

SHORT TAKES

JOINT WINNERS
FOR KAMALADEVI
CHATTOPADHYAY
NIF BOOK PRIZE

Bangalore: The jury of the Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay NIF Book Prize 2020 has for this year announced two winners - Amit Ahuja, for *Mobilizing the Marginalized: Ethnic Parties without Ethnic Movements*, and Jairam Ramesh for *A Chequered Brilliance: The Many Lives of V.K. Krishna Menon*. The two winners were selected from a diverse shortlist of six books covering a century of modern Indian history and encompassing several genres. The Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay Book Prize recognises and celebrates excellence in non-fiction writings on modern/contemporary India by writers from all nationalities. The winners were selected by a six-member jury panel including political scientist and author Niraja Gopal Jayal (Jury Chair), historian and critically acclaimed author Ramachandra Guha; entrepreneur and author Nandan Nilekani; historian and author Srinath Raghavan; historian and author Nayanjot Lahiri; and Manish Sabharwal, Chairman, Teamlease Services. The 2020 winners will share the prize money of ₹15 lakh for their respective books and will each receive the Book Prize trophy.

2 held for attacking
photojournalist

Ghaziabad: The Ghaziabad Police has arrested two people in connection with the attack on a Press Trust of India photojournalist and his fiancée in the district two days ago. Ravi Choudhary and his fiancée were on a motorcycle passing through the Ganga Canal Road in Muradnagar police station area when some miscreants in an SUV had picked up a fight with the couple on Monday. The local police had initially refused to lodge an FIR in the case but later assured action in the matter, according to Chaudhary, whose photograph of a policeman hitting a protesting farmer with a baton recently got widespread attention. "The accused were arrested on Wednesday on a road leading from the Ganga Canal to Niwari. Those held are being sent to jail while a search is on for the other accused in the case," Ghaziabad senior superintendent of police Kalanidhi Naithani said. "Those held have been identified as Ankit (21) and Nikki Singh (22), both students and natives of Meerut district in western UP," Naithani said. The police have also impounded the Bolero used in the incident by the accused. — PTI

2 arrested for
attempted murder

Ghaziabad: Two men were arrested on Wednesday morning for allegedly attempting to murder a friend who had objected to their illicit relations with his wife and sister, police said. The arrested accused have been identified as Nadeem and Ajay. A case was registered against them at Bhojpur police station on Tuesday for shooting at their friend Manoj Verma in a bid to kill him, the police said. Ajay, Nadeem and Manoj were living together in a flat in Nangloi in Delhi. The accused duo visited Manoj's home during the coronavirus-induced lockdown. Later, the duo tried to kill Manoj after he objected to Ajay's advances to his sister and Nadeem's illicit relationship with his wife. The duo were arrested and a country-made pistol and two live cartridges were recovered from them. — PTI

Unidentified body
found in Noida drain

Noida: The body of an unidentified man was found in a drain located at the Noida Special Economic Zone (NSEZ) here on Thursday morning, police said. "The body has been fished out of the 'ganda nullah' and the deceased appears to have been around 32-year-old," a police spokesperson said. Efforts are on to ascertain the identity of the man and the body has been sent for post mortem, the spokesperson said. Further legal proceedings are being carried out at the local Phase 2 police station, the official added. — PTI



Farmers at Singhu border during their ongoing protest against the Centre's new farm laws in New Delhi on Thursday. The Delhi Traffic Police on Thursday took to Twitter to inform commuters about routes closed for traffic in view of thousands of protesters camping at the city's borders. Those travelling to Haryana can take Jharoda (only single carriageway), Daurala, Kapashera, Badusarai, Rajokri NH-8, Bijwasan/Bajghera, Palam Vihar and Dundahehra borders, the police said in a tweet. — PTI

CRPF constable accuses DIG
Khajan Singh of raping her

1986 Asiad silver medallist denies charges, FIR filed

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 10

The Delhi police has filed an FIR based on the complaint of a 30-year-old Central Reserve Police Force wrestler, who has accused the paramilitary's chief sports officer and Arjuna awardee Khajan Singh and coach Surjit Singh of sexual harassment, rape, and intimidation for over three years.

However, Khajan Singh, a DIG-rank officer in the force, has rubbished the allegations by the CRPF constable who has won several medals at national and international levels. No immediate comment was available from Surjit Singh.

According to the FIR, the constable has also accused Khajan and Surjit of running a "sex scandal" in the force and alleged that they have



Khajan Singh

"many accomplices."

Khajan Singh, who won a silver medal at the 1986 Seoul Asian Games in the 200 metre butterfly event, which was India's first medal in swimming at the event since the 1951 edition, told a news agency, "These allegations are absolutely false. This has been done just to spoil my image."

In the FIR registered at the Baba Haridas police station on December 3,

the complainant, who joined the force in 2010, alleged that the two sexually harassed female constables and later used them as "their accomplices."

"They secretly took my nude photos while having bath. I was blackmailed through these photographs and they threatened that if I did not talk to them, they would circulate my photos and make it viral on the internet," the constable alleged in the FIR.

CRPF spokesperson Moses Dhinakaran said, "FIR of rape charges was filed against DIG Khajan Singh by a female constable. The CRPF has taken a serious note of the complaint and has already constituted an Internal Complaint Committee headed by an inspector general level officer to conduct an enquiry."

Third wave of Covid in Delhi 'on the wane': Jain

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 10

The third wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in the national capital is not over yet but it is "definitely on the wane," Delhi health minister Satyendra Jain said on Thursday.

Delhi recorded 1,575 new Covid-19 cases on Thursday, the lowest in over three months, even as the positivity rate dipped to below 3 per cent.

"The number of cases is falling and the death count

in a day is the lowest in the last 40 days. The situation has improved and we can definitely say the third wave of the pandemic here is on the wane. It is not over, but on the wane," Mr Jain told reporters on Thursday.

The city recorded 2,463 cases and 50 fatalities on Wednesday, the lowest number of deaths in a single day since November 1.

Talking about the plans for Covid-19 vaccination, he said that healthcare

3 killed as speeding car
falls into drain in Noida

Noida, Dec. 10: Three people, including a teenager, died after their car fell into a drain in Uttar Pradesh's Noida early on Thursday, police said.

There were five passengers in the hatchback when the accident took place near Salarpur village under Sector-49 police station limits, they said.

They were on their way to attend a wedding-related function in Garhi Chaukhandi village in Noida, police said.

"The Maruti Celerio fell straight into a drain near

Salarpur apparently due to high speed. The passengers were eventually taken out and sent to a hospital where three of them were declared dead," according to a police statement.

The deceased have been identified as Preet (14), Satyaveer Singh (22) and Kuldeep (27), police said, adding that the two others, who were injured in the accident, are undergoing treatment.

The bodies have been sent for post mortem, police said. — PTI

Realtor, associate arrested in
Burari double murder caseAGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 10

A property dealer and his associate have been arrested in connection with the murder of two men during a fight between both the parties in north Delhi's Burari area, police said on Thursday.

The accused have been identified as Anil Kumar and Arman Ali, they said. According to police, Kumar is a history-sheeter.

A total of 23 cases of murder, dacoity, robbery and snatching, among others, have been regis-

tered against him at the Shalimar Bagh Police Station. Arman Ali, Sai Hassan and Saddam are the associates of Kumar, who is a property dealer, they said. The murders took place Wednesday evening in West Kamal Vihar area of Burari. The victims, Anuj (22) and Anand (20), sustained bullet injuries

Sisodia's residence attacked
by BJP goons, alleges AAP

Saffron party refutes claim, says protest was peaceful

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 10

Delhi BJP workers staged a protest near deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia's residence on Thursday over an alleged "conspiracy" to "kill" mayors and leaders of party ruled municipal corporations staging indefinite dharna at the chief minister's residence demanding payment of dues from the Kejriwal government.

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), meanwhile, claimed that Mr Sisodia's house was "attacked by BJP goons."

The Delhi BJP vice president, Ashok Goel, who led the protest at Mr Sisodia's residence, however, refuted the allegations saying that their protest was peaceful.

Chief minister Arvind Kejriwal condemned the attack on Mr Sisodia's residence. "I strongly condemn the systematic, organised, and violent attack on deputy CM Manish Sisodia's house. The goons entered his house in the presence of the police when he was away. Why is BJP getting so desperate by the day in Delhi?" Mr Kejriwal tweeted.

Addressing a press conference, AAP spokesperson Saurabh Bhardwaj alleged that the police did not stop the BJP workers from entering Mr Sisodia's residence and even removed the barricades around his house.

Mr Bhardwaj also played a purported video of the outside area of Mr Sisodia's residence, where a group of people can be seen forcefully entering inside.

"BJP goons attacked the house of deputy chief minister while he was not at home. The Delhi police helped the BJP goons in this act," Mr Bhardwaj



BJP workers protest outside Delhi deputy CM Manish Sisodia's residence in New Delhi on Thursday. — PTI

added. AAP MLA Atishi said that this is the first time in the history of Indian politics that the goons of a particular political party (BJP) attacked the family members of a sitting deputy chief minister with the support of the police.

Ms Atishi alleged that to exact revenge on the chief minister and the deputy

chief minister—as the people of Delhi rejected the BJP in the last election—the home minister planned this attack.

Reacting to the charges, Mr Goel said that the AAP leaders were trying to divert attention from the "conspiracy" to "kill" BJP mayors and other corporate leaders. "We protested outside Mr Sisodia's residence to make it clear that

the BJP workers are capable of answering any form of challenge," Mr Goel added. He asserted that the mayors and other leaders of municipal corporations were fighting for justice for the people and employees of municipal corporations.

Workers of Delhi BJP's Yuva and SC Morchas led by Mr Goel staged the protest at the deputy chief minister's residence. Delhi BJP workers tried to get past a police barricade near Mr Sisodia's residence on Mathura Road following which a few of them were detained.

Hansraj Hans joins mayors'
protest outside CM residenceAGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 10

On fourth day of mayors indefinite dharna outside chief minister Arvind Kejriwal's residence, BJP candidates for 2020 Delhi assembly polls joined them to extended solidarity. Northwest Delhi MP Hans Raj Hans and leader of opposition in Delhi assembly, Rambir Singh Bidhuri also visited the BJP councilors who have been staying outside chief minister's residence in

open since Monday. All the three mayors are seeking release of due funds in tune of Rs 13,000 crore to three municipal corporations.

North, South and East Delhi mayor, Jai Prakash, Anamika and Nirmal Jain along with senior party councillors spent three night outside the gate of chief minister residence and were seen cleaning the premises in the morning. Mattress and blankets are arranged for protesting mayors and other BJP

councillors to beat the cold under open sky during the night.

Mr Prakash said that the protest had the support of municipal employees, who have been suffering as they hadn't been paid for months due to funds crisis.

"It is not our personal fight but a fight for the rights of the corporation employees who provide basic amenities to the Delhiites. We will continue the dharna democratically," he said.

Noida Covid
tally 23,838
with 107
new cases

Noida, Dec. 10: Uttar Pradesh's Gautam Buddha Nagar recorded 107 new Covid-19 cases on Thursday that pushed the district's infection tally to 23,838, official data showed.

Active cases in the district rose to 937 from 918 the previous day, according to the data released by the UP Health Department for a 24-hour period.

The number of active cases in Gautam Buddha Nagar is the fifth highest in the state. On the bright side, 88 more patients got discharged during the period, taking the overall recoveries to 22,816, the fifth highest in the state.

The death toll in Gautam Buddha Nagar is 85 and the district's mortality rate is 0.35 per cent. The recovery rate of patients has reached 95.71 per cent, the statistics showed.

The number of active Covid-19 cases in UP rose to 20,801 from 20,658 on Wednesday while the overall recoveries reached 5,32,349. — PTI

▶ **DELHI RECORDED 1,575 new Covid-19 cases on Thursday, the lowest in over three months, even as the positivity rate dipped to below 3 per cent**

workers and the frontline staff will be administered the vaccine first followed by the elderly and then others. "If we have vaccine availability, we can vaccinate the entire population in a week's time. We have the preparations

ready," he added. He reiterated that the overall positivity rate has been less than five per cent for the last seven days. "Also, the RT-PCR positivity rate is now down to six per cent. Since early November, there has been a fall of about 80 per cent in positivity rate, which is a satisfactory trend," Mr Jain said.

When asked about non-Covid-19 patients needing ICU beds, he said, "We will review the situation. But ICU beds can't be managed

overnight if cases suddenly increase. So, we have to see the trend stabilise first."

He asserted that over 13,000 beds are available for Covid-19 patients in Delhi, which is "not there in any other city in the country," adding that 2,500 ICU beds are also available for them.

When asked how many people have registered for the Covid-19 vaccine, he said that the number was about 2 lakh till Wednesday.

Man stabs himself to death
after argument with familyAGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 10

A 32-year-old man allegedly committed suicide by stabbing himself with a knife in his chest following an argument with his family, police said on Thursday.

Udai Mehta, a resident of Sunder Vihar in Delhi, was an engineer by profession and was working from home amid the Covid-19 pandemic, they said. The incident took place at Paschim Vihar on Wednesday night.

▶ **UDAI MEHTA, a resident of Sunder Vihar in Delhi, was an engineer by profession and was working from home amid the Covid-19 pandemic, they said. The incident took place at Paschim Vihar on Wednesday night.**

Deputy commissioner of police (Outer) A. Koan said during enquiry, it was revealed that an argument occurred in his family on some petty issue due to which the man threatened his family

members who were in his room that he would hurt himself with a kitchen knife if they didn't move out from his room immediately.

"As they were trying to console him, he became more aggressive and stabbed himself in the chest in front of his family. His family rushed him to a nearby hospital where he was declared brought dead," he said.

Inquest proceedings have been initiated and further investigation is in progress, the DCP added.

Delhi govt to hotels, clubs: Ensure
CCTVs are in working conditionAGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 10

The Delhi government has ordered hotels, clubs, and restaurants to ensure that CCTV cameras installed on their premises are in working condition, warning to take stern action including cancellation of licence in case of violation.

The order issued by the excise department earlier this week noted that instances of non-functional surveillance cameras came to the notice of the inspection teams.

The CCTV cameras help to check violations like

serving of alcohol to underage people, law and order situations, and any other irregularities that violate the conditions of the licence, said an official of the department.

"Instances have come to the notice of the department where closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras installed at hotels, clubs, and restaurants were found to be non-functional during inspection," the deputy commissioner of the excise department said in the order.

The non-functional CCTV cameras hamper inspection work due to

unavailability of footage for checking violations at these establishments by the excise department teams, the official said.

"In many cases, the hotel and restaurant staff cite non-working cameras to avoid providing footage demanded by inspecting teams to check violations," he said.

The order stated that all hotels, clubs, and restaurants are directed to ensure that CCTV cameras are installed at appropriate locations within and outside the licensed premises and record all activities without any break.

SHORT TAKES

'Drone movement over IB in Jammu'

Jammu: A drone was spotted flying over the International Border (IB) in Jammu and Kashmir's R.S. Pura sector, BSF officials said on Thursday. Alert BSF troops guarding the IB at a border outpost fired on the drone on Wednesday night, forcing it to return back, the officials said. There have been instances of Pakistan, its army and intelligence agencies using drones along the IB and LoC to ferry weapons, ammunition, explosive material and narcotics into Jammu and Kashmir in the past six months. On November 29, alert security forces deployed on the IB with Pakistan spotted a drone in Arnia sector of Jammu district. On November 21, drone movement was noticed in Mendhar sector along the LoC amid a surge in ceasefire violations by the Pakistani Army, according to sources. — PTI

Nod to lawyers for travel in peak hrs

Mumbai: The Railways on Thursday announced that it has decided to permit practising lawyers and their registered clerks to travel by local trains here during morning peak hours. Earlier, lawyers and clerks had not been permitted to travel in local trains during morning peak hours between 8 am and 11 am and from 4 pm to 7 pm in the evening, as part of restrictions imposed in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. According to a joint statement issued by the Central and Western Railway, they are now permitted to travel by suburban trains during the course of the day, every day, except during the evening peak hours from 4 pm to 7 pm. The railway authorities have also urged passengers who have been permitted to travel in suburban trains to follow medical and social protocols as mandated for Covid-19. — PTI

Cop saves woman attempting suicide

Noida: A police constable in Uttar Pradesh's Greater Noida on Thursday jumped into a brimming canal and saved a drowning woman, who had tried to commit suicide over fights with her husband, officials said. Constable Irfan Ali jumped into Khareli canal and swam about 100 metres to save the 30-year-old woman, a labourer, who had fallen unconscious, they said. Impressed by the constable's feat, police commissioner Alok Singh lauded Ali's selfless service and announced a monetary reward for him for saving a citizen's life. Congratulations braveheart for putting citizen before self. He is being immediately rewarded with ₹20,000 and also recommended for a suitable commendation, Mr Singh tweeted. — PTI

Makeup artist held with cocaine

Mumbai: The Narcotics Control Bureau on Thursday arrested Bollywood makeup artist and hair stylist Suraj Godambe and seized cocaine from him in Mumbai, an official said. The NCB, which is conducting a probe into the alleged Bollywood-drugs nexus, apprehended Godambe after a raid, the official said. Godambe is a popular makeup artist and hair stylist and has worked with some big production houses, he said. He will be produced before a court later in the day, the official said. The NCB has been conducting searches in Mumbai since Tuesday and has arrested two persons in connection with a drugs case related to actor Sushant Singh Rajput's death. — PTI

Modi will address Ficci event Dec. 12

New Delhi: PM Narendra Modi will deliver the inaugural address at the Ficci's 93rd annual general meeting and annual convention on Saturday via video-conferencing. He will also inaugurate the virtual Ficci annual expo 2020, the PMO said in a statement on Thursday. The Ficci's annual convention will be held virtually on December 11, 12 and 14, and its theme this year is "Inspired India". The event will see the participation of several ministers, captains of industry, international experts and other luminaries, the statement said. — PTI

India, Nepal flights to resume under air bubble arrangement

Ops to start with 1 flight daily from each side between Delhi & Kathmandu

New Delhi, Dec. 10: India and Nepal have decided to resume flight services under a bilateral air bubble arrangement, authoritative sources said on Thursday, in reflection of efforts to restore normalcy in ties that came under severe strain following a bitter border row.

Initially, the service will start with one flight daily from each side between Delhi and Kathmandu, they said.

The decision to resume the flight service comes two weeks after foreign secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla visited Kathmandu during which he held extensive talks with the political brass.

Nepalese foreign minis-

ter Pradeep Gyawali is likely to visit India in the next three weeks.

"India and Nepal have decided to open flights under a bilateral bubble arrangement, as we have done with several countries," said a source.

The flights between the two countries were suspended following the outbreak of coronavirus pandemic.

"We had proposed to

Nepal some time back and Nepal has cleared it now," said a source. It is not immediately known when the flight service will be started. The sources said Shringla, during his visit to Nepal on November 26 to 27 had highlighted the importance of people-to-people connectivity in sync with the special relationship between the two countries.

"We are starting the service with Indian and Nepalese nationals and holders of Overseas Citizenship of India and Persons of Indian Origin (PIO) cards of all nationalities, and all valid Indian visa holders except tourist visa," the source said.

From the Indian side, the flights will be operated by Air India which, in normal times, had a daily flight between Delhi and Kathmandu, the sources said.

"Air bubble arrangement will follow medical protocols as is being done with other countries which includes RT PCR test report of 72 hours prior to travel," the source said.

The ties between India and Nepal came under strain after defence minister Rajnath Singh inaugurated an 80-km-long strategically crucial road connecting the Lipulekh pass with Dharchula in Uttarakhand on May 8.

— PTI

ROSHNI ACT

No coercive move against landholders, J&K tells SC

PARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, DEC. 10

The Supreme Court on Thursday asked the Jammu and Kashmir high court to consider the review petitions seeking reconsideration of its October 9, 2020, judgment which had held that the Roshni Act is unconstitutional and had thrown out the land ownership claims of the people occupying the government land.

As a bench headed by Justice N.V. Ramana and also comprising Justice Surya Kant and Justice Aniruddha Bose asked the high court to decide the review petitions listed before it on December 21, solicitor-general Tushar Mehta assured the court that no coercive action will be taken against the petitioners till the hearing by the top court.

Mr Mehta told the court that he will take instructions on what is being done by the J&K administration in the wake of the high court verdict.

Observing that it would not be appropriate to hear the petitions challenging the October 9 order of the high court till high court considers and decides the review petitions, the court today directed the listing of the batch of petitions in the last week of January 2021.

Directing the J&K administration to take back the land from the beneficiaries under the Roshni Act, the HC had asked the UT administration to make public names of the allottees.

Scindia lobbies for loyalists in MP ministry, corporations

RABINDRA NATH
CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, DEC. 10

Senior BJP leader and RS member Jyotiraditya Scindia has started lobbying with the party leadership to accommodate his loyalists in the state ministry as well as the organisation.

Mr Scindia who is arriving in Bhopal on Friday on a day's visit to the state is scheduled to meet chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan here to discuss with him on the issue, sources close to him told this newspaper on Thursday.

This would be Mr Scindia's second meeting with Mr Chouhan in the last fortnight.



Sources said Mr Scindia was keen to re-induct two former ministers, Govind Singh Rajput and Tulsi Silawat, in the Shivraj cabinet as soon as possible.

The two former ministers, considered staunch loyalists of Mr Scindia, had resigned from the Shivraj government on October 27 when their 6-month-tenure as non-MLA ministers ended.

They have been elected

to the house in the November 3 Assembly byelections.

"The delay in their re-induction in the state ministry has caused unease in the Scindia camp. Mr Scindia is keen to see their re-induction in the Shivraj Cabinet as early as possible," a BJP leader told this newspaper requesting not to be quoted.

Sources said the chief minister has so far shown no interest to go for a mini-expansion of his ministry to take back the 2 former ministers in his cabinet, apprehending that such a move would trigger resentment among other ministerial aspirants in the BJP legislature party.

Woman gangraped by 17 as husband held hostage

NAYEAR AZAD
PATNA, DEC. 10

In a shocking incident, a 35-year woman was allegedly gangraped by seventeen men in Jharkhand's Dumka.

The incident allegedly occurred under the Mufassil police station Tuesday evening. According to reports, the victim in her statement to the police on Wednesday said that the crime was committed while she was returning home from the weekly village market along with her husband.

According to reports, the victim in her statement mentioned that

JHARKHAND

AN FIR against 17 people has been registered and one person was detained for questioning based on the victim's statement

the men held her husband hostage before committing the crime.

An FIR against 17 people has been registered and one person was detained for questioning based on the victim's statement.

"The matter is being investigated. One person has been detained for questioning after he was identified by the victim," DIG Santhal

region, Sudarshan Mandal told reporters.

According to Jharkhand police statistics, on an average five cases of rapes have been registered in the state till July this year. The state police website shows that around 1033 cases of rape have been registered till July, which is higher than the figure recorded in 2019.

Meanwhile, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which is the main Opposition party in Jharkhand, has blamed the state government for failure in controlling law and order and rising crime against women.

Shah directs all CAPFs to furnish leave data of jawans

New Delhi, Dec. 10: Union home minister Amit Shah has directed all Central armed police forces to compile three-year data and inform his ministry if their jawans and officers are utilising their stipulated leaves as part of his ambitious proposal that aims at allowing troops spend at least 100 days with their families in a year, officials said on Thursday.

The MAH has directed these forces to depute a senior officer in the rank of an additional director general to submit a report in this context by the first week of next month. The directive is also valid for the Assam Rifles that functions under the administrative command of the MHA.

As per officials and documents accessed by PTI, Mr Shah gave the latest direction after he recently reviewed the progress of the subject he had mooted last year, of ensuring that each jawan and officer of these forces gets to spend at least 100 days in a year with their families.

— PTI

Rollout of vaccines discussed with states

New Delhi, Dec. 10: Union home secretary Ajay Kumar Bhalla on Thursday reviewed with top officials of state governments the arrangements for the rollout of vaccines when these are available and asked them to prepare a database of frontline workers like police personnel who will be administered on priority, officials said.

The meeting was attended by the director generals of Police and other senior officials of the state governments and Union Territory administrations.

The Union home secretary reviewed the arrangements for Covid-19 vaccine rollout and asked the state and UTs to prepare a database of the frontline workers who will receive the vaccine during the initial stages, a home ministry official said.

Meanwhile, the Union health ministry placed the total number of Covid-19 cases at 97,67,371 and the death toll at 1,41,772 across the nation. The ministry said that 92,53,306 people have so far recovered from the infection.

Chandigarh on Thursday reported 88 fresh cases, taking the infection tally to 18,410 in the UT, while one more death pushed the toll to 298, according to a medical bulletin. Karnataka's tally touched 8.97 lakh with 1,238 new cases and 12 fatalities being reported.

— PTI

Trinamul releases Mamata govt's 10-yr report card

Kolkata, Dec. 10: With an eye on 2021 Assembly polls, the ruling TMC in West Bengal released a report card on Thursday, highlighting its government's welfare policies and development projects over the last 10 years.

State education minister Partha Chatterjee, who was present at the launch of "TMC Report Card — Ten Years of Development", said the schemes floated by the Mamata Banerjee government in the last decade have benefited a huge section of people.

Mr Chatterjee said party leaders would reach out to people in all 294 assembly constituencies of the state with the report card.

Among others, state minister Firhad Hakim and MPs Derek O'Brien and Sudip Bandyopadhyay were also present at TMC Bhavan during the event.

The TMC, after coming to power in 2011, has raised allocation for the education sector to ₹37,069 crore from ₹13,872 crore, Mr Chatterjee said.

"As part of the 'Sabujasathi' scheme, 84 lakh cycles were distributed. Thirty new universities have come up in the state since 2010. We could not work at the expected



pace this year due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Our projects have improved lives of a large section of people in the past nine years," he added.

Mr Hakim, who is the state urban development minister, said 1.2 lakh unorganised workers have benefited from TMC's social security schemes during emergencies.

Mr Bandyopadhyay stated that the number of factory units in the state have risen to 9,534 from 8,322 during the TMC rule.

Meanwhile, the chief minister hit out at the BJP on Thursday comparing its leadership to dictators Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini and claimed that the party is indulging in false propaganda.

Ms Banerjee, who is among the vocal critics of the saffron party, said it has a "prepared script" to break the movements against it and is trying to do so with the farmers' movement.

— PTI

IMPORTANT NOTICE

This is notified for the information of rail passengers that in addition to already announced some trains whose Arrival/Departure time has been revised, the timings of the following Special Trains will also be revised as under:-

REVISED TIMINGS OF SPECIAL TRAINS					
Spl Train No.	Station From	Dep. Time	Station to	Arr. Time	Revised Timings Effective From
09051	VALSAD	22:15	MUZAFFARPUR JN	06:50	12.12.2020
09052	MUZAFFARPUR JN	20:10	VALSAD	07:10	14.12.2020
02241	RANCHI	18:10	NEW DELHI	11:10	16.12.2020
02242	NEW DELHI	16:10	RANCHI	09:05	18.12.2020
08609	RANCHI	21:05	LOK MANYATILAK (T)	07:25	16.12.2020
08610	LOK MANYATILAK (T)	16:40	RANCHI	06:25	18.12.2020
01033	PUNE JN.	16:15	DARBHANGA JN.	06:40	Upto 30.12.2020
01034	DARBHANGA JN.	16:47	PUNE JN.	07:20	Upto 01.01.2021
01115	PUNE JN.	16:15	GORAKHPUR JN.	00:55	Upto 31.12.2020
01116	GORAKHPUR JN.	16:05	PUNE JN.	02:45	Upto 02.01.2021
01079	LOK MANYATILAK (T)	15:50	GORAKHPUR JN.	00:20	Upto 31.12.2020
01080	GORAKHPUR JN.	05:30	LOK MANYATILAK (T)	15:10	Upto 02.01.2021
01407	PUNE JN.	22:00	LUCKNOW JN.	02:40	Upto 29.12.2020
01408	LUCKNOW JN.	06:30	PUNE JN.	10:50	Upto 31.12.2020

NORTHERN RAILWAYS TRAVEL ADVISORY TO RAIL PASSENGERS IN VIEW OF REVISED TIMINGS

In order to provide better train services and due to operational reasons, the timings / stoppages of some trains have been revised from 01.12.2020 and onwards. Therefore, rail passengers are advised to:-

1) Please check and verify the revised train timings pertaining to your rail journeys well before commencement of journeys, either with Integrated Enquiry No. 139 or Indian Railways website <https://enquiry.indianrail.gov.in> or NTES App or by approaching authorized person in the nearby reservation counters/railway stations.

2) Passengers are advised to please mention their own mobile number only while filling the Reservation Requisition Form. It will help Railways to provide the important information such as 'Change in train timings' or 'Train Cancellation' etc to the bonafide passengers through S.M.S.

← All norms of the State and Central Government regarding COVID-19 including Social distancing, sanitization etc., must be followed in the trains and at the Railway stations. All other precautions associated with COVID-19 should also be ensured.

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TEMPORARY CANCELLATION & REGULATION OF TRAINS DUE FOR UPGRADATION WORK

In order to upgrade the infrastructure, Delhi Division of Northern Railway will undertake the Pre-Non-Interlocking and Non-Interlocking work in connection with doubling of track between Ghaziabad and Saharanpur Stations on Deoband - Talheri Buzurg - Nagal - Tapri Section. To execute this work Delhi Division will take suitable traffic blocks of different durations from 11.12.2020 to 23.12.2020. During this period following trains will be cancelled/regulated on the dates shown against each:-

CANCELLATION OF TRAINS		
Train No.	Train Name	Date of Cancellation (from originating station)
04522/04521	Ambala - Delhi Jn - Ambala Special Express	11.12.2020 to 23.12.2020
04507/04508	Delhi Jn - Fazilka - Delhi Jn Express	11.12.2020 to 23.12.2020
09017	Bandra Terminus - Haridwar Jn Special Express	16.12.2020
09018	Haridwar Jn - Bandra Terminus Special Express	17.12.2020
09111	Valsad - Haridwar Jn Special Express	15.12.2020 & 22.12.2020
09112	Haridwar Jn - Valsad Special Express	16.12.2020 & 23.12.2020
02017/02018	New Delhi - Dehradun - New Delhi Shatabdi Exp.	19.12.2020 & 23.12.2020
02171	Lokmanya Tilak - Haridwar Jn Superfast Express	21.12.2020
02172	Haridwar Jn - Lokmanya Tilak Superfast Express	22.12.2020

REGULATION OF TRAIN	
Train No. & Name	Regulation of Trains at Station
02055 New Delhi - Dehradun Shatabdi Express	Train will be Regulated for 60 minutes on 19.12.2020 between Ghaziabad & Khatauli Stations

Note:- For any kind of information passengers are requested to contact Railway Enquiry No. 139 or visit Indian Railways website www.enquiry.indianrail.gov.in

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SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

SHORT TAKES

AFTER 55 YEARS, MODI, HASINA TO RE-OPEN RAIL LINE

Guwahati/Cooch Behar, Dec. 10: The rail route between Haldibari in West Bengal and Chilahati in neighbouring Bangladesh is all set to reopen after a gap of 55 years on December 17 and prime ministers of the two countries will inaugurate the programme, an official of the Northeast Frontier Railway said on Thursday.

The railway line from Haldibari in Cooch Behar to Chilahati in northern Bangladesh has been defunct after rail links between India and then East Pakistan had snapped in 1965.

“Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bangladeshi counterpart Sheikh Hasina will inaugurate Haldibari-Chilahati rail route on December 17,” NFR chief public relations officer Subhanan Chanda said.

A goods train will run from Chilahati to Haldibari, which is under the Katihar division of the NRE, to mark the opening of the route, Chanda said.

The ministry of external affairs on Tuesday informed the authorities of the decision to reopen the rail route, said Katihar divisional railway manager Ravinder Kumar Verma.

The distance between Haldibari railway station till the international border is 4.5 kilometres while that from Chilahati in Bangladesh till the zero point is around 7.5 kilometres, sources in the NFR said.

Both Haldibari and Chilahati stations were on the old broad gauge railway route between Siliguri and Kolkata that went through areas in present-day Bangladesh.

When passenger train service begins on this route, people will be able to travel to Kolkata from Jalpaiguri, which is near Siliguri, in seven hours, five hours less than what it takes now, Mr Verma said after visiting Haldibari station on Wednesday. — *PTI*

N-E STUDENTS TO OBSERVE DEC. 11 AS BLACK DAY

MANOJ ANAND
GUWAHATI, DEC. 10

The North East Students’ Organisation a platform of students bodies of all the north-eastern states has decided to observe December 11, the day controversial Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 was passed by the parliament as “black day” across the region.

It was on December 11, 2019 that the controversial legislation was passed by the Parliament despite widespread protest against the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2019.

NESO chairman Samuel Jyrwa and secretary general Sinam Prakash said, “The CAA has been a glaring example of how a controversial bill was passed in the parliament in an autocratic manner, ignoring the massive protest by the people of the Northeast. The region, which is already bearing the burden of illegal migrants from neighbouring Bangladesh, would never accept this legislation and we would continue to fight against this black law.”

The student leaders said that they have called people and their supporters to display black flags and banners in public places of all district and subdivision headquarters on Friday.

In Assam, the members of the All-Assam Students’ Union would be leading the protest while others unions will take up similar protest in their respective states against the CAA.

Centre seeks report from Bengal govt on ‘serious security lapses’

Shah slams attack on Nadda

AGE CORRESPONDENT
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI/ KOLKATA,
DEC. 10

The Centre on Thursday sought a report from the West Bengal government over the alleged “serious security lapses” during the visit of BJP president J.P. Nadda to the state, as Union home minister Amit Shah called the attack on Mr Nadda “sponsored violence”, and alleged that the state has “descended into an era of tyranny and anarchy” under the Trinamul rule.

The Centre has also sent a communication to governor Jagdeep Dhankhar, seeking a detailed report on law and order situation and the steps being taken by the state government in maintaining peace and tranquillity after attack on Mr Nadda’s convoy, government officials said.

Mr Nadda’s convoy was allegedly attacked with stones and bricks while on its way to Diamond Harbour in Kolkata. Cars of several party leaders including that of BJP national general secretary Kailash Vijayvargiya and West Bengal BJP chief Dilip Ghosh which were part of the convoy were



Injured BJP national secretary Kailash Vijayvargiya receives treatment following an attack by alleged TMC activists on BJP president J.P. Nadda’s convoy at Sirakal near Diamond Harbour, South 24 Pargana, on Thursday. — *PTI*

damaged in the alleged attack.

Tweeting on the incident, Mr Shah said, “Bengal has descended into an era of tyranny, anarchy and darkness under the Trinamul rule. The manner in which political violence has been institutionalised and brought to the extreme in West Bengal under TMC rule is sad and worrying.”

Mr Shah said the Centre was taking the “incident seriously” and the West Bengal government “will have to answer to the peace-loving people of the state for this sponsored violence”.

Hours before the attack, Mr Ghosh in a letter to Mr Shah complained of serious lapses in security arrangements, purportedly due to negligence and/or casual approach of the state police depart-

ment” during Mr Nadda’s visit to the BJP office at Hastings on Wednesday.

“During the whole day’s programme, the pilot car provided by the state police did not create a smooth and safe passage for Shri Nadda Ji for travelling from one place to other. His convoy was stopped at many traffic lights, causing serious concern for potential security hazards,” Mr Ghosh said.

‘Drama to divert attention’, Mamata hits out at BJP

Kolkata, Dec. 10: West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday claimed that the incident of attack on BJP president J.P. Nadda’s convoy in the state is a “drama” to divert attention from lack of attendance in his rally.

Wondering why 50 cars were after Mr Nadda’s vehicle, the Trinamool Congress supremo said that only three cars were part of her convoy.

Mr Nadda’s convoy was pelted with stones by alleged TMC workers at Sirakol when he was travelling to Diamond Harbour in South 24 Parganas district to address a rally there.

“I feel that it is a drama to divert attention from lack of attendance in his rally,” Ms Banerjee said.

Maintaining that no untoward incident happened at Sirakol, Ms Banerjee said that there was probably some inci-



Mamata Banerjee

dent in front of a tea stall and the police were asked to inquire into it.

“In your (Nadda’s) convoy there were 50 cars, followed by 30 cars of the media and 40 motorbikes,” Ms Banerjee, who also holds the home (police) portfolio, said at a farmers’ rally here.

“So was it planned?” she asked, questioning whether a stone was thrown on the last car in the convoy and photos and videos were taken of it for propaganda.

She asked how Mr Nadda’s car could be attacked when BJP lead-

ers are protected by central security forces like the CISE, CRPF or the BSF.

“You depend on Central forces. You provide central police security to so many people without informing the state,” she said.

Maintaining that law and order is a state subject, the chief minister said that the Centre is still interfering in it.

“Is it to bulldoze the federal structure (of the country)?” Ms Banerjee asked.

The TMC supremo claimed that the state government is blamed whenever there is any kind of problem.

Ms Banerjee alleged that BJP workers create ruckus in front of her residence or gherao her vehicle whenever she goes to Delhi. “Remember that you can expect respect only when you give it,” she said. — *PTI*

STATE FAILED TO ACT DESPITE WARNINGS: GOV

Kolkata, Dec. 10: Expressing concern over the attack on BJP president J.P. Nadda’s convoy, West Bengal governor Jagdeep Dhankhar accused the state administration of failing to act in spite of his alerting the chief secretary and the director general of police.

The governor tweeted that he had intimidated the state administration, at 8.19 am and 9.05 am on Thursday, of the possibility of the collapse of law and order during a BJP meeting at Diamond Harbour in South 24 Parganas district.

The chief secretary had informed him that the director general of police had been alerted and sensitised accordingly, Dhankhar wrote on the micro-blogging site. “Events indicate total abdication of lawful authority,” he tweeted. — *PTI*

New Parl’s shape reflects sacred geometry in various religions

JATIN TAKKAR
NEW DELHI, DEC. 10

Indian Parliament’s new building will have a triangular shape to reflect the importance of triangles being a sacred geometry in various religions, while its interiors will have three national symbols as their main themes — Lotus, Peacock and Banyan Tree.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday laid the foundation stone for the new building, which is expected to be completed by the 75th anniversary of India’s independence and is estimated to cost ₹971 crore.

The new building will come up in front of the existing Parliament House

that was built nearly 100 years ago at a cost of Rs 83 lakh at that time and would eventually be turned into a museum.

The new building will house larger Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha Halls, with capacities of 888 seats and 384 seats respectively, to accommodate an expanded Parliament after the freeze on its expansion lifts in 2026. The Lok Sabha Hall will also have additional capacity, up to 1272 seats, to host joint sessions.

“The new Parliament building is designed in a triangular shape, since it sits on a triangular plot and has three main spaces — Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha and a Central Lounge. Also, triangles are sacred geometries in various reli-

gions and cultures of the country,” the new building’s architecture Bimal Patel said. “In the Lok Sabha chamber, we have used the national bird Peacock as its theme, in Rajya Sabha chamber we have used the national flower Lotus as its theme and in Central Lounge courtyard we have used the national tree Banyan as its theme,” Patel said.

The National Emblem will crown the new Parliament building. He said the architecture of the new building is in harmony with the present building so that both buildings complement each other. The ceiling of the new Parliament building will have fresco paintings like that of Rashtrapati Bhawan and carpets will have traditional designs, instead of the current single colour carpets, Patel said.

To retain some of the characteristics of the existing Parliament, the interior walls of the new one will have shlokas inscribed on them.

Dholpur stone will be largely used, as is the case with the existing Parliament, and in some interior portions, red granite may be used in place of the red sandstone.

This will be a building with most modern facilities but displaying our culture and tradition as well, the eminent architect said.

The four-storey building will be built on 64,500 square metres area.

The new building has been designed by Ahmedabad-based HCP Design and Management Pvt Limited and the construction would be carried out by Tata Projects Ltd.

It will be equipped with all modern audio-visual communication facilities and data network systems. Special care is being taken to ensure all environmental safeguards are followed, including minimal disturbance to Parliament sessions during construction work, officials said. — *PTI*

Tomar stretches hand

■ **Continued from Page 1**
and amid the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. He said that the government was ready to consider with an open mind any provision in the new laws where farmers have any issue and “we want to clarify all their apprehensions.”

In its proposal, the Centre had offered significant concessions including a written assurance on continuation of minimum support price (MSP)-based procurement and ensuring parity in transactions inside and outside existing Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) mandis. The proposal had been sent a day after 13 farmer leaders met Union home minister Amit Shah.

Mr Tomar said that during his earlier talks with farmers’ leaders, many had said that the new laws were invalid as agriculture was a state subject and the Centre can’t frame

these laws. “We clarified that we have the right to make laws on trade and explained it to them. APMC and MSP are not affected by it.”

The minister said: “It is being projected that the land of farmers will be occupied by industrialists. Contract farming has been going on for a long time in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Haryana, Punjab, Karnataka but there has never been such an experience... Still, we have already made provision in the Act that agreement under these laws will only be between processors and farmers’ produce. There is no provision for any lease or agreement over farmers’ land.”

Mr Tomar said the Swaminathan Commission report came in 2006, but its recommendation about MSP at 1.5 times cost of production remained pending till the Modi government implemented it.

PM lays foundation of new Parl House

■ **Continued from Page 1**
is not far when the world will term India “mother of democracy” if Indians extol the country’s democratic history with confidence.

“It is a very historic day. Today is a milestone in India’s democratic history... We, the people of India, will together build this new building of Parliament,” Mr Modi said, adding that the new building will be an inspiration when India will celebrate 75 years of its independence.

The making of the new Parliament building is an example of co-existence of the new with the old, he said.

“I can never forget the moment in my life when I had the opportunity to come to Parliament House for the first time in 2014 as

an MP. Before stepping in, I bowed and saluted this temple of democracy,” Mr Modi said.

“The current Parliament building played an important role in pre and post independent India. The first government of an independent India was formed here and the first sitting of Parliament took place here, our Constitution was drafted here, our democracy was re-established here, Babasaheb Ambedkar and others, after deep deliberations in the Central Hall, gave us a Constitution,” he said.

In his address, Mr Modi also quoted Guru Nanak to underscore the importance of dialogue and noted that the Sikh Guru had said that interaction should continue till eternity.

“Our democracy has moved forward with the goal that there is always room for differences so long as it is not entirely disconnected from the process,” Mr Modi said.

He stressed that policies and politics may vary but all must be for the service of the public and there should be no differences in this ultimate goal.

“Whether debates occur within the Parliament or outside, the determination towards national service and dedication towards national interest should be reflected in them constantly,” he said.

The Prime Minister asserted that every member who enters the Parliament is accountable to the public as well as the Constitution.

Mr Modi said that there are no rituals as such to

consecrate this temple of democracy. It is the representatives of the people who come to this temple that will consecrate it, Mr Modi added.

The new building will seat 888 members in the Lok Sabha Chamber with an option to increase to 1,224 members during joint sessions.

The Rajya Sabha chamber will have a seating capacity for 384 members, with an expanded capacity in view of future requirements.

Those attending the ceremony included Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, Union ministers, MPs, foreign envoys and religious leaders. Industrialist Ratan Tata, whose Tata Projects has the contract for the new Parliament building, was also present.

Will block rail tracks: Farmers

New Delhi, Dec. 10: Farmers agitating for the past two weeks against the new agri laws on Thursday announced that they will block railway tracks if their demands are not met by the government. Farmer unions, which held a meeting on Thursday, said they will soon announce a date for blocking tracks across the country.

Addressing reporters at the Singhu border where they have been protesting for almost two weeks to demand a rollback of the law, the farmer unions also reiterated that they will intensify their agitation and start blocking all highways leading to the national capital.

“We will block railway tracks if our demands are not met. We will decide on the date and announce it soon. The blocking of tracks will not be limited to Haryana and Punjab but it will be done across the country,” farmer leader Boota Singh said at the press conference.

The announcement by farmers came on the day Union agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar said it was not proper to announce the next stage of agitation when talks were continuing and urged the unions to return to the discussion table.

“Centre has admitted that laws have been made for traders. If agriculture is a state subject, the central government does not have right to make laws on it,” said Balbir Singh Rajewal, another leader.

Thousands of farmers have been protesting at various border points for almost two weeks seeking a repeal of the new agri laws, which they claim were aimed at benefitting corporates by weakening the mandi system and the minimum support price (MSP) regime for procure-

Farmer’s son gives free winter clothes

New Delhi: Not everything comes with a price tag. Not love, not respect and not the sweaters and jackets that Shakeel Mohammed Qureshi gives away free to protect farmers protesting at the Singhu border from the biting cold.

Around 8 am everyday, Qureshi starts setting up his roadside stall, from where he sells locally-manufactured warm clothes for free to the farmers protesting at the Delhi-Haryana border against the three new contentious farm laws.

The 35-year-old man, whose father is a farmer in Uttar Pradesh’s Baghpat district, has distributed around 300 jackets and sweaters for free among the peasants.

“My father is a farmer, too, so I know that their life is very tough,” says Qureshi, who lives in Narela in north Delhi with his wife and children. “Farmers don’t ask for much from the government, except a fair price for their produce.”

Unwilling to talk about the price, Mr Qureshi says: “This is my contribution to a good cause. That’s all.” — *PTI*

ment of farm produce.

“Five rounds of talks have already been held with the government, but they remained inconclusive. So far, the government has not sent us any invitation for another round of talks. If government sends us proposal for a meeting, we will decide it in our meeting,” another farmer leader Shiv Kumar Kakka said.

Asked about solution to ongoing standoff with the government, Kakka said, “only God knows”. — *PTI*



Bollywood actress Gul Panag at Singhu border, New Delhi, during farmers protest against the new farm laws on Thursday. — *PTI*

BUILT AFTER TRAMPLING DEMOCRACY, SAYS CONG

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 10

The Congress Party on Thursday said history will remember that when farmers were fighting for their rights on the street, Prime Minister Narendra Modi was busy laying the foundation stone of the new Parliament building.

It further said that what would a building represent when it is built after “trampling” democracy.

“Dear PM, Parliament is not mortar and stones. It envisions Democracy. It imbues Constitution. It is Economic-Political-Social Equality. It is

Compassion and Camaraderie. It is the aspirations of 130 crore Indians. What would a building built upon trampling of these values represent?” Congress chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala tweeted.

“Mr Modi, history will also record that when the ‘Annadata’ (food grower) was fighting for his rights for 16 days on the streets, you were building a palace for yourself in the name of Central Vista. In democracy, power is not a means to fulfil your whims, but is a medium for public service and public welfare,” he added.

Nadda convoy attacked

■ **Continued from Page 1**
“Mamataji’s misrule has lowered Bengal’s height. It has to be restored. This is Diamond Harbour from where Jyotirmoyji, a known parliamentarian, once led. But the present MP is not visible in the parliament. It is a shame on democracy. The police and the administration are getting politicised here. No administration exists here. It has collapsed. Without the Central force’s security, Bengal visit is a challenge.”

Expressing his concern, union home minister Amit Shah tweeted, “Today, the attack on the BJP National President Shri @JPNadda ji in Bengal is really condemnable. The more it is condemned, the lesser would it be. The central government is taking this

attack very seriously. The Bengal government will have to answer to the peace loving people of the state for this sponsored violence.”

He added, “Bengal has slipped into an era of tyranny, chaos and darkness under the Trinamul rule...”

The West Bengal Police, however, stated, “Shri JP Nadda, president, BJP reached safely at the venue, Diamond Harbour, South 24 Pgs. Nothing happened to his convoy. Few bystanders at Debipur, Falta PS, Diamond Harbour PD, sporadically and suddenly threw stones towards vehicles trailing long behind his convoy. Everyone is safe and situation is peaceful. Matter is being investigated to find out actual happenings.”

THE ASIAN AGE

11 DECEMBER 2020

Farmers’ standoff has a few lessons for govt

After a meeting with Union home minister Amit Shah on Tuesday following a sudden and late invitation, and considering the government’s proposals advanced through a 20-page note, the protesting farmers have announced intensification of their agitation. The protest is already a fortnight old. The new element in it is that it threatens to engulf the entire country, not just the borders of the national capital with Haryana leading on to Punjab, which has emerged as the epicentre of the dissatisfactions. This is suggested in the programme announced by a coordination committee of the dozens of farmers’ bodies from across the country. This plan visualises demonstrations at district headquarters across India, taking over toll plazas nationwide, in measured steps blocking entry by road to the national capital, and protesting at the door of all BJP MLAs, MPs, and ministers. From being seen as a movement of Punjab farmers to begin with, it is the all-India profile of the movement that has now emerged. This is a clear rebuff of the home minister who had invited only 13 of the many more farmer organisations for talks last Tuesday, excluding in fact the largest farmers’ union of Punjab, giving rise to speculation that, at one level, the effort was to sow seeds of discord among protesters. Five representatives of Opposition parties led by Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, and including NCP chief Sharad Pawar, and leaders of CPI(M), CPI and the DMK, called on President Ram Nath Kovind to submit a memorandum in support of the farmers’ demands, and later addressed the media to publicise their endorsement. While the farmers have not called for the support of political parties, the backing given to them by these entities can only impart operational resilience and muscle to any future deepening of a planned nationwide protest. Moreover, in the forum of Parliament, it is parties that represent various sections of the people, not associations and unions of occupation or trade groups. It is open to the government to appreciate that the linking of political parties brings on a new dimension, making it prudent to offer serious political conciliation. If not, the country is staring at serious economic dislocations and an atmosphere of confrontation and mistrust in the body politic. In the written offer made to the farmers on Wednesday after the meeting with the home minister, the government has agreed to present its assurance in black and white that the minimum support price regime won’t be dismantled, that terms on which private traders (the feared big business and multinational corporations) will operate in the farm sector will be the same as the present APMC “mandis”, whose vanishing the farmers fear, and also that contract farming being encouraged through the contentious agri-laws will not cause land alienation from farmers. These seem reasonable, but farmers still demand the total repeal of the three laws passed without due discussion in Parliament and without consultation with them, the key stakeholders. Their demands have sometimes been called “maximalist”. But what they emphasise, in effect, is that legislation must not be carried out on the strength of a party’s brute majority in legislature, ignoring those who are impacted the most.

It is open to the government to appreciate that the linking of political parties brings on a new dimension, making it prudent to offer serious political conciliation

Breaking up Big Tech

The war against Big Tech just got bigger in the US where the Federal Trade Commission and a coalition of attorneys general of 46 states sued Facebook on the grounds that it transgressed antitrust law and hence should be broken up. This comes on top of the Justice Department taking similar legal action Alphabet’s Google two months ago. The day cannot be far when Amazon will be facing similar charges, perhaps Apple, too, for its restrictive App Store practices. Together, the quartet is the creme de la creme of the new economy, whose bloated growth into behemoths gave them the power to influence society by dictating digital lives and the economy while enjoying a global footprint. The charge against Facebook is it used its dominance to crush rivals at the expense of everyday users even as its power rose manifold with the acquisition of Instagram and WhatsApp. The same charges could as well be aimed at other tech giants who have already been facing intense scrutiny from lawmakers in Congressional hearings. Given the US history of successfully breaking up monopolies like Standard Oil, US railroads and AT&T, besides Microsoft in the new millennium, Big Tech would look quite different in a few years. While socialist countries can move against monopolies by simply nationalising industries like India did its banks and the life insurance business, only to suffer a different kind of lazy monopoly, the US believes in dismantling monopolies to ensure healthy competition thrives. The Internet may not be that much different for users if Facebook were to hive off WhatsApp or Amazon were to divest some of its 88 acquisitions. The only difference would be that Google cannot demote competitions through clever search algorithms or Amazon copy goods of their own sellers to take a greater slice of the marketplace. When threatened with anti-monopoly action by the UK, Mark Zuckerberg challenged a nation saying he would invest elsewhere in Europe. And now you know why the arrogance of unbridled power should be curtailed by promoting healthy competition free of restrictive trade practices.

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Saeed Naqvi
Wide Angle

Is Naseer right? That Hyderabad more ‘cultured’ than Lucknow?

I don’t know when the interview was done but I saw it on YouTube last week. Naseeruddin Shah dismissed Lucknow as a centre of culture and praised Hyderabad sky-high by comparison. Naseer’s right but there’s a reason why Lucknow lost out in the culture stakes with both Hyderabad and Lahore. Both cities were around, their “culture” intact, till 1947. Lucknow had begun to “die” in 1857, after the British exiled Nawab Wajid Ali Shah to Metiabruz near Kolkata in late 1856, triggering 1857’s Great Uprising. Lucknow, however, retained its premier slot for the institution of the “ulema”, plural for “alim” which derives from “ilm”, or knowledge with theology as the main expertise. With Maulana Kalbe Sadiq’s death at the age of 83 last month, the curtain finally fell on the institution of a long line of Lucknow’s “ulema”. That this was largely a Shia institution is easily explained: the Nawabs of Awadh were Shia, which is where the patronage came from. This mustn’t detract from the fact that internationally known Sunni institutions like Darul Uloom Nadwatul Ulema also flourished. There was considerable intellectual rapport between the sects. How

else does one explain the masterly study of Anis and Dabir, a comparative study of Anis and Dabir, written by one of Nadwa’s greatest scholars Shibli Nomani. Anis and Dabir were famous Marsia writers, a genre focused on the tragedy of Karbala, central to the observance of Muharram, not exclusively but primarily a Shia occasion. Kalbe Sadiq came from a long line of “ulema”, theological scholars conversant with liberal traditions of which Sufism was another part. Saiyid Waris Shah, Pir of Dewa Sharief, 7 km from Lucknow, had a simple explanation for not going through the “namaz” rituals. “Where is the space to bow in supplication?” The implication was: “He is in me”. During my schooldays, a phase of cultural bifurcation between school and home, the two towering “Alims” of Lucknow were Maulana Kalbe Hussain (alias Kabban Sahib), Kalbe Sadiq’s father, and Maulana Ali Naqi (Naqqan Sahib), both brilliant orators whose sermons were much valued at congregations called the “Majlis”, provided the speaker deftly brought in Karbala to clinch the argument. Lucknow’s celebrated tapestry of manners found itself frayed even in this limited circle of theologians and

their followers. A group, clearly not from among “Naqqan Sahib’s” followers, created what for Lucknow was a major scandal. The group accused the respected cleric of blasphemy and physically assaulted him. Apparently, Naqqan Sahib had in his research spotted mention of water in Imam Hussain’s tent. Even a hint like this was anathema to a bunch of fanatics. The absence of water in Karbala’s torrid heat heightens Hussain’s tragedy. For that reason, even a suggestion of water in Karbala would soften the tragic effect. The truth, of course, is “Naqqan Sahib” had never said “water” was available. He simply cited sources hinting at such a possibility. Worst was the treatment of poet Yaas Yagana Changezi, a contemporary of Jigar, Firaq and Josh. Yagana wrote: “Samajh mein kuch nahee ata./ Parhey jaaney se kya hasil?/ Namazon mein hain kuch maaney./ to pardesi zabaan kyon ho?” In one of his “naats”, or religious songs, Yagana referred to Prophet Mohammad in less than reverent terms. He probably did not know that he had violated one of the unenforced codes: “Ba Khuda deewana baash-o/ Ba Mohammad hoshiyar.” (Take liberties

with God, but be careful with Mohammad) Dara Shikoh’s prime minister, Chandrabhan Brahman, broke the code brazenly: “Panja dar panja-e-Khuda daram/ Man che parwa e Mustafa daram.” (My hand is in the hand of God: Why should I worry about Mohammad?) It reflects in the backward slide of a tolerant culture that Yagana did not go scot free. His face was blackened and he was given a donkey ride through the old city. The liberal streak in the “ulema” of Lucknow comes out in bold relief in an incident concerning Josh Malihabadi. His Marsia titled “Hussain and Revolution” became a cult poem even in devout circles. Josh became a popular invitee to various Imambaras of Lucknow, indeed across the country, including Hyderabad. He built up a reputation for Marsias, second only to the great Mir Anis. A group of orthodox Shias turned up at the residence of the great Alim of his age, Maulana Naasir ul Millat, armed with a complaint. Josh, devoted to liquor (he called it *Kaaba e khaas o aam*), should be banned from reciting Marsias from pulpits in “our sacred imambaras”.

After reading Josh’s Marsias, the Maulana invited the complainants and Josh. What happened next was dramatic. The maulana spread out his personal prayer mat for Josh and invited him to recite “Hussain and Inqilab”. The message from the maulana was straightforward: it would be wrong to occupy the pulpit inebriated. This was the open mindedness Maulana Kalbe Sadiq inherited from the generations of “ulema”. From the 1990s he had pleaded: Even if the Muslims win the Ram Jannabhooni land dispute, they should gift the land to the Hindus. “You will win their goodwill.” His point was that a Muslim can turn towards Ka’aba and say his prayers anywhere. “Ram is central to the Hindu ethos.” He initiated the joint Shia-Sunni namaz, allowing the Sunni cleric to take the lead. He traced Muslim backwardness to a singular lack of education and dedicated his life to establishing non-sectarian institutions in every possible field. But he died a disappointed man because of the expanding communalism and a community trapped in the snare of self-ish political leaders.

The writer is a senior journalist and commentator based in New Delhi

Subhani



How Nehru had gutted the Constitution in 1951



Karan Thapar
As I See It

In part of a generation that grew up thinking of Jawaharlal Nehru as the architect of our democracy and the guardian of our Constitution. For many this was beyond questioning. However, a book published earlier this year reveals a very different side of the first Prime Minister. It argues that the first amendment to the Constitution, that he got passed in 1951, gutted the original. So sweeping were the changes that constitutional scholar Upendra Baxi calls the post-amendment document “the second Constitution”. He doesn’t believe that it bears credible resemblance to the original. In his book *Sixteen Stormy Days*, Cambridge scholar Tripurdaman Singh identifies several fundamental rights which the first amendment adversely affected. I shall only focus on two. The first is freedom of speech, perhaps the most important of all rights in a democracy. Nehru’s 1951 amendment added new grounds on which this could be curbed. In addition to the existing grounds of libel, slander, defamation, contempt of court and anything that undermines the security of the state or tends to overthrow it, Nehru added relations with foreign states, public order and, most important, the interests of the security of the state. Now, Tripurdaman Singh argues, this amendment created the grounds to validate sedition. This is because “the interests of the security of the state” can be variously interpreted and, thus, permits a wide range of speech to be classified under it. And this gave the state enormous powers. Admittedly Nehru did not misuse them, but his successors certainly did. Thus the first amendment “opened the floodgates for drastic and oppressive laws” like the National Security Act, the Maintenance of Internal Security Act and the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, all of which have been used to ban books, arrest journalists, jail activists and harass political opponents. The second fundamental right that Nehru’s 1951 amendments made redundant was the right to property. Because the courts placed obstacles in the way of his attempts to acquire zamindari lands — in the case of Bihar requiring unaffordable compensation — Nehru amended the Constitution to ensure that such compensation need not be paid. Consequently, the right to property may have continued in theory but in practice, because compensation was not necessary when lands were forcibly acquired, it ceased to be a fundamental right. Let me mention one other element of Nehru’s first amendment which seriously damaged the original Constitution. This is the insertion of the Ninth Schedule. Here, Tripurdaman Singh writes, “laws could be placed to make them immune to judicial challenge even if they violated fundamental rights”. In other words, the Constitution now provided protection for unconstitutional laws. Frankly, this is nothing short of a constitutional monstrosity and, arguably, the worst of the amendments pushed through in 1951. Now, if the content of the amendments was troubling, the impact they had on Indian politics was no less disturbing. For a start, Nehru established the precedent of amending the Constitution to overcome adverse judicial pronouncements. His successors and his daughter, in particular, made this almost a regular practice. Today, when governments don’t like what the Supreme Court has said, they

blithely change the Constitution to overturn its verdict. Tripurdaman Singh identifies two other equally important points. First, “the very concept of the judiciary and the Constitution as checks on the government” was undermined. Instead, a tradition of using executive power to subdue the judiciary began. Second, the 1951 amendments undermined the constitutional position of the individual qua class, caste, community and State. Since the original document had placed the individual at its heart, this changed not just its focus but, more critically, its character. So why did Nehru do all of this? The answer is simple but hardly a valid justification. He felt the original Constitution was blocking his policies and reforms. As Tripurdaman Singh writes: “Zamindars, businessmen, editors and concerned individuals had repeatedly taken the Central and state governments to court ... (and) the courts had come down heavily on the side of the citizens and struck mighty blows against the government”. So, to rein in the courts, Nehru amended the Constitution from which they got their powers. In the process, he gutted it. Nehru thus became the first Prime Minister to damage the Constitution. However, Tripurdaman Singh’s book goes one critical step further. It not only exposes what Nehru did to the Constitution, equally importantly it shines a cruel light on how he did it. In June 1951, when the first amendment was passed, the Constitution was barely 16 months old. Yet in that brief period Nehru decided it was an impediment to his government’s policies. This doesn’t speak highly of his commitment to the Constitution. In fact, as Tripur-

So sweeping were the changes in the first amendment that constitutional scholar Upendra Baxi calls the post-amendment document ‘the second Constitution’

daman Singh says, Nehru argued that his government, with its huge majority, represented “the will of the people” and thus took precedence over the principles of and the rights enshrined in the Constitution. Consequently, Nehru had no qualms using a provisional and largely unelected Parliament to amend the Constitution. But it was worse than that. The Constitution stipulates that amendments require a two-thirds vote in both Houses of Parliament. However, the provisional parliament was a unicameral institution. In 1951, the Rajya Sabha did not exist. So Nehru misused the Constitution (Removal of Difficulties) Order to get around this. It wasn’t intended for this purpose, but that did not deter him. This is a technical and complicated point and I deliberately won’t go into detail. However, what Nehru did is uncannily similar to what Narendra Modi did in 2019 when he changed the constitutional character of Jammu and Kashmir. Just as Nehru misused Article 392, from which the Constitution order gets its authority, to change the amendment procedure, so too Narendra Modi misused Article 370 to amend critical definitions thus enabling him to de-operationalise the article. Both were guilty of a sleight of hand. The only thing I can add to salvage Nehru’s image is that B.R. Ambedkar, whom we consider the Father of our Constitution, was a member of Nehru’s Cabinet when the first amendment was approved and did not protest. Even Sardar Patel, who died six months earlier and may have had reservations about the impact on the right to property, would have supported the new curbs on freedom of speech. In fact, as Tripurdaman Singh points out, he considered free speech “exaggerated exuberance”. This raises the question: how committed to protecting our freedoms were the men who fought for our Independence? The answer will have to wait for another day.

The writer is a television commentator and anchor

LETTERS
STILL HIGHEST

This refers to the editorial, “The rise of Everest” (Dec 10). Nepal and China have jointly announced that the world’s highest mountain Mount Everest is 0.86m higher than had been previously officially calculated. According to geologists, Everest does grow less than a fifth of an inch a year, from the movement of tectonic plates below it. The new measurement will have little practical impact. K2, the world’s second highest mountain, is still 237 metres lower.

Sankar Paul
Chakdaha, West Bengal

SOVEREIGNTY THREAT

THE CMS of Opposition-ruled States are vying with each other to declare that the provisions of the recently incorporated farmer bills will not be implemented in their respective domains. As if this were not sufficient, they have now started to audaciously proclaim that the newly enacted statutes, notably the CAA, NRC and NPR, passed by the highest legislative body of the country, will be summarily rejected by them. At this rate, a day is not far off when a border state under the control of a “secular” party may even object to the stationing of the Army on the border to quell threats from a religious fanatic and ideological tyrant.

Arun Malankar
Mumbai

GREAT TIMING

VETERAN INDIAN wicketkeeper Parthiv Patel just bade adieu to the gentlemen’s game. Parthiv made his Test debut at the age of 17 in England back in 2002. He reminds me of Tatenda Taibu, Zimbabwean wicketkeeper till 2012. Parthiv was not given sufficient chances by RCB skipper Virat Kohli in IPL and thus chose to quit. It is better to leave the game before people ask why. The 35-year-old hailed Sourav Ganguly as the best captain he had worked with and “a leader in the truest sense”.

C.K. Ramani
Coimbatore

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

SHORT TAKES

CHINA SANCTIONS
US OFFICIALS
OVER HK MOVES

Beijing, Dec. 10: China said on Thursday it will impose sanctions on US officials who have “performed badly” over Hong Kong issues, in response to restrictions slapped on Chinese officials this week over Beijing’s harsh clamp-down on the city.

The financial hub was rocked by pro-democracy protests last year that were largely halted by a sweeping national security law imposed by Beijing, drawing criticism over eroding rights from countries including the US.

On Monday, the US said it was freezing any US assets and barring travel to the United States for 14 vice chairs of the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress, which spearheaded the tough new law.

U.S. BOMBERS
FLY ON MISSION
TO DETER IRAN

Washington, Dec. 10: In a new show of military might, two American bomber aircraft took off from the United States and flew over a swath of the Middle East on Thursday, sending what US officials said was a direct message of deterrence to Iran.

The flight of the two massive B-52H Stratofortress bombers over the region, the second such mission in less than a month, was designed to underscore America’s continuing commitment to the Middle East even as President Donald Trump’s administration withdraws thousands of troops from Iraq and Afghanistan.

The long-range heavy bombers, which are capable of carrying both conventional and nuclear weapons, are a formidable sight and are flown less frequently in the Middle East than smaller combat aircraft, such as American fighter jets. Adversaries often complain about bomber flights in their region, deeming them a provocative show of force.

NOBEL PRIZE
WINNERS WARN
ABOUT HUNGER

Oslo, Dec. 10: Accepting the Nobel Peace Prize in a ceremony held online because of the coronavirus, the World Food Programme (WFP) warned on Thursday of a “hunger pandemic” it said could be worse than Covid-19.

“Because of so many wars, climate change, the widespread use of hunger as a political and military weapon, and a global health pandemic that makes all of that exponentially worse, 270 million people are marching toward starvation,” WFP executive director David Beasley said.

“Failure to address their needs will cause a hunger pandemic which will dwarf the impact of Covid,” he said, removing his facemask to make his remarks broadcast from the WFP’s headquarters in Rome.

The largest humanitarian organisation fighting famine, the UN agency founded in 1961 feeds tens of millions of people each year — 97 million in 2019 — across all continents.

SEXUAL ABUSE
SHAKES FBI’S
SENIOR RANKS

Washington, Dec. 10: An assistant FBI director retired after he was accused of drunkenly groping a female subordinate in a stairwell. Another senior FBI official left after he was found to have sexually harassed eight employees.

Yet another high-ranking FBI agent retired after he was accused of blackmailing a young employee into sexual encounters. An Associated Press investigation has identified at least six sexual misconduct allegations involving senior FBI officials over the past five years, including two new claims brought this week by women who say they were sexually assaulted by ranking agents.

Each of the accused FBI officials appears to have avoided discipline, the AP found, and several were quietly transferred or retired, keeping their full pensions and benefits even when probes substantiated the sexual misconduct claims against them. Beyond that, federal law enforcement officials are afforded anonymity even after the disciplinary process runs its course, allowing them to land on their feet in the private sector or even remain in law enforcement.

3,054 die of Covid
in 24 hours in USAdvisory panel convened to decide on
endorsing mass use of Pfizer virus vaccine

Washington, Dec. 10: The US has set a new grim record of more than 3,000 Covid-19 related deaths in a single day, reflecting a bleak reminder of the pandemic’s devastating toll, even as two coronavirus vaccine candidates appear to be on the verge of clearing the country’s final regulatory hurdles.

According to The Covid Tracking Project, the US on Wednesday reported as many 3,054 reported deaths — the highest single-day total to date. The previous single-day record was on May 7 at 2,769 deaths, it said. Overall, there were 1.8 million tests reported on Wednesday, 2,10,000 cases, and a record 1,06,688 Covid-19 patients in US hospitals, it said.

The 7-day average for Covid-19 deaths are at an all-time high as deaths are rising throughout the country, it said. So far more than 15 million Americans have been infected with Covid-19 and 2,86,249 people have lost their lives, according to Johns Hopkins University.

The US, the worst-affected country by the Coronavirus pandemic, is in the final stages of approving at least two Covid-19 vaccines — one by Pfizer and BioNTech and another by Moderna.

A US government advisory panel convened on Thursday to decide whether to endorse mass use of Pfizer’s Covid-19 vaccine to help conquer the outbreak that has killed close to 3,00,000 Americans.

The meeting of outside advisers to the Food and Drug Administration represented the next-to-last hurdle before the expected start of the biggest vaccination campaign in US history. Depending on how fast the FDA signs off on the panel’s recommendation, shots could begin within days.

The FDA panel functions like a science court. During the scheduled day-long session, it was expected to debate and pick apart the data — in public and live-streamed — on whether the vaccine is safe and effective enough to be cleared for emergency use.

“The American public demands and deserves a rigorous, comprehensive and independent review of the data,” said FDA’s Dr. Doran Fink, who

Cyberattackers hit
vaccine regulator

The Hague, Dec. 10: Documents related to the Pfizer Coronavirus vaccine were illegally accessed during a cyberattack at the EU regulator, the company said Wednesday, as Germany and other northern hemisphere countries grappled with a winter surge in the pandemic.

The Amsterdam-based European Medicines Agency (EMA) reported the cyberattack as European countries eagerly await a vaccine, including Germany where Chancellor Angela Merkel is pushing for tougher action against a second wave of Covid-19 that is proving deadlier than the first there.

While the EMA did not give details on the attack, Pfizer and BioNTech said documents relating to their vaccine candidate had been accessed, but that “no systems have been breached in connection with this incident.” The EMA has promised to reach a decision on conditional approval for Pfi-

described agency scientists working nights, weekends and over Thanksgiving to get that done.

With unprecedented interest in the normally obscure panel, the FDA broadcast the meeting via Youtube, and thousands logged on to follow the discussion. The FDA is not required to follow the committee’s advice but is widely expected to do so.

Once that happens, the US will begin shipping millions of doses of the shot. The meeting came as the Coronavirus continues surging across much of the world, claiming more than 1.5 million lives, including more than 2,89,000 in the US. Hanging over the meeting is a warning from British officials that people with a history of serious allergic reactions shouldn’t get the vaccine.

Government officials there are investigating two reports of reactions that occurred when the country began mass vaccina-

tion on Tuesday. Still, a positive recommendation and speedy US approval appeared nearly certain after FDA scientists issued an overwhelmingly positive initial review of the vaccine earlier this week.

FDA said results from Pfizer’s large, ongoing study showed that the shot, which was developed with Germany’s BioNTech, was more than 90% effective across people of different ages, races and underlying health conditions, including diabetes and obesity. No major safety problems were uncovered, and common vaccine-related side effects like fever, fatigue and injection site pain were tolerable.

“The data presented in the briefing report were consistent with what we heard before and are really exciting,” said Dr. William Moss, head of Johns Hopkins University’s International Vaccine Access Center.

— AFP/AP



France’s President Emmanuel Macron talks with Spain’s Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez and European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell as he arrives at the EU headquarters’ Europa building in Brussels on Wednesday, prior to a European Union summit. — AFP

Deadline to salvage Brexit
accord extended to SundayEU chief publishes ‘no deal’
Brexit contingency scheme

Brussels, Dec. 10: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen gave themselves until Sunday to decide on the future of post-Brexit negotiations, after a three-hour dinner left the two sides “far apart”.

Johnson came to Brussels on Wednesday in a last gasp effort to salvage trade talks that are teetering towards failure and the two leaders agreed that their negotiators should attempt one last push to bridge the divide.

“We had a lively and interesting discussion on the state of play across the list of outstanding issues,” Von der Leyen said in a statement after the dinner at her Brussels’ headquarters. “We gained a clear understanding of each other’s positions. They remain far apart,” she added.

A senior UK source said the talks were “frank” and that it remained unclear whether the “very large gaps” between the two sides can be bridged.

The leaders agreed to further discussions by their negotiating teams “over the next few days” and that a “firm decision” should be taken by Sunday, the UK source said.

EU negotiator Michel Barnier and his UK counterpart David Frost have narrowed the gaps over eight months but London insists it will reclaim full sovereignty at the end of the year after half-a-century of close economic integration. — AFP

Brussels, Dec. 10: EU chief Ursula von der Leyen on Thursday published a back-up plan to protect road and air travel and fishing rights if Britain leaves the union without a trade deal.

The UK left the European Union on January 31 and at the end of this month will leave the bloc’s single market and customs union, bringing a half-century of ever

closer economic integration to an end.

Negotiators from London and Brussels have been trying to agree a follow-on trade pact that would govern cross-Channel business after the transition period ends, but talks are deadlocked with three weeks to go.

The EU’s Michel Barnier and his UK counterpart David Frost resumed their talks on

Thursday with barely 72 hours left before the decisive moment, and the contingency plan served as “no deal” warning shot.

“Negotiations are still ongoing. However, given that the end of the transition is very near, there is no guarantee that if and when an agreement is found, it can enter into force on time,” von der Leyen said. — AFP

EU weighs sanctions over
Turkey’s Med drilling work

Brussels, Dec. 10: Concerned that their credibility is at stake, European Union leaders are set on Thursday to give the green light to the expansion of sanctions against Turkey over its exploration of gas reserves in Mediterranean waters claimed by EU members Greece and Cyprus.

At their last summit in October, the leaders offered “a positive political EU-Turkey agenda” to Ankara, including trade and customs benefits and

the prospect of more funds to help Turkey manage Syrian refugees on its territory if it halts its “illegal activities” in the eastern Mediterranean.

But EU foreign ministers agreed this week that Turkey’s behavior has not improved, and on Thursday’s summit is shaping up as a “crucial” meeting for EU-Turkey relations. “All of them considered that we have not seen a fundamental change of direction,” EU foreign policy chief Josep

Borrell told reporters after chairing a videoconference between the ministers on Monday.

“In several aspects the situation has worsened.” The 27 EU countries are split over how best to handle Turkey. France and Cyprus have pushed for tougher measures like economic sanctions, but other countries are concerned about further undermining the country’s already ravaged economy and destabilising the region. — AP

Fed tax officials probing Hunter Biden

TRUMP, REPUBLICANS PIN HOPES ON
TEXAS TRIAL TO OVERTURN RESULTS

Willmington, United States, Dec. 10: Hunter Biden, the son of US President-elect Joe Biden and a frequent target of Republican attacks, said Wednesday he was under federal investigation about his taxes.

The revelation about the probe included no details, but it promises to rekindle Republican rage about the Biden family, including Hunter Biden’s business dealings and the elder Biden’s anti-corruption push in Ukraine when he was US vice president.

It also presents a series of thorny issues during the president-elect’s transition into the White House in just over one month’s time, including the possibility his son will still be under investigation by the US Department of Justice.

“I learned yesterday for the first time that the US Attorney’s Office in Delaware advised my legal counsel, also yesterday, that they are investigating my tax affairs,” Hunter Biden said in a statement released by his father’s presidential transition team.

“I take this matter very seriously but I am confident that a professional and objective review of these matters will demonstrate that I handled my affairs legally and appropriately, including with the benefit of professional tax advisors,” Hunter Biden, 50, is a lawyer who has founded consulting and investment firms, worked in private equity, and served on the board of various organisations including national railroad corporation Amtrak. — AFP

Washington, Dec. 10: A longshot Supreme Court lawsuit from Texas against four states key in the November 3 election gave President Donald Trump fresh hope of stalling if not overturning Democrat Joe Biden’s victory.

Texas — a state Trump won — lodged the suit late on Tuesday against Michigan, Georgia, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, challenging Biden’s victory in each of the four.

The suit was seen as audacious and barely legally sound, given that no one state has any legal right to interfere in another’s election processes.

Texas alleged that the

results in the other four states were “unconstitutional” because of their heavy use of “fraud-prone” mail-in votes during the Coronavirus pandemic. It offered no proof of significant fraud, and it didn’t challenge the use of mailed ballots in states Trump won.

The suit cited numerous alleged examples of potential fraud already repeatedly rejected by courts in dozens of Trump campaign cases. Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton asked the Supreme Court to quickly freeze the process by which state vote counts are translated into electors at the Electoral College. — AFP

Following India protests closely,
says UK after Johnson’s gaffe

London, Dec. 10: The UK Foreign Office is closely following the protests by farmers in India, a government spokesperson said on Thursday as it clarified that Prime Minister Boris Johnson had “clearly misheard” a question in Parliament when he responded with Britain’s stance on the India-Pakistan dispute instead.

The gaffe occurred during the weekly Prime Minister’s Questions (PMQs) session in the House of Commons on Wednesday, when Johnson reiterated that any dispute between India and Pakistan was for the two countries to

● **A UK GOVERNMENT spokesperson said: “The Prime Minister clearly misheard the question in Parliament. The Foreign Office are following the issue of protests in India closely”.**

settle bilaterally in response to a question by Opposition Labour MP Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi about conveying British Sikh “anxieties” over the ongoing protests against agricultural reforms in India.

A UK government spokesperson said: “The Prime Minister clearly misheard the question in Parliament. The Foreign

Office are following the issue of protests in India closely”. Dhesi, who has been very vocal on the protests by farmers against India’s agricultural reforms, had raised the issue of the footage of “water cannons, teargas and brute force” being used against the peaceful protesters.

“So, will the Prime Minister (Johnson) convey to the Indian Prime Minister (Narendra Modi) our heartfelt anxieties, our hopes for a speedy resolution to the current deadlock and does he agree that everyone has a fundamental right to peaceful protest,” he questioned Johnson. — PTI

DYING | STATISTICS

Diabetes, dementia in top 10 causes of death, non-communicable diseases 7 out of 10 causes

Heart disease kills more people than ever: WHO

United Nations, Dec. 10: Heart disease, which has remained the leading cause of death at the global level for the last 20 years, is now killing more people than ever before, according to the World Health Organisation.

The WHO said diabetes and dementia are also among the world’s top 10 causes of death.

The WHO’s 2019 Global Health Estimates, released on Wednesday, said non-communicable diseases now make up 7 of the world’s top 10 causes of

death, an increase from 4 of the 10 leading causes in 2000.

The new data cover the period from 2000 to 2019. “Heart disease has remained the leading cause of death at the global level for the last 20 years. However, it is now killing more people than ever before,” the organisation said.

Heart disease now represents 16 per cent of total deaths from all causes and the number of deaths from heart disease increased by more than two million

● **DEATHS FROM diabetes increased by 70 per cent globally between 2000 and 2019, with an 80 per cent rise in deaths among males. In the Eastern Mediterranean, deaths from diabetes have more than doubled and represent the greatest percentage increase of all WHO regions.**

since 2000 to nearly 9 million in 2019.

Diabetes and dementia enter the top 10 causes of

death. Alzheimer’s disease and other forms of dementia are now among the top 10 causes of death worldwide, ranking 3rd in both the Americas and Europe in 2019. Women are disproportionately affected: globally, 65 per cent of deaths from Alzheimer’s and other forms of dementia are women.

Deaths from diabetes increased by 70 per cent globally between 2000 and 2019, with an 80 per cent rise in deaths among males. In the Eastern Mediterranean, deaths from dia-

betes have more than doubled and represent the greatest percentage increase of all WHO regions.

The WHO said the estimates reveal trends over the last 2 decades in mortality and morbidity caused by diseases and injuries, clearly highlighting the need for an intensified global focus on preventing and treating cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes and chronic respiratory diseases, as well as tackling injuries, in all regions of the world, as set out in the agenda for

the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

“These new estimates are another reminder that we need to rapidly step up prevention, diagnosis and treatment of non-communicable diseases,” Director-General of WHO Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said. “They highlight the urgency of drastically improving primary health care equitably and holistically. Strong primary health care is clearly the foundation on which everything rests, from combatting non-communi-

cable diseases to managing a global pandemic.”

While more non-communicable diseases are now causing deaths worldwide, there has been a global decline in deaths from communicable diseases, which however still remain a major challenge in low- and middle-income countries. In 2019, pneumonia and other lower respiratory infections were the deadliest group of communicable diseases and together ranked as the fourth leading cause of death. — PTI

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	45,959.88	-0.31
Nifty 50	13,478.30	-0.38
S&P 500*	3,671.57	-0.03
Dollar (₹)	73.66	-0.12
Pound Sterling (₹)	98.36	0.55
Euro (₹)	89.06	0.14
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	48,652*534	1.11
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	50.99	2.13
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.916	-0.001
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.933	-0.008

* As of 8:30 PM IST

India's recovery faster than expected: ADB

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) upgraded its forecast for the Indian economy, projecting 8 per cent contraction in 2020-21 as compared to 9 per cent degrowth estimated earlier, on the back of faster than expected recovery. Observing that the economy has begun to normalise, the Asian Development Outlook (ADO) Supplement said the second quarter contraction at 7.5 per cent was better than expected.

Hina Nagarajan to head United Spirits from July 1



United Spirits Ltd (USL), a part of global liquor giant Diageo, appointed Hina Nagarajan as the firm's new CEO with effect from July 1, 2021. Incumbent Anand Kripalu will step down on June 30. Nagarajan is currently MD, Africa regional markets at Diageo and will join USL as the CEO-designate from April 1. She will be a member of the Diageo executive committee. Nagarajan will be based in Bengaluru.

Mukesh Ambani becomes a grandfather

Mukesh Ambani on Thursday became a grandfather after a son was born to his eldest son. "Shloka and Akash Ambani became proud parents of a baby boy today in Mumbai," a statement from the Ambani family said. Akash married diamondaire Russell Mehta's daughter Shloka in March 2019. Ambani, 63, and his wife Nita have three children—twins Akash and Isha, 29 years old, and Anant, 25.

Bayer to sell mini packs of hybrid vegetable seeds

Bayer said it is entering India's home garden segment with mini packs of Seminis vegetable seeds, to provide rural farmers and semi-urban growers a choice in cultivation. Bayer aims to leverage its broad portfolio of high-quality hybrid seeds with mini packs of bitter melon, bottle gourd, okra and beans, initially. Gradually, Bayer plans to extend its mini packs across the entire range of its Seminis hybrid seeds.

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■ Smaller players may find norms tough Dividend cap won't affect large NBFCs

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, DEC. 10

The Reserve Bank of India's proposal to restrict dividend payments by non-banking finance companies (NBFCs) could impact several hundreds of unlisted NBFCs, but may not have any material impact on the listed ones.

The apex bank's draft norms on dividend payouts for NBFCs have been anchored on the capital adequacy ratio (CAR) and net non-performing loans (NPL) and only firms meeting the prescribed prudential requirements would be allowed to declare and distribute dividends. The RBI proposes to cap the dividend payout ratio for NBFCs at a maximum of 50 per cent.

Asutosh Mishra, head of research, institutional equity at Ashika Stock Broking, said, "There are thousands of unlisted NBFCs in India and of them around 400-500 could be impacted. Several manufacturers such as Hero, Maruti, Ashok Leyland, Bajaj Auto have their own unlisted NBFC arms and such NBFCs may have to restructure their operations to comply with the new regulatory norms in order to pay dividends. However, the large listed NBFCs may not have any significant impact."

A Kotak report said LIC Housing Finance (due to low capital adequacy ratio), Mahindra & Mahindra Financial Services (due to high net NPL) and Shriram



Transport Finance (due to high net NPLs) will not be eligible to pay dividends, if the norms apply to the previous year. "Kotak awaits the final set of guidelines and implementation timelines," the report said.

According to the draft norms released by the RBI on Tuesday, NBFCs that have capital adequacy ratio (CAR) below 15 per cent or net non-performing loans (NPLs) above 6 per cent are not eligible for paying dividend. NBFCs have to comply with these requirements for three consecutive years (including the current fiscal) to be eligible for dividend payouts. The payout ratio caps range from 15-50 per cent based on the two ratios.

"The draft circular on dividend distribution by NBFCs is unlikely to impact most of the NBFCs. Over the last three years, dividend payout ratios have been about 10-20 per cent for most entities, with a few in the range of 20-30 per cent. Ica expects NBFCs to comfortably meet the CAR criteria but a few entities having high NPLs would find it difficult to meet the

net NPA filter and thus dividend payout could be impacted for those, if this circular is implemented. Ica notes that while HFCs have not been specifically mentioned in this draft, meeting the CAR criteria would be relatively easier given the lower risk weights on the large part of their portfolio. Also, the net NPA criteria specified for NBFCs may not be a constraint for HFCs to pay out dividend considering the low NPAs for the segment," said Manushree Saggur, VP-financial sector ratings at Ica Ltd.

Kailash Baheti, CFO, Magma Fincorp, said, "Within NBFCs the NPAs for different classes of NBFCs would be very different. A vehicle financing company would typically have higher NPAs. A tractor financing company would have even higher NPAs. The higher NPAs are well covered by higher yield and does not necessarily mean weak business. It would be sensible to have different thresholds considering the underlying business of each NBFC."

CCI raids offices of UltraTech, ACC, Ambuja

ADITYA KALRA NEW DELHI, DEC. 10

India's antitrust body on Wednesday conducted raids at offices of UltraTech Cement and two subsidiaries of the world's largest cement maker LafargeHolcim, two sources close to the matter said.

Swiss firm LafargeHolcim in a statement to Reuters, confirmed officials visited the Mumbai offices of ACC and Ambuja Cements and said the companies were fully cooperating with the authorities, but could not comment further as the matter is ongoing.

Several officers of the Competition Commission of India (CCI) were involved in search operations conducted simultaneously at multiple locations, the sources said, asking not to be named because of the confidential nature of the raids.

Searches were also conducted at Shree Cement Ltd, a third source said.

None of the Indian cement companies responded to requests for a comment. The CCI did not respond either.

In 2012, the CCI imposed a total penalty of \$1.1 billion on several cement-makers for colluding to under-use their plants and create a shortage of cement. An appeal against that decision is still pending.

In recent years, the CCI has raided offices of other foreign firms, including beer giant Carlsberg and commodities trader Glencore.

—Reuters

Lawsuits could force FB to sell Instagram, WhatsApp

DIANE BARTZ, NANDITA BOSE & KATIE PAUL WASHINGTON/PALO ALTO, DEC. 10



Facebook Inc could be forced to sell its prized assets WhatsApp and Instagram after the US Federal Trade Commission and nearly every US state filed lawsuits against the social media firm, saying it used a "buy or bury" strategy to snap up rivals and keep smaller competitors at bay.

With the filing of the twin lawsuits on Wednesday, Facebook becomes the second big tech company to face a major legal challenge this year after the US Justice Department sued Alphabet Inc's Google in October, accusing the \$1 trillion company of using its market power to fend off rivals.

The lawsuits highlight the growing bipartisan consensus to hold Big Tech accountable for its

business practices and mark a rare moment of agreement between the Trump administration and Democrats, some of whom have advocated breaking up both Google and Facebook.

The complaints on Wednesday accuse Facebook of buying up rivals, focusing specifically on its previous acquisitions of photo-sharing app Instagram for \$1 billion in 2012 and messaging app WhatsApp for \$19 billion in 2014.

Federal and state regula-

tors said the acquisitions should be unwound—a move that is likely to set off a long legal challenge as the deals were cleared years earlier by the FTC.

"For nearly a decade, Facebook has used its dominance and monopoly power to crush smaller rivals, snuff out competition, all at the expense of everyday users," said New York attorney general Letitia James on behalf of the coalition of 46 states, Washington, DC and Guam, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina and South Dakota did not participate in the lawsuit.

James said the company acquired rivals before they could threaten the company's dominance.

Facebook's general counsel Jennifer Newstead called the lawsuits "revisionist history" and said antitrust laws do not exist to punish "successful companies."

—Reuters

ICI Lombard offers cashless OPD, cover reset

Mumbai, Dec. 10: Non-life player ICI Lombard on Thursday announced 100 per cent resetting of the sum assured multiple times and also cashless OPD in its bid to offer maximum benefits to likely Covid-19 patients.

As part of offering a more comprehensive health policies, the fourth largest non-life insurer launched four refreshed policies of the existing ones—health shield, health shield plus, health elite and health elite plus—offering

enhanced protection.

Some of the new coverage benefits include donor expenses, domiciliary hospitalisation, emergency assistance, worldwide cover, unlimited reset, air ambulance, super no claim bonus, sum insured protector and claim protector, cashless OPD services, among others, the company said in a concall.

We are redefining the health insurance space by introducing benefits that are aligned to the new normal and contextual to

today's customer needs, it said.

With the unlimited reset benefit, a policyholder can reset up to 100 per cent of the base sum insured unlimited times in a policy year for an un-related ailment, the company said.

The sum insured protector feature increases the sum insured every year in line with inflation rates.

The new plans also comes with services such as free health check-ups and online chat with doctors and dietician.

—PTI

Tata rejects Mistry's offer as 'nonsense'

UPMANYU TRIVEDI DEC. 10

Tata Group rejected a truce offer by Pallonji Mistry's conglomerate that suggested swapping the Mistry family's stake for shares worth \$24 billion in the listed Tata companies.

"It's nonsense. This kind of relief cannot be granted," Tata's lawyer Harish Salve said during a hearing before the Supreme Court on Thursday. "I'm opposing it," he said, arguing on behalf of the largest Indian conglomerate.

The Mistry-led Shapoorji Pallonji Group had informed the court in October that it estimated its 18.4 per cent stake in Tata Sons-- the group's main holding company -- to be worth more than Rs 1.75 lakh crore (\$23.7 billion). It was seeking pro-rata shares in all listed Tata entities, cash, or any marketable instrument in lieu. Tata Group earlier this week pegged this valuation at \$11 billion, or less than half of Mistry's ask.

Salve said that accepting the Mistry's offer could cause the issue to spill over from Tata Sons, which controls the coffee-



Pallonji Mistry

to-cars empire, to its listed firms where the SP Group would then be holding minority stakes.

Tata's rejection of SP Group's proposal threatens to stretch India's biggest corporate battle in recent history. The Mistry family announced in September its intention to sever a 70-year relationship, capping four years of bitter feud that started with a boardroom coup in 2016 at Tata Sons and led to the abrupt ouster of Cyrus Mistry as Tata Group chairman. Cyrus is the son of billionaire Mistry, 91, who controls the 155-year-old SP Group.

—Bloomberg

Shippers reposition empty containers

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, DEC. 10

In order to mitigate the shortage of containers for exports, shipping companies have started repositioning empty containers to Indian coast. Still, the shortage caused due to imbalance in trade will take at least two to three months to ease.

Integrated logistics company Maersk has started repositioning empty containers from the Middle East by almost three times in order to mitigate the

container availability issue in India.

"There has been a general shortage of equipment in the market caused by an imbalance between imports into and exports out of India. With imports being much lower than exports, there is a shortage of empty containers for exports," Steve Felder, MD, Maersk South Asia told *Financial Chronicle*.

"With exports rising from different parts of the country, we had to position empty containers accordingly across the country.

E-com shipments to touch 10 bn by FY25

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, DEC. 10

Shipments by e-commerce platforms are expected to grow from 2.5 billion in FY20 to 10 billion by FY25.

In FY20, the number of e-commerce shipments stood at 2.55 billion, having grown at a 50 per cent CAGR for the past three years. In FY18, the sector had made shipments to the tune of 1 billion, as per a report by Bengaluru-based firms RedSeer and Shadowfox.

E-commerce shipments are expected to grow by a

30- 35 per cent CAGR for the next five years and touch 10 billion by FY25.

Some key drivers of growth are the latent demand in tier-2+ cities, logistics networks, infrastructure built by large horizontal players and growth of new-age third-party logistics players.

Horizontal players like Amazon and Flipkart accounted for 43 per cent of the shipments in FY20. Hyperlocal service providers like BigBasket, Grofers, Zomato and Swiggy accounted for 44 per cent of the shipments.

We are constantly in contact with our customers... We have increased our repositioning of empty containers from the Middle East by almost three times to support our customers exporting out of India. This has helped us in improving the situation to some extent," he said.

Traditionally, Indian exports have been relying on imports for empty containers. For the past few months, the exports have been moving up and imports have been lagging behind, creating an imbalance

and shortage of empty containers. Containerised exports out of India were up by 14 per cent year-on-year in the September quarter but imports were lower by 28 per cent year-on-year.

K. Unnikrishnan, deputy D-G, Fieo, said, "Other shipping companies also are trying to reposition empty containers. However, the availability of containers and higher freight charges continue to be an issue. Until imports improve, we do not see the situation easing much."

CAUTIOUS | CHINA

Norm kicks in if infections exceed 500:1 million ratio in a region

Cabin crew told to wear diapers on risky flights

WILL DAVIES DEC. 10

China's aviation regulator recommends cabin crew on charter flights to high-risk Covid-19 destinations should wear disposable diapers and avoid using the bathroom to reduce the risk of infection.

The advice comes in a 38-page list of guidelines for airlines to prevent the spread of coronavirus. The sixth edition echoes similar instructions in previous, less lengthy versions.

The Civil Aviation Administration of China



said the recommendation applies for charter flights to and from countries and regions where infections exceed 500 in every one million people.

The diaper advice is in a

section on personal protective equipment, which also recommends the following for cabin crew: Medical protective masks; double-layer disposable medical rubber

gloves; goggles; disposable caps; disposable protective clothing; and disposable shoe covers.

Flight crew should wear masks and goggles, but they don't need diapers.

Other advice for the flights includes dividing the cabin into "clean area, buffer zone, passenger sitting area and quarantine area," separated by disposable curtains. The last three rows should be designated as an emergency quarantine area, CAAC said.

China's aviation market was hit hard at the onset of the outbreak in Wuhan and subsequent spread

around the country. But it has recovered -- on the domestic front at least-- to close to pre-pandemic levels, while other regions such as Europe and the US struggle to bring Covid-19 under control.

Airlines have insisted that it is safe to fly during the pandemic, partly thanks to the hospital-grade air filters on planes, but some researchers say it isn't yet clear to conclude there's minimal risk. Some cases have documented transmission on flights when passengers wore masks and sat far apart.

—Bloomberg

LEXUS SETS UP GUEST EXPERIENCE CENTRE IN H'BAD

Mumbai, Dec. 10: Lexus, the luxury vehicle arm of Toyota, on Thursday expanded its dealership network in India with the setting up its fourth guest experience centre (GEC) in Hyderabad.

Lexus, which entered India in March 2017, has such centres in New Delhi, Mumbai and Bengaluru.

"The overwhelming response we received from Hyderabad to our self-charging hybrid electric portfolio is what prompted us to bring the Lexus Guest Experience Centre here," Lexus India president P. B. Venugopal said.

—PTI

SHORT TAKES

Dad-to-be Kane pulls out of Test

Wellington: New Zealand captain Kane Williamson on Thursday pulled out of the second Test against the West Indies in Wellington as he awaits the imminent arrival of his first child. The abrupt U-turn came just hours after batting mainstay Williamson had told head coach Gary Stead he would play in the match, which begins on Friday. Williamson had flown home to Tauranga to be with his wife Sarah on the even of the match. After confirming his availability he flew back to Wellington where, after further discussions with Stead, he agreed it would be best if he returned to be with his wife. "It's a decision that we've come to around the best interests for him and for Sarah, and also for our team," Stead said. Williamson had previously said the baby was due "mid-to-late December". — *AFP*

Akram backs out as Pak selector

Karachi: The Pakistan Cricket Board is finding it difficult to appoint a new chief selector after its top candidate backed out of working under the current system of selection in the country. A well-placed source said that former pacer Muhammad Akram was the top candidate for the chief selector's post but he has backed out demanding that the board return to the old system of selection. Under the old system, the board used to appoint an independent three to five-member national selection committee headed by a chief selector which picked the teams and had them approved by the Chairman of the board. "Akram made it clear he didn't want to work either under the present system of selection or with the head coaches of provincial teams," the source said. — *PTI*

Anand's academy to train youngsters

Chennai: Legendary Indian chess player Viswanathan Anand has joined hands with WestBridge Capital to launch an academy, through which the five-time world champion will train youngster. The academy, named WestBridge-Anand Chess Academy, has taken on board five of the country's most promising players to be trained by Anand. The initial list of trainees and grantees of the WACA Fellowship are: 15-year old R. Pragganandhaa, Nihal Sarin (16), Raunak Sadhwani (15), D. Gukesh (14) and Pragganandhaa's sister R. Vaishali (19). As part of the partnership, deserving candidates will be identified every year and provided help to break into the top world chess ranking. They will be granted fellowships. — *PTI*

East Bengal held by Jamshedpur

Vasco: SC East Bengal held a wasteful Jamshedpur FC for a goalless draw to secure their first point of the Indian Super League at the Tilak Maidan Stadium, here on Thursday. SCEB's Eugeneseon Lyngdoh was given the marching orders following a second yellow card in the 25th minute but their defence led by Hero-of-the-Match Mohammed Irshad stayed compact and foiled every attempt. — *PTI*

Live on TV

CRICKET

Australia 'A' vs India: Day 1 from 9 am on Sony Six, HD

Big Bash League: Melbourne Stars vs Brisbane Heat from 1.45 pm on Sony Ten 2, HD

Lanka Premier League: Dambulla vs Colombo from 7.30 pm on Sony Six, HD

FOOTBALL

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

Italian League: Sassuolo vs Benevento from 11.5 am (Saturday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

WWE

SmackDown: Bouts from 6.30 am (Saturday) on Sony Ten 1, HD

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SUPERMAN CITY

Real Madrid, PSG carve out victories; Reds held

Paris, Dec. 10: Karim Benzema sent Real Madrid through to the last 16 of the Champions League on Wednesday alongside their rivals Atletico, while Neymar scored a hat-trick as Paris Saint-Germain beat Istanbul Basaksehir in a match that had been delayed for 24 hours over a racism row.

Real are Europe's most decorated club with 13 European Cups but they needed to beat Borussia Moenchengladbach in Madrid to be sure of making it through the group stage of the Champions League for a 24th straight year.

Benzema was their hero, easing the pressure on coach Zinedine Zidane with two fine back-post headers in the first half securing a 2-0 win in a game played behind closed doors at the Alfredo di Stefano Stadium.

The Frenchman also hit the bar in the second half and in the end it was a result that suited both teams, with a 0-0 draw between Inter Milan and Shakhtar Donetsk allowing Real to top Group 'B' and Gladbach, former European Cup runners-up, to go through as runners-up.

Players from the German club gathered around smartphones and laptops after full time in Madrid to follow events in Milan, where a winner for either team would have knocked Gladbach out.

They celebrated wildly when their qualification was confirmed.

"Moments like that live long in the memory. It was absolutely incredible and the joy was uncontainable," said Gladbach midfielder Christoph Kramer.

Shakhtar go into the Europa League while Inter finish bottom of their group, failing to reach the last 16 for a third season running.

Meanwhile Atletico needed to beat Red Bull Salzburg in Austria to qualify as runners-up in Group 'A' behind Bayern Munich, and did so with Mario Hermoso and Yannick Carrasco scoring in a 2-0 victory.

Salzburg now go into the Europa League while reigning European cham-



Mohamed Salah (centre) of Liverpool and Midtjylland's Jens Cajuste vie for the ball during their UEFA Champions League Group 'D' football match in Herning, Denmark, on Wednesday. — *AFP*

pions Bayern completed the group stage unbeaten as Niklas Suele and Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting gave them a 2-0 win over Lokomotiv Moscow.

ATALANTA THROUGH

The other team to clinch qualification on Wednesday was Atalanta, whose 1-0 win away to Ajax secured second place in Group 'D' behind Liverpool and a last-16 spot for the second year running.

Luis Muriel scored a late winner for Atalanta in Amsterdam after Ryan Gravenberch was sent off for the hosts, who drop into the Europa League.

Already through, Liverpool were able to give a chance to several younger players in their 1-1 draw with Midtjylland in Denmark, where Mohamed Salah put the

THE RESULTS

Real Madrid (Benzema 9, 32)	2	Paris Saint-Germain (Neymar 21, 38, 50, Kylian Mbappe 42-pen, 62)	5
Borussia Moenchengladbach	0	Istanbul Basaksehir (Topal 57)	1
Manchester City (Torres 48, Aguero 77, Sterling 90)	3	Bayern Munich (Suele 63, Choupo-Moting 80)	2
Marseille	0	Lokomotiv Moscow	0
Liverpool (Salah 1)	1	Inter Milan Shakhtar Donetsk	0
Midtjylland (Scholz 62-pen)	1		0

2019 winners ahead early on but Alexander Scholz's penalty gave the hosts an honourable draw.

PSG had wrapped up their qualification for the last 16 on Tuesday thanks to Manchester United's defeat at RB Leipzig, despite their own game

being suspended after an unprecedented walkout.

Both sets of players refused to continue after a row erupted over an alleged racist remark by the fourth official aimed at Basaksehir's assistant coach, Pierre Webó.

With a new set of offi-

cials, the game restarted in the 14th minute on Wednesday and Neymar scored a hat-trick while also winning a penalty converted by Kylian Mbappe.

That was Mbappe's first Champions League goal in 12 months, and he scored again later on after Mehmet Topal pulled one back. With their 5-1 victory, PSG go through as group winners.

Pep Guardiola's Manchester City made it five wins and a draw in Group 'D' as they eased to a 3-0 victory against Marseille with Ferran Torres and Sergio Agüero getting second-half goals before an Alvaro Gonzalez own goal.

Also, Porto beat Olympiakos 2-0 in Piraeus courtesy of Otavio's early penalty and a Matheus Uribe goal. — *AFP*

KOHLI MAINTAINS TOP SPOT IN ODI RANKINGS

Dubai, Dec. 10: India captain Virat Kohli cemented his spot at the top of the ICC Men's ODI Player Rankings for batsmen after scoring two half-centuries in the recently-concluded three-match series against Australia.

Kohli, who had scored 89 and 63 in the second and third ODI against Australia in Sydney and Canberra respectively, has 870 points.

Despite missing the ODI series owing to a hamstring injury, Rohit Sharma (842) remains at the second spot, five points ahead of Pakistan skipper Babar Azam, who is number three in the rankings.

Playing his first ODI since the ICC Cricket World Cup 2019, India all-rounder Hardik Pandya struck 90 in the first game and 92 not out in the third to make his first appearance in the top 50 batsmen at 49th place with a career-best of 553 points.

From the Australian camp, captain Aaron Finch's innings of 114 in the first ODI, followed by 60 and 75 helped him up to a career-best tally of 791 points and fifth place.

Steve Smith's twin centuries in the first two matches enabled him to move back into the top 20 for the first time since 2018. He is currently at number fifteen with 707 points. Glenn Maxwell's 167 runs in the series and featured two half-centuries pushed him back up to 20th rank. — *PTI*

Italy's 1982 WC hero Rossi dead

Milan, Dec. 10: Paolo Rossi, who fired Italy to victory in the 1982 World Cup after almost missing the tournament through a match-fixing scandal, has died aged 64, prompting an outpouring of grief and tributes.

Rossi's wife Federica Cappelletti announced the death in an *Instagram* post featuring a photo of the couple, accompanied by the comment "Forever," followed by a heart.

She did not disclose the cause of his death.

"He didn't want to go, I hugged him tightly and told him 'Paolo, now go, you have suffered too much'," Cappelletti said.

"It is not easy to summarise in a few words all that Paolo was," she continued.

"A unique person, full of optimism even in the most difficult moments, a great person but at the same time simple. He knew how to talk in the same way with Heads of State but also with the people we met at the supermarket. This was Paolo and this was his greatness," she further added.

Rossi's funeral will take place in his adopted city of Vicenza, in northeastern Italy, with his ashes returned to his native Tuscany, Cappelletti added.

Rossi won the hearts of Italian fans when his goals propelled Enzo Bearzot's Azzurri — who started the tournament with three uninspiring draws — to a third world title.

He exploded onto the stage of the 1982 tournament with a hat-trick in the 3-2 defeat of Brazil.

In the semifinals he scored both goals as Italy beat Poland 2-0, and he hit the opening goal in the 3-1



In this file photo, Paolo Rossi poses at the Juventus Stadium in Turin, Italy. — *AP*

win over West Germany in the final.

Goalkeeper Dino Zoff, who captained the 1982 winning side, described Rossi as an "extraordinary footballer, excellent teammate and friend".

"He was irreplaceable in that group. And the relationship with him was great. We were a team of friends, a great group," Zoff said.

Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte paid tribute to an "unforgettable champion", saying that his goals that summer "gave a dream to an entire generation".

"You will always remain our hero. Ciao Pablito," Juventus coach Andrea Pirlo, wrote on *Twitter*.

"Paolo was a friend, a golden boy: benevolent, humble and intelligent. He will be forever remembered by the (Juventus) team and everyone with a black and white heart," France football legend Michel Platini, who played alongside him at Juventus, said in a statement. — *AFP*



In this July 8, 1982 file photo, Paolo Rossi of Italy races across the pitch after scoring his team's first goal against Poland during their Fifa World Cup semifinal match at the Nou Camp Stadium, Barcelona, Spain. — *AP*

Highs and lows of Rossi's mixed life

Rome, Dec. 10: Football is mourning the death of Paolo Rossi, the prolific striker whose goals led the Azzurri to World Cup glory in 1982. Here are the stand-out moments from the career of one of Italy's greatest players:

INAUSPICIOUS START

Rossi made his debut with Juventus in 1973 and then loaned to Serie 'B' side Vicenza for the 1976-77 season. Rossi was Serie B's top scorer that year, firing Vicenza to promotion, and he led the Serie 'A' scoring charts the following season, earning a call-up to Enzo Bearzot's Italy squad for the 1978 World Cup in Argentina. Rossi shone in the tournament, scoring three goals as the Italians finished fourth.

TOTONERO SCANDAL

Despite his World Cup heroics, Rossi again struggled with injuries in the following season. Rossi then got embroiled in the 'Totonero' match-fixing scandal and was banned for three years, later reduced to two as he continually protested his innocence. The ban ruled Rossi out of the 1980 European Championship, where hosts Italy finished fourth. However, he was rehired by Juventus and returned in time for the tail-end of the Turin team's victorious

1981-82 season, earning a spot in Italy's 1982 World Cup squad.

WORLD CUP GOLD

A 2-1 win over Argentina was followed by the most memorable match of Rossi's career, when he hit a hat-trick as Italy downed star-studded Brazil 3-2 to reach the semifinals. Rossi won the Golden Boot for top-scoring with six goals, the Golden Ball as the tournament's best player, and that year's Ballon d'Or.

HEYSEL TRAGEDY

After the World Cup, Rossi enjoyed his most successful club spell with Juventus, where he formed a formidable partnership with Michel Platini and Zbigniew Boniek.

Juventus won the 1983 Coppa Italia, the 1983-84 Serie 'A' title and UEFA Cup Winners' Cup and the 1984 UEFA Super Cup. Rossi also top-scored with six goals as Juventus reached the 1983 European Cup final, where they lost to Hamburg. However, Rossi's final game for Juventus was marked by tragedy. At the 1985 European Cup final 39 fans died in a stampede and wall collapse following crowd disturbances. Season-long spells at Milan and Hellas Verona followed, before Rossi retired in 1987. — *AFP*

30,000 SPECTATORS TO THROG BOXING DAY TEST

Melbourne, Dec. 10: The iconic Boxing Day Test between India and Australia is set to be played in front of 30,000 fans per day after the Victorian government eased crowd restrictions on Thursday.

In a world scarred by the Covid-19 pandemic, the limited overs series between Australia and India saw the return of spectators.

The Boxing Day Test scheduled to be played between December 26 to 30 at the Melbourne Cricket Ground was earlier restricted to 25 per cent of the total capacity crowd — about 25,000 fans a day.

However, the decision to increase the cap to 30,000 was made after the state went past 40 days without a new Covid-19 case.

"We're so excited to be able to welcome so many fans to the MCG in what's been such a challenging year for Victorians! #AUSVIND," Cricket Australia tweeted.

The much-anticipated four-Test series is scheduled to begin from December 17 in Adelaide.

The Adelaide Test will be the only five-day game which Virat Kohli will feature in before he returns to be with his actor wife Anushka Sharma for the birth of their first child in early January. — *PTI*

Chennai to host 2 Tests in India-England series

New Delhi, Dec. 10: India's much-anticipated Day/Night Test against England will be held at Ahmedabad from February 24 next year and the city will also be the venue of one more Test and five T20 Internationals at its newly constructed Motera Stadium.

The two other venues that have been allotted matches as per BCCI's rotational policy are Chennai, which will host two Test matches, and Pune that will host the three ODIs during the February-March series.

BCCI secretary Jay Shah on Thursday announced Motera as the venue for the day/night Test during the Gujarat Cricket Association's Indoor Academy inauguration. The match will be India's second pink ball Test at home after the Bangladesh game at the Eden Gardens last year.

"England team will not travel the length and breadth of the country in the prevailing situation (Covid-19 pandemic). There are only three cities where BCCI is creating a bio-bubble. Two

Tests and five ODIs will be in Ahmedabad. The remaining two Tests will be in Chennai and three ODIs in Pune," a senior BCCI source said.

"As per our rotational policy, Pune and Chennai were due to get matches long back. With this series, they would get a chance to host their pending games," he further added. It is understood that a successful hosting of England series would pave the way for a good and successful IPL at home after it had to be taken to UAE this year. — *PTI*