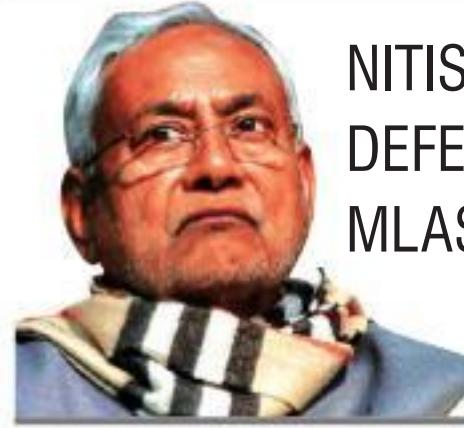




PEOPLE'S PARLIAMENT, ALWAYS IN SESSION



NITISH DOWNPLAYS
DEFECITION OF JDU
MLAS IN ARUNACHAL

P5



'BUREAUCRATS
A CAUSE
FOR CONCERN'

P7



NEPAL TOP COURT
ISSUES SHOW-CAUSE
NOTICE TO OLI GOVT

P11



LET US BOWL IN
PARTNERSHIPS,
SAYS RAHANE

P12

WEATHER

Partly cloudy sky. Shallow to moderate fog in the morning. The maximum and minimum temperatures would be around 21 and 04 degrees Celsius respectively.

RAINFALL: Nil

RELATIVE HUMIDITY

Max: 100% Min: 43%

TEMPERATURE

Max: 22.4°C (+1) Min: 4.6°C (-3)

SUN RISES

07:13 hrs

MOON RISES

14:49 hrs

SUN SETS

17:52 hrs

MOON SETS

04:30 hrs

THUMBNAILS



President Kovind pays homage to former PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee on his birth anniversary, at Sardar Patel, in Delhi on Friday.

PIB

Rajnikant hospitalised: Actor Rajnikant was admitted to Apollo Hospital, Hyderabad with his blood pressure fluctuating. This came in the wake of four people among the film crew testing positive for Covid-19. The actor had tested negative and was isolating himself. However, according to a statement from the hospital: "He will be investigated and monitored closely in the hospital till his blood pressure settles down before being discharged. Apart from fluctuating blood pressure and exhaustion he does not have any other symptoms."

Dharavi records no new Covid cases: The slum-dominated Dharavi area of Mumbai did not report a single coronavirus infection in the last 24 hours, a civic official said on Friday evening. For the first time since 1 April when the first coronavirus patient was detected in the area, no new case has been detected. The caseload for Dharavi now stands at 3,788, though the number of active cases is 12. So far, 3,464 people have recovered in Dharavi.

PM open to talks with farmers; attacks Opp

Accuses rivals of misusing protests, transfers 2k each to over 9 crore farmers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 25 DECEMBER

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday squarely blamed those with a political agenda for the deadlock in the Centre's talks with protesting farmers and asserted that his government is willing to hold dialogues with all, including those staunchly opposed to it, as long as talks are based on farm issues, facts and logic.

In a blistering speech targeting Opposition after transferring an installment of Rs 2,000 each to over nine crore farmers, Modi said when the agitation began, farmers had some genuine demands like guaranteed minimum support price but people with political motives then took over and began making unrelated demands like the release of those accused of violence and making highways toll-free.

While putting up a strong defence of the three farm laws, enacted in September, he said farmers in overwhelming numbers across the country have welcomed the three Acts and listed their benefits as well during his interaction.

His government is approaching dialogues with protesting farmers with an open heart, Modi said, claiming that the parties rejected by the electorate are pushing their political agenda by misleading farmers and using their shoulders to fire at the government as they lack any logical argument against these laws.

Defeated in elections, these parties are now indulging in event management



PM Modi addresses the launch of the seventh instalment of the PM-Kisan Samman Nidhi Scheme on Friday.

Union leaders reject PM's speech

NEW DELHI, 25 DECEMBER

Protesting farm unions on Friday alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's address appeared as an attempt to "divide and mislead" the farmers and said they want a legal guarantee on minimum support price (MSP).

Reacting to the Prime Minister's allegations that political rivals were misusing the protest to push their agenda, farmer leader Abhimanyu Kohar said unions do not allow any political party to use their stage and accused the government of diverting the issue.

Kohar said, "The Prime Minister's claim that we are

being misguided by other political parties is false. It has been a month since we have been protesting at Delhi borders, and we have not offered our platform to any politician.

Unions to meet today: The protesting farmer unions met on Friday to discuss the government's latest letter inviting them for talks, with some of them indicating that they may decide to resume their dialogue with the Centre to find a solution to the ongoing deadlock over the three agri laws.

The unions said they will hold another meeting on Saturday where a formal decision is likely to be taken.

for selfies and are appearing on television for publicity, he said. "Our decision can be tested on logic and facts. If there is any shortcomings, it should be highlighted. It is a democracy. We are not

claiming that God has given us all knowledge," he added.

Farm reforms became necessary because poor farmers, who are over 80 per cent, were getting poorer during rules of earlier

governments, he said.

He cited the BJP's victory in panchayat elections in several states, in which farmers were the main voters and including in areas surrounding protest sites, to argue that these reforms have received support from cultivators. Though the government is making humble efforts to resume the dialogue, some are not letting talks happen due to political reasons and are misleading the farmers, Modi said.

Thousands of farmers, mainly from Punjab, Haryana and parts of Uttar Pradesh, are camping on various Delhi borders for almost a month to protest against the three farm laws. At least five rounds of formal talks have failed to break the deadlock with the farmer groups refusing to accept anything less than the complete repeal of the laws.

While the government has projected these laws as major reforms for benefit of farmers, protesting unions have been saying that these legislations would leave them at the mercy of corporates by weakening the MSP and mandi systems.

The government has maintained that such apprehensions were unfounded as the MSP and mandi systems are not just continuing but also being expanded and strengthened further.

"MSP, etc were pushed aside and now they are demanding release from jail of those accused of violence... They want highways toll-free, opposing policies that have existed through several governments. Why have they shifted from farmer's issues to new demands," he added.

Bengal govt depriving farmers, says Modi; Mamata hits back

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI/KOLKATA,
25 DECEMBER

Let me set the record straight... We have always been ready to cooperate in the interest of the farmers. I personally have written two letters and have even spoken to the concerned Union minister two days ago but they are refusing to cooperate

are refusing to cooperate and are instead indulging in malicious propaganda for political gains," Miss Banerjee said.

"The fact is that the Modi government has done nothing to help Bengal. They are yet to release even a portion of the Rs 85,000 crores of outstanding dues that includes unpaid GST dues of Rs. 8,000 crores.

Miss Banerjee's ideology has destroyed the state and her actions are against the people of Bengal. She also iterated that for all its posting, the Modi government has done nothing to help Bengal.

In her strongly worded reply, Miss Banerjee accused Mr Modi of trying to mislead the people with half-truth and distorted facts over the non-implementation of the scheme in the state, maintaining that her government has always been ready to cooperate in the interest of farmers.

She also iterated that for all its posting, the Modi government has done nothing to help Bengal.

Slamming Miss Banerjee for not letting lakhs of farmers of the state avail benefits of PM-KISAN scheme in his address at the virtual event, Mr Modi said her politics has destroyed the state. "Today I regret that more than 70 lakh farmers of West Bengal have not been able to get

"Let me set the record straight... We have always been ready to cooperate in the interest of the farmers. I personally have written two letters and have even spoken to the concerned Union minister two days ago but they

Dry run for Covid vaccination drive in 4 states

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, 25 DECEMBER

To assess readiness of the mechanism laid out for the Covid-19 inoculation drive, a dry run has been planned by the Centre on 28 and 29 December in four states—Punjab, Assam, Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat.

The exercise will include necessary data entry in Co-WIN, an online platform for monitoring of vaccine delivery, testing receipt and allocation, deployment of team members, mock drill of session sites with test beneficiaries, a well as reporting and evening meetings, the Union Health Ministry said on Friday.

It will also include testing of cold storage and transportation arrangements for Covid-19 vaccine, management of crowd at session sites with proper physical distancing.

CONTINUOUS DECLINE OF ACTIVE CASES

► 23,067 new cases take India's Covid-19 infection tally to 1,01,46,845; recoveries cross 97 lakh

► The trend of more daily recoveries from Covid-19 than the number

► West Bengal



CHRISTMAS CHEER



Throwing pandemic fears to the wind, the crowds swelled at Park Street on Friday as evening descended into night as they have done every Christmas, with a slide in temperature adding an extra zeal.

BISWAJIT GHOSHAL

No link between stranded crew and bitter ties: China

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

BEIJING, 25 DECEMBER

China said on Friday that there was no "link" between the situation of Indian crew on two stranded ships at Chinese ports and its strained relations with India and Australia.

The External Affairs Ministry on Thursday said in New Delhi that two cargo vessels with a total of 39 Indians on board have been on anchorage in Chinese waters as they were not allowed to unload their cargo though some other ships have managed to do so. "There is a considerable amount of stress on the crew members on account of this unprecedented situation," External Affairs Ministry Spokesperson Anurag Srivastava said.

Srivastava said bulk cargo vessel MV Jag Anandis on anchorage near Jingtang port in Hebei province of China since 13 June and it has 23 Indian sailors. Another vessel, MV Anastasia with 16 Indians as its crew, is on anchorage near Caofeidian port in China since 20 September, waiting for discharge of its cargo, he said at a media briefing.

Asked about India's concern about the Indian crew members and whether China's decision has related to the current situation between India and China, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said, "As far as I understand, China allows the crew change while meeting certain quarantine conditions. But this Jingtang port is not in the list for such crew changes," he said.

in the 1960s.

IIM-A director Errol D'Souza, in a letter to the alumni, has shared the photographs of the depleted state of the around 60-year-old iconic brick structures.

"We felt it necessary to keep you informed as we are the custodians of the Louis Kahn buildings that have the potential to inspire future generations. Over the past couple of decades, the buildings have undergone dilapidation and structural deterioration," he said.

The institute said that these dormitories have suffered damages beyond repairs over the years, due to various reasons including 2001 earthquake and water seepages. Kahn, a world-famous architect, had been called to Ahmedabad by renowned scientist Vikram Sarabhai to design various buildings. IIM-A was one of the iconic buildings that was built by him

ments. They are unsafe for living," he said.

"We have grappled with questions as to why we should presume that the past is not changeable and why we should assume that future generations will value things in exactly the same way that past generations have. We wondered if it is appropriate

for us to colonise future perceptions of living spaces," he added.

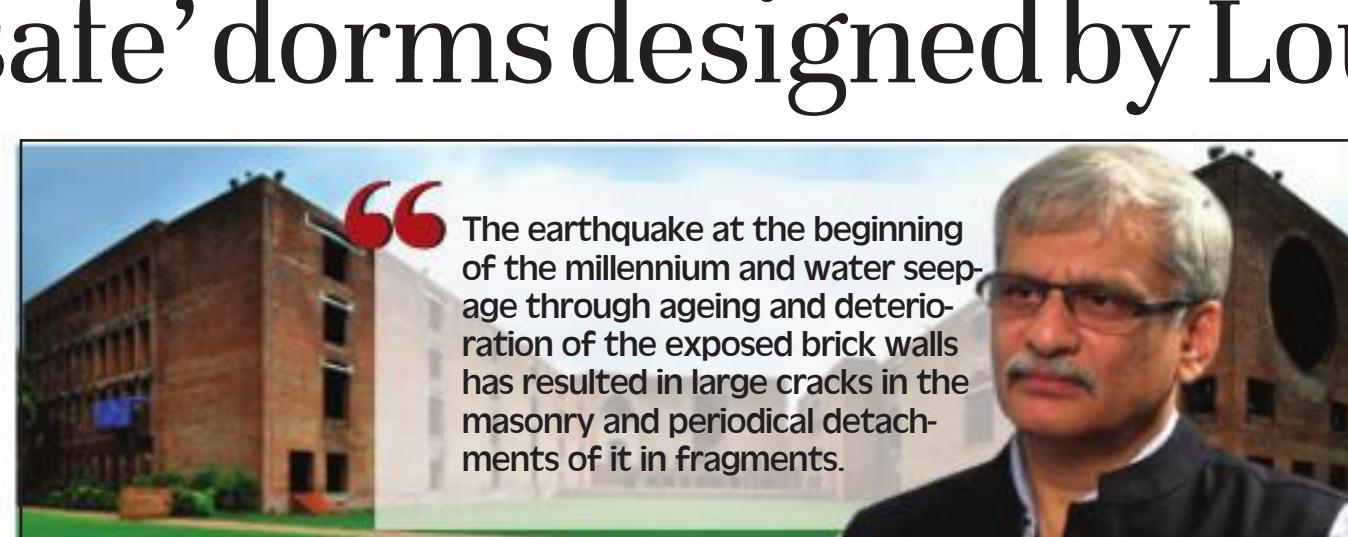
"It has not been easy to deal with the issues that have come up as we have attempted to restore these buildings," D'Souza said in the 11-page letter.

"As is well-known that concrete encasing was not used by Kahn to protect the

compressive strength of 4.89 N/sqmm and with in-built efflorescence," the letter said. "The pointing that was used to hide the blunt edges of the bricks got damaged and allowed collection of water, which resulted in ingress into the masonry," it said.

"We have attempted to address these issues with the best team of conservation architects anyone could ask for—SNK (Somaya & Kalappa Consultants). We had invited international restoration consultants Peter Inskip and Stephen Gee to advise us and they suggested we first restore one building and then based on our findings we could proceed to take up further work in other buildings."

"The bricks used by Kahn were what architects call second class bricks as per IS 3102-1971 with an average



embedded reinforcement bars in the brickwork and that has resulted in rusting of the bars and cracks in the brickwork. The bricks used were not the best in class and had an in-built efflorescence.

"The bricks used by Kahn were what architects call second class bricks as per IS 3102-1971 with an average



We (India and the US) will need to take bold steps to rebuild our economies.

NISHA DESAI BISWAL
US INDIA BUSINESS COUNCIL (USIC) PRESIDENT

Capt urges farmers not to disrupt telecom services

Stressing that telecom connectivity is critical amid Covid pandemic, Punjab CM urges farmers to show same discipline & responsibility which they have been showing during their protests at Delhi borders

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
CHANDIGARH, 25 DECEMBER

Amid reports about disconnection of power supply to various mobile towers across Punjab, chief minister Captain Amarinder Singh today appealed to protesting farmers not to inconvenience the general public with such alleged actions.

Pointing out that the telecom connectivity has become even more critical for people amid the raging Covid-19 pandemic, the CM urged the farmers to show the same discipline and sense of responsibility which they had been exercising during their protest at the Delhi border—which has completed one month—and also earlier during their agitation in the state.

Urging farmers not to take the law in their hands by forcibly shutting down telecom connections or by man-handling employees of telecom service providers, the CM said such actions were not in the interest of Punjab and its



future.

The forceful disruption of telecom services due to snapping of power supply to mobile towers by farmers in several parts of the state was not only adversely affecting the studies and future prospects of students, who are dependent entirely on online education, but also hampering the daily life of people working from home due

to the pandemic, Capt Amarinder pointed out.

Further, the disruption of telecom services would also seriously affect the state's already disturbed economy, he noted, exhorting the farmers to continue with their peaceful protests against the Narendra Modi-led central government's controversial farm laws without causing any inconvenience to the people

such actions would adversely impact his government's efforts to attract more investment in the telecom sector as part of its recently announced New Telecom Guidelines 2020, which was also aimed at improving telecom connectivity in the state.

In the wake of the Covid pandemic, the urgency of these guidelines was felt seriously as there was dire need to improve connectivity through easing "right of way" permissions for overground and underground telecom infrastructures.

The guidelines were expected to give a quantum jump to the telecom and internet connectivity in the state.

The CM's appeal came in the wake of a request from the Tower and Infrastructure Providers Association (TAIPA), a registered body of Telecom Infrastructure Providers, asking the Punjab government to persuade the farmers not to resort to any unlawful activity in their protests and fight for justice.

Addressing media, Rathore said that even as the BJP government was celebrating its three years in office, however, the state government had no achievements to celebrate during its tenure.

"The development process in the state has taken a back-seat after the BJP took over reigns in the state and the government is only carrying forward the development works initiated by the previous Virbhadra Singh regime."

The state government has not only deprived each and every section of the society of the state from any progress but also failed to provide them any relief during Covid-19 crisis," he added.

Rathore said that PM Modi had announced Rs 20 lakh Crore relief package for the nation in which Himachal should have got substantial share but the state government



didn't get any package.

"We have been repeatedly questioning the Chief Minister about the package and how much share Himachal has received but Thakur has not only evaded these but did not respond to our queries," he added.

He further stated that the state government had also failed to contain Covid-19 spread which resulted in the viral disease making inroads in remote villages of tribal Lahaul-Spiti district.

"We have warned the state government on allowing unrestricted entry of the tourists in Himachal but the government didn't pay heed to our advice which resulted in the state capital, Shimla becoming no. 1 in cases of Coronavirus in the country," he said.

He said the health infrastructure in the state was totally in bad shape and the Covid patients were preferring treat-

ment at home than Covid centres, a fact that was even highlighted by State Jal Shakti Minister Mahender Singh Thakur.

He added that the Congress party would observe 27 December, the completion of 3-year term of Thakur government as 'Black day' and will stage protests at district and block headquarters across the state.

The Leader of Opposition Mukesh Agnihotri also criticized the state government for failing to take the state on the path of development and said the government instead of providing relief to the people of the state in Covid crisis, had burdened them with hike in water and electricity tariffs.

"Corruption was at an all time high in 3 years of BJP rule and it had resulted in even a senior BJP leader resigning from the post of party chief.

Besides, all kinds of mafia are thriving in Himachal Pradesh who are looting resources of the state under the patronage of the state government," he added.

He added BJP instead of holding celebrations, should focus on the development on the ground as all the tall claims of developmental claims were only on paper and far from realities on the ground.

Jai Ram unveils Vajpayee's statue in Shimla

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
SHIMLA, 25 DECEMBER

Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur on Friday unveiled the statue of Bharat Ratna and former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee at the Ridge Ground in Shimla on the occasion of his 96th birth anniversary.

Addressing 'Atal Samrit Samarit' on the occasion of 'Sushashan Divas' organised by the State Language, Art and Culture Department at Gaiety Theatre, Thakur said Vajpayee was a statesman and a great personality who due to his politics of principles, emerged as a statesman with national appeal.

"Vajpayee was a legendary and visionary leader who defined highest values of leadership and his contribution for the development of the country would be remembered for the years to come.

Vajpayee had an orator par excellence who had the ability to cast a spell on the audience and even during some of the most tense moments in Parliament, he succeeded to defuse the situation with utmost ease," he added.

Thakur said despite being away from active politics for over a decade at the time of his demise, lakhs of youth joined the last journey of Vajpayee which shows his deep impact in the lives of the people of the country.

He further stated that the nation was first for Vajpayee and therefore regarded as the true statesman by people of the country. Vajpayee as Prime Minister of the country changed India forever in many aspects and he as a Prime Minister for six years between 1998 and 2004, was credited with reviving India's glory in the global economy.

Further, it was due to the strong willpower of Vajpayee

TESTING TIMES



Samples being collected for Covid-19 tests, at a booth at Sector-11 in Chandigarh on Thursday.

Online campaign to solicit NRIs' support for farmers launched

PTI
CHANDIGARH, 25 DECEMBER

A group of Punjab residents has launched an online campaign urging NRIs to come to India to lend moral and material support to farmers protesting against the Centre's agriculture laws.

Manik Goyal and Joban Randhawa, who are organising the #NRIsChaloDelhi campaign, said they want to increase awareness among NRIs and channelise their support for the farmers' cause.

A group of NRIs has decided to reach India on December 30 to lend "moral and material" support to protesting farmers camping at the Singhu border on the outskirts of Delhi in a bid to further strengthen their agitation against the three farm laws, the organisers said.

on Friday.

"NRIs led by Surinder Mavi (Toronto-Patiala) and his friends Raman Brar (Toronto-Faridkot), Vikramjit Saran (Vancouver-Mansa), are coming to India to contribute towards farmers' cause so as to provide moral and material support towards the ongoing farmers' agitation," they said. The organisers said the ongoing farmers' agitation has led to worldwide interest and support".

As children of farmers and Punjabis, it is the moral duty of NRIs to stand with the toiling sons and daughters of India who are braving harsh winter nights at Delhi borders for their rights, they added. Thousands of farmers, mostly from Punjab, are camping at Delhi borders for about a month demanding the repeal of "anti-farmer" laws.

Man held for opening back accounts on forged documents, routing ₹9 cr black money

PTI
NEW DELHI, 25 DECEMBER

A 35-year-old man has been arrested for allegedly opening seven bank accounts with forged documents and routing black money to the tune of Rs nine crore through them during the demonetisation drive, police said on Friday.

The accused has been identified as Gaurav Singh, a resident of Shahdara, they said.

Rajesh Kumar Gupta, Income Tax officer, had lodged a complaint with the police alleging that from November 9, 2016 to December 30, 2016, around Rs nine crore was deposited in seven bank accounts opened by the same person using forged documents, police said.

During demonetization, the accused opened bank accounts on the basis of forged documents to route black money of others on

commission basis, police added. During investigation, police found that the seven account holders were carrying out business activities from an address at Vishwas Nagar in Shahdara.

On the basis of the photographs available in the KYC documents, one of the occupants was identified as Gaurav Singh, who gave his statement to the police.

In his statement, he admitted to have prepared fake

IDs - voter cards and pan cards - for opening various bank accounts in which a large amount of cash was deposited during demonetization, a senior police officer said. During investigation, the original account opening forms of all the seven bank accounts were taken on record. It was found that all the accounts were opened using two names -- Yogesh Kumar and Rahul Jain, the officer said. The forms revealed

that Singh had used his own photographs in all the four accounts and pictures of unknown people in the remaining three accounts, police said.

The KYC documents indicated that four of the accounts were opened after giving the address at Vishwas Nagar. The investigation further revealed that the election ID-card used to open the seven accounts were fake, they said. Police also found

'Gita source of inspiration for youth'

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
CHANDIGARH, 25 DECEMBER

Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar (in photo) on Friday said that Bhagavad Gita is a major source of inspiration for the youth as this sacred scripture not only shows them the right path but also inculcates moral values in them so that they could contribute effectively to nation-building.

Speaking at the Global Gita Chanting programme organized as part of International Gita Mahotsav-2020 through video conference, the CM said that the Government provides quality education to the students so that they could excel in their life. Similarly, Gita has its own relevance as the positive energy and vibes emanating from the shlokas of Gita put a positive impact on the mind of the youth and assist them in choosing the right path in their lives. He said that 36 years prior to Kaliyuga, Lord Krishna had delivered the celestial message of Bhagavad Gita on the battlefield of Kurukshetra which has now become the essence of our life. Khattar said that various great personalities who have participated in the freedom move-

ment of the country like Mahatma Gandhi, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Vallabhbhai Patel, Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose also followed the teachings of Gita in their life and got freedom to the country.

He said that 31 years ago in 1989, Gita Jayanti was celebrated only at state level. Thereafter, it was organized at National level. But, since 2016, Gita Jayanti of international level is being organised in the state.

Khattar said that with a view to propagate the teachings of Bhagavad Gita worldwide, International Gita Mahotsav was also organized in Mauritius and the United Kingdom (UK). Similar event was also scheduled to be held in Australia but it had to be called off due to COVID-19 Pandemic, he added.

The CM said that 36 years prior to Kaliyuga, Lord Krishna had delivered the celestial message of Bhagavad Gita on the battlefield of Kurukshetra which has now become the essence of our life. On this occa-



CISF nabs man with 20 bullets at Delhi's IGI airport

PTI
NEW DELHI, 25 DECEMBER

A passenger has been apprehended by CISF personnel at the Delhi airport for allegedly carrying 20 bullets in his baggage, officials said on Friday.

The passenger was scheduled to take a flight to Aurangabad in Maharashtra, they said.

As the passenger had no documents for carrying the live ammunition, he was offloaded from the flight and handed over to the Delhi Police by the Central Industrial Security Force personnel for further probe, they said.

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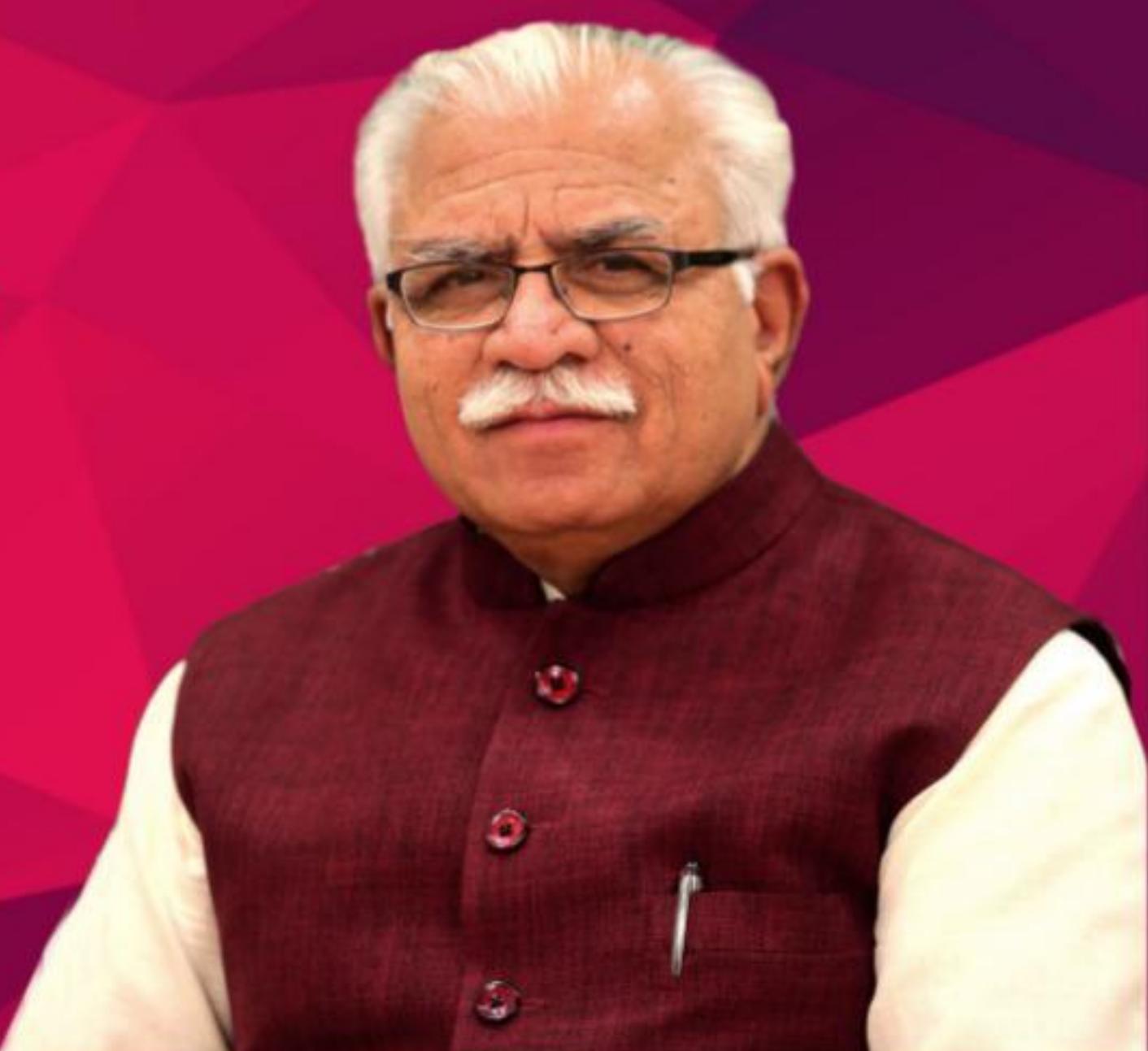
PUNJAKIAN ROAD, Garwal Bhawan, (Near Jhandewalan, Gole Chak.)
WAZIRPUR A-5, Near Richi Rich Banquet (Opp. Shalimar Bagh)
JANAKPURI B-1/2, Main Najafgarh Road, Opp. Metro Pillar 543
NOIDA, Nirula's Sec-2, Near Metro Station, Sec-15, Noida, UP
LAJPAT NAGAR, 49, Main Ring Road, Adj. Haldi Ram, Near Moolchand Crossing





On the Occasion of Good Governance Day (25 December, 2020)

Sh. Manohar Lal Chief Minister, Haryana unveiled



New Announcements

'Sooksham Sinchai Se Har Khet Me Pani'

Scheme to provide canal-based water and sewerage treated water to farmers in their fields through Micro Irrigation Project, it will be implemented from January 1, 2021.

Registration facility in any Tehsil of the District

Facility will be started from April 1, 2021. Online process for property registration already started in September 2020.

'Mukhyamantri Bagwani Bima Yojana'

20 horticultural crops included in this scheme to compensate for the losses due to natural calamities.

CLUs Will Be Online Completely

- Online facility of land use change system (CLU) in the State.
- All the CLUs will be available online and permission will be available within 30 days.

'One Time Registration for Application'

- Applicants of Haryana Staff Selection Commission and Haryana Public Service Commission will have to fill personal details only once.
- Application form will be linked to the Parivar Pehchan-Patra and applicant will not have to deposit the fee again and again.

Facilities to Employees

Deemed ACP will be provided to Government employees in case of delay of 3 months on ACP due to any reason.

'Haryana Credit Guarantee Scheme'

- Under the Credit Guarantee Scheme for the students studying in the higher educational institutions of the State.
- Higher education loan will be available at lower interest rate.

Enhancement in Honorarium for the Sports Awardees of the State from January 1, 2021

- Monthly honorarium of Arjuna, Dronacharya & Dhyan Chand awardees increased from Rs.5,000 to Rs.20,000.
- Monthly honorarium of Rs.20,000 to the winners of Tenzing Norgay National Adventure Award and Rs.5,000 monthly to Bhim awardees started.

Launch / Expansion of New Schemes

Winners of Atal Bihari Vajpayee Good Governance Award - 2020

Digital Project	Name and Department
e-Kharid Portal	Sh. PK DAS, IAS, Sh. V Umashankar, IAS, Sh. Chander Shekhar Khare, IAS, Sh. Rajiv Rattan, IAS (Food Supplies and Consumer Affairs & Information Technology Electronics and Communication Department)
Online Release Orders & Billing System (ERP) Software	Mrs. Dheera Khandelwal, IAS, Mr. P.C. Meena, IAS Mrs. Varsha Khangwal, HCS, Mr. Pardeep Kaushal & Team (Information, Public Relations and Languages Department)
Encouragement to Diversification and agriculture growth	Mr. Devender Singh, IAS, Dr. Arjun Singh Saini & Team (Horticulture Department)
Agriculture growth through enhanced water supply by ground water recharging through abandoned river beds	Mr. Devender Singh, IAS, Mr. Satbir Singh Kadian & Team (Irrigation and Water Resources Department)
Asha app to cover door to door covid-19 survey	Mr. Rajeev Arora, IAS, Dr. Prabhjot Singh, IAS Dr. V.K. Bansal & Team (Health Department)
Implementation of eSanjeevani OPD teleconsultation services	Mr. Rajeev Arora, IAS, Dr. Prabhjot Singh, IAS Mr. Suraj Bhan Kamboj & Team (Health Department)
Ayushman Bharat	Mr. Rajeev Arora, IAS, Mr. Ashok Kumar Meena, IAS Ms. Anmeet P Kumar, IAS & Team (Health Department)
Achieving immunization for all under universal immunization programme	Mr. Rajeev Arora, IAS, Dr. Prabhjot Singh, IAS & Team (Health Department)
Antyodaya-saral	Mr. V. Umashankar, IAS, Dr. Rakesh Gupta, IAS Mr. Deepak Bansal & Team (Department of Information Technology Electronics and Communication)
Jansahayak mobile app.	Mr. Vijayendra Kumar, IAS, Mr. Yashpal, IAS & Team (General Administration Department)

Integration of Parivar Pehchan Patra with the Services being provided on Saral Platform

Various services and benefits of schemes will be available to the citizens at their doorstep.

e-Office Launched in all District Offices

Initiative to ensure accountability and transparency and to perform paperless work.

Bharat Bill Payment System (BBPS)

Payment of water and sewerage bills started through this system.

Portal for Horticultural Products

Portal started in Hindi for online sale of horticultural products/vegetable plants.

Digital Public Library

More than 6 crore e-Books and other study material will be available on e-Granthkosh.

Haryana Forest Management Information System

- Various applicants of forest department integrated under this scheme.
- Size wise information of nurseries and species wise information of plants will be available for the people.

Distribution of Title Deeds under Svamitva Scheme

On Good Governance Day title deeds provided to 18,323 beneficiaries of 81 villages of 12 districts.

More Villages included under Mhara Gaon Jagmag Gaon

From 25 December 2020, 24-hours power supply to 202 more villages of the state, along with more than 5,000 villages.

Passport facility for students

Passport distribution for college students started under the scheme .





The farmer protest is a living monument of
BJP government's failure

SAMAJWADI PARTY PRESIDENT AKHILESH YADAV
AS THE FARMERS' PROTEST COMPLETED A MONTH

The Statesman

NEW DELHI, SATURDAY 26 DECEMBER 2020

05

THUMBNAILS



Bollywood music composer Ismail Darbar's son Zaid Darbar and actress Gauhar Khan at their wedding ceremony, in Mumbai on Friday.

IANS

Noted scholar Khwaja dies:

Noted scholar Jamal Khwaja, one of the last surviving members of the 2nd Lok Sabha, passed away at the age of 92 after a prolonged illness, according to his family. Khwaja died on Thursday and his last rites were performed the same night. He led the Indian cultural delegation to Afghanistan in 1960. PTI

Tansen award for Pt Vyas:

The Tansen Award 2020, instituted by the Madhya Pradesh culture department will be bestowed on renowned Santoor player Satish Vyas on the opening day of the 5-day Tansen Sangeet Samaroh in Gwalior on Saturday. Vyas' father was a recipient of the prestigious award. PTI

Plea in Mathura court:

A third plea has been filed in a Mathura court seeking removal of the Shahi Idgah mosque near the birthplace of Lord Krishna. Neha Bhadaria demanded annulment of the 1968 compromise entered through a ruling of a Mathura court, ratifying a land deal between the Shahi Masjid Idgah Management committee and Sri Krishna Janmasthan Seva Sansthan. PTI

Probe into UP jail event glorifying Asaram will be completed in 2-3 days: Official

SHAHJAHANPUR,
25 DECEMBER

The investigation into allegations that followers of self-styled godman Asaram, who is serving a sentence for rape, visited the district jail here and distributed blankets will be completed in two to three days, Deputy Inspector General (Jails) RN Pandey has said. Pandey visited the Shahjahanpur district jail in Uttar Pradesh on Thursday and investigated the matter in detail for over seven hours, besides recording statements of jail officials.

"Statements of Jail Superintendent Rakesh Kumar, Jailor Rajesh Kumar and others were recorded. Documentary evidence such as books and pamphlets distributed by the followers of Asaram were also collected," Pandey said on Friday.

The jail gatekeeper, warden and some inmates were also questioned, he said, adding that he would complete the probe in two to three days and hand over the report to the Director General (Jails). According to reports, Asaram's two followers had come from Lucknow, distributed blankets and held a prayer meeting in which Asaram's photograph was placed. PTI

Treat farm laws as an experiment: Rajnath

Singh urges farmers to try the laws for a year or two and in case they are found not beneficial Centre will make necessary amendments

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 25 DECEMBER

Senior BJP leader and Union minister Rajnath Singh on Friday appealed to farmers to try the three new farm laws as an "experiment" for a year or two and in case they are found not beneficial for the farming community, the government will do all necessary amendments.

Describing the protesting farmers as his own people, Singh said, "Those who are sitting on dharna are farmers and are born to farmers' families. We have a lot of respect for them."

Thousands of farmers, mainly from Punjab, Haryana and parts of Uttar Pradesh, are camping on Delhi borders for almost a month in protest against the three laws enacted in September.

At least five rounds of talks have taken place between the protesting unions and the government but a stalemate has continued with farmers refusing to accept anything less than the repeal of the laws, which they fear would leave them at the mercy of big private players. And today, the Prime Minister showed his apparent concern for the farmers through a televised address, instead of proactively working to resolve these issues," said Miss Banerjee.

"While he publicly claimed his intention to help farmers of West Bengal through his PM Kisan Yojana and alleges non-co-operation of the state government, the fact is that he is trying to mislead the people with half-truth and distorted facts. Let me set the record straight," the chief minister stated.

"We have always been ready to cooperate in the interest of the farmers. I personally have written two letters and have even spoken to the concerned Union min-

PM trying to mislead people with distorted facts: Mamata

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, 25 DECEMBER

The West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee and Dum Dum MP Saugata Roy today slammed Prime Minister Narendra Modi for making allegations against the state of non-co-operation in implementing the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) scheme.

In a strong worded statement, the chief minister Mamata Banerjee refuted the charges.

"Lakhs of farmers are protesting on the roads demanding the withdrawal of the new farm laws which are anti-farmer as they threaten to dilute the MSP, the state procurement system, and take away the basic protective mechanisms of the farmers hence leaving them at the mercy of big private players. And today, the Prime Minister showed his apparent concern for the farmers through a televised address, instead of proactively working to resolve these issues," said Miss Banerjee.

"Let me reiterate that in the interest of the people of Bengal, we will do everything that is needed on our part, even if it means supporting schemes of Central Government that are purely meant to further their political agenda, are at odds with the spirit of federalism, and are definitely not guided by their desire to help the people at large; so long it ensures even incremental benefit for the people of Bengal," stated Miss Banerjee.

"We have always been ready to cooperate in the interest of the farmers. I personally have written two letters and have even spoken to the concerned Union min-

ister to continue, and therefore, the government has extended an invitation to them. Singh appealed to all protesting farmers to come forward for discussions on the farm laws and if they want to rope in experts for discussions, the government is ready for that as well. "Several rounds of talks have been held whatever suggested by farmers our government has ready to do all those amendments. The problems can be resolved through dialogue only, wherever there is scope for amendment government is ready to do that," the Defence Minister said.

Some people were listening to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's address at the event venue at Amrik Singh Road when a group of farmers reached there shouting slogans and ransacked the place. They broke chairs and the LED system, the police said. Women, children and the elderly fled to nearby shops for safety. The police rushed to the spot and resorted to mild baton charge to control the situation, they said.

Bathinda BJP chief Vinod Gupta and state BJP legal cell co-convenor Ravinder Gupta, among others, sustained minor injuries in the

melee. While some farmers present at the venue claimed the ransacking was the handiwork of anti-social elements and not peasants, BJP leaders sought police action against them.

US lawmakers write to Pompeo on Indian farmers' protest

WASHINGTON, 25 DECEMBER

A group of seven influential US lawmakers, including Indian-American Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal, have written to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, urging him to raise the issue of farmers' protest in India with his Indian counterpart.

India has called the remarks by foreign leaders and politicians on protests by farmers as "ill-informed" and "unwarranted", asserting that the matter pertains to the internal affairs of a democratic country.

"We have seen some ill-informed comments relating to farmers in India. Such comments are unwarranted, especially when pertaining to the internal affairs of a democratic country," External Affairs Ministry Spokesperson Anurag Srivastava said earlier this month.

This is an issue of particular concern to Sikh Americans linked to Punjab, although it also heavily impacts the Indian Americans belonging to other Indian states, the lawmakers said in their letter to Pompeo dated December 23.

Many Indian Americans are directly affected as they have family members and ancestral land in Punjab and are concerned for the well-being of their families in India. In view of this serious situation, we urge you to contact your Indian counterpart to reinforce the United States' commitment to the freedom of political speech abroad, they said.

In their letter, the lawmakers said that the US as a nation that is familiar with political protests can offer counsel to India during their current period of social disturbance. As national legislators, we respect the right of the government of India to determine national policy, in compliance with existing law. We also acknowledge the rights of those in India and abroad who are currently protesting peacefully against agricultural laws that many Indian farmers see as an attack on their economic security, the lawmakers said.

On the 36th birth anniversary of Atal Bihari Vajpayee, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar today hailed the contribution of the former Prime Minister in shaping India's foreign policy that led to a new beginning in relations with the US. In his opening remarks at the first Atal Bihari Vajpayee Memorial Lecture, he said Vajpayee "introduced corrections, some bold and others more nuanced," in a range of national security and foreign policy issues.

Atalji's vision of India-US cooperation has been advanced, particularly in recent years, by the leadership and commitment of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Overcoming the hesita-



Makeshift tents come up at the Delhi-UP's Ghazipur Border as farmers' agitation against the Centre's three new contentious farm laws entered its 30th day, on Friday. IANS

Spl session on new farm laws: Kerala ministers meet Guv

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
25 DECEMBER

Two Kerala Ministers on Friday met Governor Arif Mohammed Khan, a day after the LDF government decided afresh to convene a special assembly session to discuss and pass a resolution against the three contentious central agricultural laws, and described their interaction as 'positive'.

The meeting came even as the government and Left parties continued their attack on the Governor over his earlier decision refusing permission for a special session on December 23, calling it 'unconstitutional' and threatening to demand his recall.

Law minister A K Balan and Agriculture Minister V S Sunil Kumar held discussions with Khan for around 35 minutes

and later expressed hope the Governor would take "an appropriate decision" on convening the assembly on December 31.

Kumar said there were certain matters suggested by the Governor which needed to be discussed with the chief minister. He, however, did not elaborate.

"The meeting turned out to be a positive one. We have discussed all the matters. With regard to the convening of the assembly on December 31, we hope the Governor will take an appropriate decision," Kumar told reporters here.

Khan had on Tuesday turned down the proposal of the LDF government for a brief assembly session on December 23 to discuss and pass resolution against the farm laws, being opposed by farmers, especially from Punjab and

Haryana, who are staging protests on the borders of Delhi. He had declined nod on ground that the government did not address the question raised by him on the nature of emergency warranting the very brief session and pointing to the regular session slated to commence from January 8. The state Cabinet which met on Thursday again decided to recommend to Khan seeking approval for a special assembly session on 31 December over the farm laws with chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan saying his government was "hopeful" that the Governor would accord sanction.

Meanwhile, law minister Balan in an article published in various Malayalam dailies on Friday said it was not desirable for the Raj Bhawan to become a centre of controversies.

Vajpayee reshaped India's foreign policy'

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 25 DECEMBER

On the 36th birth anniversary of Atal Bihari Vajpayee, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar today hailed the contribution of the former Prime Minister in shaping India's foreign policy that led to a new beginning in relations with the US. In his opening remarks at the first Atal Bihari Vajpayee Memorial Lecture, he said Vajpayee "introduced corrections, some bold and others more nuanced," in a range of national security and foreign policy issues.

Atalji's vision of India-US cooperation has been advanced, particularly in recent years, by the leadership and commitment of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Overcoming the hesita-

tions of history, we are today focused on addressing contemporary challenges and emerging opportunities," the minister said.

Describing Vajpayee as a "titan of his times who left an indelible stamp on many of our national policies", he said the late leader had an "intuitive understanding that the post-Cold War world required India to drastically rework its relationships and interests".

He said, "This vision led to a new beginning with the United States that has since been developed by successive governments on both sides. It required us, as a nation, to overcome difficult moments and continuing concerns. Only someone with Atalji's enormous self-assurance could, in

the early days, have visualised how natural this partnership would become."

At the same time, India's relationship with Russia has remained steady partly due to Vajpayee's endeavours, Jaishankar said. India's principled approach of engaging China on the "basis of mutual respect and mutual sensitivity" too reflected Vajpayee's thinking, he added. In India's neighbourhood, Vajpayee "radiated goodwill and friendship, while being clear that terrorism and trust could not coexist". Vajpayee could "finesse difficult issues" while warmly reaching out across regions and continents, he said, pointing to the country's relations with the ASEAN and with countries in Europe, Africa and Latin America.

WRAPPED UP



A view of Rajpath engulfed in fog, in New Delhi on Friday. IANS

Nitish downplays defection of JD-U MLAs in Arunachal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
PATNA, 25 DECEMBER

Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar on Friday sought to downplay the split suffered by the Janata Dal (United) in Arunachal Pradesh where all but one MLA of the party have joined the BJP.

Kumar, who is the JD(U)'s national president, sought to dismiss with a bitter laugh the development in the north-eastern state, where his party had won seven seats in the assembly polls held last year and became the main oppo-

sition group while the BJP his coalition partner in Bihar, had achieved power.

"We are focusing on our proposed meeting. They have gone their own way," Kumar said in response to queries from journalists about the split that came ahead of the JD(U)'s national executive and national council meetings scheduled here this weekend.

The Janata Dal United suffered a major jolt in Arunachal Pradesh on Friday, with six of its seven MLAs shifting allegiance to the ruling BJP. The

lone MLA from the People's Party of Arunachal, Kardo Nyigyor from Likabali constituency, has also joined the saffron party. The development comes a day ahead of the announcement of the panchayat and municipal poll results.

The JD(U) has been contesting assembly polls in a number of states without having a truck with the BJP, insisting that its tie-up with the saffron party was "confined to Bihar".

The party made an exception only in the Delhi assembly polls earlier this year which it fought in alliance with the BJP though the coalition suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of Aam Aadmi Party.

The success in Arunachal Pradesh had helped the JD(U) gain recognition as a state party there, a development which was hailed by its rank and file as an evidence of its growing footprint under the leadership of the Bihar chief minister.

Meanwhile, the Opposition RJD-Congress combine came out with statements asserting that the development in Arunachal Pradesh gave a hint of the shape of things to come in Bihar where the JD(U) has already ceased to be the senior partner in the coalition.

CANCELLATION/SHORT TERMINATION/REGULATION OF TRAINS DUE TO DOUBLING WORK

In order to further strengthen the existing infrastructure, Northern Railway will undertake the Non-Interlocking work for doubling at Haridwar-Laksar section of Moradabad Division. To execute this work, Northern Railway will take a traffic block up to 05.01.2021. As a result, the following trains will temporarily be affected on the dates shown against each:-

CANCELLATION OF TRAINS

Train No. & Train Name	Date(s) of Cancellation (from originating station)
02017/02018 New Delhi - Dehradun - New Delhi Shatabdi Special	29.12.2020 to 05.01.2021
02092/02091 Kathgodam - Dehradun - Kathgodam Jan Shatabdi Special	29.12.2020 to 05.01.2021
02191 Jabalpur - Haridwar Jr. Special Express	30.12.2020
02192 Haridwar Jr. - Jabalpur Special Express	31.12.2020
04609 Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra - Rishikesh Special Express	30.12.2020 to 04.01.2021
04610 Rishikesh - Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra Special Express	31.12.2020 to 05.01.2021
02055/02056 Dehradun - New Delhi - Dehradun Jan Shatabdi Special	29.12.2020
04888 Barmer - Rishikesh Special Express	28.12.2020 to 04.01.2021
04887 Rishikesh - Barmer Special Express	29.12.2020 to 05.01.2021
04113 Prayagraj - Dehradun Special Express	28.12.2020 to 04.01.2021
04114 Dehradun - Prayagraj Special Express	29.12.2020 to 05.01.2021
05001/05002 Muzaffarpur Jr. - Dehradun - Muzaffarpur Jr. Special Exp.	28.12.2020 to 04.01.2021
05005/05006 Gorakhpur Jr. - Dehradun - Gorakhpur Jr. Special Express	30.12.2020 to 05.01.2021

Short Termination/Partial Cancellation of Trains

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Turmoil in Israel

Even as it cements ties with a swathe of the Arab world, Israel faces political uncertainty once again with a dispute over the national budget forcing the country to embark on a fourth parliamentary election inside two years. The snap election has been called for March and follows irreconcilable differences within the ruling coalition on passing a budget by December 22. While Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu wanted the budget to cover the current year, his coalition partner, Defence Minister Benny Gantz wanted one for 2020 and 2021, arguing that the country needed stability in fiscal policy in these difficult times. Under a power-sharing deal reached between Mr Netanyahu's Likud party and Mr Gantz's Blue and White party, the two were to occupy office as Prime Ministers for 18 months each. Mr Netanyahu opposed a budget for 2021, a political tactic his critics say was aimed at ensuring the coalition's instability so that he could pull the rug from under Mr Gantz's feet just when it was time for him to rule. A bitter Mr Gantz has blamed the Prime Minister of forcing an election to ensure that legal proceedings pending against him get quashed. Taking to social media, he said, "Netanyahu is taking us to an election for the sole purpose of not going to jail."

In many respects, Mr Netanyahu is gambling both for his political survival as well as to evade prosecution on serious criminal charges. Already, he faces widespread condemnation for his handling of the coronavirus epidemic with thousands of Israelis having taken to the streets in protests that have even reached his residence in Jerusalem. Tacitly acknowledging the public anger, Mr Netanyahu said in a television address on Tuesday that his government had arranged for millions of doses of vaccine to be delivered to the country. A March election is seen in many respects as a last roll of the dice for it will be held at a time that Mr Netanyahu faces strong headwinds, principally on account of the fact that he will be forced to campaign even as his trial on charges of bribery, fraud and breach of trust gets underway. In addition, the Israeli leader has in the past profited from the strong support he received from US President Donald Trump, a factor that will not be in play with a change of guard in Washington.

Finally, he will face a formidable challenge from influential right-winger Gideon Saar who recently broke away from Likud to form his own party. An opinion poll conducted by Israel's public television network shows Mr Saar drawing level with Mr Netanyahu in popularity. Mr Gantz, too, is none too fortuitously placed with his Blue and White party having splintered over his decision to enter a coalition. Polls suggest the party may win only a handful of seats.

Trump's martial law option

In what is described as unprecedented craziness, Donald Trump has suggested a new and severe attempt to impose martial law as part of a desperate initiative to overturn Joe Biden's victory in last November's election. The move, raised in a reportedly chaotic meeting in the Oval Office, is both disingenuous and laughable. Now going through the wrap-up motions of his presidency, he is said to have raised the possibility of using the military to enforce a second term as President of the United States of America.

He was rebuffed by many of his closest advisers, but the fact that it was raised at the Oval Office serves to underline his desperation to defy the verdict. Sidney Powell and Michael Flynn, two of Trump's closest public advocates, were at the meeting. Powell is a lawyer who has led many of the failed court attempts to allege voter fraud.

Her conspiracy theories - for instance that Hugo Chavez, the former Venezuelan President who died in 2013, was part of a plot to swindle Trump out of his victory - caused the rest of the President's legal team, led by Rudy Giuliani, to cut ties with her last month. Trump's advisers, including Giuliani, have opposed the idea of martial law, and suggested instead the seizure of voting machines to investigate possible fraud. The idea was also "aggressively" opposed by Mark Meadows, Trump's chief of staff, and Pat Cipollone, the White House counsel.

The Oval office meeting is said to have become raucous and involved people shouting. Clearly Trump is fighting a losing battle though his legal advisers, pre-eminently Powell and Flynn, have suggested that Trump "could take military capabilities and could basically rerun an election in each these states". With less than four weeks to go for the transition, Trump's desperation seems to be growing.

For all that, the US government is facing the prospect of a year-end shutdown with Trump threatening not to sign a \$2.3 trillion package that includes government funding and coronavirus assistance. The package was the outcome of months of negotiations between Congressional Democrats and Republicans. It also funds government operations till September 2021. This would mean that if Trump blocks the assistance, then large sections of the government could shut down. In a video posted on social media earlier this week, the outgoing President has sought the bill be revised to include the payment of \$2000 to every American.

This is more than triple the \$600 person included in the bill. Federal funding is due to expire on Monday if Trump does not sign the bill into law. A funding lapse would furlough millions of federal workers and shut wide segments of the US government at a time when it is rushing to distribute two coronavirus vaccines. The catastrophe has killed more than 323,000 Americans, and left millions jobless.

China versus India ~ II

India should take the lead in organizing the First Asian Security Conference of all the democracies of Asia currently facing growing Chinese economic dominance, and which cannot by themselves face up to the Communist regime ever hungry for natural resources, and now even food



The second part of Sun Tzu's epigram is "know thy enemy". It is a blood-curdling thought for India and the smaller countries of Asia. The enemy is a sinister and wily foe, the like of which there is none in the modern world. An autocracy armed with nuclear weapons, and accountable to none. Dealing with such an enemy for an open democracy under the rule of law, with a Parliament where the Government is accountable, is a cruel "handicap." India is in a very unenviable position, scrupulously observing rules of international law, subscribing to the UN Human Rights regime and having no extra-territorial ambitions.

History hardly offers any guide. Europe did face an equally autocratic Soviet Communist regime in the last century. But contemporaneous democracies in Western Europe could do business with it under a 'balance of power'. Besides, and which is most relevant, the democracies led by the US had forged a credible military alliance - NATO. It maintained peace in Europe for half a century after World War II till the Soviet Union collapsed under its own weight. Moreover, the Soviet Communists were not so devious in their dealings with other powers as they, by and large abided by the rules of the game, once they realized that the Western democracies would stand together and safeguard themselves under their mutually binding military pacts.

In sharp contrast, the Chinese communists have virtually sanctified a State policy of fair is foul and foul is fair. The latest report of the US Justice Department as given out by the Attorney General, William Barr makes for a stunning read. "The Communist State (China) practises theft, currency manipulation, torture, counterfeiting, officially organized trade secret thefts and extortion." Any foreign organization that portrays the actual state of affairs behind the 'Bamboo Curtain' is subjected to subtle arm-twisting, to tow the official propaganda line, including such corporate giants as Facebook, Twitter, Zoom, Apple, Google, Cisco, Microsoft etc. behaving like obedient pygmies. The 'Bamboo Curtain' is thicker than the Iron Curtain of the erstwhile Soviet Union.

Arguably, the most sinister aspect of the Chinese communist Government is the existence of a law - the National Intelligence Law under which any Chinese citizen travelling abroad can be 'legally' required to spy on behalf

of the State, wherever he may be. Businessmen, tourists, contract labour, even scholars and students going to Western universities for higher studies! Imagine potential 1.4 billion Chinese 'spies' who may be coerced to double up as intelligence operatives abroad, on the pain of punishment under Chinese law and confiscation of their passports. It is an incredibly sinister "law", even by the standards of a modern police state or the erstwhile Soviet Communist totalitarian regime.

Can India survive an adversary that observes the rules of the game by breaching these? A nuclear power that has sanctified the art of deception as State policy. A country that takes advantage of its small and weak neighbours to continually push its borders outwards, to grab resource-rich regions to feed its ever-growing population and expand its economic clout in the entire continent of Asia and to lay 'debt traps' for struggling economies. To sneak in and occupy piecemeal uninhabited islands in international waters and establish their military bases.

In context, the recent public statement by our External Affairs minister that India has never joined any military alliance nor will it ever do, was entirely avoidable. As Winston Churchill put it, in relations between states, there can be no 'absolutes'. Of course, QUAD comprising India, USA, Australia and Japan is a bold step in the right direction. But just the first step. The foursome is somewhat of a loose arrangement for "collective security". So far, there is no military alliance and no formal treaty. In the event of a bigger Chinese thrust, we may have plenty of sympathizers but no military support, as happened in 1962. The foursome needs to become fearsome.

Kissinger hit the nail on the head. "The concepts of collective security and of alliances are diametrically opposed. Traditional alliances were directed against specific threats and defined precise obligations for specific groups of countries linked by shared national interests. The purpose of an alliance is to produce an obligation more predictable and precise than an analysis of national interest. Collective security works in the exact opposite

way. It leaves the application of its principles to the interpretation of particular circumstances."

Western democracies successfully rolled back the nuclear-armed Soviet Communist regime without firing a shot, so to say. The first common policy step was to ensure collective security through formal military treaties such as NATO and ANZUS. European democracies were under no delusion that any of them could, individually take on the mighty Soviet Communist regime without the formal military leadership of the US. The West European militaries were placed under the overall command of the US military. Even the nuclear weapons were so placed, except that two nuclear powers - UK and France - reserved nuclear weapons under national command for use as a last resort in 'supreme national interest.'

Secondly, the Western democracies publicly declared that the military alliance was purely defensive but committed to fight

together in the event of attack on any of them. They were categorical that though they viewed the Soviet Union as an "evil Empire", in the words of US President Reagan, they ruled out first use of nuclear weapons for fighting a war. "A nuclear war can never be won, and hence must never be fought", in the memorable words of Reagan again. At the same time, they demonstrated their unequivocal resolve in keeping the powder dry. The US deterred any Communist adventurism by adopting the concept of Star Wars. Another strategy employed by the Western powers to roll back the "evil Empire" and to espouse their resolute commitment against the ills of a communist threat to democracies was to expose the true nature of the Soviet regime. Reagan openly labelled the Communist regime as an "outlaw empire prepared to commit any crime, to lie, to cheat in order to achieve its goals."

The challenge before our diplomats now is to draw appropriate lessons from history and to gear up to roll back an even more "evil Empire". India should take the lead in organizing the First Asian Security Conference of all the democracies of Asia currently facing growing Chinese economic dominance, and which cannot by themselves face up to the Communist regime ever hungry for natural resources, and now even food. Believe it or not, it is importing its staple food from even its main adversary - India.

gry for natural resources, and now even food. Believe it or not, it is importing its staple food from even its main adversary - India.

The agenda should be the same as it was before the European Security Conference in 1975 - linking trade with security. Specifically, respect for historical borders and guarantee of navigation rights in open seas. An obligation on the part of all signatories not to change borders by force. Secondly, a commitment to respect certain basic Human Rights of their citizens. Incidentally, it was the latter provision which saw the successful rise of a Lech Walesa in Poland and a Vaclav Havel in Czechoslovakia. Thirdly, trade and commerce would be free and fair among all signatory nations to the Declarations of the Conference.

Within two decades of the signing of the Final Declaration of the Security Conference, the Soviet Communist regime was history. The "evil Empire" was vanquished without firing a shot. Before India, there are two possibilities for this strategy to succeed. One, that the Chinese may not take part. That would provide a chance to India to assume leadership of smaller countries in Asia which are similarly threatened by Chinese adventurism and economic domination - Vietnam, Singapore, Maldives, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand etc, and even bigger countries which may look up to Indian leadership - Japan, Philippines, Indonesia, South Korea etc. The other possibility is that the Chinese may join such a Conference. In this case, India can work together with these countries to forge a 'balance of power' in Asia with China, to checkmate further Chinese adventurism - a bipolar Asia.

The chances of India in a leadership role of these countries are good because most of these Asian countries are democracies and realize that by themselves, they are no match for the growing Chinese economic might. Nor is there any possibility of a democratic India laying a 'debt trap' for them, which is standard Chinese peacetime stratagem especially against smaller Asian countries.

In sum, India is now strong militarily but continues to be on the defensive diplomatically. The military option is ruled out against an autocracy with an undeclared military policy where, in battle, 'body count does not count for much.'

(Concluded)

A MEMBER OF THE **ANN**
ASIA NEWS NETWORK

ASIAN VOICES

Grateful for everything, even in the pandemic

Christmas is just around the corner, but sadly, this year Santa Claus may not be able to come due to the pandemic. Still, however, we should be grateful for his lifetime of service to children, coming all the way from the North Pole every Christmas.

The Bible teaches us to be grateful, saying we should be "thankful in everything, in all circumstances," in 1 Thessalonians 5:18. Yet these days, so many of us are constantly grumpy and cranky, complaining instead of being thankful.

In fact, there are many things, for which we should be thankful. For example, the people in South Korea should be grateful for not living in North Korea, which is only a few hundred miles away. If they lived in North Korea, their lives would be miserable in many respects.

Instead of being thankful, however, many people in today's South Korea seem to be hateful and vengeful, instigated by populist politicians who disseminate distorted notions of equality in wealth and class. Naturally, many Koreans are unhappy and discontent all the time.

If we try to be thankful for what we have, however, we can be happy. Sometimes, even a disaster can turn into a blessing, but only if we try to find some positive aspects in it. Take COVID-19 for example. The global catastrophe has claimed so many people.

H The Korea Herald
people's lives, devastated the world's economies and paralyzed society. Therefore, there seems to be no positive aspect to it.

Nevertheless, some people must be thankful to the pandemic, such as Joe Biden's supporters. Indeed, had it not been for COVID-19, President-elect Biden probably could not have won the election because the US economy had been so prosperous until the pandemic hit America in the election year. Furthermore, if he had not been infected by the coronavirus, President Trump could have come out with an "October surprise" that might have swept the votes.

The pandemic has other positive elements. For example, it has warned us that globalization, despite its merits, can make us vulnerable to a pandemic such as COVID-19.

Moreover, the unprecedented pandemic has enabled us to realize that some countries, taking advantage of globalism, are brazenly trying to control and manipulate other countries by using their capital and investments.

As a result, many countries are now taking precautions against the influx of foreign economic projects and the political leverage they bring. Without the pandemic, they might have lowered their guard and ended up being a country that looks like an Orwellian nightmare.

The pandemic has also taught us that there are hopelessly irresponsible, shameless countries on earth. It is a shame that no countries have ever assumed responsibility or apologized so far for the spread of the coronavirus that has claimed so many precious lives and ruined numerous people's careers. Nor is there any possibility of a democratic India laying a 'debt trap' for them, which is standard Chinese peacetime stratagem especially against smaller Asian countries.

The pandemic has also taught us that there are hopelessly irresponsible, shameless countries on earth. It is a shame that no countries have ever assumed responsibility or apologized so far for the spread of the coronavirus that has claimed so many precious lives and ruined numerous people's careers.

In addition, thanks to the global pandemic, we have come to realize that some countries, taking advantage of globalism, are brazenly trying to control and manipulate other countries by using their capital and investments.

As a result, many countries are



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Curfew in Kolkata

SIR, Emergence of a mutated variant of the coronavirus in the UK has led to a surge in the infection there. The British government has warned that the potent new 'mutant strain' is out of control and has imposed a stringent new stay-at-home lockdown from 20 December. The newly identified strain of corona virus is up to 70 per cent more transmissible than the original pathogen. This revelation by the British government has created a worldwide scare and a number



would be wise to celebrate "Christmas" this year staying at home with family and children. But the over-enthusiastic and crazy Kolkata public are likely again this year to celebrate Christmas disregarding warnings from UK and safety norms. They would throng the Park street area and Eco-Park area of Newtown and end up with the coronavirus infection. The habit or propensity of Kolkatans to raise their loud voice on any issue serious or silly, even good or bad for them and the habit of sloganizing "manchina, manbonba" may land them in deep trouble considering the minimal health infrastructure available in the state.

Taking a cue from Maharashtra, it may be prudent to clamp a dusk-to-dawn curfew in the city of Kolkata during Christmas and up to the first week of January 2021. It

Yours, etc., Samarendra Bandyopadhyay
Kolkata, 22 December.

PRASHANT EFFECT

SIR, Prashant Kishor has been one of India's most successful and respected election strategists since 2014. With some very significant and high profile election results attributable to his professional efforts, apart from other crucial factors, Kishor is certainly the most sought after poll strategist in the country.

Kishor and his team's strategies had definitely clicked with voters during the 2014 Lok Sabha campaign which led to the Narendra Modi-led BJP forming the government at the Centre, followed by important wins in the 2015 Bihar assembly elections with the mahagathbandhan, 2017 Punjab assembly elections with Captain Amarinder Singh, 2019 Andhra Pradesh assembly elections with Jagan Mohan Reddy and the 2020 Delhi assembly elections with Arvind Kejriwal. His success rate is simply phenomenal.

However, the 2021 West Bengal Assembly elections will apparently be his toughest assignment. With the Bharatiya Janata Party making substantial inroads into the political arena of the state, the ten-year-old incumbency for the Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamool Congress government being a significant factor, it will be a litmus test for Kishor, who is the TMC's chief poll strategist. He has confidently claimed that the BJP will struggle to cross double digits in West Bengal and that if the saffron party does any better than his prediction, he would quit his work. Everything will be crystal clear by May next year.

Yours, etc., Anupam Neogi, Kolkata, 23 December.

'Bureaucrats a cause for concern'

Himachal Pradesh chief minister **JAI RAM THAKUR** is completing three years of his tenure on 27 December in the looming shadow of the Covid pandemic, which has devastated the economy of the state. The five-time Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MLA from Mandi district and first time CM, Thakur, 55, faced the formidable challenge of dealing with the pandemic just as he was trying to tighten his grip on the state's administrative and political affairs. His apparent simplicity, accessibility and hard work might stand him in good stead while negotiating the tricky tightrope for the remaining two years of his tenure in the hill state whose economy has been battered by the pandemic headwinds. In an interview with **ARCHANA PHULL**, he shared his thoughts on a range of issues. Excerpts:

Q. How do you see your performance in the last three years?

A. In a real sense, Covid reduced it from three to two years. We have got the experience of working with so many hurdles in one year. But even in Covid crisis, we have not let the development works suffer in Himachal. After lockdown, the government has laid foundation stones and inaugurated development schemes worth Rs 1,558 crore. A big thing is that so far all the chief ministers of HP worked in a favourable environment. There were natural calamities for some days in the rainy season. But Covid is a lifetime experience. Nobody has experienced such a long crisis. It was a challenge to pass such a crisis without preparedness. Even otherwise, the present government worked with a new vision. We did not carry out political vendetta and there is no issue against the government even after three years.

Q. What about the financial situation in HP?

A. It is not good. When we took over, the state already had a debt burden of Rs 47,000 crore. It was not possible for any government to manage without loans in such a situation. But we checked the speed of taking loans

and the volume. The total loan on state is now Rs 56,000 crore. Covid caused GDP losses of Rs 4,000 crore in the state. The economy on the whole suffered losses to the tune of Rs 30,000 crore since March 2020.

Q. How difficult was it to handle Covid? Where did HP falter?

A. Covid situation has been unpredictable. We did our best to prevent it and monitor it daily. The peak came in different states at different times. Initially, Covid management was good in Kerala and HP. But now Kerala has gone worse and there is a spike in Covid cases in HP over the last three months. It is because of the casual approach of people in social gatherings, where 100, 150 Covid cases were reported in one go. However, there is some drop in cases after we took strict decisions. We can't leave it on the people anymore. There is a need for more public awareness on the issue.

Q. The government has blamed people for the spike in Covid cases in HP. What about political functions?

A. Political functions did take place, but the number of cases recorded there were not much. I am not justifying, but the political rallies were held in open with proper distancing. The social gatherings and marriages were mostly arranged indoors, which led to spread.

Q. Why have you chosen to go ahead with Panchayat polls in the state in January 2021. Couldn't they be postponed?

A. The Panchayat polls could have been postponed given the current Covid scenario. Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh did it. The State Election Commission had asked us also.

There was much hullabaloo by the Opposition Congress when we cancelled the winter session of the state Assembly in Dharamshala earlier this month. Our analysis is that when we are prepared for Panchayat polls, why should we give political opportunity to Congress party to raise hue and cry over this issue also.



Q. Does the state have proper facilities to deal with Covid patients even today?

A. If we do not have a facility, the Congress has to be blamed for this as it ruled the state for decades. When Covid started we had just 50 ventilators in the state. We now have 700 ventilators. It was not easy but we ensured make-shift hospitals, proper oxygen supply and other facilities to handle the crisis. HP did not have a virus testing facility earlier and the samples were either sent to Pune or Delhi. It happened when the first Covid death took place in Dharamshala. Now we can do 10,000 tests in a day in HP.

Q. Congress alleged that your government blindly followed the Centre without any local strategy?

A. It is totally wrong. The Centre gave some basic guidelines to states. We worked out our own strategy to check Covid in HP. HP did the Active Case Finding for Covid and had the system of passes and registration on border. Around 2 lakh people, who came from outside during lockdown,

followed this process and they were quarantined and tested on the border before letting them in.

Q. The Congress alleges that your government failed on all fronts. What do you have to say on this?

A. Congress has played a negative role since beginning in this tenure. We never expected that they would make even the Covid crisis a political tool. They talk about HP. But what has happened in Punjab, where the number of deaths are more than active cases of HP? We did the best possible work amid Covid and took several other development and welfare initiatives for the state and its people in three years. There is a leadership crisis in Congress, and every leader is just trying to outshine the other by sensationalising issues.

Q. Union minister of state for finance Anurag Thakur has been subtly critical of you. Do you see him as a political threat within the BJP?

A. Whatever assignment has been given to me, I am doing it. Simi-

larly Anurag Thakur and Jagat Prakash Nadda are doing their duties. Whatever issue Anurag Thakur raised recently on central university, it had nothing to do with the state government, the state has played its role and it is now on to the Centre.

Q. What is your administrative challenge? How has the role of bureaucracy been in the state?

A. The role of bureaucrats in the entire country is a cause for concern, whether it is about work or commitment. The CMs of different states often raise this issue. There are some officers in Himachal, who are to be told time and again. But now their era is over. We will not tolerate such hurdles and will keep such officers without work. We have already given them enough time and will take action if they don't improve.

Q. What is on your agenda for the next two years?

A. Let this Covid era finish. There are difficulties, but the development will certainly pick up pace. We have been putting in every effort with honesty for overall development and welfare of people without any biases. We will keep doing that. We will ensure that the trend of change in power after five years is checked this time.

Q. How do you analyse the farmers' agitation against the Modi government?

A. The same amendments were taken up during the UPA regime in the past and the issue came up time and again. If the BJP-led government has done it today, there is nothing wrong in it. People are being misled on the issue.

Q. How do you look at increasing unemployment in the country?

A. I see it as a global issue in the present context. Whatever we can do to tackle it, we are doing.

Q. What about rising prices?

A. Prices can be checked when we come out of the Covid era. The situation will definitely change.

OCCASIONAL NOTE

The appeal made by the Bishop of Calcutta from the pulpit of St. Paul's Cathedral on behalf of the Boy Scout and Girl Guides movements deserves a hearty response. It was only by degrees that the public realised the value of the organisation set on foot by Sir Robert Baden-Powell twelve years ago, and few would have ventured to prophesy that of all the services rendered to the Empire by the defender of Mafeking the greatest would prove to be the carrying out of the idea on which his troops of Boy Scouts were formed. This idea has now developed into one of the most important movements ever witnessed for the welfare of the young and the training of the rising generation for future citizenship. In its small beginning and rapid and widespread growth the movement resembles the institution of Sunday schools or the marvelous development of the Young Men's Christian Association; but it fills a place of its own, distinct from that of any other organisation. The Bishop declared that he knows of no movement which is doing more for the up-lift of boys and girls today than the Scout and the Guides movements. There must be many in Calcutta, and elsewhere, qualified to assist - men and women of good-will - who would willingly give not merely money but personal work to help the cause if they realised that their assistance would really be of value.

NEWS ITEMS

POUND 120,000 STOLEN IN NEW YORK STREET

The New York business community has been startled by the latest of a series of daring daylight robberies in the streets of the city. It occurred on an afternoon in mail week. Two bank messengers were attacked and robbed of securities of the value of pound 120,000. The messengers were within a stone throw of their destination when three well-dressed loiterers sprang upon them in the middle of the crowded street and secured the bag containing the securities after a short tussle. They then retired rapidly to a waiting motor-car behind a barrage of revolver bullets and drove away. One of the messengers managed to read the licence number of the car, but when investigated it was found to be fictitious. The police have arrested the head messenger of the bank.

STUDENTS' CONFERENCE AT NAGPUR

Nagpur, Dec 25
The first All-India College Students' Conference was opened this morning at the Badshahi Theatre. Mr. R.J. Gokhale, chairman of the reception committee, in the course of his address, said the Calcutta Congress had given its verdict in favour of non-cooperation and therefore to consider the merits and demerits of the policy of non-cooperation would be beyond the province of this Conference. The present crisis therefore was more for political than educational reasons; although the present system of education was such that its continuance any longer was a serious menace to the future prospects of the nation. After criticizing the education system at length, the speaker in conclusion said national education should be conducted along national lines controlled by representatives of the nation.

D'ANNUNZIO'S PLAN

The Times' Milan correspondent states that it has now leaked out that d'Annunzio's plan just before the Italian Government's declaration of blockade was to abandon Fiume and with all his forces in Dalmatia incite the population to attack the Jugoslav troops, and thus create such a grave incident as to destroy the Treaty of Rapallo. Two steamers, loaded with legionaries, had steam up in Fiume harbour, and a carefully prepared insurrection in Croatia was timed to break out at the same time. In view of all this the Italian Government hastened its ultimatum. D'Annunzio's army, which is numerically insignificant, is opposed by 22,000 Italian regulars, and if the blockade is really effective d'Annunzio should not be able to hold out long?

THE VICEROYALTY

The delay in the appointment of the new Viceroy of India is causing widespread comment in political circles. The appointment of Lord Willingdon, which some weeks ago was regarded as a foregone conclusion, is now believed to be improbable. Efforts have recently been made, but hitherto without success, to induce Mr. Chamberlain to accept. It is understood that Mr. Montagu's partisans are pressing his candidature upon the Government. Despite serious objections to the appointment of a Secretary of State, it is understood that these efforts are meeting with less opposition than when Mr. Montagu's candidature was first canvassed.

Allegations that must be probed

MAHFUZ ANAM

The Election Commission (EC) must be above question. But to be so, it must answer all questions. To ignore, evade, downplay or malign citizens who ask the questions is the surest way to sow doubt in the public mind that an attempt is being made to hide, something that is neither good for the EC and definitely not for the future of democracy.

The EC oversees the most crucial of events in a functioning democracy: the national and local elections. It is through that act that people's "will" is expressed, public representatives are chosen, the central institution in a democracy - parliament - is constituted, governance by the electorate (voters) is ensured, an elected government is formed, people's wishes get reflected, public mandate gets expressed, peaceful transfer of power from one political party to another takes place and, in case where the incumbent is voted out, public wrath is writ large. In short, everything in a democracy derives its legitimacy through the process of election. And the EC is solely responsible for making that election free, fair and truly representative. Any blemish on the EC is a blemish on the purity of the above process.

It is for this reason that Bangladesh's constitution gives such a pride of place to the EC and protects it from external influence. It is a constitutional body with its powers and responsibilities clearly delineated, and its functional independence guaranteed, making it a de-facto government in a limited sense during the process of election. The chief election commissioner and

other commissioners are protected and cannot be removed from office without following the same process as in case of removing a Supreme Court judge. All this is done only to ensure that the election is free and fair in nature.

It is simply impossible to overstate the importance of the Election Commission. And in the same breath, it needs to be said that it is impossible to overstate the need for the EC to enjoy the highest level of credibility in the public eye. Like justice which must not only be done but also seen to be done, the Election Commission too must not only strive to achieve the highest level of integrity but also have that integrity tested through a stringent process of public scrutiny and accountability, especially in financial matters. This is the only way to gain and maintain public trust, which is a precondition for it to conduct credible elections.

The above introduction was necessary to understand and truly appreciate the importance of some highly respected citizens' recent appeal to the President of Bangladesh to investigate corruption allegations against the EC. Forty-two professors, teachers, past advisors to caretaker governments, former government secretaries, academics, senior economists, lawyers, bankers, doctors, human rights activists, civil society leaders and others - all prominent tax-paying citizens and voters of a democratic country - have appealed to the president to set up the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) under Article 96 of the constitution to investigate the allegations.

Why SJC? Because the EC, being a statutory body, cannot be investigated by the police, other law enforcement

bodies or the Anti-Corruption Commission. Why the appeal to the president? Because only he can initiate the necessary process.

The allegations against the EC are of two distinct categories: a) election-related; and b) corruption-related.

Whether the EC did a competent job of holding a truly free and fair election as per law, whether it saw to it that all norms were complied with, whether it took all complaints into consideration and investigated them thoroughly to the satisfaction of all parties, whether proper post-election examination was made of all aspects of the elections, and whether the election tribunals discharged their duties well, are issues that require detailed examination and expert investigation. While in no way undervaluing their importance, we want to leave the above issues to the experts and to the more knowledgeable.

We, on our part, want to focus on the mundane, the prosaic, the more concrete - issues on which there should not be too much divergence of views as they are more fact rather than opinion-based.

They can all be resolved by just going through the relevant papers of the EC. We want to focus on corruption allegations and the need to investigate them both to set the record straight and to maintain EC's credibility, whatever is still left of it, as some would say.

The allegation is that EC members paid themselves Tk 2 crores just for attending events and as "special speakers" about national elections. On this allegation, we have five points to make.

First, does the law permit them to accept any financial benefit from anybody, for any work and under any circumstances? If it does not, then they are clearly in violation of the law. If it permits it, then what are its parameters and how have they been exceeded? The EC members' salary and allowances are substantial and cover all areas of their work. So why the extra payment?

The second point is about the amount taken. Even if there are provisions for "speaking" or "training" fees, can that amount to crores of taka?

One particular official of the EC (a government servant) took more than Tk 70 lakhs as speaking and training fees.

Third, they spoke at training sessions for election officials to prepare them to properly conduct the elections. Isn't this an integral part of their job? So why the extra payment?

Fourth, they are supposed to have spoken at 520 places in 18 days, and in each instance, several of the commissioners were supposed to have been present - a task that appears humanly impossible to accomplish. EC papers show that such visits actually had not taken place. So, what really happened?

Would it be wrong to ask whether it was a case of false billing? Finally, was no audit done for all the public money that was spent in connection with the elections? Isn't it mandatory that the money spent be audited? How could the EC not have its accounts audited?

Another set of corruption charges has been levelled by one of the members of the Election Commission itself, and it deals with staff recruitment involving Tk 4 crore. In his written submission to the CEC, the said election commissioner laid out his allegations in detail, putting his personal reputation and integrity on the line. His allegations merited serious consideration and an independent investigation. Anywhere else in the world it would have received far greater attention than it did in Bangladesh, at various levels includ-

ing in the media. There is an additional allegation of misuse of official cars by the CEC and some commissioners. They are entitled to two cars but they are using, or had used, three. Why they should need three cars and how it was shown in the log-books of the commission is a question that can be verified easily, if there is the will to do so.

In Bangladesh, investigation of corruption allegations is done by state officials, none of whom have any autonomy of action, and hence it always ends up as a political decision. There are early signs that the petition of the 42 citizens to the president may also go in that direction. It should not. The EC is not a part of the government and the latter should not take the responsibility of defending the former's alleged corruption. The argument that any discrediting of the EC will delegitimise the elections that were held under it is a laboured one and should not cloud the government's thinking.

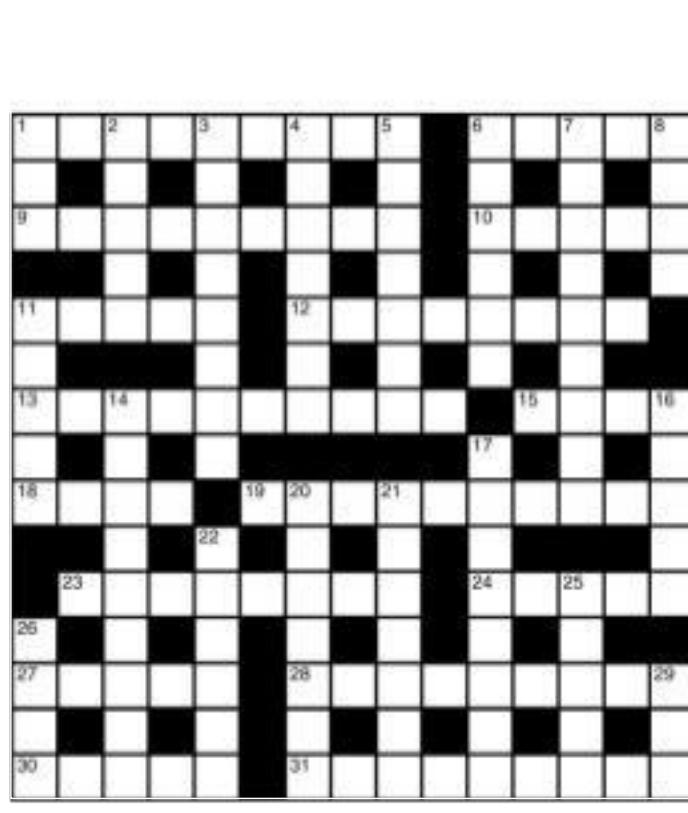
I would like to conclude with a reminder that at this stage, we are talking about "allegations" of corruption, not "proof" of the said corruption. The distinction is important and we in no way want to ascribe guilt without investigation. However, the allegations are serious and mostly based on EC documents. We strongly believe that these allegations deserve to be looked into, and it is only through a professional investigation - and not any eye-wash - that the truth will come out and our claim that nobody is above the law will get some credible traction. And hence the appeal to the president.

The nation's eyes are on him now. Will he honour the citizens by listening to their grievances, or will he ignore their voices?

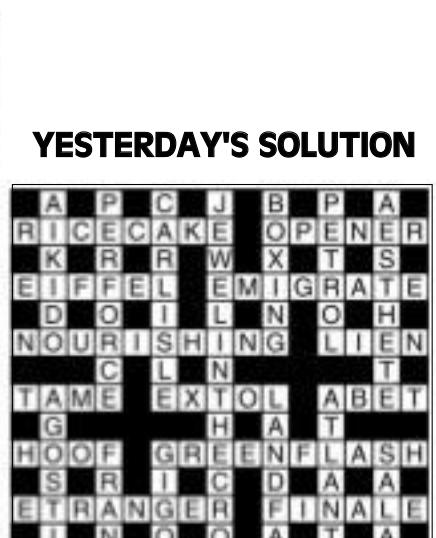
The writer is Editor, The Daily Star, a member of the Asia News Network.

NO 28176

CROSSWORD



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION



SOLUTION FOR 19 DECEMBER



- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| 1 Entertaining pair open country clubs, shrouded by uncertainty (6,3) | 23 ... their partner is working on current recommendation (8) | 7 unseen (6) |
| 6 Ring for sporting combat, Tyson's oddly missing - work hard at the start (5) | 24 Sheepish individual seen around six (5) | 8 Norwegian artist detailed Smurf's essence during a spring festival for little people; ... (9) |
| 9 Prince not quite competing with King after support for filibuster, once (9) | 27 Bad habits formed when half of 1A succeeded taking drug; ... (5) | 8 ... he died here, content to leave oils, see (4) |
| 10 Buff accountant meets half of 1A; ... (5) | 28 ... their partner starts to swear like most of 8 and it goes downhill fast (9) | 11 Triumph over former partner in the last month (5) |
| 11 ... their partner joins a posh school - discount to follow (5) | 30 Can Y appear to be stupid (5) | 14 Brown cow's first to bolt - almost a sign of stupidity (6,3) |
| 12 Idiot disheathed by stage name, touring new Romeo and Juliet, maybe (8) | 31 Two Ronnies - both on vacation - entertaining awkward teen before director came back in (2-7) | 16 Tray not right for cream (5) |
| 13 Supreme German and European achievement knocking the stuffing | | |



*India is an important market for IKEA.
We are here in India for the long term.*

PREETHI DHUPAR
IKEA INDIA CFO

THUMBNAILS

IOC to buy 15 hydrogen buses for Delhi: To give a fillip to India's push to usher in a hydrogen-based mobility solutions ecosystem, Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) plans to buy 15 buses that can run on hydrogen fuel. The country's largest oil refiner and fuel retailer is also setting up a facility at its Faridabad research and development (R&D) centre to produce hydrogen to run the buses, the company said in a statement. Like all electric vehicles, fuel cell electric vehicles use electricity to power an electric motor. In contrast to other electric vehicles, these vehicles produce electricity using a fuel cell powered by hydrogen, rather than drawing electricity from only a battery.

ITRs filing: As many as 3.97 crore taxpayers have already filed their income tax returns for assessment year (AY) 2020-21 (fiscal year 2019-20) till 24 December, the income tax department said on Friday. "Over 3.97 crore income tax returns have already been filed till 24th of December, 2020. Have you filed yours yet? If not, please do it TODAY! File your Return of Income Tax & ...Relax!" the department tweeted. This includes 2.27 crore taxpayers filing ITR-1, 85.20 lakh filing ITR-4, 46.78 lakh ITR-3 and 28.74 lakh ITR-2.

SJVN projects: State-owned power producer SJVN Ltd has been awarded three hydroelectric power projects totalling 501 megawatts (MW) by the Himachal Pradesh government. The three projects are to be developed in the Chenab river basin in Himachal Pradesh, SJVN said in a statement. "The Cabinet meeting chaired by Himachal Pradesh chief minister Jai Ram Thakur has allocated 104 MW Tandi, 130 MW Rasil and 267 MW Sach Khas Hydro Electric Projects on the Chenab Basin to SJVN," the company said.

Maruti Super Carry: Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) on Friday said its light commercial vehicle Super Carry has completed four years in the domestic market with sale of over 70,000 units. The auto major had forayed into the commercial vehicle segment in 2016 with Super Carry. The mini truck has empowered more than 70,000 owners with customised experiences in line with their versatile business needs, MSI said.

Avas Financiers: Avas Financiers Ltd on Friday said its board of directors has approved raising Rs 100 crore by issuing bonds on a private placement basis. The executive committee of the board at its meeting held on Friday approved the issuance of rated, listed, senior, secured, redeemable, non-convertible debentures aggregating to Rs 100 crore, the company said. The bonds will be issued on a private placement basis, it added.

Govt should pursue FTAs with EU and UK: Experts

Indian goods would not get much benefit from EU-UK post-Brexit trade pact, they say

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 25 DECEMBER

With European Union and the UK clinching a post-Brexit trade pact, India should now aggressively pursue free trade agreements (FTAs) separately with both the regions, according to experts.

Although it is premature to assess the gains for India from the agreement between European Union (EU) and the UK, Indian goods would not get much benefit from this pact, they said.

However, India can explore opportunities in service sectors like IT, architecture, research and development and engineering in both the markets as the EU-UK pact does not cover services, they added.

"There is not much gain for Indian goods, but we can gain in services sector in both the UK and EU markets. We will gain more in the UK market as we are English speaking country," Federation of

STRATEGY SHIFT

► "Now we should push the FTA negotiations with both the EU and the UK. Indian competitors like Vietnam have greater duty advan-

tage in sectors like apparel and marine goods," Federation of Indian Export Organisations (Fieo) director-general Ajay

Sahai said.

► Biswajit Dhar, a professor of economics at Jawaharlal Nehru University, said India had a lot of contentious issues while negotiating FTA with the EU. However, after Brexit, the UK could have different stand on those issues and now "India should pursue FTA talks again with both the regions".

Indian Export Organisations (Fieo) director-general Ajay Sahai said.

He said there are no specific customs duty benefits for domestic goods from this agreement.

"Now we should push the FTA negotiations with both the EU and the UK. Indian competitors like Vietnam have greater duty advantage in sectors like apparel and marine

goods," Sahai said.

Sharing similar views, Biswajit Dhar, a professor of economics at Jawaharlal Nehru University, said India had a lot of contentious issues while negotiating FTA with the EU.

However, after Brexit, the UK could have different stand on those issues and now "India should pursue FTA talks again with both the regions".

He added that there is a possibility of doing a favourable free trade pact with the UK.

Fieo president Sharad Kumar Saraf said that India should now "aggressively" move on starting negotiations for FTA with both the EU and UK.

"We have requested the government to sign an MoU (memorandum of under-

standing) regarding a deadline to conclude FTA talks with Britain during the visit of UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson next month in India," Saraf said.

Rakesh Mohan Joshi, pro-

fessor at Indian Institute of Foreign Trade (IIFT), said that after the trade deal with the EU and the UK, India will get a better opportunity to cater to the demands of both the markets.

"But India needs to plan accordingly," he added.

Apparel Export Promotion Council (AEP) chairman A. Sakthivel said India-UK FTA would help in removing the customs duty disadvantages faced by domestic players in Britain.

Britain clinched a historic deal with the European Union on Thursday as both sides managed to thrash out a post-Brexit free trade agreement just days before the 31 December deadline.

The bilateral trade between India and the UK dipped to \$15.5 billion in financial year 2019-20 from \$16.9 billion in financial year 2018-19.

RIL to buy out IMG Worldwide from sports management JV

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 25 DECEMBER

The company has entered into definitive agreements to acquire the shares held by IMG Singapore Pte Ltd in IMG-R, for a cash consideration not exceeding Rs 52.08 crore," the filing said.

IMG Singapore Pte Ltd, a wholly-owned subsidiary of IMG, holds 50 per cent of the share capital of IMG-R.

"Post completion of acquisition, IMG-R will become a wholly-owned subsidiary of the company and will be rebranded by the company," RIL said.

RIL will rebrand the company after the closure of the deal.

RIL had formed an equal

joint venture with IMG Worldwide, an international sports marketing and management company, in 2010 to develop, market and manage sports and entertainment in India.

IMG is a global leader in sports, fashion, events and media, operating in more than 30 countries, and is a part of the Endeavor network.

IMG-R is engaged in the business of creation, management and commercialisation of sporting, fashion and entertainment events in India.

Shares of Reliance Industries Limited on Thursday closed 2.58 per cent higher at Rs 1,993.90 on the Bombay Stock Exchange.

IKEA India FY19-20 loss widens to ₹720 crore

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 25 DECEMBER

Furniture retailer IKEA India saw its net loss widen to Rs 720.1 crore in the financial year ended March 2020, according to regulatory documents.

The company had registered a loss of Rs 685.4 crore in the financial year ended March 2019, according to Registrar of Companies filing shared by market intelligence firm Tofler. However, IKEA India saw its net sales grow 64.68 per cent to Rs 566 crore in FY 2019-20 from Rs 343.7 crore in the previous fiscal.

Its total revenue during 2019-20 fiscal was at Rs 665.6 crore, up 63.18 per cent, as against Rs 407.9 crore in the previous financial year. IKEA India, which has opened its second retail store

this month in Mumbai, saw its revenue from "other income" in FY20 at Rs 99.6 crore as against Rs 64.2 crore in FY19. When contacted, IKEA said India is an important market for the company and it is investing to offer customers an omnichannel experience.

"India is an important market for IKEA. We are here in India for the long term. We are in the initial years of operations in the country where we are investing in our priority markets to offer customers an omnichannel experience," said IKEA India CFO Preeti Dhupar. IKEA India had opened its first retail store in Hyderabad in August 2018, followed by online stores in Mumbai, Hyderabad and Pune," it said.

Besides its new flagship

store in Navi Mumbai, IKEA also has plans to set up two city centre stores in Mumbai to cater the demand from the city. "We are focussed on reaching the many people in our key markets with products and solutions that are affordable, sustainable, follow the best quality standards and relevant to their life at home," she said. IKEA is also investing in the online system and has the ambition to reach 100 million Indian customers by 2022 through its omnichannel approach.

The company continues to focus on opportunities to grow the business in existing channels and through opening new channels and units; focussing on the cities of Hyderabad, Mumbai, Pune, Bengaluru and Delhi NCR," it said.

Skill ministry and Tata launch first batch of Indian Institute of Skills, Mumbai

PTI
MUMBAI, 25 DECEMBER

The first batch of trainings at the Tata-Indian Institute of Skills, Mumbai was launched on Friday to provide an impetus to Skill India programme through private sector participation.

The institute is a joint initiative between the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE), Government of India and Tata-Indian Institute of Skills (Tata-IIS). "The primary goal behind setting up the institute is to create industry-ready workforce as per the evolving demands of the national and global markets," an official statement said.

The institute plans to provide trainings in highly specialised areas such as defense,

oil and gas, aerospace, and other emerging businesses to meet industry demands," it added.

A formal agreement for setting up the institute has been signed between MSDE and Tata-IIS on November 11, 2020. The first batch at Tata-Indian Institute of Skills will commence training with two courses in Factory Automation, with duration ranging from 1 to 4 weeks, depending upon the pre-qualification profile of the trainee. The institute will also offer scholarships to the first 100 students along with attractive fee options during this initial launch phase.

An early bird scholarship scheme of 75 per cent has also been announced for the first 100 students/trainees, an official statement said.

Speaking at the virtual launch event, Mahendra Nath Pandey

Minister of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship said, "With an aim to provide high-quality technical and vocational learning across various sectors, the foundation for state-of-the-art infrastructure was laid last year and today with the launch of its first set of courses at IIS Mumbai, I can proudly say that we are inching closer to achieve the vision of our Prime Minister Narendra Modi of making India the 'Skill Capital of the World'."

He observed that following the footsteps of other prominent centres of education in the country, IIS Mumbai will be instrumental in imparting world-class training to help build a future ready workforce.

"I extend my gratitude towards the Government of Maharashtra and Tata Group for

extending support towards Skill India Mission and I am hopeful that this collaboration will transform the state's youth from job seekers to job creators," Pandey said.

The institute envisages partnerships with multiple private organisations who are leaders in their respective fields, two of which are currently in place, with FESTO, a global leader in industrial automation and SMC Corporation, Japan, world's largest manufacturer of pneumatic components, for trainings.

The two courses launched on Friday will focus on Factory Automation, envisaged to be the foundation for future courses and Smart Manufacturing (Industry 4.0) technology and applications, to prepare youth for emerging job roles of the next five years and beyond.

Manufacturing firms' sales fall 4.3% in Q2

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI, 25 DECEMBER

► Demand conditions in the manufacturing sector returned to the recovery mode with a softer contraction of 4.3 per cent (Y-o-Y) in the second quarter of this fiscal in terms of nominal sales after shrinking 41.1 per cent in the previous quarter.

► The recovery was led by iron and steel, food products, cement, automobile and pharmaceuticals com-

panies, showed the data on the performance of the private corporate sector during the second quar-

ter of financial year 2020-21.

► Manufacturing companies reported sales of Rs 5,99,479 crore in the second quarter, compared to Rs 3,97,233 crore in April-June period of fiscal 2020-21.

from abridged quarterly financial results of 2,637 listed non-government non-financial (NGNF) companies, the RBI said.

Nominal sales of non-IT services sector also registered lower contraction of 14.5 per cent (Y-o-Y) led by expansion in sales of telecommunication and real estate companies.

Sales growth of IT sector companies remained steady at 3.6 per cent (Y-o-Y) in Q2 FY 2020-21. As per the data, sales of non-IT firms and IT firms during the second quarter stood at Rs 80,842 crore and Rs 1,01,353 crore, respectively.

"Operating profits of manufacturing companies increased on the back of savings in expenditure; operating profits of services (both IT and non-IT) companies also increased in Q2:2020-21," the RBI said in a statement.

On expenditure, it said input cost pressure from raw materials remained subdued for manufacturing sector in the July-September quarter of

the fiscal.

Meanwhile, staff cost growth (Y-o-Y) decelerated for IT companies in the second quarter, whereas it remained in contraction zone for the manufacturing and non-IT services sectors.

As per the data, with rise in profits, interest coverage ratio (ICR) of manufacturing companies improved to 4.6 in the second quarter of 2020-21 from 2.4 in the previous three-month period.

The ICR of non-IT services companies remained below one.

Also, profit margins improved across manufacturing and services companies on account of rise in profit from cost saving.

The coverage of companies in different quarters varies, depending on the date of declaration of results. This is, however, not expected to significantly alter the aggregate position, the RBI said.

CAIT urges Nirmala to defer select GST rule

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 25 DECEMBER

Traders' body CAIT today urged finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman to defer the implementation of Rule 86B in GST, whereby businesses with over Rs 50 lakh monthly turnover will have to pay at least 1 per cent of their GST liability in cash, terming it a "counter productive" measure that will increase the traders' compliance burden.

The Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs has introduced Rule 86B in GST which restricts use of input tax credit for discharging GST liability to 99 per cent.

However, this restriction will not apply where the managing director or any partner has paid more than Rs 1 lakh as income tax or the registered person has received a refund amount of over Rs 1 lakh in the

preceding financial year on account of unutilised input tax credit.

The Confederation of All India Traders in a letter to Sitharaman has drawn her attention towards Section 86B, saying that "it is a counter-productive step which will load the traders further with burden of compliance and also much financial obligation".

The traders' body stated that it has "urged Sitharaman to defer implementation of Rule 86B immediately which is scheduled to be implemented from 1 January 2021 and also extend the last date for filing GST and income tax audit return from 31 December to 31 March 2021".

CAIT secretary general Praveen Khandelwal said that in light of the current scenario, it is "strongly urged that the implementation of Rule 86B may be deferred".

Real estate sector sinks deeper into crisis this year

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 25 DECEMBER

India's real estate industry has been trying to get back on its feet ever since the 2016 note ban laid the sector low but 2020 was hardly the year to stand tall. With the pandemic devastating demand in the economy, the industry is now looking to the New Year with the hope of a sharp recovery in

Stable property prices, low home loan interest rates, discounts and freebies offered by developers and lower stamp duty rates offered by some states are what the industry hopes will aid in the recovery after housing sales and office space leasing sunk by 40-50 per cent this year.

Region (MMR), Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Pune, Chennai and Kolkata. Stamp duty cut by the Maharashtra government provided a big relief to builders and buyers alike, and was instrumental in reviving demand in Mumbai and Pune. Many developers absorbed the balance stamp duty to boost their sales. The pandemic reinforced the importance of home ownership in a world enamoured with the concept of shared economy.

On the performance in 2020, realtors' apex body Credai's chairman Jayash Shah said the realty sector in the last few years has "borne the repercussions of fiscal and non-fiscal reforms", be it demonetisation, introduction of GST or

Data compiled by property consultant Anarock showed that housing sales fell 47 per cent year-on-year to 1.38 lakh units in 2020 across top



I believe it will be the basis of a happy and successful and stable partnership with our friends in the EU for years to come

UK PRIME MINISTER BORIS JOHNSON

HAILING THE BREXIT TRADE DEAL IN HIS CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

WEATHER

CITY	MAX(°C)	MIN(°C)
SINGAPORE	31	25 H
HONG KONG	20	16 H
TOKYO	13	5 CL
LONDON	5	1 S
DUBAI	24	17 H
SAN FRANCISCO	13	9 H
NEW YORK	15	-1 R
MOSCOW	-1	-5 H

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

THUMBNAILS



A lighted Christmas tree is seen at Piazza Venezia in Rome, Italy. AP

Ivry Gitlis dies at 98: Ivry Gitlis, an acclaimed violinist who played with famed conductors, rock stars and jazz bands around the world and worked to make classical music accessible to the masses, has died in Paris at 98. Among his many worldwide appearances, Gitlis was the first Israeli musician to perform in Soviet Russia, in 1963, according to Le Monde. AP

Urdu poet Faruqi passes away: Legendary Urdu poet and critic Shamsur Rahman Faruqi passed away on Friday at his Allahabad home, a month after recovering from Covid-19. He was 85. The Padma Shri poet was discharged from a hospital in Delhi on November 23 after recovering from coronavirus. PTI

Bus crash in Russia kills 4: An intercity bus veered off a road in western Russia, killing four people and injuring another 11, authorities said Friday. The bus veered into a ditch and overturned. AP

Court affirms ruling dismissing Trump challenge in Wisconsin

MADISON, 25 DECEMBER

A federal appeals court on Thursday upheld a decision dismissing a lawsuit seeking to declare President Donald Trump won state Wisconsin.

Democrat Joe Biden defeated Trump by 0.6 points in Wisconsin in the November 3 election, a key victory that helped propel Biden to the White House.

Trump filed the lawsuit in the Eastern District of Wisconsin on December 2 against the state elections commission, arguing the court should order the state's Republican-controlled Legislature to declare he had won the state. U.S. District Judge Brett Ludwig, a Trump appointee, refused, ruling on December 12 that Trump's arguments fail as a matter of law and fact.

He said that ruling in Trump's favour would amount to the "most remarkable ruling in the history of this court" or the federal judiciary. Trump then turned to the 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. A three-judge panel from that court affirmed Ludwig's decision late Thursday, finding that Trump should have challenged the state's election laws before the election. All three judges were appointed by Republican presidents. One of them, Michael Scudder, was appointed by Trump. Allowing the President to raise his arguments, at this late date, after Wisconsin has tallied the votes and certified the election outcome, would impose unquestionable harm on the defendants, and the State's voters, Scudder wrote.

Trump and his allies have suffered dozens of defeats in Wisconsin and across the country in lawsuits. AP

Merry Christmask: Churches shut, borders complicated

Churches in Beijing abruptly cancel Mass ■ No gathering in St. Peter's Square due to lockdown

ASSOCIATED PRESS

ROME, 25 DECEMBER

Curfews, quarantines and even border closings complicated Christmas celebrations Friday for countless people around the globe, but ingenuity, determination and imagination helped keep the day special for many.

In Beijing, official churches abruptly cancelled Mass on Christmas Day in a last-minute move, after China's capital was put on high alert following the confirmation of two confirmed Covid-19 cases last week, and two new asymptomatic cases were reported on Friday. One of several notices was posted at Beijing's St. Josephs' Church, which was built originally by Jesuit missionaries in the 17th century.

Border crossing closures kept thousands of migrants from economically devastated Venezuela who live in Colombia from going home for Christmas. Colombia's government shut down the crossings in a bid to slow down the spread of Covid-19 infections. Those trying to return home for the holidays this year had to turn to smugglers. Yakelin Tamaure, a nurse who left Venezuela two years ago, won't be going home and said there will be no gifts or new clothes for her two children, aged 10 and 15. Tamaure said that she hasn't been able to find work as a nurse because she still doesn't have a Colombia residence permit. Her parents are still in Venezuela.

"My mother broke her foot and can't walk properly so I'm worried about her," said Tamaure. "I try to send her money, but it's not the same as being there."

Others successfully crossed borders elsewhere, only to find themselves in quarantine. For their first Christmas since getting married in March, Nattasuda Anusonadisai and Patrick Kaplin are cooped up in quarantine in a Bangkok



A Sri Lankan Christian girl arrives at a church to attend the Christmas mass in Colombo, Sri Lanka on Friday. AP

hotel room. It wasn't great fun but they did make sure to get a Christmas tree.

They returned earlier this month from a 4 1/2-month trip to Canada and the United States, making a 32-hour journey from Montreal via Doha. One condition of entering Thailand is a 14-day quarantine upon arrival. Thai citizens can stay at state facilities for free but foreigners like Kaplin, from Canada, must pay to stay at an approved hotel, the option the couple took so they could stay together.

"The hotel was surprised that we ordered a full-sized Christmas tree but didn't give us too much trouble to bring it in," said Anusonadisai. But they hadn't ordered enough ornaments, so they put items collected on their travels, like an eagle feather, and, of course, masks.

"We will continue this tradition now, since it's nice to see so many personal memories on the tree," Kaplan said.

Churches in South Korea have ignited clusters of coronavirus infections in densely populated Seoul, along with hospitals, nursing homes, restaurants and prisons. The 1,241 new daily cases reported by the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency on Friday was a record for the country.

Song Ju-hyeon, a resident in Paju, near Seoul, who is expecting a child in February, said home is the only place she feels safe now. "It doesn't feel like Christmas anyway, there's no carols being played on the streets," she said.

It's Christmask," the Daily Nation newspaper declared in Kenya, where a second surge in cases has eased and a brief doctors' strike ended on Christmas Eve. Celebrations were muted in East Africa's commercial hub as overnight church vigils could not be held because of a curfew.

Fewer people also reportedly headed home to see families, which could help limit the spread of the virus to rural communities, which are even less equipped to handle Covid-19 than cities.

In Rome, partial lockdown measures were keeping the faithful from gathering in St. Peter's Square, where in past years tens of thousands would receive a papal blessing and hear the pope's traditional Christmas Day message. But they wouldn't have been able to see Pope Francis anyway this year. In response to a virus resurgence in Italy, the pontiff wasn't appearing on the central balcony of St. Peter's Basilica this Christmas but opted to deliver his annual address on world issues from inside the Apostolic Palace.

TONED-DOWN CHRISTMAS



Christmas Eve concert held in Paris' fire-wrecked Notre Dame: Wearing hard hats and protective suits, members of the choir of Notre Dame Cathedral sang inside the medieval Paris landmark for the first time since last year's devastating fire for a special Christmas Eve concert.

Accompanied by an acclaimed cellist and a rented organ, the singers performed beneath the cathedral's stained-glass windows amid the darkened church, which is transitioning from being a precarious hazardous clean-up operation to becoming a massive reconstruction site. The choir initially planned to bring in 20 singers but for safety reasons they were limited to eight. The choir members stood socially distanced to be able to take off their masks which is required indoors in France to stem the spread of the virus and sing. The concert including Silent Night in English and French, The Hymn of the Angels, and even Jingle Bells was recorded earlier this month and broadcast just before midnight Thursday. The public was not allowed and isn't expected to see the insides of Notre Dame until at least 2024.

California deaths spur pleas to stay home for Christmas: California's deadly Christmas was marked by pleas to stay away from holiday gatherings outside the home and indoor church services in what could be a make-or-break effort to curb a coronavirus surge that already has filled some hospitals well beyond normal capacity. Festive gatherings with friends and family might be tempting after a year that has seen the pandemic take at least 23,635 lives and ravage the economy as much of the state remained under a stay-at-home order that has closed nonessential businesses. But officials repeated warning that Thanksgiving gatherings where people didn't wear masks or observe social distancing have resulted in a surge and begged people to forego Yule and New Year's festivities.

Elsewhere, Christmas was a difficult time. Thousands of drivers were stranded in their trucks at the English port of Dover, lacking the coronavirus tests that France was now demanding. The elderly, meanwhile, struggled with the virus travel restrictions that

kept them from visiting family or friends for the holidays.

"The solitude gets to me these days. I often feel depressed," said Alvaro Puig, an 81-year-old in Spain who spent Christmas Eve eating dinner alone with his pet rabbit.

GOP blocks \$2,000 cheques as Covid aid in chaos

ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON, 25 DECEMBER



US President Donald Trump's sudden demand for \$2,000 checks for most Americans was swiftly rejected by House Republicans as his haphazard actions have thrown a massive Covid relief and government funding bill into chaos.

The rare Christmas Eve session of the House lasted just minutes, with help for millions of Americans awaiting Trump's signature on the bill. Unemployment benefits, eviction protections and other emergency aid, including smaller \$600 checks, are at risk. Trump's refusal of the \$900 billion package, which is linked to \$1.4 trillion government funds bill, could spark a federal shutdown at midnight Monday.

We're not going to let the government shut down, nor are we going to let the American people down, said Rep. Steny Hoyer, the majority leader.

The optics appear terrible for Republicans, and the out-

lican leaders have been left almost speechless by Trump's year-end scorching of their work.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy helped negotiate the year-end deal, a prized bipartisan compromise, that won sweeping approval this week in the House and Senate after the White House assured GOP leaders that Trump supported it.

Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin boasted that the \$600 checks all sides had agreed to for Americans would be in the mail in a week.

Instead, Washington is now hurtling toward a crisis with Covid aid about to collapse, as the president is at his Mar-a-Lago club. He has been lashing out at GOP leaders for refusing to join his efforts to overturn the election that Joe Biden won when the Electoral College votes are tallied in Congress on January 6.

"The best way out of this is for the president to sign the bill," Republican Sen. Roy Blunt said.

The congressional Repub-

licans leaders have been left almost speechless by Trump's year-end scorching of their work.

Senate Majority Leader

Mitch McConnell and House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy helped negotiate the year-end deal, a prized bipartisan compromise, that won sweeping approval this week in the House and Senate after the White House assured GOP leaders that Trump supported it.

Democrats will recall House lawmakers to Washington for a vote Monday on Trump's proposal, with a roll call that would put all members on record as supporting or rejecting the \$2,000 checks. They are also considering a Monday vote on a stop-gap measure to at least avert a federal shutdown. It would keep the government running until Biden is inaugurated on January 20. Lawmakers will also be asked to override Trump's veto of a must-pass defense bill.

After presiding over the short House session, an exasperated Republican Debbie Dingell decried the possibility that the Covid assistance may collapse.

It is Christmas Eve, but it is not a silent night. All is not calm. For too many, nothing is bright," she said on Capitol Hill.

More than 870 of the 1,241 new cases were from the greater capital area, home to half of the country's 51 million population, where nearly 300 infections so far have been linked to a huge prison in Seoul.

The 1,241 new cases confirmed by the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency on Friday brought the country's caseload to 54,770.

Seventeen Covid-19 patients died in the past 24 hours, bringing the death toll to 773.

More than 870 of the new cases were from the greater capital area, home to half of the country's 51 million population, where nearly 300 infections so far have been linked to a huge prison in Seoul.

term care facilities, churches, restaurants and army units.

The country has been expanding its mass testing program to slow the rate of transmissions and more than 118,000 tests were conducted on Thursday alone.

Officials are also clamping down on private gatherings through Jan. 3, shutting down national parks and ski resorts and setting fines for restaurants if they receive groups of five people or more.

The agency said because of travel restrictions in place since March, air travel to the US from the UK is already down by 90%.

Last weekend, Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson said the new variant of the coronavirus seemed to spread more easily than earlier ones and was moving rapidly through England. But Johnson stressed "there's no evidence to suggest it is more lethal or causes more severe illness," or that vaccines will be less effective against it.

This week, New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo said three airlines with flights from London to New York, British Airways, Delta and Virgin Atlantic, had agreed to require passengers to take a Covid-19 test before getting on the plane.

United Airlines on Thursday agreed to do the same for its flights to Newark, New Jersey. Britain has been under considerable pressure since the word of the new variant of the virus was made public.

S Korea reports record surge, ramps up testing

ASSOCIATED PRESS

SEOUL, 25 DECEMBER

of its promised capacity of 2 billion doses.

For those countries that have not yet secured a vaccine, China may be the only solution.

China has six candidates in the last stage of trials and is one of the few nations that can manufacture vaccine on a large scale.

Government officials have announced a capacity of 1 billion doses next year, with President Xi Jinping vowing China's vaccines will be a boon to the world.

The potential use of its vaccine by millions of people in other countries gives China an opportunity both to repair the damage to its reputation from an outbreak that escaped its borders and to show the world it can be a major scientific player.

Yet past scandals have damaged its own citizens' trust in its vaccines, with manufacturing and supply chain problems casting doubt on whether it can really be a saviour.

A question mark remains over how China can ensure the delivery of reliable vaccines, said Joy Zhang, a professor who studies the ethics of emerging science at the University of Kent in Britain. She cited China's non-transparency over scientific data and a

troubled history with vaccine delivery. Bahrain last week became the second country to approve a Chinese Covid-19 vaccine, joining the United Arab Emirates.

Morocco plans to use Chinese vaccines in a mass immunization campaign slated to start this month.

Chinese vaccines are also awaiting approval in Turkey, Indonesia and Brazil, while testing continues in more

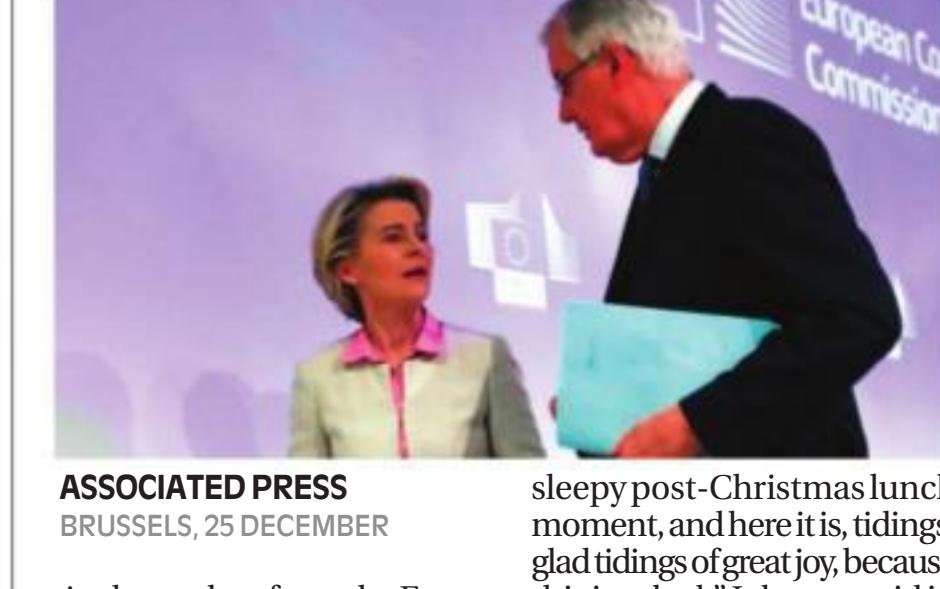
than a dozen countries, including Russia, Egypt and Mexico.

In some countries, Chinese vaccines are viewed with suspicion. Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro has repeatedly shown doubt about the effectiveness of Chinese company Sinovac's vaccine candidate without citing any evidence, and said Brazilians won't be used as guinea pigs. Many experts praise China's vaccine capabilities.

The studies look to be well done," said Jamie Triccas, head of immunology and infectious diseases at the University of Sydney's medical school, referring to clinical trial results published in scientific journals.

I wouldn't be overly concerned about that. China has been building up its immunization programs for more than a decade. It has pro-

EU nations start assessing post-Brexit trade deal with UK



ASSOCIATED PRESS

BRUSSELS, 25 DECEMBER

Ambassadors from the European Union's 27 nations convened on Christmas Day to start assessing the free trade deal the bloc has struck with former member Britain, a historic accord that takes effect in just a week.

At Friday's exceptional meeting, the EU delegations asked for more time to study the texts before sending them to lawmakers at the European Parliament, according to an EU diplomat. The ambassadors are expected to meet again on Monday.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson hailed Thursday's agreement as a new beginning for the UK in its relationship with its European neighbors. In a Christmas message, Johnson sought to sell the deal to a weary public after years of Brexit-related wrangling since the UK voted narrowly to leave the EU in 2016. Although the UK formally left the bloc on 31 January, it remains in a transition period tied to EU rules until at least 2024.

The principle is not business as usual. There will be a lot of changes starting next week, Barnier said on France 2 television Thursday night.

EU leaders voiced their sadness at the

Vaccines for everybody, especially for the most vulnerable and needy



MAKING A PLEA FOR AUTHORITIES TO MAKE VACCINES AVAILABLE TO ALL

The Statesman

11

NEW DELHI, SATURDAY 26 DECEMBER 2020

Court issues show-cause notice to Oli govt

Nepal's Supreme Court tasks govt to submit a written clarification over its decision to abruptly dissolve Parliament

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

KATHMANDU, 25 DECEMBER

Nepal's Supreme Court on Friday issued a show-cause notice to Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli-led government, asking it to submit a written clarification over its decision to abruptly dissolve Parliament.

The notice was issued after a preliminary hearing at the five-member Constitutional bench headed by Chief Justice Cholendra Shumsher Rana on the writ petitions filed against the government's decision to dissolve the 275-member House of Representatives, according to court officials.

The bench sought the written clarification from the Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Minister and Office of the President as they are made defendants in all the writ petitions, they said.

The court has also asked the government to submit an



original copy of the recommendations made by the government to dissolve the House and the decision made by President Bidya Devi Bhandari to authenticate the government's recommendations within 10 days.

Earlier, the apex court demanded an amicus curiae from Nepal Bar Association and Supreme Court Bar Association in connection with the

hearing.

An amicus curiae is a legal professional or expert who assists the court by offering information, expertise, or insight that has a bearing on the case.

Meanwhile, the Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda-led faction of the ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP) staged a protest rally in Kathmandu against the decision.

Prachanda' and Madhav Kumar Nepal, senior leaders Jhal Nath Khanal, spokesperson Narayan Kaji Shrestha along with the party's Central Committee members and members of the dissolved House gathered near the Prime Minister's Office for the protest.

We are here, Reinstate the House of Representatives, and dissolution of the House is unconstitutional, were the slogans raised by the protesters.

Around 300 Central Committee members of the NCP and nearly 100 members of the House were present in the protest rally.

After staging a sit-in, the crowd marched towards the Election Commission (EC) office.

The EC will decide which faction of the NCP is legitimate to carry the party name and election symbol.

We have the support of the majority of the Central committee members. Therefore, we are going to the com-

mission to prove and show that we are the legitimate faction, protesting leader Sunil Manahdar, who is also a Central Committee member of the NCP, said. He said that the party will launch the agitation against the Oli government in collaboration with other Opposition parties, including the Nepali Congress and Janata Samajwadi Party for the reinstatement of the House of Representatives.

Separately, Prime Minister Oli has called a Cabinet meeting on Friday evening, amid an intensified struggle between the two warring factions of the ruling Nepal Communist Party to wrest control of the party.

Oli is likely to reshuffle the Cabinet following the resignation of seven ministers close to the Prachanda-led faction, the paper said, citing a source familiar with the Prime Minister's Office.

The Oli-led Cabinet now has 18 members including ministers and ministers of state.

Meanwhile, Chinese

ambassador Hou Yanqi on Friday met Madhav Nepal, who has replaced Oli as chairman of the NCP's Prachanda-led faction.

Hou, who was concerned about the split in the ruling party, inquired about the future political course of the ruling party among other things, The Kathmandu Post quoted party's deputy chief of department of foreign affairs Bishnu Rijal as saying.

She had also met the Standing Committee member and former energy minister Basanta Man Pun on Thursday, the paper said.

Hou on Thursday met NCP's executive chairman Prachanda, who claims control over the ruling party after removing Prime Minister Oli from the posts of the party's parliamentary leader and chair. In a meeting of the Central Committee members close to him on Thursday, Oli announced the removal of Prachanda from the post of the party's Executive Chairman.

Earlier, the Prachanda-led faction of the ruling party elected him as the new parliamentary leader, replacing Prime Minister Oli.

Nepal plunged into a political crisis after President Bhandari dissolved the House of Representatives and announced dates for mid-term elections at the recommendation of Prime Minister Oli on Sunday, sparking protests from a section of the ruling party and various opposition parties, including Nepali Congress.

The ruling party has now been virtually divided more than two years after it was formed following the merger of CPN-UML led by 68-year-old Oli and CPN-Maoist Centred by 66-year-old Prachanda in May 2018.

Both factions of the party have intensified efforts to retain official party recognition along with the election symbol. The two factions are now busy making strategies to wrest control of the party.

Israeli jets fly over Beirut, explosions reported in Syria



BEIRUT, 25 DECEMBER

Israeli jets flew very low over parts of Lebanon early Friday, terrifying residents on Christmas Eve, some of whom reported seeing missiles in the skies over Beirut.

Minutes later, Syria's official news agency reported explosions in the central Syrian town of Masyaf. Other Syrian media said Syrian air defences responded to an Israeli attack near the town in the Hama province.

There was no immediate word on what the target was or whether there were any casualties.

Israeli jets regularly violate Lebanese airspace and have often struck inside Syria from Lebanese territory. But the Christmas Eve flights were louder than usual, frightening residents of Beirut who have endured multiple crises in the past year, including the catastrophic August 4 explosion at the city's port that killed over 200 people and destroyed parts of the capital. That explosion resulted from the detonation of a stockpile of ammonium nitrates that was improperly stored at the facility.

There was no immediate word from Israel on Friday's flights and alleged attacks on Syria.

In the past few years, Israel has acknowledged carrying out dozens of airstrikes in Syria, most of them aimed at suspected Iranian weapons shipments believed to be bound for Hezbollah. In recent months, Israeli officials have expressed concern that Hezbollah is trying to establish production facilities to make precision guided missiles.

Masyaf is a significant military area for Syrian President Bashar Assad's regime that includes a military academy and a scientific research center. Israel has struck targets there several times in the past.

Japan delays gender-equality goals in new five-year plan

ASSOCIATED PRESS

TOKYO, 25 DECEMBER

Japan on Friday adopted a plan that delays women's advancement goals by up to a decade after failing to reach even half of the 30% target by 2020 and other measures.

Under the new five-year gender equality plan, approved by Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga's Cabinet, the government has postponed the goal for women to account for at least 30% of leadership positions until as early as possible during the 2020s.

The earlier goal was set by Suga's predecessor, Shinzo Abe, under his womenomics' policy designed to promote more women in the workforce to make up for Japan's fast-aging population.

The plan called for a society with no gender bias by 2030s. But it said that Japan is still largely bound by traditional gender roles, making it difficult for women to pursue careers in business and politics while fulfilling expected responsibilities in homes and childrearing.

The plan backpedaled from a draft and fell short of promoting proactive steps, including a possible legal revision on family names, to allow married couples a right to choose whether to keep their maiden names. The current civil law says a married couple must choose either family name, most often causing women to adopt their husbands' household names under Japan's patriarchal tradition.

The government draft had called for taking necessary steps to address inconveniences and burdens on women. But the final plan,

reflecting conservative views of Suga's ruling lawmakers, said family name options should be carefully studied, taking into consideration Japanese tradition and possible impact on children and a sense of family unity.

Japan especially lags in women's advancement in politics. Women account for less than 10% of lawmakers in the more powerful of its two-chamber parliament. About 40% of local assemblies have no female members or only one. Suga's 20-member Cabinet has only two female ministers. While women's advancement is progressing faster in other countries, Japan has fallen behind.

Japan placed 121st in the global gender-equality ranking of 153 countries in the 2020 World Economic Forum report.

Ethiopia sets national election for mid-2021

KABUL, 25 DECEMBER

At least two Afghan army officers including a battalion commander were killed Friday when their vehicle was hit by a roadside bomb in the northern Balkh province, the military said.

Hanif Rezaie, a spokesman for the army in the country's north, said Capt. Mohammad Qasim Paikar and another officer were killed and two other soldiers were wounded in the explosion, which took place between Balkh and Char Bolak districts.

The attack was the latest amid relentless violence in Afghanistan even as Taliban and Afghan government negotiators hold talks in Qatar, trying to hammer out a peace deal that could put an end to decades of war.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for Friday's bombing. Rezaie blamed the Taliban, who are active in both districts and regularly launch attacks against Afghan security forces.

AP

SELFIE TIME



Visitors pose for a selfie outside the Wangfujing Church in Beijing on Friday.

Artists lead efforts to restore, preserve Gaza's old houses

ASSOCIATED PRESS

GAZA CITY, 25 DECEMBER

The grand, 500-year-old brick walls of the al-Kamala School slowly emerged from years of accumulated garbage as grassroots preservers began the long process of restoring it to its former glory.

Lack of public awareness and the economic considerations by owners are the greatest threats to these buildings, said Ahmed al-Astal, director of Iwan, the history and heritage institute of Gaza's Islamic University. These houses are our identity, but ignorance leads to their destruction.

Because the Gaza Strip is small, with 2 million people living in just 300 square kilometers (115 square miles), the experts and volunteers fear that structures of past centuries will disappear, like those from far more ancient civilisations.

Population growth, conflict with Israel and mismanagement by Hamas, the militant

group that has run Gaza since 2007, have contributed to the erasure of many signs of Gaza's five millennia of history. The territory has been enriched by its prime location along the route connecting ancient Egypt, the Levant and Mesopotamia.

For example, Hamas bulldozers destroyed large parts of a rare 4,500-year-old Bronze Age settlement to make way for a housing project.

windows with wood frames.

Once the renovation is completed, al-Ruzzi says the goal is to convert the building into a venue for cultural and artistic activities because such facilities are few in Gaza.

This is the only school that still maintains its architectural standing, it still has classrooms. It's clear that this school was used until a recent time in education and memorizing the Quran because it's in the old city, said Jamal Abu Rida, director of the archaeology department in Gaza's Tourism Ministry.

Residents of Gaza are preoccupied with financial woes, struggling with a 13-year-old Israeli-Egyptian blockade, and combatting a raging coronavirus outbreak that has overwhelmed the health system. Campaigns to protect heritage and archaeological sites are not top priorities, but are welcomed.

The initiatives are very important because their goal is to preserve the cultural legacy, said al-Astal.

A few blocks from the school, a different team is working on renovating a house, the Ghussein palace, named after the family that has owned it for 200 years.

The workers scraped the bricks to remove layers of dust that hid their features. Others took measurements for the door frames.

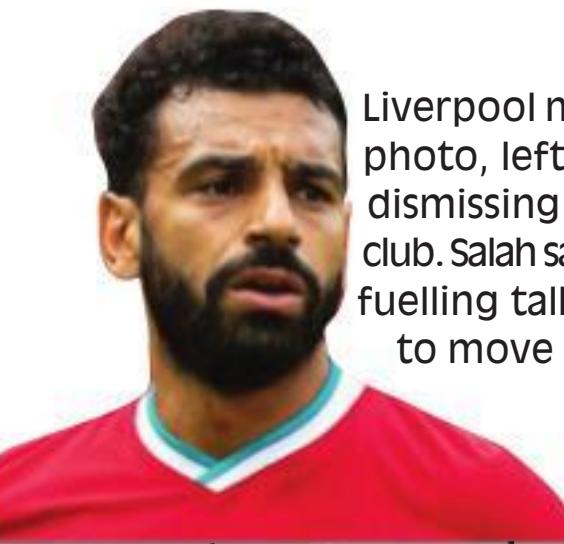
The work began on this home in August and is scheduled to be complete in January. It was left for a long time and has a lot of cracks and problems, said Nashwa Ramlawi, the architect leading the restoration. The place has a great heritage and cultural value. We will dedicate it for anything that serves the community; a cultural, service or social centre open to everyone."

In the old section of the



Mobaderoon is one of a handful of organisations seeking to preserve ancient sites in Gaza City. But their efforts are typically limited in scope and lack systematic plans. It took the team two weeks to remove the trash from the al-Kamala school, which is named after a Mamluk sultan. Each day, young men and women gather there, sweeping the dusty floor, brushing the bricks and supporting

Japan to go carbon free by 2050: Japan aims to eliminate gasoline-powered vehicles in about 15 years, the government said Friday in a plan to achieve Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga's ambitious pledge to go carbon free by 2050 and generate nearly \$2 trillion growth in green business and investment.



For more updates

www.thestatesman.com

THUMBNAILS

Test pitch: The pitch at the Melbourne Cricket Ground will suit India more because of its flat nature, says former Australia coach Darren Lehmann. The second Test between India and Australia will start on December 26 at the MCG, with the hosts ahead 1-0.

England confident: England are confident next month's tour of Sri Lanka will proceed as intended despite the new coronavirus variant identified in the UK. The new strain is said to be 70 per cent more transmissible, but the latest talks have been positive.

Board optimistic: A change of guard at the International Cricket Council has given the Indian cricket board confidence it will settle a 2021 Twenty20 World Cup-related tax exemption problem amicably, and provide an extension to the December 31 deadline.

County stint: Afghanistan spinner Mujeeb-ur-Rahman has joined Middlesex for the 2021 T20 Blast competition. He will be available for all of Middlesex's group matches in the competition and for the knockout stages of the competition should the club qualify.

Amir debate: Inzamam-ul-Haq believes the Mohammad Amir retirement controversy will have a negative impact on Pakistan cricket. Amir recently retired from international cricket owing to his differences with chief coach Misbah ul Haq and bowling coach Waqar Younis.

Ice hockey: In a "pioneering" venture, the Ice Hockey Association of India will hold a national tournament at the newly developed open-air rink against the stunning backdrop of the Himalayas in Himachal Pradesh's Spiti Valley, a cold desert, officials said on Friday.

Pochettino's return: Mauricio Pochettino is nearing a long-awaited return to management as Paris Saint-Germain attempt to finalise his appointment as Thomas Tuchel's successor. The German was reportedly relieved of his duties the night before Christmas Eve.

Rose released: Tottenham Hotspur's Danny Rose has been released from police custody under investigation after being arrested on suspicion of dangerous driving in the early hours of Wednesday morning. The Spurs left-back, 30, was arrested after an accident.

Realism urged: Manchester United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer has said talk of a Premier League title challenge by his side this season was just "noise" but insisted they were getting better. United's 2-0 victory at Everton was their 14th consecutive away win.

Patience requested: Captain Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang said the young players eager to establish themselves at struggling Arsenal must "be patient" in their wait for first team action. The Gunners have endured their worst start to a league campaign in a long time.

2 Manchester City players positive for COVID-19: Manchester City players Gabriel Jesus and Kyle Walker have tested positive for the coronavirus. The team said two staff members also tested positive and that all four are self-isolating in accordance with Premier League and government protocols. Gabriel Jesus has been slowed by injuries and has just four goals this season in all competitions. The Brazil forward scored 23 goals in 53 games last season.

HAPPY MAN

Liverpool manager Juergen Klopp has said Mohamed Salah (in photo, left) is in a "good moment" and is happy at Liverpool, dismissing media speculation the Egyptian wants to leave the club. Salah said last weekend he admired Real Madrid and Barcelona, fuelling talk in the British Press that the forward was looking to move on.

AGENCIES

MELBOURNE, 25 DECEMBER

Skipper Tim Paine today said India was a proud nation that wouldn't roll over in the Boxing Day Test, and Australia must be "bang on the mark" to inflict more misery after their Adelaide win.

Australia head into the second Test in Melbourne full of confidence after thumping the visitors by eight wickets inside three days last week, skittling them for an embarrassing 36 in the second innings.

But Paine said it would be a mistake to underestimate India despite the tourists missing superstar captain Virat Kohli, who has returned home for the birth of his first child.

They will almost certainly also be without pace spearhead Mohammad Shami, who has reportedly fractured his wrist although this has yet to be confirmed by the team.

"We can't pay any attention to mental scares or whatever anyone is talking about," Paine said of India, who were savaged at home for their Adelaide capitulation.



"I mean, India is a proud cricket country, they are an extremely talented Test match side with lots of dangerous players."

India will need to make at least two changes with Kohli and Shami out, but are widely tipped to make more after their first Test performance. In contrast, Australia are expected to name the same XI. Paine said Australia had studied everyone in the Indian squad and they were ready to face whoever took the field.

"We know that some of the

players they're talking about coming in to their side, like a KL Rahul or Rishabh Pant, are dangerous players who like to take the game on and will play positively," he said.

"If we give players like that an inch they will take a mile, so we need to be bang on the mark tomorrow as we were in Adelaide and be prepared to turn up for another five day battle." Both teams have been living in bio-secure bubbles to ensure the series goes ahead in the new coronavirus world and Paine

admitted it was easier to do so when you were winning.

This was another incentive for his team to again put India to the sword at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, where up to 30,000 fans will be allowed each day -- around one-third capacity. "We have been on overseas tours before when we have been bowled out for 50 and it can be really difficult, that's why it's so important for us to turn up tomorrow with the attitude that we turned up within the first Test," he said.

"We know they're not going to roll over, we're going to have to work our backsides off to get them in a position like we did in Adelaide."

"If we can do it again, then Tests three and four can become a real battle for them."

Gill, Siraj to play

Shubman Gill and Mohammad Siraj will be making their debuts in the second Test of the ongoing four-match series between Australia and India beginning Saturday at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

The Indian team on Friday

announced their playing XI for the Boxing Day Test, making a host of changes to the line-up which featured in Adelaide.

All-rounder Ravindra Jadeja comes into the side after clearing a fitness test on Thursday. Jadeja had injured his hamstring during the first T20I against Australia, minutes before he'd received a blow to the helmet from a Mitchell Starc delivery which led to a concussion. The team management had at that point recommended a three-week recovery period for the all-rounder.

Apologised to Virat after that run out: Rahane

Ajinkya Rahane on Friday said he had apologised to Virat Kohli after his horrible mix-up with him led to the India captain's game-changing run out in the first Test against Australia in Adelaide. Kohli was looking solid before the suicidal run out for 74 on the opening day at Adelaide Oval. Upon realising that there was no run in it, Rahane decided to send back Kohli but it was too late by then.

What followed was an inexplicable batting collapse, due to which the visitors crumbled to their lowest Test score of 36 wickets. Wicketkeeper Wriddhiman Saha, who returned with scores

of 9 and 4 in the first Test, has been replaced by Rishabh Pant.

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Stand-in skipper Rahane admitted that the run out handed Australia the momentum as they recorded an eight-wicket win inside two and half days.

"It was a really tough one, obviously we were going really well that moment, our partnership was good, and I could actually see that momentum going towards Australia after that run out," Rahane said.

Kohli, who has now returned to India for the birth of his first child, had backed Rahane to lead from the front in his absence in the remainder of the four-match series. "I have said this previously as well that I feel like this is (Rahane's) time to really step up and perform strongly as an individual and then as a captain as well," Kohli had said.

Rahane stresses bowling in partnerships

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

MELBOURNE, 25 DECEMBER

TEAM INDIA FOR 2ND TEST

AGAINST AUSTRALIA

1. Ajinkya Rahane (C)
2. Mayank Agarwal
3. Shubman Gill - DEBUT
4. Cheteshwar Pujara (VC)
5. Hanuma Vihari
6. Rishabh Pant (WK)
7. Ravindra Jadeja
8. Ravichandran Ashwin
9. Umesh Yadav
10. Jasprit Bumrah
11. Mohd Siraj - DEBUT



ing in partnerships for all of us. Having said that, we have discussed how we are going about it. Jasprit is quality bowler but it is about bowling in partnerships and to a plan," he added. India will also have a new opening pair in Mayank Agarwal and Shubman Gill. Prithvi Shaw, who paired with Agarwal at the top in the pink-ball Test, has been dropped from the second Test. Rahane said he wanted to give the freedom to the openers to play their natural game. He said he would also miss Virat Kohli, who had returned to India for the birth of his first baby.

Oz homework

Australia have done their homework on all the India players and are prepared to take on the newcomers in the second Test, said skipper Tim Paine. Australia are acutely aware of the danger posed by the likes of Rishabh Pant and KL Rahul, he said. Australia won the first Test by eight wickets after bowling India out for 36 in the second innings.

"We know some of the

players coming into their side, like KL Rahul and Rishabh Pant, are dangerous players and will play positively. If we give those guys an inch, they will take a mile. So we have to be bang on the mark as we were in Adelaide and be prepared to-

row for another five-day battle. We know we won the first Test well but it was only at stumps on day two we were in a serious fight to win that Test. So that is the attitude we are taking to this Test match," Paine told reporters today, adding: "Before the series we went through all of their players' strengths and weaknesses and identified some areas where we can attack their batsmen and bowlers. All of that stuff has been done pre-series. We just had a quick refresher yesterday before training on that. Again our focus on this Test match has been controlling what we can control and executing our skills. We have worked on who we think might play and what their side might look like and have a few plans and ideas around some of those new players, yeah we have got a little bit of time into some players that might come into their side," added Paine.

The Australians are also guarding against complacency, something that saw them lose the fifth and final Ashes Test against England in 2019 at the Oval and return home with a drawn series even though they had retained the Ashes before that.

The Aussies were leading 2-1 going into that final Test and looked good to seal the series 3-1 after bowling England out for under 300 in the first innings. But the English hit back to win and draw the series. Paine feels memories of that Test are still fresh in his mind.

The Indian players' transition from red ball to pink would have been smoother had the Test series against Australia started with red ball matches, says Sachin Tendulkar (*in photo*). If that had happened, India could have avoided the eight-wicket thrashing they suffered in the pink ball day-night first Test in Adelaide.

The former India captain feels the day-night Test has been played at the end of the four-match series, the Indians' transition from red ball to pink ball would have been smoother.

Tendulkar, 47, also said that after the Indian Premier League (IPL), which ended on November 10, ideally India should have played the three-match T20 series with Australia first, followed by the three-one-day International series, and then the four Tests, with the first three being day affairs with the red ball. "The first Test itself was a bit of apprehension, I felt, because the last Test we had played before the Adelaide Test was in February and after that no cricket was played [due to Covid-19 pandemic]. Everyone was preparing for the IPL, which was a T20 format," Tendulkar told IANS in an interview.

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