

THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI MONDAY 14 DECEMBER 2020



NATION | 3

Cong uncomfortable with possibility of Sharad Pawar becoming PM candidate



WORLD | 6

Non-essential shops, schools to close in Germany, says Merkel



DELHI AGE | 11

Sanya says she's always up to moving her feet in ways that help her burn a few calories

www.asianage.com

RNI No. 57290/94, Regd No: DL-SW-05/4189/15-17

Vol. 27 No. 298 | 16 PAGES | ₹5.00

WINDOWS



Lewis Hamilton poses with the DHL Fastest Lap award ahead of the Abu Dhabi F1 Grand Prix at the Yas Marina Circuit in Abu Dhabi on Sunday. — AFP

Nadda tests Covid positive, goes into home isolation now

New Delhi: BJP president J.P. Nadda has tested positive for the novel coronavirus and has gone into home isolation on the advice of doctors. In a tweet, he said he had undergone a test after showing symptoms of Covid-19, and was found to be positive. "My condition is alright and I am following all instructions after going for home isolation on the advice of doctors. I request everyone who got in touch with me in the last few days to isolate themselves and undergo test," he said. — PTI Full report on Page 3

Dense fog lowers visibility in Delhi

New Delhi: A blanket of "dense" fog covered parts of Delhi on Sunday morning, lowering visibility and affecting traffic movement, the IMD said. Rains on Saturday increased moisture content in the air that led to "dense" fog in parts of the city, the IMD said. Full report on Page 2

Kamal Haasan hints at Rajinikanth tieup

Madurai: Makkal Needhi Maiam chief Kamal Haasan on Sunday hinted at realignment of political alliances in Tamil Nadu ahead of 2021 assembly elections while not ruling out a possible tieup with actor Rajinikanth, who is set to float his party soon. — PTI

COUNTERPOINT



It's a multi-purpose outfit... protects me from cold and Covid!

WEATHER

Max: 21°C
Min: 7°C
RH: 59%
Rain: Nil
Forecast: Sunny

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Dakshinayana
Tithi: Kartika Bahula
Amavasya till 9.48 pm
Star: Jyeshtha till 11.27 pm
Varjyam: 6.45 am to 8.12 am
Durmuhurtam: 12.32 pm to 1.16 pm; 2.44 pm to 3.27 pm
Rahukalam: 7.30 am to 9 am
SUNSET TODAY 5.26 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 7.05 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 6.29 AM
MOONSET TODAY 5.09 PM

Shah meets Tomar, seeks ways to break logjam, resume talks

Farmers plan to hold dharnas, go on fast across India today

SANJAY KAW and RAJNISH SHARMA
NEW DELHI, DEC. 13

Scaling up their agitation against the Centre's three agriculture-related laws, the farmers will observe a day-long fast and organise dharnas at district headquarters all across the country on Monday. Not satisfied with the government's offer to amend the new farm laws, thousands of farmers from different states have started marching towards the Delhi borders, where protests have been going on for the past 18 days.

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal has said he too will hold a one-day fast in support of the protesting farmers. He also urged all Aam Aadmi Party workers and supporters to observe a day's fast in solidarity with the farmers. He said the Centre should immediately accept all demands by the farmers protesting against the agriculture laws and bring a bill to guarantee minimum support prices.

The Delhi-Jaipur highway was partially shut for about three hours on Sunday afternoon as farmers started a tractor march from Shahjahanpur on the Rajasthan-Haryana border as part of



Punjabi singer Kanwar Grewal (centre) performs during their visit to the Ghazipur border to support farmers protesting against farm laws on Sunday. — PTI

their escalating protest against the contentious farm laws.

In a bid to break the ongoing deadlock with the farmers' unions, Union home minister Amit Shah held a series of meetings on Sunday with agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar and senior BJP leaders from Punjab. Even though the farmers are insistent that the Centre should withdraw the three farm laws, the Centre is keen to once again resume its dialogue with the farmers' unions.

Sources said there was a strong possibility that the Centre could send a fresh proposal to the farmers in the next two days and invite them for a renewed dialogue. It is learnt Mr

Shah discussed in detail with Mr Tomar what additional concessions could be given to the farmers.

While information and broadcasting minister Prakash Javadekar said the government's door was always open for farmers and it was ready to discuss all issues, farmers' leader Gurnam Singh Chaduni said at the Singhu border they were going ahead with the nationwide agitation. "The heads of all farmer unions will observe a hungerstrike from 8 am to 5 pm on Monday," he said.

The I&B minister was speaking to the media at his residence ahead of the farmers' hungerstrike announcement at the ■ Turn to Page 4

Normal traffic resumes as farmers vacate Chilla border

Noida, Dec. 13: Protesting farmers on Sunday vacated carriageways on the Noida-Delhi Link Road via Chilla following a late night meeting with Union ministers Rajnath Singh and Narendra Tomar.

Officials said normal traffic resumed between Noida and Delhi via Chilla border after farmers vacated the spot they had been occupying since December 1 for their sit-in demonstration.

The movement on the DND and the Kalindi Kunj routes, both connecting Delhi and Noida, was also normal, they said.

The protest, however, continued at the border with some Bharatiya Kisan Union (Bhanu) members, including their chief Thakur Bhanu Pratap Singh, staying put at Chilla. — PTI

■ More on Page 2

DIG (Prisons) in Punjab resigns in support of stir

Chandigarh, Dec. 13: Punjab deputy inspector general (Prisons) Lakshinder Singh Jakhar on Sunday said he has resigned from the service in support of farmers who are protesting against the Centre's three new farm laws. Mr Jakhar said he tendered his resignation to the state government on Saturday.

Earlier, several international sportspersons from Punjab had also extended their support to the farmers' agitation. — PTI

BJP's election rally shikara capsizes in Dal

AGE CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR, DEC. 13

A group of BJP activists and a couple of TV reporters escaped narrowly when a shikara they were riding capsized in Dal Lake on Sunday.

The boat was part of a "shikara rally" organised by the BJP ahead of the seventh phase of Jammu and Kashmir's first-ever District Development Council (DDC) elections. ■ More on Page 4



BJP leaders hold party flags during a "shikara" poll rally for the District Development Council polls at Dal Lake in Srinagar on Sunday. — PTI

Boris, EU to 'go extra mile' for deal

We should do everything to make a deal possible, says European Council prez

Brussels, Dec. 13: Throwing overboard Sunday's self-imposed deadline, the European Union and Britain said they will "go the extra mile" to clinch a post-Brexit trade agreement that would avert New Year's chaos and cost for cross-border commerce.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen had set Sunday as the deadline for a breakthrough or breakdown in negotiations. But they stepped back from the

brink because there was too much at stake not to make an ultimate push.

"Despite the exhaustion after almost a year of negotiations and despite the fact that deadlines have been missed over and over, we both think it is responsible at this point in time to go the extra mile," Ms von der Leyen said. The negotiators were continuing to talk in Brussels at EU headquarters.

European Council presi-



dent Charles Michel immediately welcomed the development and said "we should do everything to make a deal possible," but warned there could be a deal "at any price, no. What we want is a good deal, a deal that respects these principles of economic fair play and, also, these principles of governance."

With less than three weeks until the UK's final split from the EU, key aspects of the future relationship between the 27-

nation bloc and its former member remain unresolved. Progress came after months of tense and often testy negotiations that gradually whittled differences down to three key issues: fair-competition rules, mechanisms for resolving future disputes and fishing rights.

It has been four-and-a-half years since Britons voted by 52-48 per cent to leave the EU and — in the words of the Brexiters' slogan — "take back control" of the UK's borders and laws. — AP

■ More on Page 6

We'll never forget Parliament attack: Modi



Prime Minister Narendra Modi pays homage to martyrs who lost their lives in the 2001 Parliament attack to mark its 19th anniversary at Parliament House in New Delhi on Sunday. India will never forget the cowardly attack on its Parliament, Prime Minister Modi said as he paid tributes to the martyrs. ■ Report on Page 3

— PTI

Deploy Central forces in Bengal, says BJP leader

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, DEC. 13

Senior BJP leader Kailash Vijayvargiya on Sunday sought the immediate deployment of Central paramilitary forces to tackle rising violence under Trinamul Congress rule and to restore normalcy in poll-bound West Bengal. His demand comes in the wake of two BJP workers' murder in the past 24 hours in the state and TMC workers' violent attack on BJP president J.P. Nadda's convoy on December 10 during his visit to Diamond Harbour, the Lok Sabha constituency of chief minister Mamata Banerjee's nephew Abhishek Banerjee in South 24 Parganas.

"Chief minister Mamata Banerjee wants to spread violence because she knows she has lost her ground. So, she wants to come to power again in the state, riding on the power of violence. I feel that violence or any fear of it

TMC fears a BJP 'conspiracy' to 'assassinate' Didi

Bhargar (West Bengal), Dec. 13: Alleging that the BJP may "hatch a conspiracy to assassinate West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee", if it fails to win elections, senior TMC leader Subrata Mukherjee said the saffron camp is hiring people to commit crimes, and putting the blame on others.

Mr Mukherjee, who is also the state panchayat minister, made the startling claim on Saturday, and added that if the BJP tries to harm Ms Banerjee who is the "mother of crores of citizens, we will shed our blood to stop that from happening". — PTI

should have no place in Bengal's culture. We appeal to the Election Commission to deploy ■ Turn to Page 4

BJP shines in Bodo polls, to form council with new ally

MANOJ ANAND
GUWAHATI, DEC. 13

The BJP, in collaboration with its new ally, United People's Party Liberation (UPPL), and Gana Suraksha Party (GSP), decided to form the government of the Bodoland Territorial Council, ending the 17-year rule of the Bodoland People's Front led by former militant leader-turned-politician Hagrama Mohiliary.

The results of the 40-member BTC poll led to a hung council, with the BPP emerging the single largest party with 17 seats, election officials said Sunday. The UPPL has won 12 seats, the BJP nine, while the Congress and Gana Suraksha Party (GSP) bagged one seat each.

Officially, they fought the election on their own, but the three -- BJP, UPPL and GSP -- on Sunday agreed to form a post-poll alliance to take control of the council.

The members of the three parties elected former student leader Pramod Boro as the BTC chief executive, senior Assam minister Himanta Biswa Sarma told reporters, adding the UPPL will be the BJP's new ally. ■ More on Page 4

SHORT TAKES

Police: 4 AAP MLAs detained on way to Shah's residence

New Delhi: Four AAP MLAs, including Raghav Chadha, were detained on Sunday while they were on their way to stage a protest outside home minister Amit Shah's residence here, a day after the party alleged misappropriation of crores of rupees by BJP-ruled municipal corporations and demanded a CBI probe. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has alleged misappropriation of over ₹2,400 crore in the North Delhi and South Delhi municipal corporations, and had announced to stage protests outside the residences of Shah and Lieutenant Governor Anil Bajjal from Sunday till the probe is ordered. AAP's Raghav Chadha and nine others were detained on Sunday when they were on their way to the Union home minister's residence for a protest, a senior police officer said. "They have been detained and taken to the Rajender Nagar Police Station. They had earlier sought permission for a protest, which was rejected by police in view of DDMA guidelines (on COVID-19)," the official said. Earlier in a letter to Chadha, police had said that they deny permission for the protest in view of the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) guidelines that state that all social, academic, sports, entertainment, cultural, religious and political functions or other gatherings are prohibited up to December 31 throughout Delhi to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. "Moreover, promulgation of Section 144 CrPC is already in force in the area of New Delhi district," the letter to Chadha from the office of the Deputy Commissioner of Police, New Delhi district, stated. Chadha said they were going to protest against the "biggest scam" by the BJP-led municipal corporations. "But we were arrested from our residences. Does Amit Shah want to bury this corruption using the Delhi Police," the Rajender Nagar MLA said. The other three legislators who were detained are Burari MLA Sanjeev Jha, Kirdari MLA Rituraj Jha and Konrli MLA Kuldeep Kumar, police said. The AAP has been alleging that there is a misappropriation of over ₹2,400 crore done by BJP-led North Delhi Municipal Corporation with the amount it had taken from the South Delhi Municipal Corporation. The allegation has been refuted by the BJP. — PTI

'Over 2,000 held in Delhi under Arms Act'

New Delhi: The Delhi Police has arrested over 2,000 people in cases of Arms acts and have recovered 1,702 illegal fire arms along with 3,198 live cartridges in the last six months as part of its special task to crack down the network of illegal arms and ammunition operational in the national capital, officials said on Sunday. The action was taken after Delhi Police Commissioner, S.N. Shrivastava issued directions to chalk out a concerted action plan to unearth the illegal arms held by these criminal operatives, they said. "All units of Delhi Police have activated their sources to collect ground level information about these operatives. In the last six months, approximately 2,500 persons have been apprehended and more than 1,700 illegal arms have been recovered along with huge quantity of ammunition from their possession," said Eish Singhal, Public Relations Officer (Delhi Police).

Man dies after car meets with accident

New Delhi: A man died after his speeding car collided with another vehicle in west Delhi's Vikasuri area, police said on Sunday. The accident took place near Keshopur Mandi flyover on late Saturday night. The deceased has been identified as Ankur Chanaana, a sales manager at HDFC bank. "Three men who were sitting inside the other car took the injured driver of the Honda City car to Deen Dayal Upadhyay hospital but he was declared dead by doctors. They then came to the police station and informed police about the accident," deputy commissioner of police (West) Deepak Purohit said. Both the cars were found in a damaged condition. — PTI

■ Delhi CM expresses anguish, to sit on day-long fast today**Shun arrogance and scrap farm laws: Kejri to Centre**

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 13

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal said he will observe a day-long fast on Monday in response to a call given by farmers protesting against the three new farm laws and appealed to the BJP-ruled Centre to shun its ego and scrap the legislations.

Addressing a virtual press briefing on Sunday, the chief minister asked the Centre to bring a bill to guarantee minimum support price (MSP) for agricultural produce.

Mr Kejriwal said he will hold the one-day fast in response to a call given by the agitating farmers and urged his Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) volunteers, supporters, as well as the people of the country to join in.

"I want to appeal to the Central government to put an end to their ego. The governments are formed by the public; the public is not formed by the governments. The three farm laws should be immediate-



Arvind Kejriwal

■ CHIEF MINISTER Arvind Kejriwal said that the Centre should immediately accept all demands of the farmers who have been protesting on Delhi's borders for the past two weeks

supporting and joining them were all anti-national?" he questioned.

The BJP should not think wrongly that only a few farmers from Punjab and Haryana and only a few people are in this movement.

Mr Kejriwal compared the "defaming" of the farmers' protest with Anna Hazare's movement of which he was a top leader.

"I could not help but reminisce the days of Anna Hazare Ji's movement. The Congress government defamed us as anti-nationals. What Congress did to our movement, the BJP is doing the same to the farmers protest," he said.

The chief minister claimed that even the middle-upper class people

were against the farm laws and believed it will lead to price rise.

"Until now, hoarding in this country was a crime, but under the Centre's new farm laws any person can hoard any amount of grains and it is no longer considered a crime.

"This also means that there will be high inflation. People can hoard till the time the inflation rate doubles every year. For instance, the prices of wheat grains will double from ₹20 this year to ₹40 next year and then ₹80, ₹160, and so on," he added.

Enacted in September, the three farm laws have been projected by the Central government as major reforms in the agriculture sector that will remove the middlemen and allow farmers to sell anywhere in the country.

However, the protesting farmers have expressed apprehension that the new laws would pave the way for eliminating the safety cushion of MSP and do away with the mandi system, leaving them at the mercy of big corporates.



Farmer rest next to tractors along a blocked highway during a demonstration against the Central government's recent agricultural reforms at the Delhi-Haryana border in Singhu on Sunday.

— AFP

1,984 Covid-19 cases in Delhi, 33 deaths in 24 hours

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 13

Delhi recorded 1,984 fresh Covid-19 cases on Sunday even as the death count due to the disease crossed the 10,000-mark in the city with 33 new fatalities. The positivity rate stood at 2.74 per cent, authorities said.

The positivity rate had successively dipped to 4.96 per cent, 4.78 per cent, 4.2 per cent, 3.68 per cent and 3.15 per cent from December 3-7. However, on December 8, it rose to 4.23 per cent, before falling to 3.42 per cent on December 9 and 2.46 per cent on December 10.

It rose to 3.33 per cent on December 11 and fell again to 2.64 per cent on December 12. The fresh cases came out of 72,335 tests, including 35,611 RT-PCR ones, conducted on Saturday, according to the latest bulletin issued by the Delhi health department.

Thirty-three fresh fatalities were recorded, pushing the death toll due to the disease to 10,014 in the national capital, the bulletin said. The tally of active cases dropped to 16,785 on Sunday from 17,373 the previous day. The total number of coronavirus cases has climbed to 6,07,454 in Delhi, the bulletin said.

Uttar Pradesh's Gautam Buddha Nagar recorded 49 new Covid-19 cases on Sunday that pushed the infection tally to 24,089, official data showed. Active cases in the district came down to 850 from 893 the previous day, while the recovery rate crossed the 96 per cent mark for the first time.

The number of active cases in Gautam Buddha Nagar is the fifth highest in the state. On the bright side, 94 more patients got discharged during the period.

Security enhanced as farmers threaten to block highways

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC 13

The Delhi Police has enhanced its security arrangements across the border points by deploying extra security personnel and placing multi-layered barricading as thousands of agitating farmers threatened to block the Jaipur-Delhi and the Delhi-Agra Expressways on Sunday.

The police have made adequate arrangements and these include multi-layered barricading and deployment of personnel. Measures have also been taken to ensure commuters do not face inconvenience at places where protest are being staged, a senior police officer said.

The Delhi Traffic Police has deployed its personnel across important border points to ensure commuters do not face difficulties and is constantly updating people about open and

closed routes on its Twitter handle.

The developments come after farmer leaders on Wednesday rejected a government proposal to amend the new agricultural laws and announced they would intensify their agitation by blocking the Jaipur-Delhi and the Yamuna expressway by Saturday. But no such protests were witnessed on the said borders on Saturday.

The Tikri and the Dhansa borders are also closed for traffic movement but the Jhatikara border is open only for two wheelers and pedestrian movement, the traffic police said in a tweet on Sunday.

Those going towards Haryana, can take Jharoda (only single carriageway), Daurala, Kapashera, Badusarai, Rajokri NH 8, Bijwasan/Bajghera, Palam Vihar and Dundaheera borders as they are open, the traffic police said.

#MeToo: Final hearing from today in defamation complaint by Akbar

New Delhi, Dec. 13: A Delhi court is scheduled to resume on Monday the final hearing in a criminal defamation complaint filed by former Union minister M. J. Akbar against journalist Priya Ramani for allegedly defaming him by accusing him of sexual misconduct around 20 years ago.

Ramani has said that her allegations of sexual misconduct against Akbar, made in the wake of #MeToo movement in 2018, were her truth and were made in public good.

On December 10, Ramani had told the court, "I have spoken my truth. I have said it in good faith and my truth refers to a question of good faith."

Recently-appointed Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate

■ M.J. Akbar has denied all the allegations of sexual harassment against the women who came forward during #MeToo campaign against him. Over 20 women came up with accounts of alleged sexual harassment by Akbar while they were working as journalists under him.

Ravindra Kumar Pandey will resume the hearing on Monday.

Since a new judge has taken over, parties are making final submissions afresh.

In a previous hearing, Ramani disputed Akbar's claims of having a stellar reputation "that had been tarnished by her allegation".

Akbar had filed the

criminal defamation complaint against Ramani on October 15, 2018. Akbar resigned as Union minister on October 17, 2018.

He had earlier told the court that Ramani defamed him by calling him with adjectives such as "media's biggest predator" that harmed his reputation.

Akbar has denied all the allegations of sexual harassment against the women who came forward during #MeToo campaign against him. Over 20 women came up with

accounts of alleged sexual harassment by Akbar while they were working as journalists under him.

He termed the allegations "false, fabricated and deeply distressing" and said he was taking appropriate legal action against them. — PTI

BJP challenges Delhi govt to probe ₹2.4K cr scam in 7 days

Demand Kejri's resignation if allegation not proved

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 13

'Protesters outside CM home damaged CCTV cameras'

New Delhi, Dec. 13: BJP leaders holding demonstration outside chief minister Arvind Kejriwal's residence demanding payment of funds due to the party-ruled municipal corporations damaged CCTV cameras at the spot on Sunday evening, alleged Delhi government sources.

North Delhi Mayor Jai Prakash, however, said women councillors of the BJP "smashed new CCTV cameras, installed by the AAP government, to protect their privacy". — PTI

following day the leaders of the Aam Aadmi Party are saying that there is a scam ₹Rs 2,400. The AAP must first decide what has happened," said Mr Babbar.

Mr Babbar demanded that within seven days the AAP should conduct an inquiry and take action against the concerned leaders or councillors and

if all the allegations in the investigation are found false or incorrect, Mr Kejriwal must apologise to the municipal corporation and its leaders.

Mr Prakash challenged the Delhi government to investigate the ₹2,400 crore scam within seven days and if it is proved, he will resign. However, if nothing comes out in the investigation, the entire Cabinet of the Kejriwal government will have to resign, he said.

All the three mayors claimed that the unions of sanitation staff of all the three corporations have supported their sit-in protest in front of the chief minister's residence for release of ₹13,000 crore due to the three corporations. "If their salaries are not paid soon, they (sanitation workers) may go on strike and Mr Kejriwal would be responsible for that. All the three mayors of Delhi are sitting in the open in such cold weather since the last seven days but Mr Kejriwal didn't try even once to see them. He is running away from his responsibilities towards development and the citizens of Delhi," Mr Prakash added.

Delhi-Noida normal traffic resumes at Chilla border

Farmers vacate carriageways, say protest still on

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NOIDA, DEC. 13

Protesting farmers on Sunday vacated carriageways on the Noida-Delhi Link Road via Chilla following a late night meeting with Union ministers Rajnath Singh and Narendra Kumar.

Officials said normal traffic resumed between Noida and Delhi via Chilla border after farmers vacated the spot they had been occupying since December 1 for their sit-in demonstration.

The movement on the DND and the Kalindi Kunj routes, both connecting Delhi and Noida, was also normal, they said.

The protest, however, continued at the border with some Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) members, including their chief Thakur Bhanu

Pratap Singh, staying put at Chilla.

The farmers had vacated the carriageways around Saturday midnight after a meeting with Defence Minister Singh and Agriculture Minister Kumar, a BKU (Bhanu) office-bearer said.

"Rajnath ji heard our demands and agreed to take the discussions further and resolve the issues. We were convinced and decided to vacate the road. However, this does not mean that our protest is over," Satish Kumar, a senior IT Cell member of the BKU (Bhanu), told PTI over phone.

He said a 'havan' was being performed at the Chilla border on Sunday by the protesting farmers and further course of action would be clear by evening.

At Dalit Prerna Sthal in Noida, close to the Chilla

border, another group of farmers belonging to the BKU (Lok Shakti) is staging a protest against the new laws. Some of the group members had on Saturday tansured their heads and had earlier gone semi-naked during their protest.

These protestors have gathered at the Noida border and want to proceed to Delhi to join the bigger stir called by farmers from Punjab and Haryana.

The government has maintained that the new laws will bring farmers better opportunities and usher in new technologies in agriculture.

Government officials said efforts are being made for the next round of talks between representatives of the Centre and the farmers so that the logjam over the new laws could end.

Dense fog lowers visibility in Delhi, affects traffic

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 13

A blanket of "dense" fog covered parts of Delhi on Sunday morning lowering visibility and affecting traffic movement, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said.

Rains, on Saturday, increased moisture content in the air that led to "dense" fog in parts of the city, the head of the IMD's regional forecasting centre, Kuldeep Srivastava, said.

The Safdarjung Observatory, which provides representative data for Delhi, recorded fog that

reduced visibility to 200 metres in the morning hours, the IMD said.

"Dense fog at the Palam weather station lowered visibility to just 100 metres," Mr Srivastava said and added that "moderate to very dense fog is predicted for the next two days."

"Very dense" fog is when visibility is between zero and 50 metres and "dense" when it is between 51 and 200 metres. When visibility is between 201 and 500 metres it is "moderate" fog and "shallow" when visibility is between 501 and 1,000 metres, according to the IMD.

Light rains in parts of Delhi under the influence of a Western disturbance brought the mercury down by a few notches.

On Sunday, the minimum temperature settled at 11.5° Celsius. The mercury is likely to dip below 10° Celsius on Monday with the wind direction changing to northwesterly. These winds blow from the snow-laden western Himalayas towards the plains.

Delhi's air quality was recorded in the "very poor" category on Sunday and is likely to improve due to favourable wind speed, a government forecasting agency said.

Man arrested for stealing diamond rings; ₹1,20,000

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 13

A man was arrested for allegedly stealing diamond rings and cash worth ₹1,20,000 from the house of a 90-year-old man where he worked as a home nurse in south Delhi's Greater Kailash area, police said on Sunday.

The accused Deepak Chaudhary, (34), a resident of Sarita Vihar, has been working as a nurse staff in house care for the last 10 years, they said.

The matter came to light on Friday when the beat officer had gone to meet the senior citizens of the area as part of their routine drive.

During the visit, the elderly man, a resident of M block in Greater Kailash-I informed the

beat officer that he is bed-ridden and has three servants. He informed him that around six days ago, two diamond rings and cash of Rs. 1,20,000 got stolen from his house.

A case was registered and all the servants were interrogated during which one of them identified as Deepak Chaudhary, confessed to his crime since he also had a profile on the e-beat book of the police, said Atul Kumar Thakur, Deputy Commissioner of Police (South).

During interrogation, he disclosed to have stolen two diamond rings and ₹1,20,000 cash from the briefcase, he said.

The accused has been arrested and the two stolen diamond rings along ₹80,000 has been recovered from the house of accused, he added.

▶ The EDMC has installed 15 trommel machines, each of daily 300 MT capacity for clearing the legacy waste. The civic body had signed an MoU with NHAI to use the inert material in road construction in 2016.

IN BRIEF

'U.P. GOVT DOCS SHOULD SERVE IN DEPT FOR 10 YRS'

Lucknow, Dec. 13: Government doctors in Uttar Pradesh completing postgraduate courses will have to give their services in the department for 10 years or pay a compensation of ₹1 crore, according to an official.

The order, issued last Wednesday, reiterated an earlier one issued on April 3, 2017. It said had been cases of some doctors completing the PG course and seeking a no objection certificate (NOC) for doing senior residency, which would not be allowed and they had to return to their native departments.

According to the earlier order, the PMHS (provincial medical and health services) doctors opting for postgraduation get additional marks, especially for serving in rural areas.

"On completion of the course, it's mandatory for them to serve in the government department continuously for 10 years," additional chief secretary (Health) Amit Mohan Prasad said in a statement on Saturday.

The new order stated that government doctors should return to their native departments after returning from PG courses, failing which they would have to pay ₹1 crore to the government, Mr Prasad said. He added that those leaving the PG course midway would be debarred from seeking admission for three years.

— PTI

BENGAL'S FAMED 'POUSH MELA' NOT TO BE HELD THIS YR

Kolkata, Dec. 13: The annual 'Poush Mela', a heritage cultural event attracting lakhs of travellers to West Bengal's Santiniketan, will not be held this year due to Covid-19 restrictions, an official said.

The over-a-century-old handicraft, handloom, art and music festival, is usually held in December-end. "We are not sure about getting the nod from the local administration in view of the Covid-19 situation. Most students, an integral part of Poush Mela, are not coming to the campus. Keeping all these factors in mind, we had to take this unpleasant decision for public health safety," a member of Visva-Bharati's executive council said.

The decision was taken at a high-level meeting of the executive council. Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore's father Maharshi Debendranath Tagore had first organised the fair in 1894 and Visva-Bharati, the university founded by the bard, started organising it from 1951.

The 'Poush Utsav', including prayers and singing of devotional songs in the varsity campus, will, however, take place (on December 23 this year), he said. The fate of the Poush Mela has been a subject of conjecture in the last few months, with an official of the council claiming in July that Visva-Bharati authorities had decided to scrap the event.

NORMALCY BACK AT REMOTE ARUNACHAL TOWN

Itanagar, Dec. 13: Normalcy returned to the remote Arunachal Pradesh town of Vijaynagar, which saw violent protests with several government offices burnt over the voting rights of former Assam Rifles personnel in the panchayat polls, a senior official said on Sunday.

Security has been tightened in the sensitive town, which is surrounded by Myanmar on three sides, Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Kime Kaming said after returning from the area.

Paramilitary forces along with the police have been deployed in Vijaynagar to ensure peace, he said, adding that vandalism will not be tolerated under any circumstances.

Vijaynagar, in the state's Changlang district, saw widespread arson on Friday as a mob of around 400 people led by the Yobin Students' Union set fire to the offices of the Extra Assistant Commissioner, Special Branch of the state police and the post office, besides ransacking the local police station.

The civil helipad was also partially damaged by the mob. Ex-employees of the Assam Rifles have been living in the town since the early 60s. They originally hailed from outside the state but form the majority of the local population now, official sources said.



Maharashtra CM Uddhav Thackeray with deputy CM Ajit Pawar before addressing the media ahead of the state Assembly session in Mumbai on Sunday.

— PTI

Cong uncomfortable with Pawar's growing influence

BHAGWAN PARAB
MUMBAI, DEC. 13

While the NCP and Shiv Sena are hopeful that Sharad Pawar could still make it to the coveted post of the Prime Minister even after turning 80, the issue may open fissure within Maharashtra's MVA government, which the Congress is a part of. Going by the statements of its state party leaders, the Congress is not entirely comfortable with the possibility of the NCP chief becoming a prime ministerial candidate.

Senior NCP leader Praful Patel had claimed

that Mr Pawar couldn't become prime minister on two occasions in 1990s when he was with Congress due to a 'darbar coterie' in that party acting against him. "But if the entire Maharashtra stands by him, the unfinished dream can be fulfilled," he said.

Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut too had endorsed Mr Patel's views saying leaders inferior to Mr Pawar created hurdles in his quest for becoming the PM. But age is no barrier for him though he is 80, he added.

On the occasion of veteran leader's birthday, spec-

ulations have emerged of making Mr Pawar the UPA chairman, though the NCP has denied it. Prior to that, Mr Pawar had described Congress leader Rahul Gandhi 'short on consistency.' This has not gone down well with the Congress leaders in Maharashtra. The issue has again brought to fore the differences within the MVA government.

Senior Congress leader Sanjay Nirupam believes that the talks of making Mr Pawar as chairman of UPA was a part of a larger conspiracy to destroy the Congress.

Corana positive mantri Vij shifted to Rohtak hospital

67-yr-old BJP leader complained of discomfort at civil hospital

UDF, BJP cry foul over Kerala CM's free vaccine statement

Ambala, Dec. 13: Haryana health minister Anil Vij, who had tested positive for Coronavirus recently, has been shifted to the PGIMS hospital at Rohtak from the civil hospital here after he complained of discomfort, doctors here said on Sunday.

Doctors said the minister was shifted on Saturday night. Ambala's Civil Surgeon Dr Kuldeep Singh said a team of doctors at the Rohtak hospital was monitoring his condition.

Vij, who had last month got one shot of the two-dose trial of the Covid-19 vaccine Covaxin after he offered to be a volunteer, had on December 5 tested positive for the Coronavirus. The 67-year-old BJP leader had offered to be the first volunteer in the phase three trials for Covaxin, an indigenous potential vaccine being developed by Bharat Biotech against Covid-19. He was administered the dose on November 20 at the Civil Hospital in Ambala Cantonment, about 50 km from Chandigarh.

Bharat Biotech had said that clinical trials of the vaccine are based on a two-dose schedule, given 28 days apart. The vaccine efficacy will be determined two weeks after the

Thiruvananthapuram, Dec. 13: A day ahead of the final phase of local body polls in Kerala, the Opposition UDF and the BJP on Sunday moved the state election commission against chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan's announcement of free Covid-19 vaccine, contending it violated the model code of conduct.

The ruling CPI(M)-led LDF dismissed the charge as 'childish' and said Vijayan was only answering a question from reporters and also that its manifesto included the free vaccine assurance.

Mr Vijayan had on Saturday said COVID-19 vaccine will be made available free of cost to all people in Kerala.

second dose, it said.

Covaxin has been designed to be protective 2 weeks after volunteers receive the 2nd dose. The Union health ministry had also stepped in to say that Covaxin is a two-dose anti-Coronavirus vaccine and that Vij was given only the first dose a fortnight before he tested pos-

"No one will be charged for the vaccine. This is the stand of the government," he had told reporters in Kannur.

Elections to the local bodies in the state are being held in three phases with the four northern districts going for voting on Monday in the final phase.

The first and second phases were held on December 8 and 10 respectively.

The Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) convener M.M. Hassan said the front moved the SEC as the chief minister's announcement was a violation of the model code, given that four districts are going to the polls on Monday.

— PTI

itive. "The antibodies against the infection build up in a human being only after a specific number of days pass after the second dose of the vaccine is taken. This is a two-dose vaccine. The minister in question has taken only one dose of the vaccine," the ministry had said in a statement.

— PTI

NADDA COVID +VE, GOES INTO HOME ISOLATION NOW

New Delhi, Dec. 13: BJP president J.P. Nadda has tested positive for the novel coronavirus and has gone into home isolation on the advice of doctors.

In a tweet, he said he had undergone a test after showing symptoms of Covid-19, and was found to be positive.

"My condition is alright and I am following all instructions after going for home isolation on the advice of doctors. I request everyone who got in touch with me in the last few days to isolate themselves and undergo test," he said.

The BJP president had been maintaining an active schedule and had visited states such as Uttarakhand and West Bengal recently.

Meanwhile, putting aside political differences, West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee wished speedy recovery to Mr Nadda.

Ms Banerjee, who recently engaged in a war of words with Mr Nadda following an attack on Mr Nadda's convoy, prayed for the wellbeing of his family.

— PTI

ASSAM OKAYS SHUTDOWN OF MADRASAS, SANSKRIT TOLS

Guwahati, Dec. 13: The Assam cabinet on Sunday approved a proposal to close down all government-run madrasas and Sanskrit tols (schools), and a bill in this regard will be tabled during the upcoming winter session of the state Assembly, parliamentary affairs minister Chandra Mohan Patowary said.

"Existing laws related to madrasas and Sanskrit tols will be repealed. A bill will be introduced in the next session of the Assembly," Patowary, who is also the spokesperson of the Assam government, said.

The winter session of the Assam Legislative Assembly will begin from December 28. The decision to shut down all the state-run madrasas and Sanskrit tols was taken during the cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal, he said.

Education minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had, in October, said there were 610 state-run madrasas across Assam and the government had been spending ₹260 crore annually for these institutions.

He had also said the State Madrasa Education Board, Assam would be dissolved. The minister had also mentioned that all the government-run madrasas would be converted to high schools and new admissions would be held for existing students as regular ones.

According to Sarma, the Sanskrit tols would be handed over to Kumar Bhaskar Varma Sanskrit and Ancient Studies University.

The infrastructure of Sanskrit tols would be used to convert them to centres of learning and research where Indian culture, civilisation and nationalism would be studied, he had said.

Senior BJP leader and Deputy Speaker of the Assembly Aminul Haque Laskar had said madrasas run by private parties would not be shut down.

"These (private) madrasas will not be shut down as these have kept Muslims alive," Laskar had said while laying the foundation stone for a madrasa in Cachar district in November.

— PTI

WOMAN JUDGE DIES DURING COVID TREATMENT

Indore, Dec. 13: Justice Vandana Kasarekar of the Indore bench of Madhya Pradesh High Court died on Sunday while undergoing treatment for Coronavirus at a private hospital here, a medical officer said.

Kasarekar, 60, had also been suffering from a kidney ailment since a long time, he said.

"Justice Vandana Kasarekar of the high court's Indore bench died while undergoing treatment at a private hospital in the city. She had been in a critical condition at the hospital since the last few days," district nodal officer for Covid-19 prevention Amit Malakar said.

"Justice Kasarekar had tested positive for Covid-19 a few days back. Besides, she had been suffering from a kidney disease since a long time," he said.

State Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan expressed grief over her death in a tweet. Before being appointed as a judge, Justice Kasarekar was the lawyer of civil and constitutional matters in the Indore bench of the high court.

She was the only woman judge of the Indore bench at present. She had been appointed the high court judge in October 2014 and her term was to end in July 2022.

— PTI

● **JUSTICE VANDANA KASAREKAR, 60, who had been suffering from a kidney ailment was tested Covid-19 positive a few days back.**

HEALTH | REPORT

Experts say unhealthy food choices, lack of physical activities are major causes**Survey finds drastic rise in obesity among kids**

New Delhi, Dec. 13: The latest National Family Health Survey (NFHS) has found a drastic rise in obesity among children under five years of age in 20 of the 22 states where the study was conducted, with experts attributing it to lack of physical activity and unhealthy food habits.

According to the NFHS-5, several Union Territories, and states, including Maharashtra, Gujarat, Mizoram, Tripura, Lakshadweep, Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh, have registered several folds increase in the percentage of obesity among children below five years of age in comparison to NFHS-4

between 2015 and 2016. Only Goa, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, and Daman and Diu registered a drop in the number of overweight children under five years of age, the data showed.

About 13.4 per cent children under the age of five were found to be obese in Ladakh which was highest among the 22 states and Union Territories surveyed, followed by Lakshadweep at 10.5 per cent, Mizoram 10 per cent, Jammu and Kashmir, and Sikkim 9.6 per cent each. Not just children, rise in obesity has even been recorded in adults in the latest survey in comparison to NFHS-4.

According to the survey data, 16 states and Union Territories registered a rise in obesity among women while 19 states and UTs recorded an increase in obesity among men. Kerala and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands recorded the highest percentage of obesity among women at 38 per cent.

Also, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep recorded the highest percentage of obesity among women at over 40 per cent. Men and women were counted as obese whose body mass index was found to be over or equal to 25.0 kg/m2 while children's obesity was counted in terms of

weight-for-height. Healthcare experts have attributed the rise in obesity to unhealthy food choices and lack of physical activities among children and even adults.

Sheila Vir, a public health nutrition expert and founder director of Public Health Nutrition and Development Centre, said there is also lack of awareness on what are good food habits. Also, high-fat and high-sugar foods are easily available and so there is higher consumption of it, she said.

"We have a double burden of undernutrition, malnutrition and overnutrition occurring together. So, I think what to feed a

child is what we are going wrong in," Vir said.

In view of the Covid-19 pandemic, she also raised concern over the rise in obesity. "There might be an increase in obesity among children in view of Covid-19 pandemic as after closure of schools, there was lack of physical activity among children and even in adults in some cases," she said.

Dr. Khan Amir Maroof, Professor at Department of Community Medicine, University College of Medical Sciences and GTB Hospital termed the rise in obesity a "very disturbing sign".

"Obesity is a manifestation of what is rapidly

changing in our environment. Of late, we see trends which increase the risk of developing obesity. Environmental factors, such as availability and consumption of junk foods, poor complementary feeding, lack of outdoor activity, and increased screen time on may be the reason for this trend," he said.

"For children, we need to flag screen time as it has multi-dimensional effects on children, obesity, being one of them. The focus has been on breastfeeding, but now it's time that complementary feeding is also focused upon," Dr Maroof suggested.

— PTI

SHORT TAKE

Prashant Kishor talks to Trinamul rebel for truce

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, DEC. 13

Trinamul Congress and its election strategist: Prashant Kishor on Sunday tried to placate Rajib Banerjee, the rebel forest minister of the Mamata Banerjee government, at a meeting, like they earlier did to hold back former state minister and Nandigram MLA Shubhendu Adhikari in the party, close on the heels of his complaint against "occupation of the front row by the corrupt and sycophants."

While the TMC remained silent this time after learning a lesson from the backfire by Mr Adhikari, Mr Banerjee asserted that anyone can have "dissent" which can be resolved within the party. He however kept the door ajar for "more such talks" with his party. Apart from Mr Kishor, TMC secretary general and education minister Partha Chatterjee was present at the meeting held over an hour at his residence in Naktala in the city.

Mr Banerjee said, "I came here as a party worker on the call of our party's secretary general on behalf of party's highest leadership for a discussion to decide our future strategies. Talks are talks. I do not know if it can be about satisfaction or dissent. In a democratic process, if there is dissent, it can be resolved within the party."

He added, "Anyone can have dissent. All have it in that sense. Similarly some can have too much satisfaction also. Whatever is there, can be sorted out through discussion definitely. Today's talks were on what to do in future. More such talks will follow. If I am called again, I will attend them."

On his individual campaign, the state forest minister claimed, "I do not need such campaign for myself."

Govt's BharatNet facility in 15,500 gram panchayats

ANIMESH SINGH
NEW DELHI, DEC. 13

Despite the fact that the BJP is directly in power in 12 states and is the junior alliance partner in six other states, the NDA government's ambitious BharatNet project, which had envisaged providing Wi-Fi broadband connectivity to 2.5 lakh gram panchayats of the country by March 2019, has till date managed to give the facility only to 15,500 gram panchayats, with the Centre now blaming the states for their non-involvement in the project.

According to highly placed sources, till now only 1,26,000 gram panchayats have been made service ready, which means, they have the wherewithal to start the Wi-Fi services, but Wi-Fi hotspots have not been provided there.

On the other hand, Wi-Fi hot spots have been made functional in only 15,500 gram panchayats till date, according to information available with this newspaper.

Therefore in other words, a programme, which was originally envisioned by the erstwhile UPA regime nine years back in 2011 to connect all the 2.5 lakh gram panchayats with high speed broadband network by September 2015, has not been able to achieve the objective in even one-fourth of the gram panchayats till date. Known as the National Optic Fibre Network or NOFN Project during the UPA regime, it was renamed BharatNet by the BJP-NDA govern-

ment, which had come to power in May 2014.

While NOFN was envisaged to provide infrastructure for middle mile connectivity and the service provider was to utilise the network, the NDA government - seeing that service providers were not using the network - decided to include last mile connectivity also in the scope of BharatNet.

The NDA government set new deadlines to provide broadband connectivity to all the 2.5 lakh gram panchayats and this was to be done in two phases by March 2019. However as can be seen by the figures provided above, the project has anything but progressed, even in the last six years.

Senior officials in the department of telecom which is supposed to monitor BharatNet's progress, blame the dismal performance of the project on the lack of cooperation on part of the states.

They say that distancing of states from the ownership of the project has resulted in its slow progress. In fact till March 2020, i.e. just before the nation-wide lockdown was imposed on March 24, only four states had finalised their tenders for awarding work related to providing broadband connectivity. Of these four states, work could only be awarded in Chhattisgarh.

During the review of the slow progress of the scheme, questions were also raised whether states had been properly sensitised about the project's significance.

BJP shines in Bodo council elections

To form council with new ally, bringing end to 17-yrs rule of Bodoland People's Front

MANOJ ANAND
GUWAHATI, DEC. 13

The BJP, in collaboration with its new ally, the United People's Party Liberation (UPPL) and the Gana Suraksha Party (GSP), has decided to form government of the Bodoland Territorial Council bringing an end to 17-years rule of Bodoland Peoples Front led by former militant leader turn politician Hagrama Mohillari.

The results of the 40-member BTC poll have led to a hung house with the ruling BPF emerging as the single largest party winning 17 seats, election officials said on Sunday. UPPL has won 12 seats, the BJP nine, while the



Supporters of United People's Party Liberal celebrate after forming their government in an alliance with the BJP at Kathalburi in Baksa district of Assam. — PTI

Congress and the Gana Suraksha Party (GSP) bagged one seat each.

Officially, they fought the election on their own but the three — BJP UPPL and GSP — on Sunday agreed to form a post-poll alliance

to take control of the governance in the council.

Informing the council members of all the three political parties have elected former students leader turn politician of UPPL Pramod Boro as

chief executive member of the council, the minister Mr Himanta Biswa Sarma told reporters that UPPL will be their new ally in the Bodoland Territorial Council.

Assam BJP president Ranjeet Dass, while expressing his gratitude for 5.4 lakh BJP workers and the voters in BTC area for his party's impressive result given the fact that in 2015 BJP had won just one seat, announced that UPPL will be its partner.

"BTC people wanted a change. The BTC polls were more of a test for BJP's popularity before the coming assembly elections in April. This BTC election was the semi-final to the assembly election, which is just 115 days

away," said Mr Dass while addressing a joint press conference with UPPL chief Pramod Boro after meeting Assam chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal who also congratulated Mr Boro for getting elected BTC chief.

Polling for 40 seats of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) was held in two phases on December 7 and 10. BJP contested against its own ally party Bodoland People's Front (BPF) in this election.

BPF is an ally party of the BJP-led Assam government since 2016 and BPF has ruled Bodoland Territorial Area Districts which covered four districts - Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri for the last 17-years.



BJP leaders being rescued after a shikara carrying them capsized in Dal Lake during an election rally in Srinagar on Sunday. — PTI

BJP election rally shikara overturns in J&K's Dal

AGE CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR, DEC. 13

A group of BJP activists and a couple of TV reporters escaped narrowly when a shikara (water gondola) they were riding capsized in Srinagar's Dal Lake on Sunday.

The boat was part of a 'shikara rally' organised by the BJP ahead of the seventh phase of Jammu and Kashmir's first-ever District Development Council (DDC) elections scheduled to take place early next week.

The rally was being led by Union minister of state for finance Anurag Thakur who is in-charge of the BJP's election campaign in J&K and it's national general secretary Tarun Chugh. The others who attended the rally included Syed Shahin-awaz Hussain, BJP's national spokesperson, and the party's local leaders including Sofi Yousuf and Altaf Thakur.

Witnessed said that one of the shikaras carrying a few BJP activists and a couple of TV reporters and camerapersons capsized near Ghat No.17 of the lake. However, all of them were rescued immediately by local boatmen. The videos of the incident went viral on social media platforms with some netizens mocking the BJP.

However, the BJP denied any of its activists were riding the boat which met with the mishap and alleged that a section of media was "spreading negative propaganda against the party".

"It was a boat carrying three TV journalists that capsized. None of the BJP leaders or workers was onboard," claimed party's media in-charge Manzoor Bhat.

The police said that those who fell in chilly waters of the lake were given medical attention to ensure "as a safety measure".

Defying many adversities, midwives in Odisha stage dharna 6K disengaged nurses fight for survival

AKSHAYA KUMAR
SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, DEC. 13

Braving unbearable winter night chill and morning fogs; defying many adversities, over six thousand auxiliary nurse midwife (ANM), some of them pregnant women, have been staging a dharna under the open sky in front of Odisha Legislative Assembly for 17 days now protesting their disengagement midway the fight against Covid-19 and non-payment of the promised remuneration. In view of the rapid

spread of Covid-19, the state health and family welfare department had on July 7, 2020 issued an office order seeking temporary engagement of 7000 ANMs with a daily remuneration of ₹850 for ANM and Rs 1000 for staff nurse and pharmacists for three months.

The selected ANMs were engaged at Covid Care Homes (CCH) and Covid Gruhas. However, at many places their jobs were terminated allegedly after 38 days. The others were disengaged after three months as mentioned in the health department's

THE AUXILIARY nurse midwives said the district level officials told them that their services were discontinued due to lack of fund

official engagement order. What has shocked the ANMs is that most of them have not been paid their remuneration till yet.

The ANMs said the district level officials told them that their services were discontinued due to lack of fund.

"Doctors, paramedics and we fought shoulder-to-

shoulder against the Covid-19 pandemic. We conducted door-to-door surveys on health conditions of people and accompanied identified Covid positives to Covid Centres. Shockingly enough, while discharging our responsibilities, many of us were not provided personal protective equipment kits, gloves, face masks and sanitisers. Some of us even got infected with the disease. Provisionally, those who got infected with Covid-19 have recovered," said Sasmita Behera of Khurda.

She added that they often

took the identified patients to Covid Care Centres (CCCs) on their own arrangement as they authorities did not send vehicles to pick them up.

"On several occasions, we hired vehicles on our own expenses as the designated officers did not respond to our call for providing conveyance facility. Many of us spent money to the tune of ₹15,000 from our own pocket to buy masks and sanitisers to distribute it among people in our locality," said Madhusmita Sahoo, Madhusmita Behera, Saila Jena and Dali Gouda.

'All to get vaccines by Sept-Oct'

Continued from Page 1 now conducting Phase 3 trials of their respective vaccine candidates in the country. The applications of Pfizer, SII, and Bharat Biotech are being reviewed by the subject expert committee (SEC) on Covid-19 at the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation.

SII's CEO Adar Poonawalla has said India's vaccination drive may begin by January 2021 as his company is hoping to get emergency-use authorisation by the end of December. He said life is likely to become normal by September-October 2021 as by then there will be enough vaccines for everyone. Mr

Poonawalla said: "By this month-end, we might get an emergency licence, but the actual licence for wider use might come at a later date. But we are confident that if the regulators give the nod, India's vaccination drive can start by January 2021."

While India's Covid-19 caseload has gone up to 98.57 lakh, the number of people who have recuperated from the disease has also surged to 93.57 lakhs, pushing the national recovery rate to 94.93 per cent. The death count due to the disease now stands at 1,43,019. The silver lining is that the active caseload has remained below four lakhs for the seventh consecutive day.



Polling officials carry election materials at a distribution centre ahead of the third phase of Kerala local body elections in Kozhikode on Sunday. — PTI

Farmers plan to hold dharnas, go on fast 'Deploy Central forces in Bengal'

Continued from Page 1 Singhu border -- one of the key agitation spots on the Delhi-Chandigarh route where thousands of farmers are sitting under the open skies, braving chilly winter nights. He said: "The government's door is always open to have a conversation with farmers on their issues. The procedure is continuously moving forward. The government is keeping proper monitoring of the current situation and ongoing developments."

In Nagpur, Union minister Ramdas Athawale said the Centre was ready to make amendments in the farm laws. He said: "The farmers should not be

adamant on the repeal of laws, but should pursue a dialogue on this issue," he said. "Both (farmers and government) should take two steps back and (then) try to move ahead on the issue."

The Centre has already conveyed to the agitating farmers its willingness to make all possible amendments in the three laws so their demands can be met. In a written proposal a few days ago, the Centre agreed to make nine important changes in the three laws and even give a written assurance on MSP.

Mr Tomar and top BJP leaders from Punjab briefed the home minister on the "valid" problems faced by

farmers from the region so that these can be addressed. Mr Shah is said to have advised Mr Tomar that all efforts should be made to continue the dialogue process with farmers.

Support for the farmers has been growing in different quarters. Voicing solidarity with the protesting farmers, a serving Punjab police officer had resigned from his post on Saturday. Lakshminder Singh Jakhar, posted as deputy inspector-general (prisons) in Chandigarh, said: "I am a farmer first and a police officer later. Whatever position I got today, it is because my father worked as a farmer in the fields and he made

me study. Hence, I owe my everything to farming. I have completed all the formalities and I don't think there will be any hassle in accepting my resignation." Mr Jakhar was suspended in May over corruption charges, but the 56-year-old officer was reinstated two months ago.

In his resignation letter, he offered "to deposit three months' salary (in lieu of) notice period and other arrears as well, so that he can be relieved at the earliest".

A day after railway minister Piyush Goyal said the farmers' agitation has been "infiltrated by Leftist and Maoist elements", Mr Athawale said on Sunday it

is important to inquire if such people have joined the farmers' protest. Mr Athawale, head of the Republican Party of India (A), which is a BJP ally, also said Union minister Raosaheb Danve's claim of China and Pakistan being behind the farmers' protest was "not the stand of the government".

Mr Athawale also said social distancing was not seen at the farmers' protest and the spread of the coronavirus cannot be ruled out in such crowded places. "I can understand the feelings of farmers, but the three farm laws are in the interest of farmers. We do not support their demand for a repeal of the laws," he said.

Continued from Page 1

Central forces now to end the era of the politics of violence here and ensure that people can cast their votes without any fear," the BJP national general secretary said at Santiniketan after he met Visvabharati vice-chancellor Bidyut Chakrabarty to discuss Prime Minister Narendra Modi's virtual address at the Central university's foundation day function on December 24.

During the day, a BJP worker's body with injury marks on his face was found from a pond at Katwa in Burdwan East.

Sukhdeb Pramanik, the deceased, was from the party's Mondal No. 38 in Purbasthali. Two days back

DURING THE day, a BJP worker's body with injury marks on his face was found from a pond at Katwa in Burdwan East. Sukhdeb Pramanik, the deceased, was from the party's Mondal No. 38 in Purbasthali. On Saturday, a BJP booth prez was beaten to death.

he had gone to participate in a protest in the district against the attack on Mr Nadda's convoy but went missing.

On Saturday evening, a BJP booth president, Saikat Bhawal, was beaten to death while six others were injured in an attack by TMC workers on the party's

door-to-door outreach programme "Aar Noy Onnyay" (No More Injustice) at Halishahar in North 24 Parganas. Three persons with links to the TMC were arrested by the police. However, TMC minister Firhad Hakim rejected Mr Vijayvargiya's allegations and demand.

"We do not resort to any violence. Fear prevails in Madhya Pradesh where Mr Vijayvargiya hails from. Dacoits of Chambal are available there. They open fire to create fear.

"This does not happen here. The BJP, being in the government, misuses power. But that does not affect us as the people of Bengal are with Ms Banerjee," he said.

THE ASIAN AGE

14 DECEMBER 2020

Russian ‘concerns’ drew a fitting Indian response

In a speech last week at the Russian International Affairs Council, a government think tank, the country’s veteran foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, noted that “currently” India was “an object of the Western countries’ persistent, aggressive and devious policy as they are trying to engage it in anti-China games”. New Delhi has done well to respond with alacrity — and clarity.

The external affairs ministry noted at a briefing, responding to questions, “Our relations with Russia stand on their own merits including in the sphere of Military and Technical Cooperation (MTC).” Mr Lavrov had made a special mention of MTC, saying it was the “goal of the US (to bring to bear) very tough pressure on New Delhi” in the MTC area.

The Indian reaction seeks to reassure Moscow on continuing close bilateral relations, including in the defence domain. At the same time, by making no reference to China, New Delhi has conveyed to Moscow that it is free to make decisions as regards the world stage in light of its own perception of self-interest.

Recently India signed on to the last of the four “foundational” agreements of the US. Without these, America does not extend special partnership deals with any country. These agreements include exchanging logistics and bases, joint training of forces, and military cooperation in the limitless geo-spatial field. In addition, India has signed the Defence Technologies and Trade Initiative (DTTI) with the US. These have understandably made Russia somewhat nervous.

On the other hand, India signed up two years ago to purchase the Russian S-400 Triumf air defence system that can neutralize incoming aircraft, missiles and even drones 400 km away. The system is scheduled to be delivered by end-2021. Meanwhile, in July this year, Russia confirmed supplies of anti-aircraft and anti-missile systems months after the face-off with China had begun in eastern Ladakh. This point is of special relevance since Russia has special ties with China. It is not inconceivable that Mr Lavrov’s formally expressed anxiety about India being roped into an anti-China configuration is to deflect possible head-shaking from Beijing.

Meanwhile, Washington is upset with India’s planned sourcing of advanced anti-missile systems from Moscow and the Trump administration even contemplated penalising India under CAATSA (Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act), but held back. In light of India’s expanding warmth with it in a multi-faceted way, Washington has had to be indulgent about India’s ties with Iran and Russia.

Moscow has proved India’s all-weather friend. This has been India’s most abiding strategic relationship, regardless of personalities, systems and parties in power. With no country have such ties subsisted. This is on account of geo-strategic realities and geography. It would be unwise of either side to lose sight of this. Moscow has to understand that while it may have close ties with Beijing — and also a few worries in the Central Asia theatre — India has its reasons to bolster itself in the diplomatic and strategic domains all round in light of the difficulties posed by China’s rise.

India has spoken, while responding to Mr Lavrov’s talk centred on multi-polarity and US moves to go back to a unipolar world, of its “independent” foreign policy. Even if some questions have risen about it, as a middle-level power India would do well to remind itself of the need for such independence, which permits it the latitude to negotiate with contending parties.

Lessons from Delhi border

It’s all in the ‘mindset’. The farmers’ barricade at the capital’s borders that has entered its 16th day and is stubbornly refusing to go away, to the chagrin of the Narendra Modi government, is now beginning to expose the hypocrisies of the ruling party and its constituents. And in so doing, embarrass them.

On December 10, Human Rights Day, Bharatiya Kisan Union leader Joginder Singh Ugrahan’s colleagues had held posters of jailed human rights activists arrested in the Bhima Koregaon case. It drew a reaction from the usual suspects — this time in the shape of Union minister Piyush Goyal — who tossed out at them his party’s overused salvo — that of being “hard Left” and “antinational”. However, the former soldier was nonchalant.

Mr Ugrahan, whose organisation recently moved Supreme Court to have the three contentious farm laws repealed, has a question for the government. Is the government afraid to engage with him on the points that he is making regarding the laws?

For whatever they are worth, Mr Ugrahan can’t very well be expected to be punished for his beliefs, or the positions he has taken on these other matters, empowered as he is to have done so by dint of Articles 19, freedom of expression, and 25, freedom of conscience and religion, of our esteemed Constitution.

On the flipside, Mr Goyal can’t properly be said to have indulged in whataboutery either, because it is socialists who have historically upheld the humanitarian cause. Be on the Left to fight for the right.

As evidenced by the tweets sneering at fox nuts and foot massages at the protest venue, the government’s propaganda machine, however, is jealous of the confident, new farmer. For them, the kisan bhai, and he needs must be a bhai, even as 60 per cent of India’s subsistence farmers today are female, so farmer’s rights are equally women’s rights, is cast in the image of the emaciated ploughman. The government is stereotype-bound and lack ideas — for actual agro-reform — and imagination.

There is hope yet. A way to avoid more embarrassment is to learn from one’s mistakes.

THE ASIAN AGE

T. VENKATRAM REDDY
Editor in Chief

Printer & Publisher: K. SUBHAKAR
THE ASIAN AGE office is located at:
New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Phone: (011) 23211124.
Published and Printed on behalf of and for
Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited, Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi 110 002 at BFL Infotech Ltd., C-9, Sector-III, Noida -201301.
London: Quickmarsh Ltd, 8th Floor, Block 2, Elizabeth House, 39 York Road, London, SE1 7NQ.
RNI Registration number: 57290/94

Subhani



Justice hurried can be justice buried



V. Vijayasai Reddy

Benjamin Franklin’s maxim that “it is better 100 guilty persons should escape than that one innocent person should suffer” has been staple legal thinking for centuries.

Would a time bound and hurried disposal of cases be more of a quantitative exercise than a qualitative one? Would not this unwarranted haste totally invalidate the maxim given by Franklin?

Earlier this month, senior advocate Vijay Hansaria, acting as an amicus curiae, informed the Supreme Court that as per the latest data available after collating inputs from various high courts, the number of cases against public representatives stood at 4,859. The report submitted by him also recommended that the high courts be directed to prepare a blueprint for expeditious disposal of cases with the conclusion of trials by no later than one year. The chief justices of each high court may be personally requested to look into the matter and submit an action plan. Now, a lot is being discussed as to this recommendation and whether it would create more logistical and legal problems than it would solve.

For such special treatment of expedited trial to be given to all serving and former public representatives, it must first pass the requirement of constitutionality. When the Constitution speaks of the fundamental right to equality why is it a public representative’s case merits priority over a longer pending case? The question, therefore, is whether public representatives form a separate class of citizens within the society to enable them preferential adjudication. If the answer is yes on the basis of their role, responsibilities and powers, then shouldn’t judges and heads of all statutory bodies, serving and retired, too, fall in the same category? The Supreme Court refrained from answering this question in 2013 and has, therefore, left it open to interpretation. Disproportionate focus on cases against public representatives, most of which are either political or cases with less than five years’ jail term if the accused is convicted, takes away from our focus cases against hardened criminals and repeat offenders.

The prospect of disposal of cases within one year against public representatives may make headlines but it also brings up a disturbing matter for discussion. Can a time frame be set to elicit information and verify the veracity in statements recorded by the prosecution from witnesses? Is not “justice hurried justice buried”? Normally, examination of witnesses in trials is filled with research and production of data beyond what was filed by the prosecution in Courts. Would not a trial court judge be pressured to deny time just

Disproportionate focus on cases against public representatives, most of which are political or with less than five years’ jail term if the accused is convicted, takes away from our focus cases against hardened criminals

The pressure on the trial courts to dispose a case within one year and limited resources may lead to disastrous results. One wrong conviction would lead to immediate disqualification of an incumbent MP...

because he has a deadline to catch? How can we ensure that all efforts have been made and sufficient time devoted to elicit the truth? What is the logic behind fixing a timeframe? Is it that the judiciary is again pushing against the boundaries of the doctrine of separation of powers and thereby sacrificing our constitutional right to equality?

This speedy disposal paradigm also conflicts with the present condition of fast track courts in the country. The fast track courts were meant to dispose of criminal cases. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data from January this year, the trials in fast track courts, set up in several states to allow quick trials in cases of serious crimes such as rape, take longer than those in regular courts. The data also showed that of the more than 28,000 trials completed in India’s fast track courts in 2018, only 22 per cent took less than a year to complete and about 42 per cent of the cases took more than three years to complete. While the Supreme Court has lamented about the pending cases against public representatives, it has overlooked the delay in the trial of much more heinous crimes such as crimes against women and children.

Further, the resources needed to be able to dispose of a case within one year are huge. As of 2018, India roughly has just 19 judges per million population with a shortage of over 5,700

judges in the trial courts, themselves. To squander the limited infrastructure of the judiciary, in terms of lack of judges, limited judicial time and physical resources in one type of mostly political cases would be unjust to victims of much more heinous crimes who would see further delay getting justice. The judiciary and the justice delivery system has limited infrastructure and it is important to efficiently use them for the greater good of the people. Rather than making an un-implementable law, the focus should be on distributing resources with focus on matters, which are of higher judicial importance, such as cases of rape, murder and even habeas corpus. The amicus curiae’s report if implemented would see the judiciary jump to the end result without providing for a path to enable the same.

Lastly, the pressure on the trial courts to dispose a case within one year and limited resources may lead to disastrous results. One wrong conviction with over two years’ jail term would lead to immediate disqualification of an incumbent MP or MLA and tarnish the reputation which he or she built over decades. Rather than actually cleaning politics, it shall clean up all the politicians, good and bad.

Of late, we have been witnessing several bills being passed by the legislatures, which stipulate a timeframe within which the judiciary is expected to adjudicate. How feasible is it and are we jumping upon the result rather than creating an enabling environment for it? That is a question that only the passage of time will answer.

The writer is YSR Congress Parliamentary Party leader and general secretary. He can be reached at venumbaka.vr@sansad.nic.in.

LETTERS

BETTER A MONARCHY

We find that edifices, public facilities and even a GT Road in use today built by a series of kings and emperors have endured. In a monarchy, the national infrastructure has an owner who would maintain the country in good order so that he passes it on, with enrichment perhaps, to his heirs. A democratic government run by politicians, who get re-elected periodically, do not own anything but are keen to maximise the short term. It needs to pander to the current voter generation and not the next whose votes are too distant to matter. Many European nations are happy to carry on public business in their centuries old public spaces and structures that bear the memorable stamp of every periodic occupier, like the age-rings of giant trees.

R. Narayanan
Navi Mumbai

PAWAR TACTIC

A SENIOR NCP leader has said Sharad Pawar was prevented from being made PM on two occasions in the 1990s by a darbar coterie. But the leader deftly avoided mentioning the Maratha strongman’s disloyalty. Didn’t Mr Pawar stab Vasantdada Patil in the back when he seized the state throne in 1978 forming the PDF government? Didn’t he revolt against the Congress leadership over the issue of foreign origin of Sonia Gandhi to found NCP, which continues to exist even though the issue is no longer relevant? Why is he not going for an outright merger of the NCP with the Congress?

Arun Malankar
Mumbai

DANCE’S GREAT SON

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, “A lone ranger departs” (Dec. 12). Renowned for marrying kathak and kathakali into a unique form, Astad Deboo’s dance career is unforgettable. Combining modern and old Indian dance, he presented a different dance form to the new generation. He was an extraordinarily sensitive human being. What he accomplished with street children, the deaf and the marginalised artistes from the Northeast was truly commendable.

Sankar Paul
Chakdaha, West Bengal

₹500 for the best letter of the week goes to Bidyut Chatterjee (Dec. 13). Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

A.G. Noorani



On farm bills, govt needs to consult Opp. & cultivators

Since Independence, India has seen many a protest, some massive. But never before has it seen such an organised, mammoth demonstration in which old as well as young participated. I am referring, of course, to the protests by the farmers of Punjab. Schoolboys left their homes and schools to be counted among the protesters. All were overshadowed by elderly women, whose presence made this unprecedented show of righteous wrath even more impressive.

It was a unique, unmatched feat of organisation. They travelled on their tractors, on and under which they slept, covered with blankets, under open skies in bitter cold. The traditional Sikh langar is another story. There were giant tawas to cook food for the huge crowds that had assembled — all united by clear, precise demands that the Modi government could have easily anticipated when it inflicted the three laws on a host of sites pertaining to the farmer, from farm to mandi.

The demonstrations, covered by

the Indian and international press, have evoked strong reactions among the Punjabi, particularly Sikh, diaspora. It has united a fragmented opposition. There have been some rounds of talks with government representatives, all to no avail.

The episode holds a lesson in democratic governance. A government ‘majority’ in parliament cannot, must not, govern without consulting not only the opposition but also the affected parties.

The government refused to even refer the three offending agriculture bills to a joint committee of parliament. It would have studied them far more closely than either house of parliament possibly could. It would have asked the farmers’ representatives to appear before it with facts and figures, expound their case and answer questions thoroughly, and satisfy themselves that they had been heard fully. Experts would have studied the committee’s report. An informed public opinion would have been evolved. In the time thus taken, the heat would have subsided.

This process is an integral part of participative government. In Deep Citizenship, P.B. Clarke wrote, “Democracy is unfinished business. It has yet to widen and institutionalise the crucial dimension of public participation.” To that I would add, old as it is, democracy has not passed the age of childbearing. The last half-century has sprouted the ombudsman; call him the mohatsib or lok pal.

Both in formulating policy and introducing it as a bill, the government may embark on a process of consultation with outside interests, and sometimes issue consultation documents to invite public comment. This can help to improve and legitimise a bill, and win the support of those whose cooperation is needed if the legislation is to be effective.

The UK’s Hansard Society Commission on the Legislative Process made a number of recommendations for more timely, open, and sufficient consultation so that bills could be got into “a form fit for enactment, without major alteration, before they are presented to

parliament”. A few years later in 1997, the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons found there was little or no consultation within parliament or with other bodies before bills were introduced. Subsequently, the government issued a code of practice that urges departments to consult widely throughout the process of policy development and sets out criteria for effective consultation.

Pre-legislative scrutiny by parliament as well as outside bodies is facilitated if bills are published in draft well before their formal introduction. It has been said authoritatively that proper consultation is a crucial part of the process of determining the most effective way of achieving a policy objective, and where legislation is deemed to be necessary. It is important therefore that, when a law comes before parliament, it should have been exposed to those who will be affected by its provisions and its suitability reviewed in the light of their reactions.

Some enabling acts oblige the minister concerned to consult

organised interests or other bodies before making regulations. The particular organisations to be consulted may be specified by the act, or left to the judgement of the minister in accordance with some general formula.

In the UK, legislation is sometimes virtually the product of negotiation with affected groups. Some policies are not so much influenced by pressure as produced in a joint effort by a government department and one or more groups with which it shares a common interest. For example, a continuous dialogue takes place between the department for environment, food and rural affairs and the farmers’ union on questions of agricultural policy. In his masterpiece, *Parliament*, Sir Ivor Jennings refers to the practice of consultation between the government and Opposition, if arrangements are arrived at “behind the speaker’s chair”. Narendra Modi has no use for that.

By arrangement with Dawn

SHORT TAKES

**NIGERIA: GUNMEN
ATTACK SCHOOL,
400 KIDS MISSING**

Lagos (Nigeria), Dec. 13: Hundreds of Nigerian students are missing after gunmen attacked a secondary school in the country's north-western Katsina state, police have confirmed.

The Government Science Secondary School in Kankara was attacked Friday night by a large group of bandits who shot "with AK 47 rifles," Katsina State police spokesman Gambo Isah said in a statement. Police engaged the attackers "in a gun duel which gave (some of) the students the opportunity to scale the fence of the school and run for safety," Isah said. About 400 students are missing, while 200 are accounted for, Isah said. The school is believed to have more than 600 students.

**AZERBAIJAN
DECLARE BREACH
IN PEACE DEAL**

Baku, Dec. 13: Azerbaijan announced on Sunday that four of its troops had been killed in the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region since a peace deal with Armenian separatists was agreed in early November.

The defence ministry said a group of Armenian fighters remained in the mountainous province — breaking the terms of the Russian-brokered truce — and had recently launched fatal attacks on Azerbaijan's forces.

The ministry said three servicemen were killed in a separatist ambush on November 26 and another sustained fatal injuries during an attack near the village of Hadrut on Tuesday last week.

Both Armenia and Azerbaijan accused each other of breaching the truce that ended six weeks of fighting between the longstanding foes for control of the breakaway region.

**IRAN SUMMONS
EU ENVOYS FOR
PROTESTING**

Tehran, Dec. 13: Iran on Sunday summoned the German envoy to Tehran after the European Union condemned the execution of an Iranian journalist whose work helped inspire nationwide economic protests in 2017, Iranian state media has reported.

IRNA said that an Iranian foreign ministry official summoned the German ambassador because of EU statements on the exiled reporter Ruhollah Zam, 47, who was hanged on Saturday. Zam was being held in jail in Iran after Iranian authorities seized him while he was traveling in neighbouring Iraq last year.

The German Foreign Ministry on Saturday expressed its shock about the circumstances of Zam's sentencing and what it described as his "abduction from abroad" and forced return to Iran. Iran will also summon today the French ambassador to Tehran over European reactions to the journalist's execution, **IRNA** added.

**MANY HELD AT
PARIS STIR OVER
SECURITY BILL**

Paris, Dec. 13: Paris police took nearly 150 people into custody at what quickly became a tense and sometimes ill-tempered protest Saturday against proposed security laws, with officers wading into the crowds of several thousand to haul away suspected trouble-makers.

Police targeted protesters they suspected might coalesce together into violent groups like those who vandalized stores and vehicles and attacked officers at previous demonstrations.

The interior minister said police detained 142 people. Long lines of riot officers and police vehicles with blue lights flashing escorted Saturday's march through rain-slickened streets. They hemmed in protesters, seeking to prevent the flare-up of violence that marked many previous demonstrations.

A police water cannon do-used demonstrators at the end of the march, as night fell. Marchers were protesting against a proposed security law that has sparked successive week-ends of demonstrations and against a draft law aimed at combating Islamist radicalism. The security bill's most contested measure could make it more difficult to film police officers. It aims to outlaw the publication of images with intent to cause harm to police.

Brexit deadline goes 'extra mile'

Johnson feels Brexit failure still 'most likely'**Ursula von der Leyen**

simplicity in that approach that has its own advantages. It's not where we wanted to get to... but the UK is prepared," he said.

"Either way, whatever happens, the UK will do very, very well." UK businesses welcomed the agreement to keep talking, but disagreed strongly with Johnson's cheerful forecasts for Britain's future if it severs all ties with its biggest overall trading partner from the New Year.

"We now need negotiators to finish the job and agree the deal we all so desperately need," Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders chief executive Mike Hawes tweeted.

Hawes added: "'No deal' would be nothing less than catastrophic for the automotive sector, its workers and their families, and represent a stunning failure of statecraft. Quite simply, it has to be

ruled out." Nissan has warned that a no-deal Brexit would make its Sunderland car factory in northeast England, which employs more than 6,000 workers, unviable due to the restoration of tariffs on cross-Channel trade.

Last week, Japanese automaker Honda suspended production at its British plant for a day after suffering a shortfall in parts, owing to blockages at ports caused by the coronavirus pandemic and Brexit stockpiling.

Even with a trade deal, Britain will still be out of the EU's common market and businesses will face new customs regulations and paperwork.

They warn the government has failed to get vital IT systems ready in time, leading to fears of transport gridlock on roads and at ports.

Confederation of British Industry director-general Tony Danker said the news of talks continuing "gives hope", but demanded the government fix the IT rollout and offer more support to businesses.

"A deal is both essential and possible. It is the only way to build upon the extensive support for the economy given by all governments during the pandemic. Without it, that progress is undermined," he said in a statement.

The British Chambers of Commerce appealed to London and Brussels not to give up. — **AFP**



Thousands of red-hatted protesters filled Washington streets to demand 'four more years' for Donald Trump's presidency and to denounce, without proof, the 'massive fraud' they insist gave the election to Joe Biden. — **AFP**

Clashes erupt after pro-Trump rallies

Washington, Dec. 13: Four people were stabbed and one shot at rallies backing President Donald Trump's baseless claims of election fraud led to clashes in major US cities on Saturday.

Scuffles broke out in many places between rally-goers and counter-protesters who turned up to criticize the president, who lost the November 3 election to Democrat Joe Biden but is yet to concede.

Washington State Police said in a tweet late Saturday that a shooting had taken place after clashes near the capitol building in Olympia, and that a suspect had been detained.

In the US capital, DC Fire and EMS Department communications chief Doug Buchanan said that four people had been stabbed and were now hospitalised "with serious injuries." The *New York Times* reported that 23 had been arrested throughout the day.

There was no indication of whether any of the victims had been involved in the protests, on either side of the divide.

The day had begun with a festive atmosphere as thousands of red-hatted protesters filled Washington's streets to support the president, undeterred by the US Supreme Court's rejection

on Friday of what may have been his last chance to overturn the results.

Similar events took place in Olympia, Atlanta and St. Paul, Minnesota, as well as in smaller towns in Nebraska, Alabama and elsewhere.

Demonstrators at the DC rally — noticeably smaller than a similar protest last month — said they were steadfast in their support for the embattled president. "We're not gonna give up," said Luke Wilson, a sixty-something protester who had come all the way from the western state of Idaho.

"I believe there is a big injustice being done to the American people," added

Dell Quick, a regular at Trump's political rallies, as he brandished a flag defending gun rights.

Protesters offered no shortage of explanations for the poll results, even though they have been affirmed by state election officials — several of them Republican — and by judges in several key states.

Every state has now certified the results, giving Biden 306 votes in the Electoral College to Trump's 232. Electors are to formally cast their votes on Monday. But protesters insisted, as Trump has repeatedly, that there was widespread fraud in the election. — **AFP**

US set for Covid vaccine rollout

Non-essential shops, schools to close in Germany, says Merkel

Berlin, Dec. 13: Shops selling non-essential goods, hair-salons and schools in Germany will close from Wednesday, Chancellor Angela Merkel said, to halt an "exponential growth" new in coronavirus infections in Europe's biggest economy.

The partial lockdown will apply until January 10, with companies also urged to allow employees to work from home or offer extended company holidays, under the new measures agreed by Merkel with regional leaders of Germany's 16 states on Sunday.

Alcohol sales would be banned in public places,

essentially outlawing the business of mulled wine stands, which have proved popular in the days running up to Christmas.

"The Corona situation is out of control," said Bavarian state premier Markus Soeder, welcoming the tougher restrictions which he pledged to implement in his state.

Germany in November closed leisure and cultural facilities and banned indoor dining in restaurants.

The measures had helped to halt rapid growth of infections after the autumn school holidays, but numbers had plateaued at a high rate.

Over the last week however, the country's disease control agency reported that the infections trend has taken a worrying turn.

"With increasing mobility and the therefore linked additional contacts in the pre-Christmas period, Germany is now in exponential growth of infections numbers," said the policy paper agreed by regional leaders and Merkel.

It was therefore "our task to prevent an overload of our health systems and that's why there is an urgent need to take action," said the chancellor. — **AFP**

JAPAN, S. KOREA SET NEW DAILY COVID RECORDS

Tokyo, Dec. 13: Japan's daily coronavirus cases have exceeded 3,000 for the first time while the government delays stricter measures for fear of hurting the economy ahead of the holiday season.

The 3,030 new cases, including 621 in Tokyo, took Japan's national tally to 1,77,287 with 2,562 deaths, the Health Ministry said on Sunday.

In other developments in the Asia-Pacific region: — South Korea has set another record for its daily coronavirus tally with 1,030, as authorities struggle to suppress the viral spread. — **AP**

Pakistan Oppn set to stage final showdown in Lahore

Lahore, Dec. 13: The Pakistan Democratic Movement, an 11-party Opposition alliance seeking the ouster of "puppet" Prime Minister Imran Khan, is set to hold its final rally here on Sunday, despite a ban on the gathering of more than 300 people owing to an increase in Covid-19 cases across the country.

A number of workers of the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) have reached Minar-i-Pakistan. They broke the locks of its main gate, placed chairs and have installed lights for Sunday's much-hyped power show of the Opposition.

The rally will be addressed by former prime minister and PML-N supreme leader Nawaz Sharif from London, his daughter Maryam Nawaz, Jamiat Ulema Islam chief and PDM head Maulana Fazlur Rehman and PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari.

"The government has not given permission to the PDM to hold a rally at Minar-e-Pakistan Lahore because of the rise in Covid-19 cases. Action will be taken against those who will take the law into their hands," Punjab Law Minister Basharat Raja said.

So far, police in Lahore have booked more than 3,000 workers of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) for violating Covid-19 SOPs during this week's meetings held here by its vice-president Maryam, he said. PDM's Minar-i-Pakistan public meeting will be the last one in its first phase of rallies that had begun

over two months ago. The PDM will announce the 'decisive phase' of its struggle against Prime Minister Khan's government in this public meeting.

The alliance has already announced that all Opposition parties will resign from the national and provincial assemblies to pressure the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf government for fresh elections.

The details about the insurance policy were revealed during the hearing of a terror funding case against him and his absconding accomplices on Saturday.

The insurance company provided this information to an Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) in Karachi during the hearing of the

case registered against Mansour and his accomplices by the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) last year, Dawn news reported.

It emerged during the investigation that the Taliban leader and his accomplices were involved in generating funds for terrorist activities through the purchase of properties on the basis of "forged identities".

He had purchased five properties including plots and houses, estimated to be valued at ₹32 million (\$1.99,812) in Karachi.

The report said that it surfaced during the investigation that Mullah Akhtar Mansour had purchased the "life insurance" policy by using a fake identity and had paid up to ₹3,00,000 to the company before his death in the drone attack on May 21, 2016. — **PTI**

case registered against Mansour and his accomplices by the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) last year, Dawn news reported.

It emerged during the investigation that the Taliban leader and his accomplices were involved in generating funds for terrorist activities through the purchase of properties on the basis of "forged identities".

He had purchased five properties including plots and houses, estimated to be valued at ₹32 million (\$1.99,812) in Karachi.

The report said that it surfaced during the investigation that Mullah Akhtar Mansour had purchased the "life insurance" policy by using a fake identity and had paid up to ₹3,00,000 to the company before his death in the drone attack on May 21, 2016. — **PTI**

The long march towards Islamabad is also on the cards for the PDM. Punjab Chief Minister Usman Buzdar has asked the PDM to delay its Minar-e-Pakistan rally in light of 'terror threat alerts' and the coronavirus situation. "I ask the Opposition to resolve issues through talks. Discuss their issues through dialogue and not by playing with people's lives," Buzdar said. — **PTI**

FARMERS | SUPPORT

Car rally to Indian embassy hijacked by separatist Sikhs who were carrying Khalistani flags

Khalistan supporters vandalise Gandhi's statue in US

Washington, Dec. 13: A violent group of Khalistani separatists has desecrated Mahatma Gandhi's statue outside the Indian embassy here in the US during a demonstration by Sikh-American youths in support of farmers protesting against the recently enacted agriculture laws in India.

Hundreds of Sikhs from in and around Greater Washington DC area, Maryland and Virginia, along with many from

other states like New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Ohio and North Carolina, on Saturday undertook a car rally to the Indian embassy in downtown Washington DC, where they gathered to express solidarity with the protesting Indian farmers.

However, the peaceful protest was soon hijacked by the separatist Sikhs who were carrying Khalistani flags with anti-India posters and banners. During the protest, many

of the pro-Khalistan Sikh youths flashing kirpans jumped on the statue of Mahatma Gandhi and pasted a poster over it.

The group raised anti-India and pro-Khalistan slogans. The Indian embassy condemned the "mischievous act" by hooligans masquerading as protesters. "The statue of Mahatma Gandhi at the Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Plaza in front of the embassy was defaced by Khalistani elements on 12 December 2020. The

Embassy strongly condemns this mischievous act by hooligans masquerading as protesters against the universally respected icon of peace and justice," it said in a statement.

The embassy said it has lodged a strong protest with the US law enforcement agencies and also taken up the matter with the Department of State for an early investigation and action against the culprits under the applicable law. — **PTI**

Congressman Ro Khanna seeks fair, peaceful solution to farmers

Washington, Dec. 13: Indian-American Congressman Ro Khanna has hoped for a peaceful and fair solution to the farmers' issues in India, saying he is encouraged by the ongoing dialogue between the protesting farmers and the government.

Khanna, 44, was recently elected for a third consecu-

tive term from the congressional district representing Silicon Valley. "India and the US share a rich tradition of democracy and peaceful protests.

Farmworkers are the backbone of both our nations and must have their voices heard. "I hope there's a peaceful and fair solution so they can pro-

vide for their families," Khanna said in a tweet on Saturday. "I am encouraged by the ongoing dialogue," he said, joining other American lawmakers who have expressed their views on the ongoing farmers' protest in India, several of whom have expressed their concerns. — **PTI**

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	46,099.01	0.30
Nifty 50	13,513.85	0.26
S&P 500*	3,663.46	-0.39
Dollar (₹)	73.64	0.03
Pound Sterling (₹)	97.75	0.35
Euro (₹)	89.31	-0.17
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	48,594	102 0.20
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	50.03	-0.22
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.956	0.040
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.883	-0.025

* As of Friday/Saturday

Third tranche of Bharat Bond ETF likely this fiscal

The Centre is likely to launch the third tranche of Bharat Bond ETF, the exchange traded fund that invests in PSU debt, this fiscal. "Central public sector enterprises have fund raising plans of about Rs 12,000 crore. We are thinking of launching the next tranche of Bharat Bond ETF in a couple of months," a source said. The second tranche of Bharat Bond ETF, launched in July, was oversubscribed more than three times.

EPFO may credit 8.5% interest on EPF by Dec.-end



Retirement fund body EPFO is likely to credit 8.5 per cent rate of interest for 2019-20 in the Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) accounts of around six crore subscribers in one go by the end of December. Earlier in September this year, the EPFO had decided to split 8.5 per cent interest into two installments of 8.15 per cent and 0.35 per cent in its trustees meet headed by labour minister Santosh Gangwar.

Triumph plans 9 new bikes in India in H1

Triumph Motorcycles has an aggressive product pipeline for India market in the next six months, with nine new bike models, including some special editions, slated for launch as the British premium bike-maker looks to consolidate its position further in the niche space, an official said. Triumph India has 16 motorcycles in its portfolio ranging from modern classics to adventure motorcycles, including the iconic Rocket 3R.

Bharti Infratel gets nod to be Indus Towers

Bharti Infratel has got approval from the RoC for changing its name to Indus Towers, following the recent merger of the two firms. The company has initiated due process for final approval from stock exchanges for updating the name change. In a BSE filing, Bharti Infratel said it "has received approval from the Registrar of Companies, NCT of Delhi and Haryana for change of name of the company."

Printed & Published by K. Sudhakar on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited. Printed at BFL Infotech Ltd, C-9 Sector 3, Noida-201301. Published at 219, N D Tiwari Bhawan, Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Editor: T.Venkatram Reddy, RNI Registration number 30074/09, Air surcharge Re 1. © All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission of The Editor, Financial Chronicle ® is prohibited.

Person days rise but fewer households get 100 days job Job guarantee scheme utilises 90% of funds

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, DEC. 13

Person days generated by the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme have already crossed last year's numbers and fewer people are turning up for work in rural areas from September. However, the total number of households which have received 100 days of guaranteed employment is lagging far behind compared to last year.

The scheme has used up over 90 per cent of the allocation for the fiscal so far. With the government increasing the allocation of MGNREGA this year due to the pandemic, the number of person days have already touched 276.51 crore against 265.43 crore in last fiscal.

However, the goal of providing 100 days of employment to households has been met only for 20.81



lakh households. This is almost half of 40.60 lakh households covered last fiscal.

Average days of employment per household too are lower at 41.76 days against 48.4 days last year. But a larger number of households, 6.62 crore, participated in the job guarantee scheme this year against 5.48 crore households last year. The total number of individuals too has been higher at 9.6 crore against 7.89 crore last year.

"People from a single household participating in the scheme would have been more this time. Both individuals and households are higher," said Kruti Shah, economist, Emkay Global Financial Services.

The work demand—those seeking work—has been tapering down since September. This month, the work demand stood at 1.44 crore households against 2.27 crore in November. Work demand was the highest in June at

4.47 crore. At 3.89 crore, the employment provided to households was also at the highest level in June.

The scheme has undertaken 1.84 crore new and spillover works this fiscal against 1.91 crore last year. The expenditure on agriculture and allied works has been higher this year at 69.42 per cent against 66.12 per cent last year.

The scheme has utilised 90.85 per cent of the Rs 85,124 crore available till now. The total expenses made till now stood at Rs 77,337 crore against Rs 68,286 crore last fiscal. The scheme had utilised 90.43 per cent of the available funds last year.

The government had increased the allocation for MGNREGA this year by Rs 40,000 crore and this had taken the total allocation to Rs 1 lakh crore. With the work demand tapering and four more months left, it will have to be seen whether the scheme utilises the total allocation.

GSTN enables auto-populated GSTR-3B return form from Nov.

New Delhi, Dec. 13: Businesses will now get complete auto-populated monthly sales return form GSTR-3B, the GSTN said on Sunday.

"For ease of taxpayers, now the system will auto populate GSTR-3B (monthly) on the basis of details filed in GSTR-1 and auto-drafted ITC statement GSTR-2B from November 2020 tax period onwards," the Goods and Services

Tax Network said.

Based on the supplies return GSTR-1 filed by businesses, GSTN will auto-populate the liabilities, while input tax credit (ITC) would be populated from system-drafted statement GSTR-2B.

"If the total liability of a particular period is negative on account of debit/credit notes, the same will be auto-populated as zero liability," GSTN said.

While businesses file GSTR-1 of a particular month by the 11th day of the subsequent month, GSTR-3B is filed in a staggered manner between 20th-24th day of the succeeding month.

Also, the facility of communication between taxpayers has been enabled on the GST portal.

EY tax partner Abhishek Jain said the GSTN has enabled the facility for sup-

pliers and recipients to communicate with one another over the online portal itself.

"This shall enable the businesses to raise a red flag to their suppliers/recipients in relation to various discrepancies at their end, as well as receive their comments. This development by the GSTN should facilitate better reconciliation of GST credits," Jain said. —PTI

Maruti Suzuki to re-enter diesel segment next year

New Delhi, Dec. 13: The country's largest carmaker Maruti Suzuki India (MSIL) is looking to enter the diesel segment once again next year as the vertical continues to draw customers, especially in the high-selling SUV and multipurpose vehicle segments, as per industry sources.

The auto major had discontinued diesel models from its portfolio with the onset of stricter BS-VI emission norms from April this year.

As per the sources, MSI has initiated the process to upgrade its Manesar-based powertrain plant so that it can start rolling out BS-VI diesel engines starting the middle or festive season next year.

Sources also confirmed that the company plans to utilise the BS-VI compliant diesel powertrain in the Ertiga and Vitara Brezza to start with in the domestic market.

The auto major, however, did not specify any



reasons for reentering the diesel segment.

When contacted, an MSI spokesperson said in a statement: "We cannot give any guidance on future technologies."

Sources said the company is looking to upgrade the current set-up at the Manesar plant, which earlier used to produce its in-house developed BS-IV compliant 1,500-cc diesel engine.

MSIL had used this powertrain briefly in its mid-sized sedan Ciaz and Ertiga before deciding to pull the plug on diesel.

The company's other models like Vitara Brezza, Dzire, Swift, S-Cross and Baleno at that time used to be powered by the Fiat-sourced 1,300 diesel unit.

MSI's entire model range is currently powered by BS-VI compliant 1 litre, 1.2 litre and 1.5 litre gasoline engines. The company sells CNG versions of some of the models.

On April 26, 2019, MSI chairman R.C. Bhargava had announced that the company will phase out all diesel cars from its portfolio with effect from April 1, 2020.

He reasoned that small diesel cars would see the maximum impact in terms of pricing with the coming of BS-VI compliant engines.

He, however, at that time had added that if there is a demand for BS-VI diesel cars the company might go ahead and cater to that demand. —PTI

Investors keen on how Vedanta deal with structural challenges

RAHUL SATIJA, BIJU GEORGE & AMEYA KARVE DEC. 13

Investors in Vedanta Resources Ltd are turning their attention to the miner's longer-term plan to streamline a complex group structure that has kept the parent from easily accessing cash at its units.

Vedanta Resources, controlled by billionaire Anil Agarwal, allayed some immediate concerns this week when it received vital funding by selling \$1 billion notes due 2024 at 13.875 per cent, albeit at one of the highest yields for a dollar bond in Asia this year. The company plans to use that cash to finance a buy-back offer for \$670 million of notes due next year, and the rest to repay other debt or to increase stakes in its Indian units.

However, the company has yet to announce a plan on how it wants to address its structural challenges. A failed plan to simplify its corporate layout by delist-

FPIs stock up on equities, inflows hit record ₹1.4 L cr

SHILPI PANDEY NEW DELHI, DEC. 13

Excess liquidity, attractive valuations and weakness in the US dollar propelled foreign investors to flock to the Indian stock market in a big way, with the highest-ever net inflow of Rs 1.4 lakh crore in 2020, but they also dumped debt securities worth a little over Rs 1 lakh crore.

The market men expect a similar trend to continue for a few months unless there is a major change in the overall investment scenario.

"With some major developments on the Covid-19 vaccine front, India stands to benefit. Also, growth in the economy will improve investor sentiments and their outlook towards India. From the risk-reward profile perspective, these aspects make India a good investment destination," said Himanshu Srivastava, associate director manager research, Morningstar India.

However, if the economy remains weak for a longer period of time, that could be a big deterrent. Also, if there is another wave of the coronavirus pandemic resulting in re-implementa-



Prior to this, the feat was achieved in 2019, 2013, 2012 and 2010, when overseas investors infused a net sum of Rs 1.01 lakh crore, Rs 1.13 lakh crore, Rs 1.28 lakh crore and Rs 1.33 lakh crore, respectively.

On the other hand, debt markets have seen FPIs turn net sellers in 2020 as they withdrew a massive Rs 1.07 lakh crore from debt, however, they invested a net amount of Rs 23,350 crore in debt-VRR. The voluntary Retention Route (VRR) channel was introduced by the Reserve Bank of India in March 2019 to attract long-term and stable FPI investments into debt markets.

Broadly, investments through this route are free of macro-prudential and other regulatory norms applicable to FPI investments in debt markets, provided FPIs voluntarily commit to retaining a required minimum percentage of their investments in India for a certain period.

The year 2020 marked the biggest outflow by foreign investors from debt markets since 2002, when bifurcation of net investments had become available. The previous record

outflow was in 2013, when FPIs pulled out a net sum of Rs 50,849 crore from debt markets. Also, an exodus to the tune of Rs 47,795 crore was seen from such instruments in 2018.

Taking all asset classes together, FPIs have made a net investment of Rs 68,200 crore (\$9.3 billion) in the Indian capital markets (equity, debt, debt-VRR and hybrid) so far in 2020, while a few days of trading remains.

While FPIs have made gross purchases worth Rs 20.7 lakh crore so far this year, they have sold securities worth Rs 20 lakh crore across all instruments.

In comparison, the net inflow into Indian capital markets was at Rs 1.36 lakh crore in 2019.

This comprised a net investment of Rs 1.01 lakh crore in equities, Rs 25,880 crore in debt and around Rs 9,000 crore in hybrid securities.

Experts said availability of excess liquidity in the global financial market, attractive valuation compared to developed markets, and weakness in the US dollar have supported buying in Indian equities. —PTI

UP okays sops for Samsung display factory



New Delhi, Dec. 13: Uttar Pradesh said it will give financial incentives to South Korea's Samsung Electronics Co to set up a Rs 4,825 crore (\$654.36 million) display factory.

Samsung is re-locating the factory to the state from China, the Uttar Pradesh administration said in a statement, a move that will help boost Prime Minister Narendra Modi's flagship drive to make India a manufacturing hub.

India is the world's second-biggest smartphone market with significant growth potential, which has driven companies such as Samsung to expand locally.

New Delhi earlier this year also approved financial incentives—under a \$6.65 billion central plan to boost domestic smartphone production—for 16 companies, including Samsung and top Apple suppliers Foxconn, Wistron and Pegatron.

On Friday, Uttar Pradesh said Samsung will receive Rs 700 crore in financial benefits and will also get an exemption from a tax payable on the transfer of land for the factory.

Samsung had sought tax and other incentives from Uttar Pradesh for this smartphone display manufacturing plant, Reuters previously reported.

The unit, expected to create 510 direct jobs, is expected to be operational next year.

Samsung already operates one of the world's biggest mobile phone manufacturing plants in Uttar Pradesh. —Reuters

HOT MONEY | AGAIN

Positive global trends buoying traders' desire for both real and paper barrels

Oil rises from the ashes as a Covid recovery bet

ALEX LONGLEY & JAVIER BLAS DEC. 13

Brent crude topped \$50 a barrel last week for the first time since March, a milestone for an oil market that's been grinding its way back out of a deep slump for months.

Things aren't back to normal yet, but the positive signals are proliferating. The enormous glut of fuel that accumulated this year on everything from tiny barges to giant supertankers is being steadily depleted.

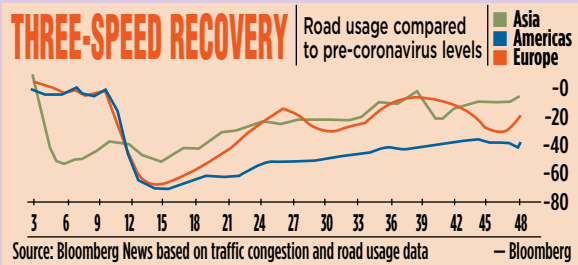
While the coronavirus pandemic is worse than ever in the US, demand in Europe is bouncing back as a second wave of lockdowns eases and Asia continues to pull in huge volumes of crude.

But there's more to this

than a realignment of supply and demand—huge financial flows are also driving the price rally. In a world that's expecting to see travel recover sharply next year, crude has become a hot Covid-vaccine trade.

"Oil is the cheapest of all refraction assets," said Amrita Sen, co-founder of London-based consultant Energy Aspects Ltd. "With vaccines slowly rolling out, we expect investors to start returning to the oil sector and for prices to continue firming."

In some corners of the world, the recovery in demand is almost complete. India's largest refiner said last week its plants are processing at full capacity and it's expecting a v-shaped rebound in fuel use. Consumption of petrol is also at or near



pre-Covid levels in China and Japan, the world's second and fourth biggest oil consumers.

European motorists are hitting the roads again as governments relax national lockdowns in countries including the UK, Spain, and France, according to an index of road usage and traffic compiled by Bloomberg News. Road freight is sharply higher as companies rebuild inventories and the

Christmas shopping season gets in full swing.

As demand is recovering, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies are keeping tight limits on production. The group cancelled January's 1.9-million-barrel-a-day supply hike and will instead add no more than 500,000 barrels a day to the market each month in 2021. Estimates for US shale oil output are still falling.

Cargoes of crude are changing hands at higher prices from the North Sea to the US shale heartland of Midland, Texas as consumers trawl the globe for extra supplies. Saudi Arabia raised the cost of its oil for Asia—a benchmark for the world's refiners—by the most since August last week.

A more subtle shift in the market has also got traders excited. For most of December, nearby crude futures have been trading at a premium to later-dated ones, a price structure known as backwardation.

That buying of contracts at the front of the so-called price curve is evidence that managed money is flowing into the market, Eagle Commodities said. The steeper the backwardation, the greater the

return from holding futures from one month into the next, which encourages further buying in a "self-reinforcing cycle," the brokerage said.

In recent weeks, cash has poured back into energy markets. Holdings of energy contracts rose by \$3.6 billion through early December, according to JPMorgan Chase & Co, driven by inflows into Brent and West Texas Intermediate. Investors pumped money into US exchange-traded energy funds last week, with a swing of almost \$400 million from the prior period's outflows.

For now, positive trends in fuel consumption are buoying traders' desire for both real and paper barrels. There could be more hot money coming down the pipe. —Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Manchester derby ends in stalemate

London: Manchester United and Manchester City did their Premier League title ambitions little favours in a drab 0-0 draw at Old Trafford as Chelsea's challenge also suffered a setback in a 1-0 defeat at Everton on Saturday. The pressure on United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer was ramped up after his side crashed out of the Champions League with a midweek defeat at RB Leipzig. The beleaguered boss desperately needed an uplifting result in the derby to win back some support, but there was little for either side of the Manchester divide to get excited about as both teams failed to fire. A penalty was the difference between the sides at Goodison Park as Everton fed off the atmosphere created by 2,000 fans for the first time since March to arrest their slide.

— AFP

Verstappen wins Abu Dhabi GP

Yas Marina, UAE: Max Verstappen claimed his second win of the season and the 10th of his career on Sunday when he drove to a clinical victory for Red Bull in a pedestrian season-ending Abu Dhabi Grand Prix. The 23-year-old Dutchman dominated from start to finish as he turned his third pole position into a demonstration of speed, talent and flawless strategy to leave both Mercedes men well beaten behind him. Verstappen eased home 15.976 seconds clear of Valtteri Bottas, who at least recovered some pride by taking second after his forlorn showing at the Sakhir Grand Prix, and 18.415 ahead of seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton. On his return to action after recovering from a bout of Covid-19, Hamilton struggled to make any impact as he battled through ahead of Alex Albon, who finished fourth in the second Red Bull. — AFP

Honda Erula finish with 7 podiums

Chennai: The curtain went down on Sunday at the Madras Motor Race Track with final day of 2020 Indian National Motorcycle Racing Championship & IDEMITSU Honda India Talent Cup Round 1. Marking their dominance, ENEOS Honda Erula Racing team now lead the ProStock 165cc class of the total 7 podiums including 2 wins. Sunday's races saw Mathana Kumar stamping his first victory and a total of 4 podium finish while Rajiv Sethu bagged another podium finish for Honda in PS165cc category. Alongside the national championship, the IDEMITSU Honda India Talent Cup saw the energetic young guns Sarthak Chavan, Kavin Quintal & Varoon S leading at top 3 in the NSF 250R open class whereas Shyam Babu leads the CBR150R Novice class.

Datta signs off with a double

Coimbatore: Chennai's Ashwin Datta (Dark Don Racing) and Kottayams Amir Sayed (MSport) signed off with a double each in the first round of the 23rd JK Tyre FMSCI National Racing Championship here on Sunday. Datta cashed in on the chances that came his way to win both races in the national championship class for Formula LGB4 cars. However, it wasn't a great start to the day for the youngster from Chennai as the placings had changed, based on protests and official observation, for Saturdays final race, which Datta won.

Live on TV

CRICKET

Big Bash League: Sydney Thunder vs Brisbane Heat from 1.45 pm on Sony Six, HD

Lanka Premier League: Semifinal-2 from 7.30 pm on Sony Six, HD

FOOTBALL

Indian Super League: Mumbai City vs Jamshedpur from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

WWE

RAW: Bouts from 6.30 am (Tuesday) on Sony Ten 1, HD

Published by K. Sudhakar for and on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited at Jawaharal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi 110 002, and Printed by him at BFL Infotech Limited, C-9, Sector - III, Noida - 201301. Editor - T. Venkatram Reddy, RNI Registration number 57290/94, Price in Nepal - Nep. Rs. 20.00 per copy.

HANUMAN ON FIRE

Vihari confident of contributing to team's cause

Sydney, Dec. 13: The reticent Hanuma Vihari has slowly but surely cemented his place in the Indian Test team and is confident of contributing to the team's cause, saying he is well-equipped to execute plans in the traditional format.

Vihari scored a hundred and also got a wicket with his part-time off-breaks against Australia A in the pink ball warm-up game. He looks set to bat at number six in the first Day/Night Test at Adelaide.

"In 2018, it was my second overseas tour (after England) and it was a good challenge for me back then. Although I contributed a little (back then), I feel I am more well equipped with my game and pretty sure with my gameplan as well and looking forward to the Test series," Vihari said after the end of the warm-up tie.

While he will be batting at number six in the Test match, during the warm-up game, he did get a chance to bat at number 4 and 5 along with seasoned pros like Cheteshwar Pujara and Ajinkya Rahane.

"At number four, I always feel you have more time than you think. In domestic cricket, I have always batted number three, so I am a bit familiar batting up the order," he said.

"Obviously, batting with Pooji (Pujara's nickname) is completely different. We always have a good communication and he tells me what the bowler is trying to do," he observed.

His assessment of Rahane is that the Mumbaier is more flamboyant and has a good grip on game situations.

"Batting with Ajinkya, he is more flamboyant and he has also got a good sense of game situation.but coming to bat at number six is a total different game situation. You have to bat with the keeper or an all-rounder or the bowlers. I enjoy batting at both position and it's about what the team needs," he said.

Having been in Australia for a month along with two first-class matches under their belt, Vihari said the players are now well-prepared to tackle the pace and bounce of Australian tracks.

— PTI



Hanuma Vihari in action during the warm-up match against Australia A. — BCCI

Ben & Jack shine in drawn game

Sydney, Dec. 13: The Indian cricket team will head into the first day-night Test against Australia with a lot of optimism and happy selection dilemmas, having managed to tick most of the boxes before drawing the three-day pink-ball dress rehearsal against Australia A here on Sunday.

Australia A gave a better account of themselves on an eased out third day track, despite being reduced to 25/3, ending

● **Australia A gave a better account of themselves on an eased out third day track, despite being reduced to 25/3, ending on 305/4 riding on Ben McDermott and Jack Wildermuth's centuries.**

on 305/4 riding on Ben McDermott and Jack Wildermuth's centuries. Both the batsmen survived a barrage of bouncers under lights from Indian pacers.

The talented McDermott (107 off 167 balls), younger son of

Craig McDermott who was India's tormentor during the forgettable 91-92 series, along with his skipper Alex Carey (58, 111 balls) added 117 runs in a counter-attacking fourth wicket partnership to partially save the game.

The four-Test series gets underway from December 17 in Adelaide.

Rookie Wildermuth (111 off 119 balls) also got his ton and added 165 runs with McDermott but Virat Kohli and Ravi Shastri, watching the proceedings from the dug-out, will be happy with multiple options that emerged from the game. — PTI

Brief scores: Indians 194 & 386/4 d/w Australia A 108 & 307/4 (Wildermuth 111, McDermott 107*, Carey 57).

NEW ZEALAND CLOSE IN ON VICTORY IN SECOND TEST

Wellington, Dec. 13: New Zealand were in touching distance of an innings win and series sweep over the West Indies on Sunday when bad light stopped play on the third day of the second cricket Test.

The West Indies were 244/6 in their second innings at stumps drawn early because of the light still trailing New Zealand by 85 runs after being forced to follow on 329 behind.

West Indies captain Jason Holder was 60 not out and involved in an unbroken seventh-wicket stand with Joshua da Silva (25) which was worth 74 by stumps and frustrated

New Zealand's push to victory.

The umpires offered the batsmen the light around 5.30pm local time as dark clouds gathered over the Basin Reserve and with no improvement in conditions, players were unable to return.

Earlier, opener John Campbell reached his highest test score of 68, his second half century, in an 89-run third-wicket partnership which provided a further obstacle to New Zealand's push for victory.

Brief scores: New Zealand 460 vs West Indies 131 & 244/6 (Campbell 68, Holder 60*, Boult 3/75, Jamieson 2/43).

NorthEast remain unbeaten

Vasco, Dec. 13: NorthEast United extended their unbeaten run in the Indian Super League after a goal-less draw with Chennaiyin FC here on Sunday.

With one point from the match, the Highlanders are placed joint second with ATK Mohun Bagan on 10 points while Chennaiyin have now failed to pick up a win in their last four matches. NorthEast United made three changes to their side as Idrissa Sylla started upfront ahead of Kwesi Appiah.

BFC CLIP KERALA WINGS

Bengaluru FC walked away with three points after a 4-2 win over Kerala Blasters at the Fatorada Stadium. The teams were tied 1-1 at the break with Rahul K.P. (17') giving Kerala a sur-



Bengaluru FC players celebrate their 4-2 win over Kerala Blasters in an ISL-7 match in Fatorada on Sunday. — ISL

prise lead which was canceled out by Cleiton Silva (29'). The second half saw four goals being scored in the span of 14 minutes. Erik Paartalu (51') and Dimas Delgado (53') scored

in quick succession to give BFC breathing space but Jordan Murray (61') gave some hope to the away team. Sunil Chhetri (65') put the game to rest with a fine header. — Agencies

■ Raina bags doubles crown

Ankita ends year on a high

Dubai, Dec. 13: Top Indian tennis player Ankita Raina won her third doubles title of the pandemic-hit 2020 season, clinching the Al Habtoor challenge with Ekaterine Gorgodze here.

The unseeded Indo-Georgian pair won 6-4 3-6 10-6 against Aliona Bolsova Zadoinov from Spain and Slovakian Kaja Juvan in the final of the \$100,000 hard court event on Saturday.

Ankita said success on the singles circuit is unparalleled but a deep run in doubles draw is not without significance.

"The doubles has always helped me in singles. Playing well in doubles has always been followed by good run in singles in my career. You get to practice with good players, get to play and can work out a few things in matches," Ankita said.

It was the fourth doubles final of the season for Ankita but the biggest trophy of the calendar since her earlier two titles were at the \$25,000 level.

In February this year, Ankita had made three finals, winning back-to-back titles in Nonthaburi

(Thailand) with Bibiane Schoofs and ending runners-up in Jodhpur with compatriot Snehal Mane.

The 27-year-old said returning to the circuit after a long break too was relieving. "It's really good that I am able to travel again. I was doing a bit of training, both physical and mental at home and it was different coming back to tour. Europe had already opened up and their players already had two months of match sharpness behind them."

"Most of the matches were on clay at that time and I had never played so many back-to-back clay court matches. It was a good learning curve."

During the last three months, Ankita also got exposure of playing on the US circuit.

"I have mostly played on hard courts and this time I got to play a lot in the US. Thankfully I had my coach Hemant Bendre's friend Shirish Deshpande to help me out. He has been there for long as a coach."

"It was good to have someone watching your matches and giving feedback." — PTI



Ankita Raina

Mushtaq Ali T20 from January 10

New Delhi, Dec. 13: The BCCI will start its much-delayed domestic season with the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy from January 10 to 31 in six different states where bio-secure hubs will be created. The participating teams will be expected to report to their respective hubs on January 2.

It is learnt that BCCI secretary Jay Shah has e-mailed all the state units that Mushtaq Ali will kick-start the domestic itinerary although there is no clarity as to when the Ranji Trophy will start. The schedule has been thrown haywire owing to the Covid-19 pandemic.

"After having gone through your responses and in accordance with the feedback received, I am pleased to inform you that BCCI is planning to start the domestic season 2020-21 with the scheduling of the T20 tournament for the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy,"

Shah wrote to state units.

"By Saturday, January 2, 2021, teams will have to assemble in their respective hub. From Sunday, January 10, 2021, tournament will start and the final will be played on January 31, 2021."

Shah, however, said that a decision on Ranji Trophy and the Vijay Hazare Trophy will be taken once the group stage of the Mushtaq Ali gets over. Feedback from members will be factored in.

"BCCI will subsequently seek feedback from the members on organising any other domestic tournament after the group stage of Syed Mushtaq Ali trophy," he stated.

It is understood that Mushtaq Ali is being held because the BCCI wants to have a mega players' auction in early February ahead of the next IPL which may have nine or 10 teams. — PTI

Vihari has made a strong case for his inclusion



Hemant Kenkre Silly Point

Former Indian opener, Wasim Jaffer neatly summed up the situation that is currently being faced by the think tanks of both the Australian and the Indian teams as they prepare for the first, pink ball, day/night Test match at Adelaide. Jaffer gave a fitting reply to ex-Australian spinner Brad Hogg who had questioned the technique of the Indian top order batsmen while playing the Australia 'A' team in a practice match at the Sydney Cricket Ground. In a social media interac-

tion, Hogg had suggested that the "Indian top order need to know where their off stump is, learn to leave the ball off a good length, and not chase the ball moving away outside off stump." Jaffer, known for his mild manner during his playing days, took to humour telling Hogg: "Australia need to know who their top order is."

At this point in time, both teams are struggling to finalise their playing elevens for different reasons. The Aussies will miss their regular opener David Warner who is out

due to a groin injury he suffered during the second One Day International. Will Pucovski, the likely debutant, was declared out of contention due to the concussion he suffered after being hit on the head while batting in the first practice match against India 'A'.

Joe Burns, the third opener is in miserable form notching just 5 runs in 4 innings against the visitors. Marcus Harris who was drafted into the Aussie Test squad as a replacement for Pucovski will probably open the innings with Burns, unless the hosts decide to take a punt with Marnus Labuschagne who has had a tremendous run in Test cricket over the last season. The ominous form showed by the Indian pacers, particularly

Mohammed Shami (who accounted for Burns and Harris in the last practice match) and Jasprit Bumrah has made the task of the Australian selectors a bit more difficult.

For India, the two practice matches in Sydney gave their batsmen an opportunity to test their form in the middle — which was grabbed by those who intend to make the cut for the Adelaide Test. Currently, three batsmen (in the top/middle order) are certainties to be on the list to be exchanged at the toss: Cheteshwar Pujara, skipper Virat Kohli and Ajinkya Rahane. The dilemma that the Indian team management faces centres around the openers, the number six position, the wicket keeper and the bowling attack. For the opening slots, the

choice will be between the experienced Mayank Agarwal, Prithvi Shaw and the uncapped Shubham Gill. Of these three, Agarwal looks to be more certain to walk out to bat at Adelaide considering his past record playing Test cricket in Australia coupled with the 61 runs that he scored against Australia A in the second innings at the SCG. Gill, who had a fruitful outings in the two practice matches and has impressed many with his technique in trying conditions, will be a strong contender as the second opener.

The point is will the Indians open with Gill, a debutant, in a crucial game or go in with Shaw who has four Tests under his belt. Or, will they take a chance with KL Rahul who has the maximum Test

match experience of the lot. For the sixth batting position, Hanuma Vihari has made a strong case for inclusion with an unbeaten century in his last innings at the SCG. The wicket keeper's position seemed to be fixed with Wriddhiman Saha sure to play until his deputy, Rishab Pant, threw a spanner in the works with a beligerent, unconquered 103 runs in the practice match.

The biggest issue facing the Indians will be to go into the Test with the most balanced side. For starters, the game will be played with a pink ball and partly under lights — a tough scenario. The fluorescent ball tends to swing a lot more than its red and white cousins; a big factor when Kohli sits down to finalise his playing eleven. With all-rounder Ravindra

Jadeja out of the equation, the Indian team will have to go in with four (instead of five) regular bowlers to bolster their batting line up.

Team India will look at three parameters while picking the side: 1) form, 2) technique and 3) experience. If one was to don the selectors cap, one would reverse the order considering the pink ball and the match being a day-nighter. Technique and experience would matter more than mere form, which has proven (comparatively) to be a fickle criterion. My openers will be Agarwal and Gill with Vihari at six followed by Saha, the best gloveman. The experienced Ravichandran Ashwin and Umesh Yadav would be my choices to support Shami and Bumrah.