign. However, it had to be removed as it had the potential to become a malignant tumour. Doctors say that pancreatic tumours can form within the head, body, and tail of the pancreas. While small tumours do not display any symptoms, large tumours can cause back pain and abdominal pain. The only way to treat such a tumour is to remove it through surgery.



Bharatiya Kisan Union spokesperson Rakesh Tikait leads a farmers' rally during their 'Delhi Chalo' protest march against the new farm laws in Ghaziabad on Saturday. — PTI

Feeling 'emotional connect', students join farmers' protest

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, NOV. 28

Playing the "dafli" and singing songs about distress, a number of students from different universities have joined farmers in their protest against the Centre's three agriculture-related laws at the Delhi-Haryana border at Singhu. Arpan, a student from the Punjab University and a resident of Chandigarh, said she has joined the farmers' agitation as she felt an "emotional connection" with their land. "We have come here along with farmers to support them. We have been living here with the farmers and are having food at the langars. We are also singing songs in Punjabi and Hindi to explain the condition of farmers," she said. Arpan further said, "Women are also protesting here as they are emotionally connected to their lands". At least around 25 to 30 students have come to the Singhu border from different parts of Haryana and Punjab, including Panipat, Jhajjar, Patiala, Chandigarh and Sonapat. The students sat on the roads and sang songs about the difficulties faced by farmers, playing tambourines or "dafilis" and clapping along.

Denied 'bidi', three men kill labourer

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, NOV. 28

A 49-year-old labourer was killed allegedly by three men in southeast Delhi's Shaheen Bagh area after he refused to give them a 'bidi', police said on Saturday. The deceased was identified as Siddique, a resident of Malda in West Bengal, they said, adding that the three accused — Mohammad Faizan (20), Mohammad Usman (22) and Jaheer Mansoori (20) — have been arrested. The deceased had been working as a labourer at the house of a man named Nadeem in Shaheen Bagh area. Both of them had become good friends and used to often hang out together, they said. On Thursday evening, when Nadeem along with Siddique were sitting on the banks of Yamuna river and smoking, three men came there and asked them for a 'bidi'.

When they refused, the men started abusing them and thrashed them, police said. The media platforms were reporting about him on the basis of the supplementary chargesheet filed in a case pertaining to the February riots, even though Khalid did not have a copy of the chargesheet and cannot defend himself in the alleged "media trial" or

Traffic movement hit in key roads of Delhi

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, NOV. 28

Following the ongoing farmers' agitation against the Centre's new farm laws, traffic was affected on key roads in Delhi on Saturday as police kept the Singhu and Tikri borders closed. While traffic was also seen moving in snail speed at Ghazipur (UP Gate) border after farmers from Uttar Pradesh (UP) gathered at the border to mark their protest. "Tikri border is closed for traffic movement. Available open borders to Haryana are — Jharoda,

They also ate the meals cooked by the protesting farmers in their makeshift community kitchens. Ankit, a student of Kurukshetra University, said he has come to Singhu along with farmers from Jhajjar district in Haryana. "We have joined the farmers, we will follow them and do what they will do. We have come here by our own wish. We are eating with them, sleeping with

6 people killed in accidents on Gr Noida expressway

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NOIDA, NOV. 28

Six people died in two separate road accidents on the Yamuna Expressway in Greater Noida on Saturday, according to police. The first incident took place around 3.15 am when an SUV collided with a privately-operated bus that was coming in on the wrong lane, leading to the death of two car occupants, police said. "The crash took place in the Jewar police station area, 32 km prior to the Zero Point. Both vehicles were on the Agra-Noida lane of the expressway," a police spokesperson said. The Mahindra Bolero bore a registration number of Bihar's Gaya district. The deceased have been identified as car driver Pappu Prasad (32) and Dhananjay Kumar (50), both from Gaya, the spokesperson said. Four people died in another incident that took place around 6.45 am when another SUV rammed into a state transport bus from

Dhansa, Daurala Jhatikara, Badusari, Kapashera, Rajokri NH 8, Bijwasan/Bajghera, Palam vihar and Dundahera border," said the Delhi Traffic Police on its Twitter. The traffic police said the Singhu border was still closed from both the sides. "Please take an alternate route. Traffic has been diverted from Mukarba Chowk & GTK road. Traffic is very very heavy. Please avoid outer ring road from Signature Bridge to Rohini and vice versa, GTK Road, NH 44 & Singhu border," it tweeted.

them. They (farmers) are giving us food and treating us like their kids," Ankit said. Some students from Delhi have also joined the farmers in their protest. Feroz Alam, a student of history at Delhi University who joined the farmers at Singhu border on Friday, said, "As a student, I have come here to extend my support to the farmers and will not move till the farmers' demands are accepted," Alam said.

the rear, according to the police.

The fifth passenger of the car was hospitalised with severe injuries after the road crash that took place in the Beta 2 police station area.

"The incident took place around one-and-a-half kilometres prior to the Zero Point. The vehicle was on the Agra-Noida lane on the expressway. The Toyota Innova rammed into the roadways bus from behind after which four of its five occupants died on the spot," the police spokesperson said. The deceased have been identified as Ashish Chauhan, a native of Ghaziabad; Alok Kumar Gupta from Faridabad in Haryana; Manikandan Maikan, who belonged to Thane in Maharashtra; and Firoz from Agra, police said.

"One passenger was left with severe injuries and has been hospitalised. He has been identified as Prince Pal, a resident of Faridabad," the official said.



Umar Khalid

the allegations raised by Khalid. Khalid, Jawaharlal Nehru University student Sharjeel Imam and Faizan Khan have been chargesheeted for offences under the Unlawful Activities

■ Total reaches 5,61,742, death toll mounts to 8,998

Delhi sees 4,998 Covid-19 cases, positivity rate dips

AGE CORRESPONDENT
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, NOV. 28

The Covid positivity rate in Delhi dropped to 7.24 per cent on Saturday, the lowest since October 23, as authorities detected 4,998 fresh Covid cases from a record 69,051 tests.

Eighty-nine more fatalities pushed the city's death toll to 8,998.

"Since 7 Nov, cases and positivity in Delhi are going down. Today, less than 5000 cases, 89 deaths and 7.24 positivity. Hope this trend continues. Delhiites and Delhi govt together will win over this third wave also. Pl continue to observe all precautions," chief minister Arvind Kejriwal tweeted.

On October 23, Delhi recorded a positivity rate of 6.98 per cent. It was 8.51 per cent on Friday, 8.65 per cent on Thursday and 8.49 per cent on Wednesday.

A record 69,051 tests, including 33,147 RT-PCR ones — the highest till date — and 35,904 rapid antigen tests, were conducted the previous day for the detection of Covid, according to a bulletin by



A health worker collects samples for Covid test at Delhi border in Noida on Saturday. —PTI

the Delhi health department on Saturday.

As many as 64,455 tests were conducted on Thursday.

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

As many as 131 Covid-related deaths were recorded on November 18, the highest till date.

According to the bulletin, the total number of coronavirus cases climbed to 5,61,742 on Saturday, of which 516,166 have recovered. The tally of active cases in Delhi was 36,578 down from 38,181 on Friday.

Delhi recorded 6,746 cases on Sunday, 4,454 on Monday, 6,224 on Tuesday, 5,246 on Wednesday and 5,475 on Thursday and 5,482 on Friday.

The number of Covid containment zones in Delhi rose to 5,331 on Saturday from 5,229 on Friday.

Of the total number of 18,389 beds in Covid hospitals, 9,739 are vacant, according to official data.

Health minister Satyendar Jain said Delhi has sufficient infrastructure and equipment to vaccinate its entire population in a few weeks once a Covid vaccine is avail-

Satyendar Jain: Over 50% Covid-19 beds unoccupied

AGE CORRESPONDENT
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, NOV. 28

Delhi health minister Satyendar Jain, on Saturday, said more than 50 per cent of the beds reserved for coronavirus patients in the city are unoccupied. Mr Jain pointed out that more than 1,200 ICU beds and around 9,500 normal ones are unoccupied at present. Overall, more than 50 per cent beds are available so the city is in a slightly better situation, he added.

"There were 5,482 new cases in Delhi on Friday. Positivity rate was down to 8.51 per cent from 15.26 per cent. It has become less than half since November 7. At present, more than 50 per cent beds are available in hospitals. Total beds available are more than 9,500. The occupancy rate is therefore steadily decreasing. In terms of ICU beds, more than 1,200 are available," Mr Jain added.

According to Mr Jain, there were some problems related to oxygen



Satyendar Jain

supply in Delhi on Friday which have been resolved. The national capital reported 5,482 fresh Covid-19 cases on Friday, while 98 more fatalities pushed the city's death toll to 8,999. The positivity rate was 8.51 per cent. It was 8.65 per cent on Thursday and 8.49 per cent on Wednesday.

Mr Jain emphasised that Delhi has sufficient infrastructure and equipment to vaccinate its entire population in a few weeks once a Covid-19 vaccine was available.

"We are waiting for the vaccine to be made available. Delhi has the infrastructure to roll it out and make it accessible to all the citizens within 3-4 weeks. Delhi is equipped

able.

"There is no need to worry about storage of vaccines. We have a large number of health care facilities, such as mohalla clinics, poly clinics, and hospitals etc., where a Covid vaccine can be administered to people," Jain told reporters.

"Once a vaccine is available, we can vaccinate the entire population of Delhi in a few weeks," the minister said.

Mr Jain also said that Delhi should be given priority during the distribution of the vaccine as it is the national capital.

A three-storeyed building on the premises of Rajiv Gandhi Super Specialty Hospital has also been identified for storage of Covid vaccines.

Mr Jain said that more than 50 percent of the beds reserved for coronavirus patients in Delhi are unoccupied.

"More than 1,200 ICU beds and around 9,500 normal ones are unoccupied at present. Overall, more than 50 percent beds are available. So, we are in a slightly better situation," he told reporters.

with the latest infrastructure to facilitate the roll-out of the vaccine to Delhi's population.

"For application, there are mohalla clinics, hospitals, etc. It depends on how soon we get it from the Central government. As far as storage is concerned, all amenities have been taken care of," said the Delhi health minister.

Amid a spike in coronavirus cases, the Delhi government has also sought L-G Anil Bajjal's approval to reduce presence of employees associated with non-essential services at offices for ensuring social distancing.

It also sought recommendations to private establishments to stagger office timings, reduce presence of their staff and encourage work from home.

The proposal from the Delhi government's revenue department was sent to the L-G who is also chairman of Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) for approval, said Revenue Minister Kailash Gahlot.

Delhi's air deteriorates to 'poor' zone

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, NOV. 28

Delhi's air quality slipped back into the "poor" category on Saturday, a day after it had improved significantly due to favourable wind speed.

The city's air quality index (AQI) was 209 at 9 am. The 24-hour average AQI was 137 on Friday, 302 on Thursday and 413 on Wednesday.

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

tion in the contribution of stubble burning were two major reasons for cleaner skies over Delhi on Friday

The city's air quality index (AQI) was 209 at 9 am. The 24-hour average AQI was 137 on Friday, 302 on Thursday and 413 on Wednesday.

The winds slowed down at night allowing the pollutants to accumulate.

The maximum wind speed was 18 kmph on Friday. It is likely to be 15 kmph on Saturday, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

The share of stubble

burning in Delhi's pollution has also reduced significantly as the harvesting season has ended.

The contribution of stubble burning in neighbouring states to Delhi's PM2.5 levels was just two per cent on Friday and one per cent on Thursday, according to the Ministry of Earth Sciences' air quality monitor, SAFAR.

The weather department said the maximum temperature was likely to settle around 26 degrees Celsius on Saturday.

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

Meanwhile, The air quality remained "moderate" in Faridabad but slipped to "poor" level in Gurgaon, Noida, Greater Noida and Ghaziabad on Saturday, according to a government agency.

Presence of pollutants PM2.5 and PM10 remained high in the five immediate neighbours of Delhi, according to the air quality index (AQI) maintained by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB).

The average 24-hour AQI at 4 pm on Saturday was 171 in Faridabad, 204 in Gurgaon, 233 in Noida, 226 in Greater Noida and 240 in Ghaziabad, according to CPCB's Sameer app.

Hindu college alumni to provide study grants to needy students

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, NOV. 28

The Old Students Association (OSA) of Hindu College will provide annual study grant to needy meritorious students. The move comes against the backdrop of financial hardships being faced by students due to the Covid-19 pandemic. "The pandemic has created major problems for students from economically weaker sections and they are facing a huge challenge in paying their college fee," said president, OSA of Hindu College, Ravi Burman. According to Mr

Burman, the association (OSA) has decided to help such students, whose family annual income is below ₹5 lakh, with a one-time study grant to cover their annual college fees up to ₹20,000. The students who would like to apply for this assistance can submit their application along with a family income certificate to the college's accounts department.

"We also appeal to distinguished alumni of the college that we seek your support in this endeavour of ours to provide much-needed relief to needy students in this hour," Mr Burman added.

SHORT TAKES

Chargesheet in TRP scam soon, says Deshmukh

BHAGWAN PARAB
MUMBAI, NOV. 28

Notwithstanding the Supreme Court observation that the FIR against journalist Arnab Goswami did not establish the ingredients of the offence of abetment of suicide against him, Maharashtra home minister Anil Deshmukh has said a charge sheet will soon be filed in the architect-interior designer Anvay Naik suicide case in which *Republic TV* editor is accused. "It is only after getting permission from the court, investigation into the Anvay Naik suicide case, in which Arnab Goswami is accused, is currently going on. Very soon a charge sheet will be filed in this case," Mr Deshmukh said on Saturday. Mr Goswami and two others — Feroze Shaikh and Nitish Sarda — were arrested by Alibaug police in Raigad district on November 4 in connection with the suicide of architect-interior designer Anvay Naik and his mother in 2018 over alleged non-payment of dues. Mr Goswami was released from the Taloja bail on November 11 after the SC granted him interim bail. Further, the SC has extended the interim bail of Mr Goswami and two others till four weeks, stating that the judiciary should ensure that the criminal law does not become a weapon for selective harassment. It has also said that prima facie evaluation of the FIR against Mr Goswami and two others did not establish the ingredients of the offence of abetment to suicide.

Punjab govt nod to Centre's option over GST shortfall

New Delhi: Congress-ruled Punjab has accepted the Centre's borrowing proposal and will get ₹8,359 crore through the special window to meet GST revenue shortfall. "The government of Punjab has communicated acceptance of option 1 to meet the revenue shortfall arising out of GST implementation. The number of states which have chosen this option has gone up to 26. All the 3 UTs with Legislative Assembly (i.e. Delhi, J&K and Puducherry) have also decided in favour of option 1," a finance ministry statement said. The Centre has already borrowed ₹24,000 crore on behalf of the states in four instalments and has passed it on to 23 states and three UTs on October 23, November 2, November 9 and November 23. From the next round of borrowings, Punjab, Kerala and West Bengal too would receive funds raised through this window. Under the terms of option 1, besides getting the facility of a special window for borrowings to meet the shortfall arising out of GST implementation, states are also entitled to get unconditional permission to borrow the final instalment of 0.50 per cent of the GSDP out of the 2 per cent additional borrowings. — PTI

NDTV shares: Sebi bars 2 promoters for insider trading

New Delhi: Regulator Sebi has barred NDTV promoters, Prannoy Roy and Radhika Roy, from the securities market for two years and also directed them to disgorge illegal gains of more than ₹16.97 crore for indulging in insider trading more than 12 years ago. Besides, the watchdog has barred seven individuals and entities for insider trading in the shares of the company for a period varying from one to two years. Also, some of them have been asked to disgorge illegal gains made from trading in the shares when they were in possession of Unpublished Price Sensitive Information (UPSI). The directions follow a probe conducted by the markets regulator between September 2006 and June 2008 wherein various violations of insider trading regulations were found. The amount has to be paid jointly or severally by them along with 6 per cent interest from April 17, 2008 till the date of actual payment. All the entities have violated Prohibition of Insider Trading Regulations, Sebi said in three separate orders passed late on Friday. — PTI

Khattar must apologise for 'brutality': Capt.

Haryana CM says officials in Amarinder's office giving directions to protesting farmers from Punjab

Chandigarh, Nov. 28: Punjab chief minister Capt. Amarinder Singh on Saturday said he will not speak to his Haryana counter Manohar Lal Khattar until he seeks an apology for "inflicting brutality" on farmers marching to Delhi. The Punjab chief minister also junked the allegations that he did not speak to Mr Khattar over the farmers' issue despite repeated attempts by the Haryana CM, according to a statement. Mr Khattar is lying that he tried calling me earlier and I did not respond. But now, after what he has done to my farmers, I will not speak to him even if he calls me 10 times. Unless

he apologises and admits that he did wrong with Punjab's farmers, I will not forgive him, said Singh, seeking apology from the Haryana CM for "inflicting brutality" on farmers. The Punjab CM's reaction has come after Mr Khattar alleged on Saturday that despite wanting to talk to him over the issue, he did not respond even when telephone calls to his office were made for three days. Claiming a conspiracy, Mr Khattar told reporters in Gurgaon that officials in the Punjab CM's office are giving directions to the protesting farmers from Punjab. Earlier, Mr Khattar had



Bharatiya Kisan Union members sit on a road during their Delhi Chalo march in on Saturday. — PTI

accused the Punjab CM of only tweeting and running away from talks with him on the issue. Amarinder Singh said there is no way he would talk to Mr Khattar again — neighbour or no neighbour — after Haryana's use of water cannons and

teargas shells against farmers.

Capt. Singh said if he could talk to the Prime Minister and the Union home minister so many times on the farmers' issue, why would he have not taken calls from a neighbouring chief minister if he had truly called earlier.

Questioning Mr Khattar's decision of not allowing farmers to go peacefully to the national capital, Amarinder Singh demanded to know who's Khattar to come in between? What business does he have interfering in this whole affair?

Amarinder Singh also slammed the Haryana CM for making baseless alle-

gations that he is instigating farmers.

"I am a nationalist to the core. I run a border state and will never do anything to create a law and order problem of any kind, he asserted. For 60 days, the farmers were blocking Punjab's railway tracks, causing more than ₹43,000 crore in losses to the state, without any problem. I will not take this nonsense from Khattar. Don't I have better things to do than to incite farmers," he asked.

Sometimes they say it's Khalistanis who're managing the protests and sometimes they accuse me of doing it let them make up their minds, said Amarinder Singh.

— PTI

UP farmers reach border, join march

New Delhi, Nov. 28: Some groups of farmers from Uttar Pradesh gathered at the Ghazipur border with their vehicles on Saturday afternoon, lending support to the agitation by their counterparts from Punjab against the Centre's new agri laws. A senior Delhi police officer said that around 200 farmers arrived at UP Gate (Ghazipur border) as part of "Delhi Chalo" march call given by farmer organisations in Punjab and police officials were talking to them.

The protesting farmers have parked their vehicles in line at the designated spot to avoid any inconvenience to the public and ensure a smooth flow of traffic, he said. "The farmers are

demanding that they want to proceed towards Delhi but we are talking to them. At present, there are around 200 of them. They are sitting at UP gate," said Jasmeet Singh, deputy commissioner of police (East).

Amid heavy police presence, thousands of farmers from Punjab and Haryana stayed put at the Singhu and Tikri border points for the third consecutive day on Saturday even after being offered a north Delhi ground to hold peaceful demonstrations.

Numbers swelled at the Singhu border point as farmers gathered there were joined by more protesters and they refused to move towards the Sant Nirankari Ground.

— PTI



Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) members attempt to cross a barricade at Ghazipur border to enter Delhi during their Delhi Chalo protest against the Centre's new farm laws in New Delhi on Saturday. — PTI

Farmers booked for bid to murder, rioting

Ambala, Nov. 28: The Haryana police has booked state Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) chief Gurnam Singh Charuni and several farmers for attempt to murder and rioting, officials said on Saturday. Besides Ambala district, hundreds of farmers have been booked for rioting, unlawful assembly, obstructing public servant in discharge of public functions, damage to public property and provisions of the Disaster Management Act, 2005, in Panipat, Rohtak, Kaithal, Sirsa and other districts.

The Opposition Congress claimed that over 20,000 farmers in Haryana have been booked by police for various violations during the Delhi Chalo march.

In Ambala, a case was registered against Charuni and others on November 26 under IPC Sections 147 (rioting), 149 (unlawful assembly), 186 (obstructing any public servant in discharge of public functions), 269 (negligent act likely to spread infection of disease dangerous to life) and 307 (attempt to murder) at the Parao police station on a

complaint from head constable Pardeep Kumar. The FIR names Mr Charuni and several other unknown farmers as accused.

According to it, the Haryana BKU chief and others had gathered near Mohra village in Ambala. The FIR says deputy superintendent of police

Ram Kumar, who was leading the police team at the spot, asked Charuni not to proceed further but he refused. It adds that Mr Charuni and other farmers broke police barricades with their tractors.

Some of the police officials had a narrow escape and could have been run over by the tractors heading towards Delhi, says the FIR.

Mr Charuni and other farmers also violated guidelines pertaining to the Covid-19 pandemic, it further states.

In Ambala, a youth who climbed a water cannon to

turn it off, was also booked on various charges.

A case against some farmers from the BKU (Charuni) and others from Punjab was also registered at Panipat for violations relating to breaking police barriers and other charges.

"A case has been registered under the provisions of Section 188 of the IPC (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant), the Disaster Management Act, 2005 and other provisions of the IPC," inspector Rajvir Singh, SHO of Panipat's police station said. — PTI

Cong seeks probe into matter

BSY political secy hospitalised after 'suicide' attempt

Bengaluru, Nov. 28: Karnataka chief minister B.S. Yediyurappa's political secretary and relative N.R. Santosh, who was hospitalised following an alleged suicide attempt, is "stable and cheerful" and may be discharged in a day or two, doctors treating him said on Saturday.

Responding to the incident, the state Congress demanded an investigation into the matter to enable the truth to come out and claimed that some confidential matters are linked to it.

An FIR has been registered against Santosh for allegedly attempting to kill himself, police sources said.

According to sources, Santosh is said to have attempted suicide by consuming sleeping pills on Friday night.

On finding him unconscious at his Dollars Colony residence here, family members rushed him to the Ramaiah Memorial Hospital.

Santosh (31) was brought at about 8.30 pm with an alleged history of consumption of sleeping tablets at around 7 pm, the Hospital President Dr Naresh Shetty said in a statement.

Noting that on admission he was drowsy, the

■ **ACCORDING TO** sources, Santosh is said to have attempted suicide by consuming sleeping pills on Friday night. He is 'stable and cheerful' and may be discharged in a day or two

doctor said appropriate treatment was administered immediately and all investigations were carried out.

"He has been taking sleeping tablets occasionally for his sleep disturbance as per past history. This morning, the patient is stable. He had his breakfast and is cheerful. The plan is to shift the patient to the ward post noon. He may be discharged in a day or two, based on his health status and recovery," the statement added.

Addressing the media, ICU specialist at the hospital Dr Deepak said Santosh was stable without any drowsiness and all his parameters BP, pulse and heart rate was good.

To a query, the doctor said Santosh had taken sleeping pills alprazolam. Mr Yediyurappa had rushed to the hospital late last night to inquire about Santosh's health.

— PTI

Russia appreciates India's UNGA resolution backing

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, NOV. 28

It is the duty of the international community to safeguard the decisions of the Nuremberg Tribunal as per the norms of international law, and attempts to forget or undermine them are detrimental to global security, Russian deputy chief of mission in New Delhi Roman Babushkin has said, adding that Russia "highly appreciated India's co-sponsorship of the Russia-proposed UNGA annual resolution against glorification of Nazism, neo-Nazism and other contemporary forms of racism".

He was speaking at an online webinar organised by the Russian Centre of Science and Culture in New Delhi earlier this week to mark the "75th Anniversary of the Nuremberg Trials" in 1945 that had tried the then leadership of Nazi Germany for their war crimes.

Russia had earlier this year celebrated the 75th anniversary of the victory of the erstwhile Soviet Union over Nazi Germany in 1945. A staggering 27 million Soviet citizens died heroically defending their country from the Nazis. It is hailed by the Russians as the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945

that began when Hitler invaded the Soviet Union in June, 1941, and ending when Soviet troops entered Berlin in May, 1945, heralding the defeat of Hitler's Third Reich.

The Russian DCM said, "We highly appreciate India's co-sponsorship of the Russia-proposed UNGA annual resolution against glorification of Nazism, neo-Nazism and other contemporary forms of racism. We were happy to welcome defence minister Rajnath Singh in Moscow this June who came to participate in the events dedicated to the Victory in the Great Patriotic War."



TRS chief and CM K. Chandrasekhar Rao holds a mace during an election campaign meeting ahead of GHMC elections in Hyderabad on Saturday. — PTI

Navy steps up search for missing MiG pilot

SAURABH JOSHI
MUMBAI, NOV. 28

The search is still on for pilot Cdr Nishant Singh who has been missing since a MiG-29K fighter aircraft of the Indian Navy crashed into the Arabian sea, a Western naval command spokesperson said on Saturday. The Russian-origin jet had taken off from aircraft carrier *INS Vikramaditya*, and went down at around 5 pm on Thursday. The naval officials have stepped up search for the missing pilot of the ill-

fated fighter jet. The exact reason for the plane to go down is yet to be established. The Navy has constituted an enquiry into the incident.

"More surface and air assets have joined the search," the spokesperson said.

Soon after the incident, a pilot of the aircraft had been rescued and after Cdr Singh was reported missing, a search operation was initiated on the war footing. *INS Vikramaditya* was part of the second phase of the Malabar exercise.

V-P Naidu to chair SCO meet hosted by India

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, NOV. 28

The ministry of external affairs (MEA) announced on Saturday that vice-president Venkaiah Naidu would chair the 19th meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Council of Heads of Government to be hosted by India in virtual format on Monday, while Pakistan will be represented by its parliamentary secretary for foreign affairs.

The other six SCO member-nations — Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan — will be represented by their Prime Ministers, New Delhi added.

It may be recalled that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had just attended the SCO Council of Heads of State meeting in Virtual format earlier this month on November 10 that had been chaired by Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The meeting had also been attended by other leaders including Chinese President Xi Jinping and Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan. Some of the media reports suggest PM Modi may be visiting his Lok Sabha constituency Varanasi on Monday.

■ **Pakistan will be represented by its parliamentary secretary for foreign affairs. The other six SCO member-nations will be represented by their Prime Ministers**

"By chairing the 19th meeting of the SCO Council of Heads of Government on 30 November, India hopes to further strengthen greater trade, economic and cultural cooperation within SCO by putting human beings at the center of SCO activities and to foster greater peace and prosperity in the region. We

hope that India's initiatives will not only be helpful for SCO Member States in overcoming the economic challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, but will also signal our continued commitment to strengthening the organisation. The November 30 summit will end with the adoption of the joint communique under the chairmanship of vice-president of India," the ministry of external affairs (MEA) said in a statement on Saturday.

"It will be the first time that a summit-level meeting will be held under India's chairmanship,

since it gained full-membership of the organization in 2017. This Summit is held annually at the level of Prime Ministers of SCO and deals primarily with the trade and economic agenda of the organisation," it added.

"India considers the SCO as an important regional organisation to promote cooperation in the areas of peace, security, trade, economy and culture. India is committed to widening our cooperation with SCO by playing a proactive, positive and constructive role in the organisation," the MEA added.

IN BRIEF

MINOR'S MURDER:
ODISHA GOVT NOD
TO SIT INQUIRYAKSHAYA KUMAR
SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, NOV. 28

The Odisha government, under pressure from the Opposition and facing large-scale public outrage over the soft-peddling the investigation into the murder of five-year-old girl, on Saturday agreed to institute a probe by a court-monitored five-member Special Investigation Team (SIT), on Saturday. The SIT will be headed by Inspector General of Police (IGP) Arun Bothra, who had cracked the 2018 Patnagarh parcel bomb case in which a newly-wed couple and their grandmother were killed. State parliamentary affairs minister Bikram Kesari Arukha made the announcement in the Assembly. The announcement came a day after the Opposition parties attacked the Naveen Patnaik government over the ambiguity in the announcement by the latter regarding a SIT probe made on the floor of the House through video-conferencing on Friday. The CM had said, "If required, the state government will order SIT probe into Pari murder case." Arukha's announcement failed to pacify the Opposition which continued its attack on the government, forcing Speaker S.N. Patro to adjourn the proceedings till 3 pm.

Modi reviews
Covid vaccine
preparations

■ Continued from Page 1

Modi spent over an hour at the plant, before leaving for the airport, from where he left for Hyderabad at 11.40 am.

Mr Modi landed at Hakimpet Air Force station near Hyderabad around 1 pm and proceeded to pharma major Bharat Biotech's vaccine manufacturing facility at Genome valley, located around 20 km from the air station, by road.

Covaxin, being developed by Bharat Biotech in collaboration with the Indian Council of Medical Research and National Institute of Virology, is undergoing phase-3 trials.

At 3.20 pm, Mr Modi took off for Pune, where he landed at 4.30 pm. From the airport, Mr Modi proceeded by helicopter to the SII at Manjari, located 17 km from the airport.

PM Modi was received by Dr Cyrus Poonawalla, chairman of Poonawalla Group, and his son Adar Poonawalla, the CEO of Serum Institute who briefed him. The vaccine maker's chief Adar Poonawalla said that the Serum Institute will apply within two weeks for the emergency use of the coronavirus vaccine being developed by the University of Oxford and pharma giant AstraZeneca.

"As of now, we don't have anything in writing with the government of India on how many doses they will purchase but the indication is that it would be 300-400 million doses by July 2021," he told reporters.

Centre 'ready'
for talks
with farmers

■ Continued from Page 1

leader said that the farmers will stay wherever they are for now and the next course of action will be decided on Sunday. Bharatiya Kisan Union (Dakaunda) president Buta Singh Burjigill over the phone said no decision has yet been taken on shifting to the Burari ground in Delhi, a place earmarked for their agitation by police.

He said representatives of several farmers' organisations will hold another round of meeting on Sunday to decide the next course of action.

Farmers stayed put at Delhi borders on Saturday with thousands more set to join them and their leaders yet to take a call on shifting to the Burari ground, a place earmarked for their agitation by police. Thousands of farmers protesting the Centre's new farm laws are currently staying put at the Singhu and Tikri borders amid heavy police presence. At present, we are here (at the Delhi border). We have still not decided on going to the Burari ground. We will have a meeting in the evening to decide the next course of action, Bharatiya Kisan Union (Rajawal) president Balbir Singh Rajawal said over the phone.

■ Jail term up to 10 years and fine of ₹50K for those violating its clauses

UP 'love jihad' law gets gov nod

Lucknow, Nov. 28: The Uttar Pradesh ordinance aimed at curbing forcible or fraudulent religious conversions including those for the sake of marriage has got the assent of state Governor Anandiben Patel with the new law providing for a jail term of up to 10 years for any violations.

The law, which has been published in the UP gazette, comes into force at once, an official spokesperson said on Saturday. The ordinance was promulgated by the Governor on Friday with immediate effect.

Under the law which deals with different categories of offences, a marriage will be declared

"null and void" if the conversion of a woman is solely for that purpose, and those wishing to change their religion after marriage need to apply to the district magistrate.

The Yogi government on Tuesday approved the draft of the Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Ordinance, 2020, which also curbs religious conversions only for the sake of marriage, dubbed by BJP leaders as 'love jihad'.

"The way in which religious conversions are done using deceit, lies, force and dishonesty is heart wrenching, and it was necessary to have a law in this regard," Cabinet minister and UP government

spokesperson Sidharth Nath Singh said.

Conversion for the alleged purpose of marriage is, however, only one aspect of the ordinance.

The new law was opposed by the Opposition SP. Hours after the governor's nod, SP president Akhilesh Yadav said his party will oppose the Bill when it comes up in the state Legislature for passage.

"The Samajwadi Party is not in favour of any such law. We will oppose it (when it comes up in the assembly)," the former chief minister told a press conference.

The new law also has a provision under which if someone returns to their original religion, it shall

not be deemed a conversion. The onus to prove that the conversion has not been done forcibly will lie on the person accused of the act and the convert, it said.

In cases of violations of the law, the ordinance stipulates that the court shall grant appropriate compensation payable by the accused to the victim of conversion which may extend to a maximum of ₹5 lakh in addition to the fine.

The ordinance mainly envisages that no person shall convert, either directly or indirectly from one religion to another by use or practice of misrepresentation, force, undue influence, coercion, allure-

ment or by any fraudulent means or by marriage nor shall any person abet, convince or conspire such conversion. Minister Sidharth Nath Singh on Tuesday told reporters that the punishment under the new law is a jail term from one to five years, and a fine of ₹15,000.

But if the woman involved is a minor or belongs to a Scheduled Caste or a Scheduled Tribe, the jail term would range from three to 10 years, he said.

But if the woman involved is a minor or belongs to a SC/ST, the jail term would range from three to 10 years, he said. The fine would increase to ₹25,000. — PTI



Members of the transgender community distribute pamphlets to commuters during their awareness campaign against the spread of coronavirus in Prayagraj on Saturday. — PTI

BJP in touch with Suvendu, but nothing decided as of now

■ Continued from Page 1

Kolkata, Nov. 28: The BJP central leadership is in touch with disgruntled TMC mass leader Suvendu Adhikari, who resigned from the Mamata Banerjee Cabinet on Friday, but nothing has been decided as of now regarding his joining the saffron party, sources in it said.

Mr Adhikari, they said, is in good terms with some of the saffron camp leaders but talks regarding his conditions for joining the party are yet to begin.

The BJP is, however, hopeful about his joining as it feels that the heavy-weight TMC leader has "few options left" a senior BJP leader said.

"We are in touch with Suvendu Adhikari. We share good terms with him but nothing has been decided as of now regarding his joining us. We have to wait for few more days to have a clear picture," the leader said on condition of anonymity.

Although Mr Adhikari has resigned from the Mamata Banerjee Cabinet in which he was the minister in charge of transport, waterways and irrigation, he has not resigned from TMC or as MLA.

"After resigning as minister it will be tough for Adhikari to continue in TMC. So the options before him are floating a

Doors still open for talks with disgruntled party, says TMC

Kolkata, Nov. 28: Trinamul Congress MP Saugata Roy on Saturday said doors are still open for talks with Suvendu Adhikari, who has resigned from his office as a West Bengal Cabinet minister.

Mr Roy, a veteran lawmaker tasked by the TMC top brass to hold parleys



Suvendu Adhikari

new party or joining BJP or Congress," the BJP leader said.

"It takes a lot of money and human resource to float a new political outfit, which we don't think is possible at this juncture," he said.

The option for Adhikari to join the Congress is less as the party is very weak in Bengal. "So the only option left is the BJP, which we think is the most beneficial proposition for both of us," he

said. Sources said Mr Adhikari's exit from the cabinet is seen as a prelude to his severing of his two-decade-old association with TMC right from its inception in 1988.

The TMC leadership, which had initiated back channel talks with him, has decided to adopt a "wait and watch" approach and will not initiate any further talks to address his grievances, sources in the party said.

Apart from his home district of East Midnapore, Adhikari has influence over at least 40-45 assembly segments in tribal Jangalmahal area comprising the districts of West Midnapore, Bankura, Purulia and Jhargram and parts of Birbhum and minority-dominated Murshidabad district. — PTI

'Bollywood mafia is kind compared to Maha govt'

AGE CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI, NOV. 28

After Mumbai mayor Kishori Padnekar called her "do take ke log", Kangana Ranaut on Saturday said "Bollywood mafia and people like Aadiya Pancholi and Hrithik Roshan seem like kind souls". Mayor Padnekar accused Ranaut of using courts to settle her political scores.

Mayor Padnekar, while speaking to the media commented on HC decision in Kangana case, said, "Citizens of city surprised that an actress who lives in Himachal Pradesh, comes to Mumbai and compare our Mumbai with Pak occupied Kashmir... Such do take ke log want to make courts for political rivalry, it is wrong."

Reacting to the mayor's comments, Ranaut posted on her twitter handle, "The amount of legal cases, abuses, insults, name calling I faced from Maharashtra government in these few months make Bollywood mafia and people like Aadiya Pancholi and Hrithik Roshan seem like kind souls.... I wonder what is it about me that rattle people so much."

India, Nepal put 'sour' ties back on friendly track

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI
NEW DELHI, NOV. 28

With India declaring it is "Nepal's foremost friend and development partner", bilateral ties are once again firmly back on track following the successful two-day visit of foreign secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla to Kathmandu this week. Sources said recently that both sides "noted the special relations between India and Nepal, and the importance of respecting each other's sensitivities", adding that the two sides "shared their perspectives on boundary matters and discussed ways to take it forward under the appropriate bilateral mechanisms".

The visit comes even as China — much to India's concern and dismay — has extended its influence in the Himalayan nation enormously in the past few years especially after the Nepalese Communists assumed office.

It may be recalled that ties between India and its Himalayan neighbour had soured in the summer months this year after Nepal went ahead and unveiled a new map that showed portions of territory in India's Uttarakhand state — Limpiyadhura, Kalapani and Lipu Lekh — as part of Nepal.

New Delhi had objected to that move. But much water has flowed under the proverbial bridge in the

past few months. The ice had initially been broken in August after Nepalese Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli had called up Prime Minister Narendra Modi then to wish him on the occasion of India's 74th Independence Day, with both leaders "expressing mutual solidarity" and agreeing to strengthen cooperation.

Foreign Secretary Mr. Shringla said in Kathmandu during his just-concluded visit that culminated on Friday that "aside from our common civilisational inheritance, India's relationship with Nepal rests on four pillars — development cooperation; stronger connectivity; expanded infrastructure and economic projects; easier and enhanced access to educational opportunities in India for the young people of Nepal".

He had also declared that "underlying all of these is a steadfast principle: we will work to Nepal's priorities".

The Foreign Secretary also "assured the people of Nepal that, once a vaccine is rolled out, meeting Nepal's requirements would be a priority for us". He had added, "Given our genetic profiles, what works for India is likely to work for Nepal as well. Together we will recover from the pandemic and together we will protect our people."

Chirag: BJP free to take call on RS seat

Patna, Nov. 28: Cold-shouldered by the BJP in the byelection to a Rajya Sabha seat in Bihar, LJP president Chirag Paswan said on Saturday that it belonged to the saffron party which was free to take a decision about whom to field.

The seat had fallen vacant following the death of Chirag Paswan's father and Lok Janshakti Party founder Ram Vilas Paswan. The BJP has nominated former Bihar deputy chief minister Sushil Kumar Modi for the seat.

Sushil Modi is likely to win uncontested unless the opposition Grand Alliance fields a candidate to challenge him.

In that event, the polling will take place on December 14.

A Union minister, Ram Vilas Paswan had got elected from the seat last year after it fell vacant following his cabinet colleague Ravi Shankar Prasad's election to the Lok Sabha from Patna Sahib.

"The seat belonged to



the BJP and it is for the party to decide which candidate from which party to field in the byelection," the 37-year-old leader told reporters at a function held to celebrate his party's 20th foundation day.

Chastened by the drubbing in the recent Bihar elections, Chirag Paswan asked the party rank and file to gear up for the next assembly polls which could take place "any time".

He reiterated it in a letter addressed to LJP workers and shared with the media.

Responding to questions, Mr Paswan maintained that he saw "fresh elections taking place any time in Bihar, given the way the new government is functioning".

In a written message to party workers, Mr Paswan defended his decision to go solo in the Assembly polls.

— PTI

CBI raids at 45 locations in 4 states over coal mining case

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, NOV. 28

The Central Bureau of Investigation on Saturday conducted searches at 45 locations in West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand and Bihar in connection with a case of illegal mining and theft of coal from public sector coal firm Eastern

Coalfields Limited (ECL), which operates in West Bengal and Jharkhand.

According to sources the central probe agency had registered the case on Friday against accused Anup Manjhi (a private person) and other unidentified people, including some employees of the ECL, Railways and CISF personnel.

EPFO extends deadline for pensioners till Feb 28

New Delhi, Nov. 28: Retirement fund body EPFO has extended the deadline for submission of life certificates by pensioners till February 28, a move which would benefit over 35 lakh persons who could not submit the document by November due to coronavirus pandemic. The pensioners who could not submit their life certificates till November 30 deadline, would get pension every month till February. "In view of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and the vulnerability of elderly population to coronavirus, the Employees' Provident

Fund Organisation (EPFO) has extended the time limit up to 28th February 2021 for submission of Life Certificate (Jeevan Pramaan Patra-JPP) in respect of the Pensioners drawing pension under EPS 1995 (Employees' Pension Scheme-1995) and whose Life certificate is due in any month till February 28, 2021," a labour ministry statement said.

Presently, a pensioner can submit JPP anytime during the year up to 30th November, which is valid for a period of one year from the date of issue. — PTI

J&K DDC polls: 51.76% turnout recorded

Jammu/Srinagar, Nov. 28: In the first electoral exercise in Jammu and Kashmir since the abrogation of Article 370, nearly 52 percent voter turnout was recorded on Saturday in the staggered polls to district development councils.

The first round of polling in the eight-phase maiden DDC elections passed off peacefully, except for a minor incident of stone-pelting in Kulgam, officials said.

"A voter percentage of 51.76 was recorded in the first phase — 64.2 percent in Jammu division and 40.65 percent in Kashmir division, state election commissioner K.K.

Sharma told reporters in Jammu.

Reasi in Jammu recorded the highest voter turnout of 74.62 percent while militancy-infested Pulwama in south Kashmir witnessed the least voter participation at 6.7 percent.

In Kashmir, Budgam recorded the highest poll percentage of 56.96 percent.

Enthusiasm among the voters was witnessed in all the 43 DDC constituencies which went to polls today including 25 in Kashmir and 18 in Jammu region.

"The men, women and young voters thronged the polling stations, adhering to the Covid-19 protocols,



Voters undergo thermal screening as they arrive to cast their votes for the first phase of District Development Council polls at Hariganian area. — PTI

Mr Sharma said. Barring a minor stone-pelting incident in Kulgam district of south Kashmir, the overall polling concluded peace-

fully with voters showing enthusiasm despite the morning chill, he said. The election is witnessing a triangular contest

among the People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD), an amalgam of parties that are seeking restoration of Article 370, the BJP and the Apni Party floated by former finance minister Altaf Bukhari.

In the first phase, as many as 1,475 candidates are in the fray, according to officials.

In the Jammu division, Sharma said a turnout of 74.62 percent in Reasi was followed by Rajouri (70.52 percent), Poonch (68.69), Samba (68.61), Doda (64.49), Ramban (64.21), Kathua (62.82), Jammu (61.49), Udhampur (57.13) and Kishtwar (55.16). — PTI

THE ASIAN AGE

29 NOVEMBER 2020



Sanjeev Ahluwalia

Off the beaten track

Different, and same: Pandemic musings

Big calamities induce great change. The Fukushima disaster 2011 in Japan left behind 16,000 dead and the haunting image of the Emperor Akihito, kneeling before aged victims— a never before, mutely humane gesture expressing remorse and reassurance.

April 2020, India. A possible 10 million emigrant workers abandon locked down cities. Some walk to distant villages with their family in tow and their meagre possessions on their heads — a replay of the post-Partition mass exchange of the dispossessed in 1947 — except this is just one-way.

Media reports kindle public sympathy. Yogi Adityanath mobilises hundreds of buses to ferry “his” people home to Uttar Pradesh. Their cousins from Bihar are left to brave the searing summer heat and exhaustion — some die on the way.

November 2020, New Delhi, Mumbai — lockdowns are long over but most people now carry documents to prove residence, drown themselves in vitamins and track the apps for movement restrictions. The worst is over. The Covid monster is dying. But the fear is palpable of being dragged under by its distended death spasms.

The ongoing pandemic’s most telling debris — other than heightened neurosis and germaphobia — are the ubiquitous masks. Masks everywhere in a macabre caricature of a Venetian Carnival — except here masks are the vehicle to scurry home not strut the streets and party.

Product design lags horribly. The masks either keep pollution out or the deadly spiked pathogens. You must choose between the two — a senseless game of Russian roulette. Pollution choked lungs gasp for air through impermeable medical grade masks. But there are eyes watching everywhere now.

Furtively, you avert your face, tug downwards and gulp in the air quickly, lest someone fingers you for violating the Covid regulations. Some are complicit out of propriety; others to escape the Rs 2,000 fine.

Sitting next to a stranger on a bus, in an aircraft or even in a waiting room is so off-putting that it makes you shun all human contact and become a mole. Voluntary social distancing is not going away anytime soon.

For the well-off, excluding others from physical proximity, unless they are suitably bathed and clad, was always the norm. South Asians smarten up before they go to beg for relief for a Bahubali (big man). It is not just hotels and the military, which enforce daily dress and hygiene inspections. Privileged homes also follow this rule, requiring house help to change into “clean uniforms” before going about their work.

It all goes back to the Raj, when *mem-sahibs* would drill the women of the “coolie lines” — people not like them — on the basics of hygiene, partly, to forestall the spread of classless contagion to the “main house”.

Hawking or spitting is second nature to South Asians. An early morning ritual which requires the most labored exertions to eject yesterday’s detritus from around our gullets, in a fluid heave by contracting the stomach and gagging ferociously. Sensible Europeans brush their teeth post dinner. Asians must do it early in the morning, before eating anything, or lose their meal.

Touching and feeling anything and everything is second nature. It could be a door frame, the back of a chair or even the person ahead of oneself in a queue. Does “connecting” physically create a human chain of reassurance circling the Globe?

With masks obscuring the face, all-American, blindingly white teeth and a now-it’s-on, now-it’s-off toothy smiles are yesterday’s asset — dentists, beware of your declining profits. Today it is the eyes which are once again the windows to a person’s soul.

And don’t forget how voice and audio have eaten into video’s share as the principal tool for business and social communication, to access knowledge, music, shows or catch-up on current affairs because pod casts allow you to “multitask” — the holy grail of the 2020s, also known by the less flattering epithet of “shared attention” — as by a mother of quintuplets.

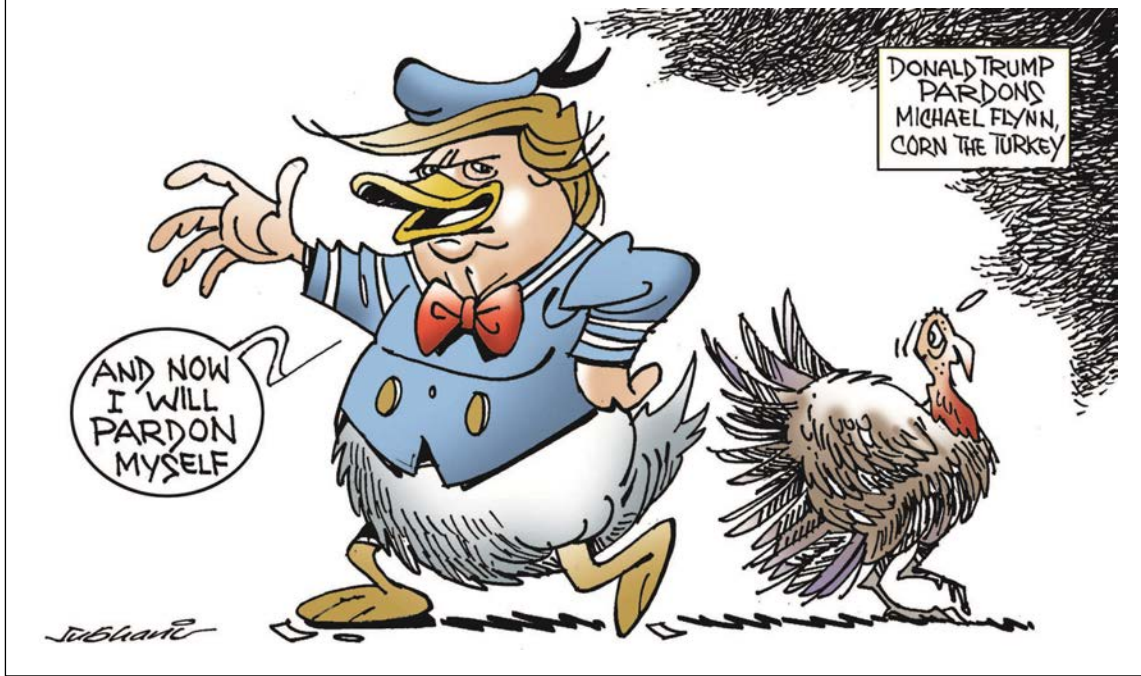
Personal vehicles, insanely popular in South Asia because of poor public transport, soar in appeal. They extend the bubble of “safe social isolation” to the street. The purveyors of the virtues of “shared mobility” need to come up with very rigorous sanitisation options before people go back to Uber and Ola. One option is drive through UV sanitizers — giant versions of the smaller ones for home use, to disinfect mobiles and parcels, now available at between ₹2,000 to ₹10,000 apiece.

Accessing doctors is, at once convenient and yet dreadfully stressful. Letting a doctor look down your gullet online whilst lying in your bed is sheer luxury, as is ordering medicines like pizza. The bad old days of heaving yourself to a hospital or a clinic for a doctor’s appointment or to get a medical test done, are now mere memories, except for the truly ill, who now need generous insurance policies and “connections” for non-Covid medical help.

Dying at home was once a preferred eventuality for the aged. Today they are denied even this final dignity. Doctors hesitate to certify the cause of death. Even the dead must pass by a hospital to be stamped as “non-Covid” before being cremated or buried. Some say, the movers and shakers, who know how to live and die comfortably, get certificates prepared in advance, just to avoid the detour. Kafka rules now more than ever.

The writer is adviser, Observer Research Foundation

Subhani



At best, farm laws pass reform buck to big biz



Pavan K. Varma

Chanakya’s View

As I saw thousands of farmers being tear-gassed and drenched by water cannons, and the mass of lathi wielding policemen and barbed wire barricades put up to prevent farmers coming to Delhi to protest against the recent farm bills, I was reminded of Tulsidas’ remarkably insightful lines in the *Ramcharitmanas*: *Nahin kou asa janama jaga mahin, prabhuta pai jahi mada nahin*. Never was a creature born in this world, whom power did not intoxicate. How else can one explain the arrogant manner in which the BJP government has handled the entire project of farm reforms? It is a classic case of hubris derailing even a well-intentioned attempt of change.

Firstly, it was the manner in which the three agricultural bills were passed in Parliament last September. This is a government with an overwhelming majority in the Lok Sabha, and a manageable preponderance in the Rajya Sabha. It is in a position on a simple numerical basis to get its legislative agenda through. Why then were these bills passed in a tearing hurry, without a structured discussion, through a voice vote, and without sending the bills for wider consultations and thorough consideration to the select committee?

Let us accept, too, that there is a need to replace the stranglehold of middlemen in agricultural trade and do away with the APMC Act. However, if the farmers are protesting the move it is not because they have shrunk craniums that prevent them from realising what is good for them. The question is not that agricultural commerce needs to be opened up, but what is going to replace it. The government says that removing unproductive middlemen and allowing farmers to sell to whomsoever they want is good for farmers. It will open the way for corporate India to buy from farmers, enhance business investment in the agricultural sector, facilitate healthy price competition and thereby increase farmer remuneration.

The fact of the matter is that, while this sounds great in theory, marginal and small farmers with less than five hectares of land account for 86 per cent of total farmers in India. No attempt has been made, as part of preparatory steps leading up to this reform legislation, to aggregate them or to encourage cooperatives. They have been given the freedom to sell outside the APMC, but given their indigent and scattered status, are without the power to negotiate the best deal for themselves.

It is true that there are only some 7,000 APMC mandis across the country, and farmers can theoretically sell to anyone they wish to. In fact, some states like Bihar, Kerala and Manipur have scrapped the APMC Act. But has the condition of the small and marginal farmers really improved in these states? The truth is that the old system — which does need reform — guaranteed to most farmers through the MSP, a mini-

mum floor price for their hard earned produce. The much maligned middlemen or adhatis provide a support system to farmers for transporting their produce and selling it; they also are a part of a familiar socio-economic eco system available to farmers in times of need, such as a temporary loan for marriage ceremonies or child education. Now the assurance of the old system is being removed, and there is no explicit guarantee in the law for MSP.

Reforms, although necessary, need to be prepared for and properly transitioned. Suppose, the government made a peremptory announcement that henceforth everybody will travel in New Delhi only by public transport. The step can be justified as a ‘reform’ because it will save fuel, encourage savings, and reduce pollution. But the ordinary person will ask the basic question: is the existing public transport infrastructure good enough to meet this increased demand? If the answer is no, then people will protest.

The guarantee of MSP has led farmers, especially in Punjab and Haryana, but also elsewhere, to grow crops, such as paddy, even when government godowns are unable to efficiently store the grains, and rats consume a great deal of it. But why are farmers growing paddy in Punjab and other states? It is suc-

sive governments that have for vote bank politics guaranteed them free water and free electricity. Now that they have utilised this largesse to cultivate paddy, the government suddenly has a change of heart and says it will not buy, and wants corporate India to step in. A businessman, who is given certain inputs for production free, and encouraged to make a particular product which the government guarantees it will buy at remunerative prices, will change his production line to respond to such a situation. Suppose, after he has done so, the government says that its decision was wasteful, and it will not guarantee purchase, would not the businessman feel he has been cheated?

The agricultural sector is crying out for greater investment. The government feels that these farm bills will facilitate this but by the corporate sector. However, has the government come out with the requisite tax incentives and fiscal policies that will encourage such investment? Besides, there is a point beyond which governments — both at the centre and in the states — cannot abdicate their own responsibility. Systemic investments in modernising the food supply chain should have been made in much greater measure by governments. The buck is now being passed on to the private sector, on the uncertain premise that they will do what successive governments did not.

We need agricultural reform. But it must be done through consultation with the stakeholders and systematically prepared for. Teargassing farmers and intimidating them is not the answer.

The writer, an author and a former diplomat, is in politics

The government feels that these farm bills will facilitate investment by the corporate sector. However, has the government come out with the requisite tax incentives and fiscal policies that will encourage such investment?

LETTERS

DO RIGHT BY SWAMY

The incarceration of the 83-year-old Jesuit priest Stan Swamy, who has Parkinson’s disease, while denying him courtesies due to an elderly person, has outraged many Indians. The veteran human rights activist has worked for over 50 years in Jharkhand, fighting for the adivasis’ land, forest and labour rights. In charging Swamy with ‘anti-national’ conspiracies vis-a-vis the Bhima-Koregaon case, the prosecution is aiming to discredit law professionals and social reformers who raise their voices for the rights of the poorest of poor. And denying him even basic privileges due to the disabled is unconscionable. Instead of privileging the criminal and the unworthy, the court must free Swamy immediately.

Jubel D’Cruz
Mumbai

WRITING ON THE WALL

THIS REFERS TO “Top mantri quits Mamata government”. In politics, there are no permanent friends and foes, therefore, turn-coats jumping ship is not surprising. Politicians have no allegiance to the party that has nurtured them for years and succumb to the allurements at the drop of a hat. The BJP has become a master in poaching people and is now using all its resources in West Bengal to target such sitting ducks. It is an ominous sign for Mamata Banerjee and the Trinamul Congress. The BJP is sure to expand its footprint in the coming Assembly elections in the state.

Deepak Singhal
Noida

TERROR TRIGGER

MOHSEN FAKHRIZADEH, the evil brain behind the nuclear fission technology of Iran, has been found murdered in an eastern suburb of its capital Tehran. As expected, the ruling coterie of the theocratic nation has blamed Israel for having carried out the assassination and has warned of severe retaliation. That means all the Jewish interests across the globe, like the diplomatic missions, will now be made targets of Islamic terror strikes by the religious fanatic regime of the Shia Muslim country.

Arun Malankar
Lucknow

FIRST BLOOD

AUSTRALIA DREW first blood, winning by a mile the first one-day international in Sydney. Steve Smith, Aaron Finch and Glenn Maxwell threw their weight around with the bat while Zampa and Hazlewood chipped in with the ball. The 128-run partnership between Hardik Pandya (90) and Shikhar Dhawan (74) was the only bright spot for India, which kept losing wickets at regular intervals. Kohli and company need to get their act together quickly.

N.J. Ravi Chander
Bengaluru

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

Anita Katyal

Political Gup-Shup

Despite defeat, Rahul vac was on track; Patel’s unenviable role

Over the past few days, there have been numerous accounts of how Ahmed Patel managed affairs in Congress president Sonia Gandhi’s office as her political secretary. Among the various responsibilities entrusted to the late leader was to keep his boss out of the line of fire. It was left to him to tactfully handle delicate situations. A phone call from Patel generally meant he was ringing to convey some bad news. This happened with senior Haryana leader Birender Singh (now with the BJP) when he was getting ready to leave for the Rashtrapati Bhavan to be sworn in as a minister in the Manmohan Singh government in 2013. Minutes before Mr Singh stepped out, he got a call from Patel. When Mr Singh heard who the caller was, he realised he would not be joining the Union Cabinet. “I knew immediately I was out... because Ahmed Patel would not be calling to congratulate me,” says Mr Singh whenever he recounts this story. This was not the first or the last time that Mr Patel was called upon to perform

such an unpleasant task. But he handled it tactfully, breaking the news in his inimitable gentle style. His general refrain was, “*Sorry yaar, tumhara kaam nahin hua. Dekho, agli baar shayad kuch ho payega.*”

Thanks to the enthusiastic response RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav got at his election rallies, Rahul Gandhi was convinced that their alliance was all set to form the next government in Bihar. In fact, he was so confident that he took a break in the midst of the election campaign and went off for a short holiday to Shimla at his sister, Priyanka’s house. The Nehru-Gandhi scion had even planned to go on a desert safari to Jaisalmer before the declaration of the Bihar poll results. However, these plans came unstuck because Rahul Gandhi was denied permission by the security agencies as Prime Minister Narendra Modi was due to visit the forward areas and spend his Diwali with the jawans. This was just as well as the Bihar poll results proved to be a real letdown

for the Rahul-Tejashwi duo. However, this did not stop Rahul Gandhi from proceeding on vacation to Goa later with Sonia Gandhi.

Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has put the proverbial cat among the pigeons with his recent announcement that he is in no hurry to expand his Cabinet. This has obviously come as a rude shock for former ministers Tulsil Silawat and Govind Rajput who had to resign their posts in October as they had failed to get elected as MLAs in the stipulated six months following their induction into the Cabinet. Both Silawat and Rajput are Jyotiraditya Scindia loyalists who had crossed over to the BJP from the Congress along with 20 other MLAs which led to the downfall of the Kamal Nath government. The two were hoping to get back their ministries after they were re-elected in the recent Madhya Pradesh bypolls. They are naturally depending on Mr Scindia to push their case but their mentor is him-

self waiting for the ministerial berth promised to him by the BJP as reward for bringing down the Congress government.

Ahmed Patel’s untimely demise is undoubtedly a blow for the Congress but it is a personal setback for former Rajasthan deputy chief minister Sachin Pilot who had led a rebellion against the Ashok Gehlot government earlier this year but backed off subsequently. The Congress leadership had then set up a three-member committee, comprising Patel, K.C. Venugopal and Ajay Maken to hear out Mr Pilot’s grievances and find an alternate role for him. This was in July but the panel has yet to submit its report. With Patel’s departure, it is highly unlikely that Mr Venugopal and Mr Maken will be in a rush to send in their recommendations. As it is, Mr Venugopal and Mr Maken were depending on the more senior and experienced Patel to find an amicable solution to the Gehlot-Pilot rivalry. This is certainly not good news for Mr Pilot who has

been waiting to be rehabilitated for the past five months.

Soon after BJP Rajya Sabha MP and Amit Shah confidant Bhupendra Yadav was given charge of the poll campaign for the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation, he immediately got down to business. He has set up shop in Hyderabad and has been approaching local Congress leaders for induction into the BJP. Realising that the Congress is on a weak wicket, Yadav and his team has been sending out feelers to the rival party’s leaders, even going to the extent of calling on them at their homes. This is the same pattern adopted by the BJP in West Bengal as the saffron party is determined to expand its footprint in the East and South. Unlike Trinamul chief Mamata Banerjee who is putting up a tough fight in West Bengal, there is no one in the Congress to counter the BJP’s expansionism.

Anita Katyal is a Delhi-based journalist

IN BRIEF

PAKISTAN,
U.S. RESTORE
MONASTERY

Peshawar, Nov. 28: Pakistan and the US have jointly completed restoration work at the Takht-i-Bahi Buddhist monastery in northwest Pakistan under the \$230,000 cultural preservation project.

US Consul General Gregory Macris virtually participated in the closing ceremony of the project at the monastery in Mardan in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province.

"The US mission in Pakistan is committed to working with local partners to support conservation and preservation of sites of great cultural significance across Pakistan," said Macris.

The Humanitarian and Facilitation Organisation (HAFO) received a US grant to execute the two-phase project at Takht-i-Bahi.

OLI SUBMITS
SEPARATE
DOCUMENT

Kathmandu, Nov. 28: Nepal's protracted political crisis deepened on Saturday after embattled Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli rejected Pushpa Kamal Dahal "Prachanda's" accusations that he was running the government without consulting the party, and instead blamed his rival for non-cooperation in handling the party's affairs.

In the much-awaited Central Secretariat meeting of the ruling Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) on Saturday, Prime Minister Oli submitted a separate 38-page political document in response to the allegations made by party's executive chairman "Prachanda".

Oli was responding to the allegations made against him by "Prachanda" in his 19-page political paper presented at the Secretariat meeting on November 18. In his report, Prachanda had accused Oli of running the government without consulting the party, failing to abide by the party's due procedures and engaging in corruption.

Oli dismissed the allegations levelled against him by "Prachanda" while submitting the separate report, according to a senior Standing Committee member of the party.

FUTURE OF WALES
GANDHI'S STATUE
IN QUESTION

London, Nov. 28: There is a question mark over the future of a statue of Mahatma Gandhi in Wales after an official Welsh government review into Britain's colonial and slave trading history drew up a list of memorials that require a rethink. "The Slave Trade and the British Empire: An Audit of Commemoration in Wales" report released this week also shortlists the commemoration of Britain's war-time Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Robert Clive, referred to as Clive of India for his role in establishing Britain's colonial hold in India, as "persons of interest" to move to a second stage of the review process.

Wales has a bronze sculpture of Gandhi at Cardiff Bay, unveiled in 2017 to mark the 148th birth anniversary of the leader of the Indian national movement.

In the audit, he has been classified under Category E of persons of interest who "require examination as having been highlighted by campaigners".

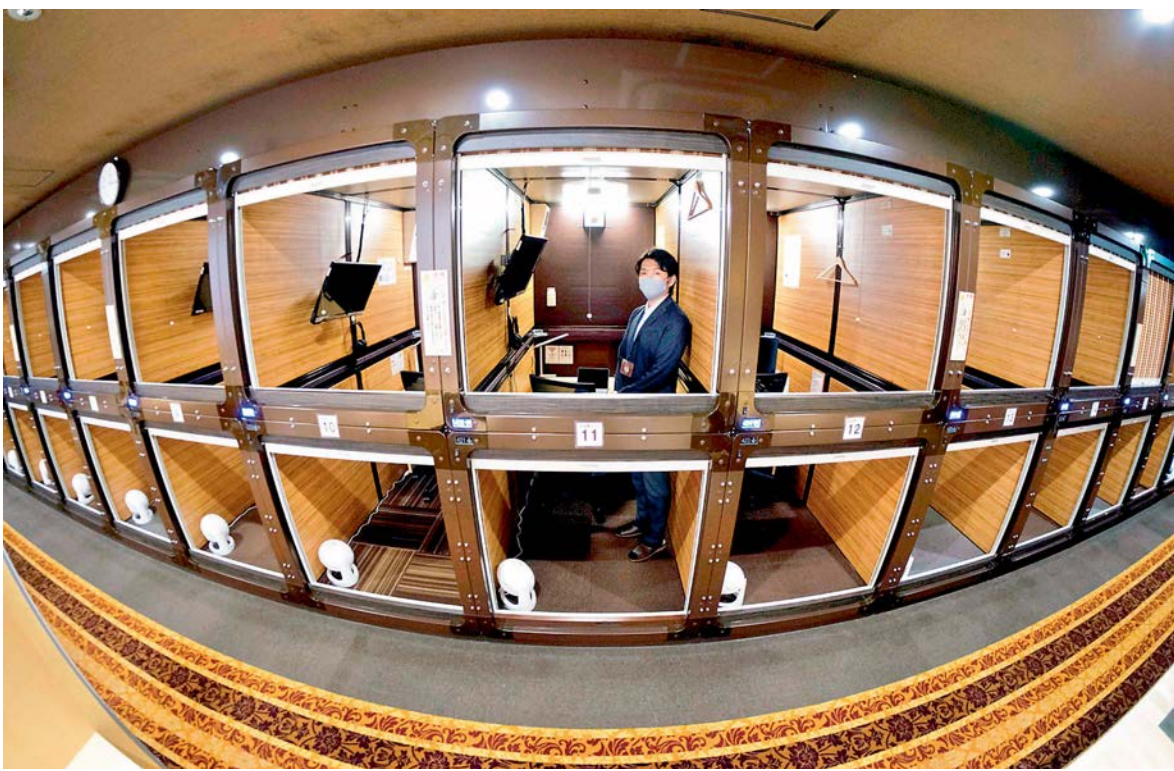
INDIAN MAN ON
TOURIST VISA
MISSING IN UAE

Dubai, Nov. 28: An Indian man, who reached the UAE on a tourist visa to seek a job, has been missing since November 9, a media report has said.

Amrithalingam Samayamuthu, 46, a father of four from the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu, had come over to take up a job in the UAE, the *Gulf News* reported on Friday. Samayamuthu's nephew Durai Maniraja, who is a fisherman in Ras Al Khaimah, said his uncle came with three people from Tamil Nadu on November 8.

"They stayed in an accommodation in Hor Al Anz. His roommates said the next morning he went to the workplace. After he came back, they went for work at night," Durai said. He said Samayamuthu was upset as he would be alone in the room and also wanted to go.

"But the others told him not to. There was no news about him later is what they told us," Durai said. Samayamuthu had not called home as he did not have a UAE SIM card. His brother-in-law Kannan Nagorokani, said he approached the Al Muraqqabat Police Station to file a complaint.



This picture taken with a fisheye lens on Friday shows coworking rooms of the capsule hotel Anshin Oyado Shinjuku, Tokyo, which has been renovated into a coworking space without the upper and lower partitions of the capsule. Facing unprecedented challenges due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the capsule hotel renovated an entire floor to be used as a coworking space, offering office necessities such as high speed internet required for telework and web conferencing, including computer hardware and other computing devices.

— AFP

Germany hits mn cases as Russia
links up with India on vaccine

Berlin, Nov. 28: Germany, once a beacon of hope in Europe's Coronavirus nightmare, logged more than one million cases on Friday, while Russia asked India to help mass produce its controversial Sputnik vaccine.

Although the virus spread is slowing thanks to weeks of tough restrictions, Europe remains at the heart of the pandemic, recording more cases than the United States in the past week.

The pandemic is spreading fastest in Asia and Latin America, and is up by a worrying 113 percent over the week in Mexico.

Until recently, Germany's relative success in containing the virus had offered some sense of hope, with authorities putting in place some precautions that still allowed life to carry on almost as normal. However, its measured approach has failed during the second wave, endangering the health of Europe's biggest economy and weighing on the mood as the northern hemisphere heads into the winter holidays.

Germany's Robert Koch Institute recorded more than 22,000 new daily cases on Friday, pushing the overall total beyond the one-million mark.

The number of Covid-19 patients in intensive care has soared from around 360 in early October to more than 3,500 last week.

Most countries hope to ease their virus rules for Christmas and New Year.

— AFP

Scientists to detect
single virus particles

Tokyo, Nov. 28: Scientists have developed a new method for identifying single virus particles based on changes in electrical current when they pass through ultrasmall pores, an advance which they claim may lead to new rapid Covid-19 tests.

The study, published in *ACS Sensors*, demonstrated a new system for identifying single virus particles using an algorithm trained to detect changes in the current passing across silicon nanopores. According to the scientists,

the work may lead to fast and accurate screening tests for diseases like Covid-19 and influenza.

In the new method, the scientists said a layer of the compound silicon nitride just 50 nanometres (nm) thick has tiny nanopores added.

The motion of the ions can be monitored by the current they generate, and when a viral particle enters a nanopore, it blocks some of the ions from passing through, leading to a transient dip in current.

— PTI

Persistent high case

numbers loom over governments' hopes to ease their virus rules for Christmas and New Year.

Europe on Saturday crossed a grim barrier, registering 400,649 deaths. Stores began lifting their shutters in France on Saturday, while Poland's shopping centres will also reopen.

"I'd rather avoid the internet, I'm going to buy things in the shops. They need it," said Anne Dubois, one of the first customers applauded through the doors by staff at

Paris' vast Galeries Lafayette department store.

"Whether or not there's people here, at least we've got our daily life getting back to normal," said 36-year-old Aurelie, a manager in the L'Oreal section at Galeries Lafayette.

Belgium will allow shops to reopen from December 1, but keep the current semi-lockdown in place possibly until mid-January. The move mirrors similar easing in Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands.

— AFP

CONGRESSMAN
TESTS POSITIVE
FOR VIRUS

Miami, Nov. 28: South Florida Congressman-elect Carlos Gimenez has tested positive for Coronavirus, his campaign announced Friday.

The former Miami-Dade County mayor and his wife, Lourdes, tested positive Thursday for Covid-19 after having mild symptoms, according to a statement. They said they're self-isolating at home, in accordance with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines.

— AP

India, Lanka, Maldives to bolster
maritime security cooperation

Colombo, Nov. 28: Top security officials of India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives on Saturday agreed to further strengthen cooperation and ensure peace for common benefit as they took stock of the current maritime security environment in the region during the high-level trilateral dialogue which was held here after a gap of six years. National Security Advisor Ajit Doval took part in the dialogue along with Sri Lankan Defence Secretary Major Gen (Retd.) Kamal Gunaratne

and Maldivian Defence Minister Mariya Didi. Sri Lanka hosted the fourth National Security Adviser-level trilateral meeting on maritime security cooperation with India and the Maldives.

It took place after six years — the last one was held in New Delhi in 2014. According to a joint statement issued by Sri Lanka's Ministry of Defence, the three countries — recognising the significance of the forum for promoting meaningful cooperation in the Indian Ocean

Region on common issues pertaining to maritime security — took stock of the current maritime security environment in the region.

They discussed mutual cooperation in the areas of Maritime Domain Awareness, Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief, Joint Exercises, Capacity Building, Maritime Security and Threats, Marine Pollution, and Maritime Underwater Heritage, it said. They agreed to further strengthen cooperation in dealing with these chal-

lenges, to ensure peace and security in the region for common benefit, the joint statement said.

The three countries also exchanged views on common security threats and agreed to broad base cooperation by expanding the scope to improve intelligence sharing and include issues like terrorism, radicalisation, extremism, drugs, arms and human trafficking, money laundering, cyber security and effect of climate change on maritime environment, it said.

— PTI

DETERIORATING | CONDITION

PM invites singer to contribute to protected areas expansion initiative

Imran lauds Cher efforts to relocate elephant

Islamabad, Nov. 28: Prime Minister Imran Khan on Friday appreciated efforts of US celebrity singer Cher to relocate Kaavan, dubbed as the world's loneliest elephant, from a Pakistani zoo to Cambodia for better conditions. Cher, who called on the Prime Minister in Islamabad, has been campaigning for retiring Kaavan, the country's only Asian elephant, to an elephant sanctuary. The story of Kaavan, who is 35 years old, attracted world attention after reports went viral about the deteriorat-

ing condition of the zoo in Islamabad where the elephant was kept.

Khan "thanked Cher for her campaign and role in this regard," according to his office. He said that "it was indeed a happy moment for all of us that after giving joy and happiness to the people of Islamabad and Pakistan for about 35 years, Kaavan will now be able to retire with other elephants in a specialised sanctuary in Cambodia."

The Prime Minister also invited the singer to participate and contribute tow-

ards the government's initiative for the expansion of protected areas, to which she agreed.

Cher also tweeted about her meeting with Khan. "Just Came From Meeting To Thank Prime Minister Imran Khan For Making It Possible For Me To Take Kaavan To Cambodia," she said. The Pakistan government on Monday issued a permit to transfer the elephant and sources said Kaavan will be flown to Cambodia on November 29.

The elephant was already handed over to experts who

● **PRESIDENT ARIF** Alvi attended a function at the Marghzar Zoo in Islamabad to mark the handing over of the elephant to experts to finalise its shifting to Cambodia.

were dealing with its transfer. President Arif Alvi along with his wife Samina attended a function on November 24 at the Marghzar Zoo in Islamabad to mark the handing over of the elephant to

Court rejects Don
Pennsylvania suit

Observes voters, not lawyers choose Prez

Washington, Nov. 28: In a fresh setback to US President Donald Trump's efforts to reverse the November 3 presidential election result in the battleground state of Pennsylvania, a court has dismissed a lawsuit filed by his team, observing that "voters, not lawyers choose the president." The judgement came four days after Pennsylvania certified Trump's Democratic rival Joe Biden as the winner in the state which has 20 electoral college votes.

Trump, a Republican, has refused to accept defeat in the November 3 presidential election, and told reporters on Thursday that it would be "hard" to concede to Biden, a Democrat. The President has said that he would leave the White House if the Electoral College declares Biden as the winner, but made clear he is not prepared to "concede" the election. He has launched a slew of lawsuits in key states, but has not provided any evidence to back his claims of electoral fraud.

Many of the lawsuits have been dismissed by courts. The three-judge panel of the 3rd US Circuit Court of Appeals on Friday upheld a previous ruling that dismissed the Trump campaign's request for an injunction in the case in Pennsylvania to challenge the election results and slammed the lawsuit. "Free, fair elections are the lifeblood of our democracy. Charges of unfairness are serious, but calling an election unfair does not make it so. Charges require specific allegations and then proof. We have neither here," Judge Stephanos Bibas said in his order.

"The campaign cannot win this lawsuit," said Bibas, who was appointed by Trump. He authored the order along with two other judges on the bench, Chief Circuit Judge Brooks Smith and Judge Michael Chagares, who were appointed by former Republican president George W. Bush. Trump has refused to concede the November 3 election to Biden and has

Biden to represent
best in us: Harris

Washington, Nov. 28: Joe Biden will be a president who represents the best of America, his deputy and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris has said, asserting that he is a leader the world will respect. Lavishing praise on the 78-year-old US President-elect, Harris on Friday said that Biden will be a president for all Americans.

"Know that" Biden "will be a president who represents the best in us. A leader the world will respect and our children can look up to," Harris said in a tweet.

Harris, 56, the daughter of an Indian immigrant from Chennai, has created history by becoming the first Black American woman to be elected as the

country's Vice President. While Indian-origin politicians have been elected as heads of the state in various parts of the world in the last several decades, from Mauritius to Fiji, Harris as the vice president of the United States would be the most powerful politician ever.

Biden, in a series of tweets, called for unity in the country. "This is our moment — ours together — to write a newer, bolder, more compassionate chapter in the life of our nation," Biden said in a tweet. "Each of us has a responsibility in our own lives to do what we can to slow the virus. Every decision we make matters. Every decision we make can save a life."

— PTI

GUANTANAMO:
SOME MAY BE
RELEASED

Washington, Nov. 28: The oldest prisoner at the Guantanamo Bay detention centre went to his latest review board hearing with a degree of hope, something that has been scarce during his 16 years locked up without charges at the US base in Cuba.

Saifullah Paracha, a 73-year-old Pakistani with diabetes and a heart condition, had two things going for him that he didn't have at previous hearings: A favourable legal development and the election of Joe Biden. President Donald Trump had effectively ended the Obama administration's practice of reviewing the cases of men held at Guantanamo and releasing them if imprisonment was no longer deemed necessary.

— AP

US curbs on Russian, Chinese
firms for Iran missile supportKILLING OF SCIENTIST: KHAMENEI
CALLS FOR 'DEFINITIVE PUNISHMENT'

Washington, Nov. 28: The US has imposed sanctions on four companies from China and Russia for supporting Iran's missile programme that remains a "significant proliferation concern," Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has said.

"The US has sanctioned four entities in China and Russia for their support of Iran's missile programme. We will continue to use all our sanctions tools to prevent Iran from advancing its missile capabilities," Pompeo said.

The companies are Chengdu Best New Materials Co Ltd and Zibo Elim Trade Co. Ltd. in China and Nilco Group, which is also known as Nil Pam Khazar Company and SanTERS Holding and Joint Stock Company Elecon in Russia for transferring sensitive technology and items to Iran's missile programme.

President Donald Trump withdrew the US from the landmark Iran nuclear deal in 2018.

— PTI

Tehran, Nov. 28: Iran's supreme leader on Saturday called for the "definitive punishment" of those behind the killing of a scientist linked to Tehran's disbanded military nuclear programme, a slaying the Islamic Republic has blamed on Israel.

Israel, long suspected of killing scientists a decade ago amid tensions over Tehran's nuclear programme, has yet to comment on the killing Friday of Mohsen Fakhrizadeh.

However, the attack bore the hallmarks of a carefully planned, military-style ambush.

The slaying threatens to renew tensions between the US and Iran in the waning days of President Donald Trump's term, just as President-elect Joe Biden has suggested his administration could return to Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers

from which Trump earlier withdrew.

The Pentagon announced early Saturday that it sent the USS Nimitz aircraft carrier back into the Mideast.

In a statement, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei called Fakhrizadeh "the country's prominent and distinguished nuclear and defensive scientist."

Khamenei said Iran's first priority after the killing was the "definitive punishment of the perpetrators and those who ordered it."

He did not elaborate. Speaking to a meeting of his government's Coronavirus task force earlier Saturday, President Hassan Rouhani blamed Israel for the killing. Rouhani said that Fakhrizadeh's death would not stop its nuclear programme, something Khamenei said as well.

— AP

VIDEO OF COPS
BEATING POC A
SHAME: MACRON

Paris, Nov. 28: French President Emmanuel Macron has said video images showing police officers beating up a Black man "shame us," and condemned violence both by and against the police. Macron asked the government to quickly come up with proposals "to reaffirm the link of confidence that should naturally exist between the French and those who protect them" and to better fight discrimination.

— AP

In Santa's mailbag, a peek into kids' Covid worries

JOHN LEICESTER

Jim, from Taiwan, slipped a face mask inside the greeting card he sent to Santa and marked "I (heart) u." Alina, 5, asked in her Santa letter written with an adult's help that he please use the front door when he drops in, because the back door is reserved for Grandma and Grandpa to minimise their risk of contamination.

And spilling out her heavy little heart to "Dear Father Christmas," 10-year-old Lola wrote that she is wishing "that my aunt never has cancer again and that this virus no longer exists."

"My mother is a caregiver and sometimes I am scared for her," Lola explained, signing off her handwritten letter with, "Take care of yourself Father Christmas, and of the Elves."

The emotional toll wrought by the pandemic is jumping off pages in the deluge of "Dear Santa" letters now pouring into a post office in southwest France that sorts and responds to his mail from around the world.

Arriving by the tens of thousands, the letters, notes and cards — some mere scribbles, other elaborate labours of love in collared pens — are revealing windows into the tender minds of their young authors, and of adult Santa fans also asking for respite and happiness, at the tail end of a year of sickness and tumult.

Like this letter from young Zoe, who limited her requests to a music player and amusement park tickets because "this year has been very different from others because of Covid-19."

"That's why I am not ask-



Envelopes (above) addressed to "Pere Noel" — Father Christmas in French — decorated with love hearts, stickers and glitter, are displayed by postal workers in Libourne, southwest France. A postal worker (right) dressed as Santa, reads letters.

— AP

ing you for many thing(s) to avoid infection," Zoe wrote, signing off with "Merci!" and a heart.

In theory, and often in practice, any letter addressed "Pere Noel" — French for Father Christmas — and slipped into any post box around the world is likely to wend its way to the sorting office in France's Bordeaux region that has been handling his mail since 1962.

Toiling out of sight among vineyards, his secretariat of workers (who call themselves "elves") spends the months of November and

December slicing open envelopes decorated with hearts, stickers and collars, and spreading Santa magic by responding on his behalf.

From the first letters opened at the secretariat from Nov. 12, it quickly became apparent how the pandemic is weighing on children, says the chief elf, Jamila Hajji. Along with the usual pleas for toys and gadgets were also requests for vaccines, for visits from grandparents, for life to return to the way it was. One letter in three mentions the pandemic in



some way, Hajji says.

"The kids have been very affected by Covid, more than we think. They are very worried. And what they want most of all, apart from presents, is really to be able to have a normal life, the end of Covid, a vaccine," she says.

"The letters to Father Christmas are a sort of release for them. All this year, they have been in

lockdowns, they have been deprived of school, deprived of their grandpas and grandmas. Their parents have been occupied by the health crisis and what-not. So we, of course, can tell that the children are putting into words everything they have felt during this period."

"We are like elf therapists," she adds.

Replying to 12,000 letters per day, the team of 60

elves sets aside some that move them or catch the eye. Lola's is among those that have stood out so far, with its heartfelt confession to Santa that "this year more than the others, I need magic and to believe in you." The elves say their sense is that children are confiding worries that they may not have shared with parents.

Emma Barron, a psychiatrist specialising in the mental health of children and adolescents at the Robert Debré paediatric hospital in Paris, says landmark dates, including birthdays and holidays like Christmas, provide structure in childhood. Amid the pandemic's uncertainty, the Dec. 25 anchor of Christmas is particularly important to kids this year.

"Children are quite surprising in that they can adapt to many things," Barron says. "But rhythms, rituals and things like that are an integral part of children's mental stability."

As the letters flood in, it's also clear that this goes beyond childhood. Santa is proving a beacon to adults, too, with some writing to him for the first time since they were kids.

One asked for "a pandemic of love." A 77-year-old lamented that "lockdown is no fun! I live alone." A grandparent asked Santa to "say 'Hi' to my two grandkids that I won't be able to see this year because of the health situation."

"Your mission will be hard this year," wrote Anne-Marie, another adult suppliant. "You will need to sprinkle stars across the entire world, to calm everyone and revive our childhood souls, so we can dream, at last, and let go."

— AP

Rapid Covid tests give lifeline for London orchestra

STUART MCDILL

Maxine Kwok, a violinist in London's oldest symphony orchestra, is delighted that rehearsals have resumed thanks to a rapid, lab-free Covid-19 test that gives the musicians the confidence to work together again.

"It was so difficult not to play for months," Kwok, a member of the London Symphony Orchestra (LSO), said after being tested. "But the moment that we were able to have this kind of testing at this regularity, meaning we could just come back to work and feel comfortable and safe, really made a huge difference for us," Mr Kwok told Reuters.

"I was so thrilled. I can't describe it really," she added ahead of a rehearsal attended by around 40 musicians, all masked and still observing social distancing rules.

Once a month, the musicians provide a phlegm sample by spitting into a small pot which is tested in groups, called bubbles, by Imperial College London spin-off DNANudge with their cartridge-based technology that gives a result in just over an hour. "The bubble test is really relevant when you've got organisations that work together and they need to get back to work," said Professor Chris Toumazou, chief executive of DNANudge, outside the LSO rehearsal studio in east London.

"For example the London Symphony Orchestra, key to the arts industry, they need to rehearse together.

■ **ONCE A month**, the musicians provide a phlegm sample by spitting into a small pot which is tested in groups, called bubbles, by Imperial College London spin-off DNANudge with their cartridge-based technology that gives a result in just over an hour.

■ **TESTING MORE than one** phlegm sample at a time significantly increases testing capacity

Just having one bubble test or a couple of bubble tests for the entire orchestra means they can be tested on the day of rehearsals," he said.

Testing more than one phlegm sample at a time significantly increases testing capacity, maximising the number of people who can be tested over a given period while using fewer testing resources.

"... to know that you start every four weeks with a clean group, everyone negative, is a huge confidence to everyone in the organisation," said Kathryn McDowell, the LSO's Managing Director, adding that other "mitigating measures" such as masks and social distancing also remained important.

DNANudge is providing Britain's national health service with nearly six million rapid Covid-19 test kits at a not-for-profit cost price but it's also making them available to people without symptoms seeking reassurance on whether they could be infectious, including key workers and travellers.

— Reuters

Explainer: Will Covid-19 vaccines protect us?

KATE KELLAND

The frontrunners in the Covid-19 vaccine race have emerged with different success rates for their shots in clinical trials, but what does that mean for the global fight against the pandemic?

US drugmakers Pfizer-BioNtech and Moderna have each said their coronavirus vaccines have an efficacy rate of around 95% and a Russian project touted 92% efficacy for its Sputnik V vaccine.

Britain's AstraZeneca announced an average efficacy rate of 70%, still well above the 50% rate that US regulators have said they want to see before approving a Covid-19 vaccine for use.

WHAT ARE EFFICACY NUMBERS?

If a vaccine has an efficacy of, say, 80%, it means that if 100 people who have not previously been infected by the coronavirus are given the vaccine, on average 80 of them will not get the disease that the virus causes: Covid-19. These rates relate to vaccines administered and monitored in controlled circumstances, such as clinical trials.

DOES THAT MEAN AN INDIVIDUAL'S PROTECTION LEVEL IS THE SAME?

No. A person immunised with a vaccine that has, say, 80% efficacy is very likely to be protected from getting

the disease with symptoms, especially severe ones.

They are also very likely to be protected from asymptomatic disease - but this, depending on the vaccine, may be less certain.

Even with 95% efficacy, there is no absolute guarantee of protection for any particular individual.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN IN THE REAL WORLD?

There is a difference between efficacy rates obtained in clinical trials and effectiveness — the real-world protection rate of a vaccine when it is rolled out. "Efficacy says: 'Does it work?'. Effectiveness says: 'Can it be applied? Can you carry

the efficacy to the people?'," said Marcel Tanner, an epidemiologist and president of Switzerland's Academies of Arts and Sciences.

In the real world, a vaccine's effectiveness can be influenced by multiple, unpredictable factors including, for example: the rate of spread of a virus; how many, or few, people adhere to the optimum dosing schedule and timetable; how individuals' immune systems respond; whether the vaccine was stored at the correct temperature; whether people know, or don't know, if they've been exposed before.

Generally, a vaccine's real-world effectiveness tends to be slightly lower than its efficacy.

WILL THESE VACCINES STOP THE Covid-19?

Experts say this is unlikely. More realistic, they say, is that we will have to live alongside the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Evidence so far suggests that Covid-19 vaccines developed by Pfizer-BioNtech, Moderna and AstraZeneca will help stop people developing the disease. Only AstraZeneca's data, so far, shows signs that its shot may also help prevent transmission of the virus.

"Protection against illness has a value for an individual," said Penny Ward, a visiting professor in pharmaceutical medicine at King's College London. She added, however, that vac-

cines that do not prevent transmission will not halt the pandemic.

"Until the vaccination and other measures result in the virus being close to elimination in any particular country, and worldwide, there will still be a need for distancing, masks and hand washing to reduce transmission further than will be achieved by the vaccine alone," said Stephen Evans, a professor of pharmacoepidemiology at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

"(A) vaccine is no good until people are vaccinated, and even then, it will not result in a situation where all other protective measures can be immediately abandoned."

— Reuters

For Big Tech, Joe Biden brings a new era but no ease in scrutiny

MARCY GORDON

The Obama-Biden administration was a charmed era for America's tech companies — a moment when they were lionised as innovators, hailed as job creators and largely left alone.

Now Joe Biden is coming back, this time as president. But times have changed. The halcyon days of an adoring Washington are unlikely to return when Biden takes the oath of office in January with mounting legislative and regulatory challenges to the industry — including stronger enforcement of antitrust laws — nearly certain to outlast the tenure of President Donald Trump.

"The techlash is in full force," said Eric Goldman, a law professor at Santa Clara University and co-director of its High Tech Law Institute.

In the years since Barack Obama and Biden left the White House, the tech industry's political fortunes have flipped. Facebook, Google, Amazon and Apple have come under scrutiny from Congress, federal regulators, state attorneys general and European authorities. Twitter has found itself in frequent run-ins with lawmakers over its policies for moderating content on its platform. And compa-



nies have seen their political support in Congress erode.

Lawmakers on both sides of the aisle champion stronger oversight of the industry, arguing its massive market power is out of control, crushing smaller competitors and endangering consumers' privacy. They say the companies hide behind a legal shield to allow false information to flourish on their social media networks or to entrench bias.

In steps Biden, who may aim to take a bite out of the dominance of Big Tech and may welcome an opportunity to work with the opposing side to curb the power of a common adversary.

As a presidential contender, Biden said the breakup of big tech companies should be considered.

Dismantling the tech giants is "something we should take a really hard look at," he told The Associated Press in an interview. He said he wants to see quickly crimped the social media companies' long-held legal protections for speech on their platforms. And he singled out Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg for scorn, calling him "a real problem."

The Biden administration is also expected to press forward with the Trump Justice Department's new antitrust lawsuit against Google, though its shape likely could be changed.

But if Biden decides to pursue major legislation to overhaul the laws governing tech competition, he'll have to navigate a tricky congressional and political landscape.

■ **IN THE years** since Barack Obama and Biden left the White House, the tech industry's political fortunes have flipped. Facebook, Google, Amazon and Apple have come under scrutiny from Congress, federal regulators, state attorneys general and European authorities. As a presidential contender, Biden said the breakup of big tech companies should be considered.

Democratic lawmakers in the House, after a sweeping investigation by a Judiciary Committee panel, called last month for Congress to rein in Big Tech, possibly forcing the giants to break up their businesses while making it harder for them to acquire others and imposing new rules to safeguard competition.

Those kinds of mandated breakups through a legislative overhaul would be a radical step for Congress to take and could be a bridge too far for most Republicans.

Though it hasn't been settled, Biden faces the possibility of becoming the first Democrat in modern history to take office without his party controlling Congress. Republicans would retain control of the Senate by winning one of two runoff

elections in Georgia in January. Democrats have already won the House.

Republican control of the Senate would force Biden to curb his ambitions and pursue a different legislative agenda, one rooted in bipartisanship. Legislation on the tech industry could be one area of possible agreement.

"Biden's strength as a senator was exactly trying to broker those kinds of deals," noted Santa Clara University's Goldman.

But what may emerge in the end is a heavy reliance on executive power through more vigorous enforcement of existing antitrust laws, said Jerry Ellig, a former government official and professor at George Washington University's Regulatory Studies Centre. Republican lawmakers are likely to hang together in opposing fundamental changes to the tech industry, which also could affect smaller companies, while Democrats could be pulled in different directions.

The Justice Department's landmark suit last month accused Google of abusing its dominance in online search and advertising to boost profits — the government's most significant attempt to protect competition since its groundbreaking case against Microsoft over 20 years ago.

— AP

British bike maker pedals on, with Brexit deal up in the air

JILL LAWLESS

The team at Brompton Bicycle Ltd. thought they were prepared for Brexit. Bosses at the British firm, which exports hand-made folding bikes to 47 countries, looked at the uncertainty swirling around the UK's decision to leave the European Union and started stock-piling parts.

Yet with just over a month to go until Britain makes a sharp economic break with the EU, Brompton faces uncertainty about supplies and unexpected new competition from China, all amid a global pandemic. Its experience is evidence that Brexit is set to be bumpy, even for businesses that have tried to get ready.

"We'd built up this fantastic stock for the worst-case Brexit scenario," said Brompton chief executive Will Butler-Adams.

Then the coronavirus pandemic struck. Orders dried up as stores closed during the spring lockdown, only to surge once it was lifted.

"We struggled to get the parts back in again," Butler-Adams said. "So we've had to eat into our Brexit stock, which has saved us in many respects. But it now means, having been prudent and got it all organized three years ago,

■ **BROMPTON IS** just one of thousands of British companies bracing for huge changes on Jan. 1, when Britain leaves the economic structures of the 27-nation bloc.

we're now sitting here with a month to go and we've got no Brexit stock and we're facing Brexit."

Brompton is just one of thousands of British companies bracing for huge changes on Jan. 1, when Britain leaves the economic structures of the 27-nation bloc. The U.K. split from the EU politically early this year, but remained part of the bloc's economic embrace during an 11-month transition as the two sides tried to negotiate a new free-trade deal to take effect Jan. 1.

But months of tense and often testy negotiations have not resolved differences on fishing rights, fair-competition rules and how to settle future disputes. Intense talks must produce either a breakthrough or a final breakdown in coming days. If there is no deal, New Year's Day will bring tariffs and other barriers to U.K.-EU trade. The burden will fall most heavily on Britain, which does almost half its trade with the EU.

Things will be smoother with a deal, which would remove quotas and tariffs on goods,

though businesses still face new obstacles and red tape. Brexit means millions of customs declarations to be filled in, thousands of new border staff to check shipments, and construction of vast parking lots for trucks as a new border is built after decades of seamless trade.

Trade expert David Henig of the European Centre for International Political Economy said Jan. 1 marks "the biggest one-day change in trading relations that any country since 1945 will have experienced."

"This is going from a permissive regime, where more or less we can trade anything with the EU that we like, to a permission-based one where we have to check for everything that we want to trade - whether that's goods or services - whether we're allowed to do it," he said.

Supporters of Brexit say any short-term pain will be worth it, because, freed from EU rules, the U.K. can set its own priorities and forge new trading relationships around the world.

But most economists say the economy will suffer. Britain's independent Office for Budget Responsibility says a no-deal Brexit will wipe 2% off U.K. GDP in 2021, on top of the pandemic damage.

— AP

SHORT TAKES

Hamilton takes Bahrain GP pole

Manama: Lewis Hamilton claimed pole position at this weekend's Bahrain Formula One Grand Prix on Saturday after posting a new track record lap.

The newly-crowned world champion finished ahead of Mercedes team-mate Valtteri Bottas and Red Bull's Max Verstappen with a blistering time of one minute, 27.264 seconds at the Bahrain International Circuit.

The pole was Briton Hamilton's 10th of 15 races run so far this season, and a record-extending 98th of his career.

Verstappen's Red Bull team-mate Alex Albon finished fourth, just over a second back, in a qualifying session that saw the likes of Charles Leclerc and Sebastian Vettel fail to make the top 10 places. — *AFP*

Jehan pips Mick for F2 podium

Bahrain: Rising Indian racer Jehan Daruvala earned his maiden Formula 2 podium after pipping championship leader Mick Schumacher in a gripping battle for the third place at the Bahrain Grand Prix support race, here.

Starting eighth on the grid, Jehan gained two places and stayed sixth for a few laps. However, in Lap 5, he lost two places and was forced off the circuit.

Jehan soon overtook multiple race winner Robert Shwartzman to move up to fifth. Race leader Schumacher then took his mandatory pit stop.

Jehan's blistering pace after his own pitstop meant that Schumacher emerged from the pits behind the Indian, who was now running third. — *PTI*

Reds frustrated by VAR, Brighton

Brighton: Liverpool were frustrated by VAR as Pascal Gross's controversial late penalty rescued a dramatic 1-1 draw for Brighton on Saturday.

Jurgen Klopp's side took the lead through Diogo Jota's second half strike after Brighton's Neal Maupay had missed a penalty in the first half.

But Liverpool were stunned in stoppage-time when Andrew Robertson's challenge on Danny Welbeck was ruled a penalty after Stuart Attwell overturned his initial decision.

Gross converted from the spot, leaving Klopp sarcastically applauding the officials at the end of a disappointing week for Liverpool after their shock Champions League defeat at home to Atalanta.

Liverpool went back to the top of the table as a result of their draw, but the champions are just one point ahead of previous leaders Tottenham. — *AFP*

Bundesliga pays tribute to Diego

Wolfsburg: Wolfsburg and Werder Bremen played an eight-goal thriller as Wolfsburg won their Bundesliga game 5-3 after paying tribute to Diego Maradona. The teams held a moment's silence for the Argentina great, before producing uncharacteristic efficiency in a show of attacking soccer.

Wout Weghorst scored twice to help unbeaten Wolfsburg climb to fifth place at the start of the ninth round on Friday.

Both sides had the fewest goals in the Bundesliga, just 14 in eight games involving Wolfsburg, while Bremen had the second fewest at 20. — *AP*

Live on TV

CRICKET

Australia vs India: 2nd ODI from 9:10 am on Sony Six, Ten 1, HD

South Africa vs England: Second T20 from 6 pm on Star Sports 1

FORMULA ONE

Bahrain Grand Prix: Main race from 7.35 pm on Star Sports Select 2

FOOTBALL

English Premier League: Southampton vs Man United from 7.30 pm; Chelsea vs Tottenham from 10 pm; Arsenal vs Wolves from 12.45 am (Monday) on Star Sports Select 1

Indian Super League: Jamshedpur vs Odisha from 4.50 pm; Chennaiyin vs Kerala Blasters from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

Italian League: Lazio vs Udinese from 5 pm; Milan vs Fiorentina from 7.30 pm; Cagliari vs Spezia from 10.30 pm on Sony Ten 2, HD

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TIME TO PONDER

With no Plan 'B' in place, India need their 'A' game to save ODI series

Sydney, Nov. 28: India's battered bowling unit will have little time to regroup and limited resources at its disposal in a desperate bid to perform a redemption act and save the ODI series against a turbo-charged Australia in the second game here on Sunday.

It wasn't just about the margin of defeat — by 66 runs — but the manner in which the home team exposed India's vacant cupboard of all-rounders that will give Virat Kohli and Ravi Shastri numerous points to ponder.

Hardik Pandya's 76-ball-90 was at best a good innings but just like the Champions Trophy final in 2017, the sparkling knock was never going to help India win the contest.

Adding insult to injury the was Pandya's frank admission that he is not bowling anytime soon and even if he rolls his arm over, it is likely to be in 20-over World Cups.

So with no back-up all-rounders or a plan B in place, India will have to execute their plan A perfectly.

That leaves Kohli with bowlers who can't bat and a top-order where none can bowl. Kohli did bowl an over or two but that is history as far as the skipper is concerned.

With Australia's top three — captain Aaron Finch, David Warner and Steve Smith — hitting the straps right away, Jasprit Bumrah and company will have no option but to pick up the pieces and give a better account of themselves on a strip that promises to be a belter.

It is highly unlikely that India's combination will change unless both Yuzvendra Chahal and Navdeep Saini are declared unfit.

The duo collectively conceded 172 runs in 20 overs between them and the wiry wrist-spinner did leave the field after sustaining an on-field injury just after the completion

BAIRSTOW TAKES ENGLAND HOME IN OPENING T20

Cape Town, Nov. 28: Jonny Bairstow brought England home with an unbeaten 86 from 48 balls against South Africa to win the first Twenty20 by five wickets on Friday.

Bairstow won it with back-to-back boundaries, a four and then a big six over wide long-on, to take England to 183-5 and past South Africa's 179-6 with four balls to spare.

England was behind the game through most of their chase despite Bairstow's boundary hitting until the 17th over, when Bairstow and captain Eoin Morgan plundered 28 off left-arm seamer Beuran Hendricks. The game was the first international cricket fixture in South Africa since the coronavirus outbreak.

Brief scores: S. Africa 179/6 in 20 overs (F. Du Plessis 58, H. Van der Dussen 37; S. Curran 3-28) lost to England 183/5 in 19.2 overs (J. Bairstow 86 not out, B. Stokes 37; G. Linde 2-20).



India captain Virat Kohli (right) talks with teammates before the start of their one-day international match against Australia at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Friday. — *AFP*

of his spell.

Saini, on the other hand, has back spasms and Thangarasu Natarajan has been inducted in the 50-over squad as a cover.

In case they are ruled out, Shardul Thakur, with decent batting abilities could replace Saini and Kuldeep Yadav's inclusion will be a forced change.

For Australia, it is possible that highly-rated all-rounder Cameron Green will be rewarded with an ODI cap as Marcus Stoinis picked up a side strain during the first game.

— *PTI*

HOLDING SAYS INDIA MISSING DHONI'S SKILL

New Delhi, Nov. 28: West Indies fast bowling great Michael Holding feels that despite a star-studded batting line-up, the Indian team is missing the "skill and character" that the peerless Mahendra Singh Dhoni used to display during big run chases.

The Indian team looked completely out of sorts as a unit in the opening ODI against Australia.

After a listless bowling display that helped the home side reach 374 for 6, the Men in Blue crumbled under pressure, slumping to a 66-run defeat. "It was always going to be difficult for India to chase that down. One thing India will struggle with is the loss of Mahendra Singh Dhoni," Holding said in a chat show *'Holding Nothing Back'*.

The 66-year-old further said that India missed the composure and control of Dhoni, who retired from international cricket in August this year.

"Dhoni comes in to this Indian batting order halfway down and he usually takes control while chasing. India have chased so well in the past with MS Dhoni in the team." — *PTI*

Smith enjoys smacking Indian bowling line-up

Sydney, Nov. 28: Australian batsman Steve Smith found his "rhythm" with a cracking hundred against India in the first ODI but admitted that there wasn't much pressure unlike other times.

Smith struck 105 off 66 balls in Australia's lop-sided 66-run win in the first ODI.

"I just found a nice rhythm again," Smith told reporters while crediting his skipper and fellow centurion Aaron Finch for setting up a nice platform with a 156-run opening stand with David Warner.

"It was just see-ball, hit-ball and obviously the foundation had been set so I could be quite aggressive," Smith said.

Having found his "hands" as he had said prior to the match, Smith was happy that he could decide which



Steve Smith

bowlers to attack even though the entire Indian bowling line-up was at the receiving end of his onslaught.

"I picked my bowlers and where I wanted to hit them, and just played some good shots to the areas of my strengths."

By his own admission, the pressure was less unlike some other times

when quick wickets have fallen around him.

"There wasn't a whole lot of pressure. Probably, at other times, when I have batted my best, it's been when the team has been under a bit of pressure and I have had to play almost an anchor role to help us get a total," the former skipper said.

— *PTI*

INDIA FINED FOR SLOW OVER-RATE IN SYDNEY ODI

Dubai, Nov. 28: The Indian cricket team was fined 20 per cent of its match fee for maintaining a slow over-rate against Australia in the series opening first ODI in Sydney.

India took an unprecedented four hours and six minutes to complete their 50 overs during their 66-run loss in the first ODI.

ICC match referee David Boon imposed the sanction after India was ruled to be one over short of the target after time allowances were taken into consideration.

"In accordance with Article 2.22 of the ICC Code of Conduct for Players and Player Support Personnel, which relates to minimum over-rate offences, players are fined 20 per cent of their match fee for every over their side fails to bowl in the allotted time," the ICC said in a statement on Saturday. — *PTI*

Hyderabad FC, BFC split points

Margao, Nov. 28: Hyderabad FC settled for their second successive draw, a stalemate, in the Indian Super League, splitting points with Bengaluru FC here on Saturday.

Getting four points from two outings is best start in the league for Hyderabad.

However, it was a frustrating evening for Bengaluru FC, who are yet to taste a win this season.

The two sides showed attacking intent from the word go and BFC had their first attempt as early as the fifth minute. Ashique Kuruniyan tried his luck from a distance but his effort took a deflection before being collected by Hyderabad custodian Subrata Paul.

This turned out to be the only attempt at goal in the first session.

Hyderabad's adamant defending frustrated Bengaluru, who struggled to take the ball up to their

attacking trio of Sunil Chhetri, Kristian Opseth and Udanta Singh. Trying to find an alternative, Bengaluru engaged in long-range shots, which proved futile.

Going forward, Hyderabad were the better side in the first half. The men in yellow nearly took the lead in the 25th minute from a Lluís Sastre set-piece. Bengaluru keeper Gurpreet Singh Sandhu denied Aridane Santana's header with a full-stretch save to keep the scores level.

Hyderabad pushed Bengaluru deep in their territory with Halicharan Narzary, Joel Chianese and Santana making regular inroads.

However, the visitors suffered a blow before the break as their foreigners — Chianese and Sastre limped off the pitch with Yasir and Sharma replacing the duo. — *PTI*



Hyderabad FC's Aridane Santana (left) attempts a header against Bengaluru FC in an ISL match in Fatorda. — *ISL*

DELHI | HALF MARATHON

Belihu, Gemechu eye double delight

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, NOV. 28

Two-time winners Andamlak Belihu and Tsehay Gemechu are not only ready to defend their titles, but are also determined to break the course record this year at the Delhi Half Marathon here on Sunday.

Ethiopia's Belihu will be bidding for his third successive crown but the course he will cover is radically different to the one he conquered in 2018 and 2019.

To comply with prevailing health-related measures, the runners will cover around 4.5 kilometres, starting at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium, and then embark on two loops of, approximately, six kilometres each, before returning to the finish outside the stadium by the same route.

The event will be conducted in a bio-secure bubble. "Last year, I was just four seconds outside the course record (59:06 set by Ethiopia's Guye Adola in 2014) and I think I can bridge the difference," Belihu said.

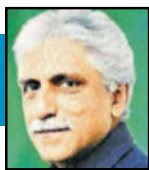
Belihu's compatriot Gemechu rewrote the women's course record when winning in both 2018

and 2019 and it currently stands at 66:00. She is raring to go even faster this year. However, the defending champion will face a strong challenge from fellow Ethiopian and world half marathon record holder Ababel Yeshaneh and women's world marathon record holder Brigid Kosgei from Kenya.

BUGATHA, PARUL WILL LEAD INDIAN CHARGE
Defending champion Srinu Bugatha and Parul Chaudhary will spearhead the local challenge in the Indian elite men's and women's categories respectively. Apart from Mumbai Marathon 2020 winner Bugatha, Abhishek Pal, Avinash Sable and Pradeep Singh are other renowned names in the elite men's field.

The winner of the half marathon race at the Mumbai Marathon earlier this year, Parul finished second in the last two editions of the Delhi Half Marathon but this year she will look to change the colour of her medal. Sanjivani Jadhav, Monika Athare and Chinta Yadav are the other elite athletes to look out for in the women's section.

Lack of transparency shows Indian cricket in poor light



Ayaz Memon
Over The Top

The thrashing handed out by Australia in the first ODI holds out ominous portents for the Indian team on this tour. Virat Kohli and Co were outplayed comprehensively in every department of the game.

While the team is struggling Down Under, controversy over Rohit Sharma's injury has been further stoked with last week's developments. This has significant ramifications for Indian cricket and must be addressed.

On the eve of the first ODI, skipper Virat Kohli

opened up on Rohit's absence in Australia, saying there was "lack of clarity" on how the matter had been handled.

According to Kohli, before the selection committee meeting, he was informed by mail about Rohit's hamstring injury suffered during the Indian Premier League, and that he would be unavailable for the Australia tour.

Statements were then also made by Shastri and BCCI President Sourav Ganguly, advising Rohit from taking undue risks.

After that, however, Rohit played in the play-

offs for Mumbai Indians and led his team to a fifth title, scoring a valuable half century in the final.

In the press conference before the first ODI, Kohli spoke about his surprise at not seeing Rohit travelling with the team to Australia subsequently.

"We thought he would be on the flight with us, we had no information why he wasn't" said the Indian captain.

Intriguingly, wicket-keeper Wriddhiman Saha, also recovering from an injury during the IPL, was on the flight.

"It definitely would have been helpful if they (Rohit and Ishant) would have been here to do the rehab like Saha," said captain Kohli.

After the IPL, Rohit had returned to India and went to the NCA in Bangalore

for treatment and rehab. When asked about the stellar batsman's fitness around this time, BCCI president Ganguly said he was "70 per cent fit."

A few days later, in an interview to PTI, Rohit said his hamstring was fine, that he wanted to get it nice and strong and could be in Australia for the Test series.

Meanwhile, in Australia Shastri said that if Rohit and Ishant were not on the flight in the next 4-5 days, they might not be able to play the Tests as they'd be spending time in quarantine instead of playing practice matches to prove fitness and form.

Following Kohli's press conference before the first match, the BCCI went hurriedly into damage control, putting out an urgent press release (around midnight IST!) Thursday, to

clarify matters around Rohit and Ishant, but making it even more confusing instead.

On Ishant, the BCCI said while he had recovered completely from the side strain suffered before the IPL began, he's still building up his workload for full Test fitness and would miss the series versus Australia.

On Rohit there was a quirky twist, the BCCI saying he had come back to India from UAE to be with his ailing father, after which he had gone to the NCA for rehab and that he would be next assessed on December 11 if he can travel to Australia for the Test.

Technically, Rohit will miss the first two Tests (starting December 17 and December 26) even if he is cleared to travel December 11 itself since Australia's

Covid rules demand a 14-day quarantine period.

The core question, however, is: If Rohit wasn't fit, why was his name added to the Test squad, and if he was named in the squad, why isn't he in Australia?

The twists and turns in this story show how major constituents in the Indian cricket establishment (and here we are talking about the BCCI president Sourav Ganguly, selectors, chief coach, NCA headed by Rahul Dravid) pulling in different directions at different times.

Lack of transparency, ham-handedness in tackling such problems, with glaring hints of internecine strife show up Indian cricket in very poor light, never mind how rich and powerful it may be.

That said, one can't absolve Rohit and Kohli either from confounding

the matter further. How difficult was it to pick up the phone, speak to each other? This could have prevented the matter becoming a messy rigmorale.

Every now and then, one hears of differences between the two. But this is hardly uncommon in sport, and I can draw up a laundry list of personality clashes among major players across sports.

For differences not to become all consuming, what's important is sublimation of individual ego, and establishing a relationship that works towards a common cause.

With mutual accommodation, these two stellar players could have resolved the issue to their own, and everyone else's satisfaction. Not the least the cricket-mad, trusting Indian fan, now left bewildered.