

THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI TUESDAY 8 DECEMBER 2020



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WINDOWS



A kite maker poses with a kite displaying Covid-19 prevention guidelines at a workshop ahead of Makarsankranti in Ahmedabad on Monday.

— AFP

Thick blanket of fog engulfs Delhi, visibility is 'zero'

New Delhi: A thick blanket of fog shrouded the national capital on Monday morning, leading to "zero" visibility in some areas and affecting traffic movement. This is the first time that visibility has dropped to "zero" in the city this winter season. Kuldeep Srivastava, the head of the regional forecasting centre of the India Meteorological Department (IMD), said the Palam weather station recorded "zero" visibility due to "very dense" fog at 6:30 am.

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Sushil Modi elected to RS unopposed

New Delhi: With the election of senior BJP leader and former deputy chief minister of Bihar Sushil Kumar Modi to the Rajya Sabha unopposed, the number of the party's MPs in the upper house from the state has risen to four.

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HC stays oil drilling at Assam reserve

Guwahati: The Gauhati high court on Monday stayed the Centre's permission to Oil India to drill seven wells inside Dibru-Saikhowa National Park, which is adjacent to Baghjan well blaze site. The stay order was issued by a division bench of Chief Justice (Acting) N. Kotiswar Singh and Justice Manish Chowdhury.

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COUNTERPOINT



No food today... in support of farmers' Bharat Bandh!

WEATHER

Max: 27°C
Min: 13°C
RH: 56%
Rain: 10%

Forecast: Sunny

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Dakshinayana
Tithi: Kartika Bahula Ashtami till 5.12 pm
Star: Pubba till 1.43 pm
Varjyam: 8.32 pm to 10.03 pm
Durmuhurtam: 8.50 am to 9.34 am; 10.49 pm to 11.41 pm
Rahukalam: 3 pm to 4.30 pm
SUNSET TODAY 5.24 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 7.02 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 12.55 PM
MOONSET TODAY 1.02 AM

■ **BKU:** Stir from 11 am to 3 pm ■ 'Shops, offices won't be forcibly shut'

Farmers' stir support grows, Delhi food supply may be hit

SANJAY KAW and BHASKAR HARI SHARMA
NEW DELHI, DEC. 7

With growing support from the trade unions and Opposition parties for Tuesday's "Bharat Bandh" call, some essential services, including supply of fruits, vegetables and milk, could get affected in Delhi, which is now the epicentre of the farmers' protests, and the rest of the country. The nationwide shutdown call is being observed by the farmers a day before their sixth round of talks with the Centre's representatives to mount pressure on the government to repeal the three controversial farm laws.

As the protesters have threatened to block the national highways and toll plazas during their strike,



Private bus workers raise slogans before leaving for Delhi to join the farmers' agitation in Amritsar on Monday.

— PTI

the Centre has directed all states and Union territories to tighten security and ensure peace and tranquillity. The home ministry, in a countrywide advisory, said the state governments and UT administrations must ensure that the

Covid-19 guidelines issued with regard to health and social distancing are strictly followed.

The Delhi police has also made adequate arrangements to ensure normal movement of people on Monday.

■ Turn to Page 4

Can't have old laws in new century: PM

Lucknow: Amid the row over laws meant to bring a major change in the agri-marketing sector, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday said that reforms are needed for development and some laws from the past century have become a burden now.

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Akhilesh detained after Lucknow stir

Lucknow: Police detained SP chief Akhilesh Yadav after party cadres led by him broke through a security cordon to sit on a dharna in Lucknow to oppose new farm bills.

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BJP hits back at Opp. over farm laws, lambasts Congress' 'double standards'

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 7

Insisting that a section of farmers have fallen in the grip of a few vested interests, the BJP on Monday said Opposition parties are supporting the protests by some farmers' groups against the recently passed legislations "to save their existence after being repeatedly rejected by people in different elections across the country."

The ruling party said Opposition parties jumping in to support the protest and the "Bharat Bandh" called by some farmers unions are "irresponsibly and unwarrantedly trying to give protests

Whether it is CAA or Shaheen Bagh or any reform, Opposition parties oppose the Modi government for the sake of Opposition forgetting their own work on the same issue in the past, exposing their 'double standards.'

— **Ravi Shankar Prasad**
Union minister

a wrong direction in order to serve their political interests."

The BJP asserted that



the reforms will benefit the small and marginal farmers, which are 86 per cent of the total farming community.

Pointing out that the earlier Congress-led UPA government, the then agriculture minister and NCP supremo Sharad Pawar and the Congress' Rahul Gandhi had supported

reforms in the APMC Act, senior BJP leader Ravi Shankar Prasad said whether it is CAA or Shaheen Bagh or any reform, Opposition parties oppose the Modi government for the sake of opposition forgetting their own work on the same issue in the past, exposing their "double standards."

Reading from the Congress' 2019 Lok Sabha poll manifesto and citing a meeting of Congress chief ministers called by Mr Gandhi in 2013, a policy document of the erstwhile Planning Commission and letters by the then agriculture minister Mr Pawar to chief ministers of all

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J&K seeks review of Roshni Act order

YUSUF JAMEEL
SRINAGAR, DEC. 7

In what seems like a bizarre move but may well be an afterthought to protect its own, the Jammu and Kashmir government has sought a review of the annulment of a 2001 controversial land act by the high court, asserting that a large number of people, including landless cultivators and those residing in modest dwellings, will suffer.

On October 9, the court had in its judgment termed the Jammu and Kashmir State Land (Vesting of Ownership to Occupants) Act, 2001, commonly known as 'Roshni Act',

► **ON OCTOBER 9**, the court had termed the Jammu and Kashmir State Land (Vesting of Ownership to Occupants) Act, 2001, commonly known as 'Roshni Act', which granted ownership of state land to occupants as "illegal, unconstitutional and unsustainable".

which granted ownership of state land to occupants as "illegal, unconstitutional and unsustainable". The court also ordered a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) investigation, asking that within one month identities of those who have derived

benefit under the Roshni Act, including ministers, legislators, bureaucrats, government officials, police officers and businessmen, their relatives or persons holding benami for them, be made public.

Following the order, the Union Territory government had on November 3 declared all mutations taken under Roshni Act as "null and void" and released the first list of beneficiaries of alleged illegal mutations. But the move stirred a political controversy as several Opposition leaders, including former chief minister Farooq Abdullah, were shown as land grabbers, a

charge they vehemently denied.

The BJP had described the Roshni Act as "land jihad" and the government's decision declaring it null and void as a "surgical strike".

However, subsequent lists revealed several serving and former bureaucrats, police officers as well as political activists and businessmen owing allegiance to the BJP or supporting outfits as alleged beneficiaries of the act.

And now Nazir Ahmad Thakur, special secretary with the J&K revenue department, has in the review petition on behalf of

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BJP worker dies in clash with cops at Siliguri rally

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, DEC. 7

A BJP worker died and several others were injured after the police allegedly lathi-charged and teargassed saffron party workers in the face of their violent attack at a rally to Uttar Kanya, the North Bengal secretariat of the state government, in Siliguri on Monday afternoon. Blaming the police for its worker's death, the BJP has called a 12-hour North Bengal bandh on Tuesday.

BJP leaders also complained to governor Jagdeep Dhankhar about police brutality. The deceased BJP worker, Ulen Roy, was a resident of Gajoldoba near Siliguri. Led by its president Tejaswi Surya, the BJYM had organised the Uttar Kanya Abhijan to protest misrule, anarchy and unemployment.

BJP general secretary Kailash Vijayvargiya and state chief Dilip Ghosh were at the rally, which went out of control as party workers broke the barricades and pelted stones at the police after defying prohibitory orders at around 2 pm. The police also retaliated swiftly. Lashing out at the police, Mr Ghosh alleged: "Roy suffered injuries on the head and chest in the lathi-charge. He succumbed to his injuries. A female worker of our party is also injured."

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Sportsmen try to return awards, stopped



Wrestler Kartar Singh, hockey player Rajbir Kaur, Olympics gold medalist hockey player Gurmail Singh and other sportspersons march towards Rashtrapati Bhavan to return their awards to President Ram Nath Kovind in protest against the new farm laws in New Delhi on Monday. The Delhi police stopped their march.

■ Report on Page 4

5 suspected terrorists held after shootout in East Delhi

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA
NEW DELHI, DEC. 7

The Special Cell of Delhi Police nabbed five suspected terrorists on Monday in east Delhi's Shakarpur area after an encounter. Police said that the suspects have revealed Pakistan spy agency Inter-Services Intelligence's attempt to link up terror outfits in Kashmir with Khalistan operatives and two of them are also allegedly involved in the murder of Shaurya Chakra winner Balwinder Singh in Punjab.

Police said that these sharpshooters recently killed Shaurya Chakra recipient Balwinder Singh Sandhu on the instructions of Sukh Bhikharwal, who is working for the ISI.

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China FM seeks 'reset' in US ties, says 'obstacles must be removed'

K.J.M. VARMA
BEIJING, DEC. 7

China on Monday called for a reset of its troubled ties with the US under the incoming administration of President-elect Joe Biden to rebuild mutual trust and end months of hostility between the world's two largest economies.

President Donald Trump's four-years in power is regarded as the worst phase in US-China relations as the ruling Communist Party of China (CPC) headed by President Xi Jinping struggled to deal with Washington under an unpredictable American leader.

"The top priority is that both sides should work together to remove all



Wang Yi

kinds of disruptions and obstacles, and achieve a smooth transition in China-US relations," Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi said during a video meeting with business leaders from the US-China Business Council.

"At the same time, based on the direction of mutual benefits for our two peoples and countries, we need to strive to restart dialogue, return to the

right track and rebuild trust in this next phase of relations, he was quoted as saying by the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post.

Mr Trump, a Republican, pushed aggressively on all aspects of US-China ties, including with his relentless trade war, challenging China's military hold on the disputed South China Sea, its constant threats to Taiwan and branding coronavirus as 'China virus' after it emerged from Wuhan in December last year.

The Trump administration also lobbied hard with allies against Chinese telecoms giant Huawei, sanctioning Chinese officials over human rights abuses in Muslim-majority Xinjiang.

— PTI

SHORT TAKES

3 MCD MAYORS
SIT ON DHARNA
OUTSIDE CM HOUSE

New Delhi: Three mayors of the BJP ruled municipal corporation, on Monday, staged a dharna (sit-in protest) at the chief minister's residence demanding release of outstanding fund dues to the civic bodies. Jai Prakash, Anamika Mithlesh, and Nirmal Jain—mayors of North, South, and East Delhi respectively—led the dharna along with senior party councillors demanding to release the outstanding fund of ₹13,000 crore to all the three municipal corporations. According to Mr Prakash, all the three mayors of Delhi sought time to meet chief minister Arvind Kejriwal regarding the release of corporations' outstanding dues of ₹13,000 crore. However, he did not meet the mayors. "After which we were forced to sit on the dharna outside the chief minister's residence to press our demands. Even before, all the three mayors tried hard to meet the chief minister but he did not meet them," said Mr Prakash. Mr Prakash alleged that the Delhi government is playing politics keeping in mind the upcoming civic polls.

53-yr-old killed in
accident at Janpath

New Delhi: A 53-year-old man was killed after his scooter was allegedly hit by a speeding Audi car in central Delhi's Janpath Road, police said on Monday. The deceased, identified as Vinod Kumar, a resident of Yusuf Sarai, was unemployed, they said. The incident took place at Janpath Road on Sunday night, police said, adding that on reaching the spot, both the car and the scooter were found lying at the spot. Kumar was taken to Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital by the car owner, Ankit Gupta, a senior police officer said. Later, Kumar was declared brought dead at the hospital, he said. A case was registered under section 279 (rash driving or riding on a public way) and 304 A (causing death by negligence) of the Indian Penal Code and the accused, was arrested but was released on bail later, he added. Gupta, 30, who is a Chartered Accountant student, was returning home in Vasant Vihar when the accident took place, police said, adding that the deceased was survived by his wife and a minor son.

Groom shot at during
wedding procession

New Delhi: A 27-year-old groom was shot at allegedly by unidentified men during his wedding procession in outer Delhi's Mundka area, police said on Monday. The groom, Raman, sustained gunshot injury and is out of danger, they said. The incident took place Sunday night near Hiran Kudna in outer Delhi, police said. The police were informed that the groom had sustained gunshot injury. Raman was taken to a hospital, a senior police officer said. During an inquiry, witnesses informed the police that a few unknown men came in a car and fired at the groom when he was sitting in the chariot and fled. When the relatives tried to catch the assailants, they hit a relative of the groom with their car and sped away, police said. A case under relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code has been registered and teams have been made to identify the accused, they added.

FIR lodged after
cow carcasses found

New Delhi: Police on Monday said it has registered a case against unknown people after cow carcasses were allegedly found disposed in a drain in Dwarka sector-23. The action was taken after police received information on Monday afternoon about cow carcass found disposed in a drain at a secluded spot in Dwarka sector-23, a senior police officer said. "We have registered a case under relevant sections against unknown persons and will take appropriate action as per further investigation," he said. Police suspects it to be a case of cow slaughter. West BJP MP Parvesh Sahib Singh also visited the spot, which falls under his constituency, and demanded strict action against culprits involved in the incident.

‘Suspects killed Shaurya Chakra recipient Sandhuon’

Five held after gunfight,
cops probing terror links

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA
NEW DELHI, DEC. 7

The special cell of the Delhi police has nabbed five suspected terrorists on Monday in Shakarpur area after an encounter. The police said that the suspects have revealed Pakistan spy agency Inter Service Intelligence's (ISI) attempt to link up terror outfits in Kashmir with Khalistan operatives and two of them are also allegedly involved in the murder of Shaurya Chakra winner Balwinder Singh in Punjab.

The terrorists have been identified as Gurjit Singh and Sukhdeep Singh, both sharpshooters of most wanted gangster Sukhmeet Pal Singh alias Sukh Bhikhariwal and residents of Punjab while others have been identified as Shabir Ahmad Gojree, Mohammad Ayub Pathan, and Riyaz Rather, residents of Jammu Kashmir.

The police said that these sharpshooters have recently killed Shaurya Chakra recipient Balwinder Singh Sandhuon on the instructions of Sukh Bhikhariwal, who is working at the behest of ISI.

The police said that with their arrest nexus of ISI-Pakistan, Pro-Khalistan radicals and Narco-terrorism has been exposed and a slew of targeted killings in Delhi have been averted.



5 suspected terrorists brought to PHQ by special cell after being arrested in a narco-terrorism case in New Delhi on Monday.

According to DCP (Special Cell) Pramod Singh Kushwaha, since January this year, special cell has been working on credible information that ISI is planning to execute targeted killings of right-wing leaders in Delhi and its neighbouring states and has activated their K2 (Kashmir-Khalistan) desk to execute the same.

"On December 7, specific inputs were received that Sukh Bhikhariwal had instructed his sharpshooters Gurjit and Sukhdeep to commit another targeted killing of a right-wing leader in Delhi on the instructions of ISI. Bhikhariwal had further tasked them to meet some person from Kashmir near Ramesh Park bus stand at Shakarpur in Delhi, having links with banned terrorist organisation Hizbul

Mujahiddin," said the DCP. "Acting on the inputs, a trap was laid and at about 6.45 am and two cars were spotted near the place of information. Sensing police presence, the suspects tried to flee by firing at the police team, following which the police team also fired in self-defence," said the DCP.

"In a swift and clinical operation, both the sharpshooters were nabbed along with three people from Kashmir. The two Kashmiri men were found in possession of a total of two kilogram of Heroin and ₹1 lakh in cash. Three sophisticated pistols of different make were recovered from the two sharpshooters. A total of 13 rounds were fired during the exchange of fire," said the DCP. "During preliminary

interrogation it was revealed that Gurjit and Sukhdeep were roped in by Sukh Bhikhariwal through jailed gangster Ravinder Singh lodged in Ferozepur Jail. The duo was provided with monetary support and were also given sophisticated weapons," said the DCP.

"In October this year, they were tasked to execute Shaurya Chakra recipient Balwinder Singh Sandhu. On October 16, Gurjit along with one other associate went to his residence cum school and killed him. Thereafter, they had been hiding at different hideouts arranged by Sukh Bhikhariwal. They were again being tasked to execute the targeted killing of an important person in Delhi. Before divulging more details, Sukh Bhikhariwal asked them to receive money from their associates based in Kashmir for arranging logistics," said the DCP.

"Other accused, Ayub Pathan was working as OGW of terrorist organisation Hizbul Mujahiddin. His cousin, Abdul Majeed Khan introduced him to Pakistan based operative code name "Sadakat," another senior operative of Hizbul Mujahiddin based in Rawalpindi, Pakistan. Sadakat is said to be handling channelling of funds through Narco-terrorism," said the DCP.

‘Dense’ fog lowers visibility
to ‘zero’ in parts of Delhi

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 7

A thick blanket of fog shrouded the national capital on Monday morning, leading to "zero" visibility in some areas and affecting traffic movement.

This is the first time that visibility has dropped to "zero" in the city this winter. Kuldeep Srivastava, the head of the regional forecasting centre of the India Meteorological Department (IMD), said the Palam weather station recorded "zero" visibility due to "very dense" fog at 6.30 am.

At the Safdarjung Observatory, which provides representative data for the city, "moderate" fog was recorded which lowered visibility to 300 metres, he said. The visibility should be around 800 metres at the airport for flights to take off, the senior scientist added.

Mr Srivastava said moisture-laden easterly winds and low wind speed led to "very dense" fog in parts

One killed, over dozen injured in
multi-vehicle pile ups due to fog

Noida, Dec. 7: One person was killed and over a dozen people injured in separate multi-vehicle pile ups due to fog on two expressways in Greater Noida on Monday, officials said.

Around 15 to 20 vehicles piled up in the crash on the Eastern Peripheral Expressway in the Dankaur in the morning, they said.

"A truck had overturned on the expressway after which 15 to 20 vehicles piled up. All damaged vehicles have been removed from the road and the injured people taken to hospital," a

police spokesperson said. "One of the travellers on a tempo died in the crash, while four others were injured," the spokesperson said.

In another accident, a bus rammed into a truck on the Yamuna Expressway after which five to seven other vehicles piled up, the official said.

"Seven to eight people were injured in the pile up and were sent for medical treatment," the spokesperson said. The accident took place on the Agra-Delhi carriageway of the expressway, he added. —PTI

BHARAT BANDH

Transport services,
essential supplies
may get affected

New Delhi, Dec. 7: Transport facilities and supplies of essentials like vegetables and fruits are likely to be affected in the city on Tuesday as various unions and associations of cab drivers and mandis traders have decided to join the "Bharat Bandh" strike called by farmers' unions demanding the repeal of Centre's three farm laws.

Some of the taxi and cab unions, including those associated with app-based aggregators, have decided to join the one-day strike.

The work at major wholesale vegetable and fruit markets is likely to be hampered with a section of traders favouring the farmers' demands.

"I have received calls from several traders' associations for strike on Tuesday. I believe the Mandis at Ghazipur, Okhla and Narela will also be closed due to "Bharat Bandh" called by farmers," Adil Khan, chairman of Azadapur Mandi, said. Mr Khan said he personally has appealed to people from all walks of life to support the farmers who feed the country.

Chairman of Ghazipur wholesale Mandi for veg-

SOME OF the taxi and cab unions, including those associated with app-based aggregators, have decided to join the one-day strike

etables, fruits and poultry and meat said many traders' association in the market have said they will join the strike.

Some auto and taxi unions in the city have also decided to join the "Bharat Bandh" on Tuesday. Kamaljeet Gill, president of Sarvodaya Driver Association of Delhi, comprising mainly drivers working with cab aggregators, said drivers will not run their cabs associated with Ola, Uber and other app-based aggregators on the day.

President of Delhi Taxi Tourist Transporters' Association Sanjay Samrat, in a statement, said several unions including Delhi state taxi cooperative society and Kaumi Ekta Welfare Association will join the strike. However, many other auto and taxi unions have decided to continue normal services despite their support to demands raised by the agitating farmers. —PTI

Rai: AAP to hold
demonstration
in support of
'Bandh' today

New Delhi, Dec. 7: The AAP will hold a peaceful demonstration in the national capital on Tuesday in support of the "Bharat Bandh" called by farmer unions protesting on Delhi's borders demanding the repeal of the Centre's new agri-marketing laws, said party leader and Delhi minister Gopal Rai.

The party has extended its support to the "Bharat Bandh" and Mr Rai appealed to all citizens to extend their support to it. "The AAP will hold a peaceful demonstration on December 8 in support of the Bharat Bandh called by the farmers at 11 am at the ITO crossing," Mr Rai was quoted as saying in a party statement.

He said, "Today the farmers are in distress. I want to appeal all the citizens of India to support their demands and extend their support to the Bharat Bandh called by the farmers tomorrow. I want to appeal all to join this bandh peacefully and stand in solidarity with the farmers of our country," Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal had said that all AAP workers will support the nationwide strike and appealed to all citizens to support the farmers. —PTI

Cops: Elaborate security
arrangements in place

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 7

The Delhi Police on Monday said elaborate security arrangements have been made in view of the "Bharat Bandh" called on December 8 by farmers protesting against the Centre's new farm laws, and warned that strict action will be taken against those trying to disrupt movement of people or "forcefully" shut shops.

The agitating farmers have called "Bharat bandh" on December 8 and threatened to intensify their agitation and block more roads leading to the national capital if the government did not accept their demands.

Eish Singhal, Delhi Police (PRO), said adequate arrangements have been made by the Delhi Police to ensure normal movement of people on roads during "Bharat Bandh" on Tuesday.

CM visits Singhu border, reviews arrangements

AGE CORRESPONDENT
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, DEC. 7

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Monday visited the Singhu border, where thousands of farmers are protesting against the Centre's new farm laws, and reviewed arrangements made for them by the city government.

The visit comes a day after the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) extended its support to the "Bharat Bandh" called by protest-

ing farmers on December 8. Mr Kejriwal was accompanied by his Cabinet ministers and some party MLAs during the brief visit to the protest venue on the Delhi-Haryana border.

"I checked the arrangements. We received a lot of pressure to allow the use of stadiums as temporary prisons but we did not give permission and I feel this helped the movement. Since then our party MLAs and ministers have been involved in ensuring that farmers do not face

THE VISIT comes a day after the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) extended its support to the "Bharat Bandh" called by protesting farmers on December 8.

any discomfort," he said. "We are working like 'sewadaar'. Here I have not come as a chief minister but as a 'sewadaar' to serve the farmers. It is our responsibility to support the farmers. I hope soon a solution is reached," he told reporters.

On the bandh called by farmers on Tuesday, the chief minister said, "AAP will participate in the nationwide strike. I hope the whole country joins it peacefully and I appeal to them to join and support the farmers."

"I have come to survey the arrangements. The toilets are clean. Water isn't reaching all points so a motor and a pipeline will be placed," he said.

"The farmers said they are happy with the arrangements. Our MLA Jarnail Singh spent the

night here in support of them. All our volunteers and party members are involved in serving the farmers," Mr Kejriwal added.

Thousands of farmers, mostly from Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, are protesting at various border points of Delhi against the new farm laws.

The Centre's offer to amend the contentious laws failed to cut ice with farmer groups during the fifth round of talks on Saturday.

SDMC budget proposes
increase in property tax

SHASHI BHUSHAN
NEW DELHI, DEC. 7

Putting additional burden on citizens, the South Delhi Municipal Corporation (SDMC), on Monday, proposed an increase in property tax in its jurisdiction. The increase has been proposed in the SDMC budget for the next financial year.

The budget was presented by additional commissioner Ramesh Verma after municipal commissioner Gyanesh Bharti tested positive for Covid-19. As per the budget proposal, the SDMC has proposed two per cent

increase to 14 per cent from 12 per cent of the annual value of the property tax of colonies in A and B category. Similarly, an increase from 11 per cent to 12 per cent has been proposed in C to E categories while from 7 per cent to 12 per cent in F to H category colonies.

The SDMC budget also proposed to reduce the rebate provided to property taxpayers who pay tax by June 30.

"It is proposed to provide one time rebate on payment of property tax until June 30 at 10 per cent instead of 15 per cent. It is proposed to do away with an additional rebate of 20

per cent for payment of one time property tax in respect of co-operative groups on society properties," said the budget proposal. The SDMC has also proposed to roll out an amnesty scheme for recently regularised unauthorised colonies, under which property holders will get waiver of property tax since 2004-05 if they pay property tax of the last three financial years.

The SDMC has planned to extend waste segregation in all the 104 municipal wards from existing 58 wards. The SDMC has also planned to take all its services online in the coming months.

City records 1,674 Covid cases, positivity rate dips

New Delhi, Dec. 7: Delhi recorded 1,674 fresh Covid cases on Monday, the lowest in over three months, even as the positivity rate slipped to 3.15 per cent, authorities said.

The positivity rate on Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday had stood at 4.96 per cent, 4.78 per cent, 4.2 per cent and 3.68 per cent, respectively. These relatively low number of fresh cases came out of 53,207 tests conducted the previous day, according to the latest bulletin issued by the Delhi health department.

Sixty-three fatalities were recorded, pushing the toll in the national capital to 9,706, while the positivity rate dropped to 3.15 per cent, the bulletin said, adding that the average

death rate of the past 10 days stood at 2.14 per cent.

Meanwhile, Delhi health minister Satyendar Jain tweeted about the improved Covid situation, "In a month, positivity declined to 3.15 per cent today from 15.26 per cent on November 7. During the same period, RT-PCR positivity reduced to 6.68 per cent from 30.20 per cent. Lowest positivity in the last 6 months. Steadily Covid cases and positivity are coming down. Hope this will continue. Please observe all precautions."

The active cases tally on Monday dropped to 22,486 from 24,693 the previous day. Delhi recorded 2,706 fresh Covid cases on Sunday. The fall in daily cases here is significant, as it is the lowest since

SIXTY-THREE fatalities were recorded, pushing the toll in the national capital to 9,706, while the positivity rate dropped to 3.15 per cent

August 31, when 1,358 fresh incidences were recorded. The Monday bulletin said that the total number of cases has climbed to 5,93,924, while the recovery rate stood at over 94 per cent.

The number of containment zones in Delhi jumped to 6,292 on Monday from 6,173 on Sunday. The highest single-day spike of 8,593 cases till date was reported on November 11.

Mr Jain on Friday had said if the Covid positivity rate in the national capital

stayed below 4 per cent for five consecutive days, it would indicate that the city has successfully combated the pandemic.

The recent spike in cases had come during the festive season and rising pollution level. While Durga Puja celebrations ended on October 25, Diwali fell on Saturday and Chhath was observed on November 20-21.

The National Centre for Disease Control in a report drafted recently had warned that Delhi needs to be prepared for about 15,000 fresh cases of Covid per day, taking into account the upcoming winter season-related respiratory problems, large influx of patients from outside and festive gatherings. —PTI

IN BRIEF

Self-proclaimed Odisha godman Sura Baba dies

Bhubaneswar: Controversial self-proclaimed Odisha godman Surendranath Mishra alias Sura Baba passed away on Sunday night while undergoing treatment at a private hospital. He was admitted to the hospital in Jayadev Vihar area as he was not keeping well since the last few months and breathed his last while undergoing treatment, family members of the deceased said. The 73-year-old Sura Baba, who was the chief of Trahi Achyuta Ashram on the outskirts of Bhubaneswar, was released on bail from Jharpada Special Jail here on December 2, 2017, more than two years after getting arrested. Sura Baba and his two sons were arrested by the Balipatna police on August 31, 2015 under relevant sections of the IPC and Section 3(l)(x) of the SC and ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989. He was accused of land grab and exploiting women among other serious charges.

Law against 'love jihad' during next session: BSY

Bengaluru: The Karnataka government on Monday made it clear that the anti-cow slaughter bill will be introduced during the ongoing Winter Session of the Karnataka legislature, while a law against "love jihad" will be taken up in the next session. "Anti-cow slaughter, we had earlier (previous tenure) tabled it, but it was not given assent. I have asked the Law Minister to table it once again.. it will be tabled by tomorrow or the day after and we will get it approved," CM B.S. Yediyurappa said. Speaking to reporters, he said, "Love Jihad, we will think about it in the next Assembly session. We will not be tabling it in this session. Anti-cow slaughter, we will do it now." The BJP's Karnataka state executive on Saturday had adopted resolutions for the passage and implementation of the two legislations. Revenue minister R. Ashoka too said, the bill against "love jihad" will be taken up during the next session. — PTI

■ 32,981 new Covid cases, tally now 96,77L

After Pfizer, SII seeks DGCI nod for vaccine

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 7

Pune based vaccine manufacturing major Serum Institute of India (SII) on Monday said it has applied to Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) for emergency use authorisation for its Covid-19 vaccine "Covishield".

The SII has collaborated with Oxford University and pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca for making the vaccine and is conducting clinical trials in India.

"As promised, before the end of 2020, Serum Institute India has applied for emergency use authorization for the first made-in-India vaccine, Covishield," tweeted SII CEO Adar Poonawala.

Mr Poonawala further said: "This will save countless lives, and I thank the Government of

India and Narendra Modi for their invaluable support."

Earlier, Pfizer India said it has applied to India's drug regulator DCGI for emergency-use authorisation for its vaccine, after the company's parent received clearance for the treatment from UK and Bahrain.

With 32,981 new infections, meanwhile, the country's coronavirus infections rose to 96.77 lakh, while the active caseload fell below four lakh after 140 days while the death toll rose to 1,40,573 with 391 new fatalities. Daily fatalities fall below 400 after 157 days. Recoveries surged to 91.39 lakh. The total cases climbed to 96,77,203.

There are 3,96,729 active cases in the country which comprises 4.10 per cent of the total caseload. The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 91,39,901.

PM expresses condolences in the wake of terrorist attacks in France

Modi talks to Macron, discusses terror, Covid

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 7

In a late-evening development, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday spoke to French President Emmanuel Macron during which Prime Minister Modi "reiterated India's full support to France in the fight against terrorism, extremism and radicalism" and expressed his condolences in the wake of the terror attacks in France a few weeks ago.

India is a major strategic partner of France and has close defence ties with it. India is also currently in the process of acquiring 36 state-of-the-art Rafale fighter aircraft from France, with a few of these aircraft already inducted into the

Indian Air Force.

In a statement, the MEA said, "Prime Minister Narendra Modi had a telephone conversation today with his excellency, President of the French Republic. The Prime Minister conveyed to President Macron his condolences for the terror attacks in France, and reiterated India's full support to France in the fight against terrorism, extremism and radicalism."

The MEA added, "The leaders also discussed other bilateral, regional and global issues of mutual interest, including improving the affordability and accessibility of Covid-19 vaccines, post-covid economic recovery, cooperation in the Indo-Pacific



▶ New Delhi had then 'also condemned the brutal terrorist attack that took the life of a French teacher in a gruesome manner that has shocked the world', adding that 'there is no justification for terror for any reason or under any circumstance'



region, maritime security, defence cooperation, digital economy and cyber security, strengthening multilateralism, and climate change and biodiversity." The MEA further said,

"The two leaders expressed satisfaction at the depth and strength that the India-France Strategic Partnership has acquired in recent years and agreed to continue working closely together in the post-Covid era."

"Prime Minister expressed his wish to welcome President Macron in India after the normalisation of the public-health situation."

It may be recalled that India had in October come out vociferously in support of strategic and defence partner France, and had "strongly deplored the personal attacks in unacceptable language on (French) President Emmanuel Macron in violation of the most basic standards of

international discourse", amid an international row over a remark made by the French President following the beheading of a teacher near Paris by an extremist then.

New Delhi had then "also condemned the brutal terrorist attack that took the life of a French teacher in a gruesome manner that has shocked the world", adding that "there is no justification for terrorism for any reason or under any circumstance".

After a Chechen-born extremist had beheaded a French teacher near Paris in October, the French President had strongly criticised fundamentalists in a remark that triggered an international row in a section of the Islamic world.



Villagers stand in a queue to cast their votes for the fourth phase of District Development Council elections at Bain Bajalta on the outskirts of Jammu on Monday.

Phase 4 of J&K local body polls passes off peacefully

Over 50% turnout reported; Poonch dist reports highest percentage at 75.42%

YUSUF JAMEEL
SRINAGAR, DEC. 7

The polling in the fourth phase of Jammu and Kashmir's first-ever District Development Council (DDC) elections was held amid tight security on Monday. As per the initial official statistics, half of the over seven lakh electors cast their vote.

State election commissioner K.K. Sharma, while addressing a press conference in winter capital Jammu said that the polling took place peacefully in all the 34 constituencies-17 each in Jammu region and Kashmir Valley. "The fourth phase of the DDC elections has been conducted successfully with a 50.08 per cent voter turnout", he said.

He said that a total of

▶ THE FIRST three phases of these polls, as per official statistics, recorded an overall 60% turnout which was termed by the concerned officials as 'pleasing and encouraging'

364,527 voters including 195,206 males and 169,321 females voted to choose their representatives in their respective councils. He added that Jammu division recorded an average voter turnout of 69.31 per cent with frontier Poonch district reporting the highest percentage of 75.42 per cent followed by hilly Doda district with 75.03 per cent.

The lowest turnout in Jammu division was in Udhampur district

which recorded 59.90 per cent. The Kashmir division recorded 31.95 per cent average voter turnout with Gand-e-rbal district recording the highest polling at 56.28 per cent followed by Baramulla district at 47.43 per cent and Bandipora with around 45.22 per cent polling. However, South Kashmir districts of Anantnag, Kulgam, Pulwama and Shopian recorded only 27.04 per cent, 8.73 per cent, 6.70 per cent and 1.96 per cent, respectively. The first three phases of these elections, as per official statistics, recorded an overall 60 per cent turnout which was termed by the concerned officials as "pleasing and encouraging".

With these elections, the bypolls to panchs and sarpanchs and vacant

seats for local urban development bodies are also being held.

This is the first such exercise in J&K after the Centre stripped the state of its special status and split it up into two Union Territories in August last year, the contentious move which also brought the political activity to a grinding halt in the erstwhile state as it was followed by a crackdown on political parties-both mainstream and separatist- and a complete communication black-out.

However, with the official announcement of the eight-phased DDC elections earlier last month, the political activity gained momentum across what is now called the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

SC defers 94-year-old's petition over Emergency

PARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, DEC. 7

The Supreme Court on Monday deferred for December 14 the hearing on a 94-year-old woman Veera Sarin's plea seeking a declaration that June 1975 which lasted till 1977 was "unconstitutional" and also seeking a compensation of ₹25 crores.

Deferring the hearing for December 14 as senior counsel Harish Salve who was to appear for the petitioner in the matter could not present due to some difficulty, Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul, heading a bench also comprising Justice Dinesh Maheshwari and Justice Hrishikesh Roy question the petition being filed more than three decades after emergency was imposed for internal reasons.

Justice Kaul remarked, "What kind of a writ petition is this after 30-35 years!"

In Monday's hearing lawyer Neela Gokhale appeared for petitioner Veera Sarin,

The petitioner has said that she has filed it for "restitution of a lifetime spent in utter misery and anguish on account of the atrocities" suffered by her, her deceased husband, and her family.

The petition by the 94-year-old said that the burial of the darkest chapter in Indian democracy is yet to provide respite to them, who it said suffered atrocities at the hands of the authorities during the Emergency period.

BJP workers, cops clash during rally in Siliguri, 1 dead

Party calls 12-hr N. Bengal bandh today

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, DEC. 7

A BJP worker died and several others injured after the police allegedly lathicharged and teargassed the saffron party workers in face of their violent attack during their rally to Uttar Kanya, the North Bengal state secretariat of the Mamata Banerjee government, in Siliguri on Monday afternoon.

Blaming the police for its worker's death the BJP has called a 12-hour North Bengal bandh on Tuesday. It's leaders also complained to governor Jagdeep Dhankhar about the police brutality.

Denying the BJP's allegations, the West Bengal police said, "Today in Siliguri, serious acts of violence were committed by the supporters of a political party during their protest programme. They resorted to arson, brick-batting, firing and vandalism of government property. The police showed restraint and didn't do lathicharge or used firearms. Only water cannons and teargas were used to disperse the violent crowd. However, death of a person has been reported. Body is being sent for post-mortem. The actual cause

of death will be known only after the post-mortem."

The deceased BJP worker, Ulen Roy, was a resident of Gajoldoba near Siliguri. Led by its national president Tejaswi Surya, the BJYM had organised the Uttar Kanya Abhijan to protest anarchy, unemployment, misrule by the Trinamul Congress.

BJP general secretary Kailash Vijayvargiya and state president Dilip Ghosh also participated in the rally which, however, went out of gear as the party workers broke barricades and pelted stones at cops after defying prohibitory orders at Teen Bati More at around 2 pm. The police also retaliated swiftly.

Lashing out at the police, Mr Ghosh alleged, "Roy suffered injuries on head and chest in the lathicharge by the police. He succumbed to his injuries. A female worker of our party is also among hundreds injured. Our rally was peaceful. Still the way the police used lathicharge, teargas and water canons it reflects that the state government has lost its confidence."

Rejecting his version senior TMC MP Sougata Roy claimed, "BJP has been trying to create disturbance here for a long time."

Sushil Modi gets elected unopposed to Rajya Sabha

Patna, Dec. 7: Former Bihar deputy chief minister and senior BJP leader Sushil Kumar Modi was on Monday declared elected unopposed to the Rajya Sabha in a bypoll that was necessitated by the death of Union minister and Lok Janshakti Party founder Ram Vilas Paswan.

Mr Modi was handed over his certificate in presence of a host of dignitaries, including chief minister Nitish Kumar, with whom the former is known to enjoy an excellent rapport, his successors as deputy CM Tar Kishore Prasad and Renu Devi and state BJP president Sanjay Jaiswal.

Mr Modi was declared elected unchallenged on the last date for withdrawal of



nomination papers. With his election to the Rajya Sabha, Mr Modi has come to hold the rare distinction of having been a member of both Houses of Parliament as well as the bicameral legislature in the state.

Sushil Modi has become the only well-known leader from Bihar to have achieved the "feat" after his bete noire Lalu Prasad.

In addition to the former deputy CM, only an Independent candidate, Shyam Nandan Prasad, had filed his nomination papers which were rejected during scrutiny since he could not garner support of at least 10 members. — PTI

NORTHERN RAILWAY OPEN E-TENDER NOTICE	
No. 128-W/260/Tender Notice/NIT 38-W-IV/20-21	
Date: 07.12.2020	
The Sr. Divisional Engineer-IV, Northern Railway, Delhi Division for and on behalf of President of India invites E-Tender on prescribed form for the following work.	
Invitation of tender through E-Tendering (E-Procurement Systems)	
1 Name of work with its location	Merging of L-Xing No. 52 with 53 to eliminate to L-xing no. 52 at km 62/19-21 on DLI-BTI section in the section of SSE/WBGZ under ADEN/ROK.
2 Approx. cost of work.	Rs. 89,85,867.25
3 Earnest money.	Rs. 1,79,700.00
4 Date and Time of submission of tender and opening of tender.	Bidding Start date for work no. Up to 15:00 hrs. on 15.12.2020 opening of e-Tender at 15:00 hrs. on 29.12.2020.
5 Website particulars, published e-tender, notice location etc. complete details of tender can be seen and web site where the tender form can be downloaded	Above tender available on IREPS site i.e. www.ireps.gov.in
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IMPORTANT NOTICE

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

REVISED TIMINGS OF SPECIAL TRAINS					
Spl Train No.	Station From	Dep. Time	Station to	Arr. Time	Revised Timings Effective From
05955	KAMAKHYA	14:35	DELHI JN	04:30	20.12.2020
05956	DELHI JN	23:40	KAMAKHYA	13:30	17.12.2020
05211	DARBHANGA JN	17:20	AMRITSAR	01:45	14.12.2020 to 31.12.2020
05212	AMRITSAR	19:15	DARBHANGA JN	02:55	16.12.2020 to 02.01.2021
05022	GORAKHPUR JN	13:50	SHALIMAR	09:30	14.12.2020
05021	SHALIMAR	20:20	GORAKHPUR JN	16:30	15.12.2020
02587	GORAKHPUR JN	14:20	JAMMU TAWI	13:00	14.12.2020
02588	JAMMU TAWI	22:45	GORAKHPUR JN	20:30	19.12.2020
05097	BHAGALPUR	23:55	JAMMU TAWI	13:00	17.12.2020
05098	JAMMU TAWI	22:45	BHAGALPUR	09:55	15.12.2020
02505	DIBRUGARH	22:00	NEW DELHI	13:38	11.12.2020
02506	NEW DELHI	11:25	DIBRUGARH	03:45	13.12.2020

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

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

- Please check and verify the revised train timings pertaining to your rail journeys well before commencement of journeys, either with Integrated Enquiry No. 139 or Indian Railways website <https://enquiry.indianrail.gov.in/> or NTES App or by approaching authorized person in the nearby reservation counters/railway stations.
- Passengers are advised to please mention their own mobile number only while filling the Reservation Requisition Form. It will help Railways to provide the important information such as 'Change in train timings' or 'Train Cancellation' etc to the bonafide passengers through S.M.S.

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

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IN BRIEF

**SACKED LJP NETA
ACCUSES PASWAN
OF MAOIST LINKS**

Patna: LJP president Chirag Paswan has been accused of maintaining links with Maoists by a leader who was recently expelled from the party for indiscipline. The allegation has come from Keshav Singh, a former Bihar unit general secretary of the LJP, who was expelled last week after he issued a number of statements in the media criticising Paswan for pulling out of the NDA and going solo in the recently held assembly election. Mr Singh lodged a complaint at the Shastri Nagar police station here on Sunday, alleging that he had received a threatening telephone call from Amar Azad, a close aide of Paswan, after he opened a front against the LJP leadership and flagged the alleged lack of internal democracy. In his FIR, Mr Singh also alleged that Paswan, who represents Jamui in the Lok Sabha, named after a Naxal-hit district of Bihar, has maintained "close links" with Maoists. He also claimed that in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, when the son of late Ram Vilas Paswan made his political debut, the help of Maoists was taken to ensure the victory of the young leader. The LJP had fought the Lok Sabha polls in 2014 as well as 2019 as a junior partner of the BJP-led NDA and, riding the Modi wave, came out with stellar performances on both occasions. — PTI

**HC STAYS OIL
DRILLING INSIDE
ASSAM RESERVE**

Guwahati: The Gauhati high court on Monday stayed the Centre's permission to Oil India to drill seven wells inside Dibru-Saikhowa National Park, which is adjacent to Baghjan well blaze site. The stay order was issued by a division bench of Chief Justice (acting) N. Kottiswar Singh and Justice Manish Chowdhury on a PIL filed jointly by advocate Minmoy Khatanar and mountaineer Amar Jyoti Deka. "After hearing the counsels, the Hon'ble Division Bench of the Gauhati High Court stayed the environmental clearance dated on May 11 this year for non compliance of the Supreme Court order of September 7, 2017," the petitioners' advocate Debajit Kumar Das told PTI. As per the Supreme Court order, Oil India Ltd (OIL) was required to conduct the Bio Diversity Impact Assessment Study, he added. "The division bench of Gauhati High Court was prima facie satisfied that OIL had failed to carry out the assessment study. So it stayed exploration and drilling of seven hydrocarbon projects in the Dibru-Saikhowa National Park," said Rakhee Sirauthia Chowdhury, another advocate of the petitioners. The ministry of environment, forest and climate change had accorded environmental clearance to OIL for drilling and testing of hydrocarbons at seven locations under Dibru-Saikhowa National Park, north west of Baghjan in Tinsukia district. — PTI

Central Vista

■ **Continued from Page 1**
time to take instructions in the matter, but the court insisted on the Centre's views being conveyed in just five minutes, and adjourned the hearing until then.
Taking on record a statement by the solicitor-general that "there will be no construction activity of any nature on the concerned site(s) nor demolition of any structure will be done, including the further trans-location of tree(s) will be kept in abeyance, until the pronouncement of the judgment in all these cases", the court said, but permitted the authorities to "continue with procedural processes without altering the status of the site(s) in question in any manner, including to continue with the scheduled programme of foundation stone-laying on December 10, 2020."
The Central Vista area in Lutyens' Delhi houses iconic buildings like North and South Blocks of the Central Secretariat, Parliament House, Rashtrapati Bhavan and India Gate.
The petitioners before the Supreme Court have challenged a notification issued by the Delhi Development Authority on December 21, 2019 on the changes in land use for the area's redevelopment. The court had reserved its ruling on November 5.

Can't build new century with old laws: Modi

Reforms needed for development, says PM

Lucknow, Dec. 7: Amid the row over laws meant to bring a major change in the agri-marketing sector, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday said reforms are needed for development and some laws from the past century have become a burden now.

Launching the Agra Metro rail project through video conference, Mr Modi said the reforms carried out by his government are also getting reflected in election results.

His pitch on the importance of reforms comes ahead of Tuesday's Bharat Bandh over the three new farm laws enacted at the Centre. But during his brief address, the Prime Minister made no direct reference to the new laws or the farmers' protests.

"Reforms are needed for development. Reforms are very much needed for a new order and to give new facilities. We cannot build the next century with the laws of the previous century," he said.

Some laws that used to be good in the past century have become a burden in the present century. Reforms should be a continuous process," he said.

Mr Modi said his govern-



A Kendriya Sainik Board official pins a flag to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the occasion of Armed Forces Flag Day. — PTI

ment is carrying out holistic reforms. "Earlier, reforms used to happen in a piecemeal manner, or keeping in mind some sectors and departments," the Prime Minister said.

He said the reforms carried out in recent past have infused self-confidence in the country, adding that people will be satisfied when they go through the finer details.

"This confidence has been seen in every election in the recent past. A glimpse of this confidence is seen in the election results in every part of the country, including UP," he

said.
The PM said in recent years the poor and the middle class have showered their unprecedented blessings on the efforts of the government. He said their support and the small joys experienced by the countrymen gives me the courage to do new things and take new initiatives."

Mr Modi said his government intends to solve the festering problems faced by people, make life easy, increase investment and ensure the maximum use of modern technology. — PTI

Cong: Govt responsible for inconvenience due to stir

**AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 7**

Lending its full support to the "Bharat Bandh" called by farmers' unions against the three Central agriculture laws, the Congress on Monday said the government would be responsible for any inconvenience caused to people due to the strike.

Around 18 Opposition parties, including the Congress, have already supported the "Bharat Bandh" call.

The Opposition party also said it would not accept what it termed was "corporatisation of the agriculture sector", and urged the government to "shed its ego" and agree to the farmers' demands of repealing the contentious laws.

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi termed the newly-passed laws as the "Adani-Ambani Farm Laws". He said he would not accept anything less than repealing the laws.

"The 'Adani-Ambani Farm Laws' have to be

INLD backs 'Bharat Bandh'

Chandigarh, Dec. 7: The Indian National Lok Dal extended its support to the "Bharat Bandh" called by farmer unions which have been protesting at the Delhi borders against the new central agri-market-

ing laws. Abhay Singh Chautala said his party had announced its support to the protesting farmers the day the agitation started, adding that each and every worker of the INLD will fight this battle shoulder-to-shoulder to strengthen this movement so that the

Centre is forced to abolish the three black laws imposed on the peasants.

Our party has decided to extend full support to the Bharat Bandh, he said.

Mr Chautala, younger former chief minister O.P. Chautala, said he will visit the Tikri border on December 9.

The INLD leader said no farmer organisation of the country had demanded the new agricultural laws, but the central government enacted the black farm legislations to benefit the corporates. — PTI

Munnnetra Kazhagam (DMK), Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), Samajwadi Party (SP), All India Forward Bloc (AIFB), Shiv Sena and NCP.

Punjab Congress chief Sunil Jakhar alleged the sentiments of farmers were hurt in bringing these laws as they were not consulted before the legislations were passed by Parliament.

Akhilesh detained after Lucknow stir

Lucknow, Dec. 7: The police took Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav into custody on Monday after party workers led by him broke through a security cordon to sit on a dharna in the heart of the city to oppose the new farm bills.

Mr Yadav was detained for violating section 144 of the CrPC which prevents assembly of five or more people at one spot. With UP police laying a virtual siege to the area around the Samajwadi Party headquarters here, a defiant Yadav sat on a dharna on the road for some time joined by several party leaders, before he was detained by the UP police and bundled into a police van to remove him from the spot.

"If the new farm laws are intended to help the farmers, then why are they on the war path? Why is the government so



Akhilesh Yadav

adamant? If farmers don't want the new laws, the government should take these back," he told reporters at

the protest site.

TV footage showed police using "laathis" to push back SP workers.

While being whisked away to Eco Garden in the state capital by the police, Mr Yadav said, "This is a dictatorial approach of the BJP. It has blatantly violated the Constitution. There is no coronavirus for the BJP, it is only for the opposition. The BJP can hold meetings and election campaigns anywhere, and for it there will be no coronavirus threat. The government wants to kill democracy on the pretext of coronavirus," he said. — PTI



Muslims from Punjab offer Zuhr prayer during their agitation against the new farm laws at Singhu border in New Delhi on Monday. — PTI

India hosts fewer foreign defence firms despite largest importer tag

**PAWAN BALI
NEW DELHI, DEC. 7**

India hosts a relatively low number of large foreign defence manufacturers considering that it has been among the world's largest arms importers for decades and has a policy of domestic arms—industrial development, according to a report by Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

The report looked at the international presence of the 15 largest arms companies in 2019. These companies are present in a total of 49 countries, through majority-owned subsidiaries, joint ventures and research facilities.

The report said that it identified 13 foreign entities in India. However, only two are involved in manufacturing activities.

Airbus, BAE Systems, Boeing, General Dynamics, L3Harris Technologies, Leonardo, Lockheed Martin and Thales all have foreign entities in India.

UK hosts the most entities about 14 per cent of the total for the 15 largest arms companies. This was followed by Australia (9.5 per cent), the USA (9.0 per cent), Canada (7.5 per cent), Germany (7.3 per cent), Saudi Arabia (6.0 per cent), Italy (3.8 per cent) and India (3.3 per cent).

With a global presence spanning 24 countries each, Thales and Airbus

are the two most internationalised companies — followed closely by Boeing (21 countries), Leonardo (21 countries) and Lockheed Martin (19 countries).

The report said that low presence of foreign companies could be explained by its Indian rules on foreign investment in its domestic arms industry, which have evolved over time. As India developed its arms procurement policy, it introduced offset requirements to leverage foreign technologies in support of its arms industry. However, between 2006 and 2014 the offset rules capped foreign direct investment in Indian arms companies at 26 per cent; this rose to 49 per cent

after 2014. In September 2020 the cap was revised again, to 74 per cent. "This higher threshold may raise the interest of major arms companies in partnering with India's domestic firms or setting up local subsidiaries, it said.

In August, India announced a negative list of 101 defence platforms and weapons whose import will be progressively banned starting December 2020 to boost indigenisation of defence production under Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative. India hopes with this embargo, contracts worth ₹4 lakh crore will be placed with the domestic industry within the next five to seven years.

BJP hits back at Opp.

■ **Continued from Page 1**
states, Mr Prasad said all had suggested and supported amendment in the APMC Act, which the Modi government has done. On the issue of contract farming, Mr Prasad pointed that during the UPA rule, states like Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Chattisgarh, Odisha, Haryana, Goa, Maharashtra, MP, Mizoram had implemented model contract farming.
"I will reiterate again that farmers' land can neither be leased nor sold nor mortgaged in contract farming as it is not the land but produce that will be the collateral," asserted Mr Prasad.

On allegations that the government wants to shut down mandis, Mr Prasad said since implementation of reforms laws, the MSP of six Kharif and Rabi crops have been hiked and by the end of November, 318 lakh tonnes of rice worth ₹600 crore has been procured out of which 202 lakh tonnes of paddy has been procured from Punjab itself.

"If we had any intention of shutting down mandis and end MSP regime, procurement of rice at such a large scale would not have been done... Till date 1,000 mandis, 1.68 crore farmers and 1.51 lakh traders have registered with e-NAM platform (digital mandis). Trade worth over ₹1.15 lakh crore has been done through the e-NAM platform," he said, adding that the Modi government has been finding ways to improve the lives of farmers and to make them more progressive and give more opportunities to prosper and grow through laws.

Farmers' stir...

■ **Continued from Page 1**
roads during the "Bharat Bandh". The police said anyone who tries to disrupt normal movement or tries to forcibly close shops or other establishments will be dealt with strongly under the law.

With massive protests at Delhi's borders continuing for the last 12 days, the protesting farmers at the Singhu border urged peace, and clarified that no shops or establishments will be forcibly closed on account of the bandh. "There will be a complete 'Bharat Bandh' till 3 pm on Tuesday, but emergency services will be allowed," farmers' leader Balbir Singh Rajewal said. Bharatiya Kisan Union spokesman Rakesh Tikait said that "tomorrow's Bharat Bandh is from 11 am to 3 pm. It is a symbolic protest. We will begin at 11 am so everyone can reach office on time... Services such as ambulances, even weddings, can go on. People can show their card and leave".

Several bank workers' unions have also supported the farmers' cause, thus giving rise to the possibility that banking services may end up being affected in some places. In Punjab, petrol pumps decided not to open on Tuesday. The Punjab unit president of Petrol Pump Dealers Association, Paramjit Singh Doaba, said petrol pumps in the state will remain closed in solidarity with the protesting farmers.

There could be some problems for commuters as well as some auto and taxi unions in Delhi have decided to back the farmers' call. A number of other unions, however,

Athletes march to Rashtrapati Bhavan, halted midway

New Delhi, Dec. 7: Led by two-time Asian Games gold-winning former wrestler Kartar Singh, a few sportspersons from Punjab on Monday marched towards the Rashtrapati Bhavan to return "35 national sports awards" in a show of solidarity with farmers agitating against new agriculture laws but were stopped midway by the police.

Kartar, who was presented the Arjuna award in 1982 and Padma Shri in 1987, was accompanied by Olympic gold-winning former hockey player Gurmail Singh and former women's hockey captain Rajbir Kaur among others. While Gurmail is a 2014 Dhyanchand awardee, Rajbir was bestowed the Arjuna in 1984.

"The farmers have always supported us. We felt bad when we saw that our farmer brothers were lathicharged, roads were closed. Farmers are sitting on streets in bitter cold for their rights," said Kartar, gold medalist in the 1978 and 1986 Asian games.

"I am a farmer's son. I still do farming despite being IG, police," he added.

The athletes, who reached Delhi on Sunday, began their march from the Press Club of India but were halted near Krishi Bhavan by the police and sent back.

"I would like to request the government to repeal the draconian law. When the entire country was shivering for the fear of corona, they passed the bill in both houses and got it passed from the President," Kartar said.

The Indian Olympic Association offered its first comments on the sportspersons' involvement in the protest, urging them to have faith in the government and to treat their national honours and the agitation as "two separate things."

The marching athletes claimed to have the support of several Arjuna and other national sports awards winners. — PTI

THE ASIAN AGE

8 DECEMBER 2020

Govt needs to do more to push vaccine awareness

The news of Haryana health minister Anil Vij contracting Covid-19 after receiving a shot of Covaxin, the Coronavirus vaccine that Indian company Bharat Biotech International Ltd has developed in association with the Indian Council for Medical Research, may be seen as a setback but the larger point the incident flags is the need for a far better understanding of the defence that human beings have created against the killer micro-organism. It has now emerged that the state minister, who volunteered for the trial, had received only one shot of the vaccine and that he had missed the second one, which should have been administered 28 days after the first one. Though anyone's body should start developing immunity with the first dose itself, it would take the second dose to make it fairly foolproof. According to the company, the Covaxin trials are based on a two-dose schedule, which are administered 28 days apart. The vaccine's efficacy will be determined two weeks after the second dose. As per the data the company has published, it expects a certain number of infections among the volunteers, and the minister contracting the disease is not entirely unexpected. It may be remembered that the efficiency of the Pfizer vaccine that has been given a licence in the United Kingdom as well as Bahrain is only 95 per cent.

The Centre must think of designing a campaign on the need for vaccination and its protocols. If a minister can skip a dose, it is likely that many Indians may do so

So, it's no reason to be less confident about the indigenous vaccine development process that is now under way. It should not also impact India's partnership in the development and manufacture of the other vaccines as well — Indian volunteers are part of the clinical trial of vaccines developed in foreign countries; Indian companies are gearing up for the mass production of vaccines once they receive the authentication. However, the incident related to the Haryana minister has some lessons for the government. It has been working with the stakeholders on the details of the way people are to be vaccinated. It has a lot of ground such as finalising the norms for preparing the priority list, arranging the logistics, creating a cold chain and setting up the last mile inoculation mechanism to cover.

It looks like the government has taken one area for granted — public awareness about the vaccine. That the government had made no plans as such on handling Covid-19 when it struck is obvious — most decisions were haphazard, giving little thought on their impact on the people at the bottom. It is noteworthy that the government later launched awareness campaigns about the pandemic. And given that the number of daily cases has not risen the way it was projected, it would be safe to assume that the campaign had played its part.

The government should think of designing a similar campaign on the need for vaccination and its protocols. If a minister can skip a dose for whatever reason, it is highly likely that millions of Indians could do something similar due to sheer ignorance or negligence, defeating the very purpose of the entire exercise. This is a serious public health issue, and the government must use whatever tools it has to make it a success. The campaign on vaccination looks as important as vaccination itself.

Christmas threat harmful

The extreme right-wing group Bajrang Dal's threat to Hindus who may wish to attend church on Christmas Day in Assam's Barak Valley is a self-destructive diktat emanating from hard Hindutva. It's a clear threat not just to communal harmony but also an assault on Hinduism, which is an open religion that for millennia has been known to respect variety, plurality and diversity and for its acceptance of all other faiths. The likes of the Bajrang Dal do no justice to the beliefs of its own faith that has been able to assert itself globally without threatening any other faith.

Regardless of such threats materialising to pose a danger to ordinary people who have been accustomed to celebrating the special days of all faiths, the truth is they serve only to tear the fabric of harmony prevailing in most parts of India. Fringe elements tend to be pockets of religious bigotry and communalism, but their voluble presence presents an image that brings about an avoidable perception across the world that India is a hotbed of Hindu communalism.

The threat itself was triggered by a non-event in the assumed closing of a Vivekananda cultural centre in Shillong, which was denied by the Meghalaya government, which said the centre was merely shut for a district holiday. Taking offence at imaginary slights and assuming a rigid stand on religious matters is not uncommon for Hindutvadis. What makes this case curious is that the main character in this play of religious fervour, Mithu Nath of Bajrang Dal, is indoctrinated to the extent of claiming that Hindus have never broken a mosque or church to build a temple. Recent history doesn't bear that out: we know how the Babri Masjid was brought down in a cataclysmic moment for inter-religious harmony.

All governments need to rein in such divisive forces or at least reassure people that they will not come to any harm if they follow the simple but eloquent practice of enjoying all festivals: whether it be Diwali, Id or Christmas.

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Subhani



Worry on Brahmaputra waters seems misplaced



Mohan Guruswamy

Last week, the Chinese state media said the country could build up to 60 GW of hydropower capacity on a section of the Brahmaputra, citing a senior executive. Yan Zhiyong, chairman of the state-owned Power Construction Corporation of China, speaking at an industry conference, said plans to dam the river were a "historic opportunity". This is not a confirmation but an old pipe-dream. But it has set off a howl of protest in the social media.

The Chinese have built a run of the river hydel (215 MW) project at Zhangmu, just like the dams that India is building on the Jhelum and which Pakistan vigorously contests. The bottom-line is that the upper riparian states may use the water but not divert it. But we seem to have other concerns too. An external affairs ministry consultant has cautioned: "First, China's attempt to build infrastructure in Tibet and improve its connectivity with the Chinese mainland has been one of China's major strategies, not only in terms of military preparedness but also to overcome the challenge of regional disparity. Second, China has been working on improving infrastructure and connectivity with the frontier states along its border. Finally, the Brahmaputra is a major lifeline for India's northeastern region. If the situation continues unabated, it will have long-term implications for India."

Let's examine these. Should not the improvement of infrastructure within its own territory be the concern of every government? Are we to keep complaining about every road or bridge, just in case military vehicles

use them? Our first two concerns are not really serious. Then there is the concern over the Brahmaputra waters. We need to familiarise ourselves with some realities.

Many Indian and international security experts have been warning of the looming "water wars" between the two countries. A few years ago, the late B.G. Varghese, an acknowledged expert on the India-Pakistan-China water disputes, and myself made a presentation on this subject at the well-known think-tank, the Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS). We showed that India and Bhutan together generate about 80 per cent of the system's input. China accounts for almost half the basin area, but it actually contributes a fraction of the system's input of waters. The narrow Yarlung Tsangpo actually becomes the mighty Brahmaputra only after it enters India after the Great Bend. Yet the water wars narrative persists.

The supporters of this narrative believe that China already has a plan to divert the Brahmaputra river's waters — more specifically, the western route of China's South-North Water Diversion Projects. They are referring to the Grand Western Water Diversion Plan (GWWD), which was proposed a long time ago by Chinese water expert Guo Kai, to divert water from the upstream sections of six rivers in southwest China, including the upstream Mekong, the Yarlung Tsangpo River, and the Salween, to the dry areas of northern China. Writing about this, Zhang Hongzhou, of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Singapore, unambiguously states: "This is a misperception. It was

only an idea. And it will be no more than an idea."

The Yarlung Tsangpo originates near Mount Kailash and traverses eastward for about 1,700 km as a relatively shallow and small river when the river enters the area known as the Yarlung Tsangpo Grand Canyon. This is the deepest canyon in the world, and at 504.6 km is longer than the famed Grand Canyon (446 km) in the US. As the gorge bends around the 7,800-metre-high Mount Namcha Barwa and cuts its way through the eastern Himalayan range, its waters drop from about 2,900 metres (9,500 ft) near Pei to about 1,500 metres (4,900 ft) at the end of the upper gorge, where it is joined by the Po Tsangpo river. The river continues through the lower gorge to the Indian border at an elevation of 660 metres (2,170 ft). The steep river drops make it a raging torrent all along the canyon. As the canyon passes between the peaks of the Namcha Barwa and Gyalma Peri mountains, it reaches an average depth of about 5,000 metres (16,000 feet) around Namcha Barwa. The canyon's average depth overall is about 2,268 metres (7,440 feet), while the deepest depth reaches 6,009 metres (19,714 feet). Now imagine the physical challenge of damming this canyon. And if it is meant to also support irrigation in Yunnan, the water has to be lifted a few thousand metres and will involve monumental costs. Even in China a cost-benefit analysis will make its unviability apparent. Even the technically less challenging American-designed Three Gorges

A published paper estimates that the utilisable water of the Brahmaputra system is just four per cent of the total discharge. It reflects the very high speed of the discharge and its sheer volume.

Dam in Hubei cost China over \$50 billion.

Now let's look at some basic realities of the Yarlung Tsangpo-Brahmaputra system. While China has the largest spatial share of the basin at over 50 per cent, it generates only 22 per cent of the total basin discharge. Tibet's low precipitation and desert conditions is the main reason for this. In contrast, the India section of the basin, with about 34 per cent of the basin area, contributes about half of the total discharge. This is because of melting snows in the eastern Himalayas and the severity of the monsoon. Equally significant is the contribution from Bhutan, that has 6.7 per cent of the total basin area but generates 21 per cent of the output. The utilisation rate of water in the Brahmaputra is very low. Prof. Pranab Kumar Ray, director, Centre for Hydro-Meteorological Research, Kolkata, in "Rivers of Conflict or Rivers of Peace", a paper published by the ORF, estimates that the utilisable water of the Brahmaputra system is just four per cent of the total discharge. This is a reflection of the very high speed of the discharge and its sheer volume. That's to say even a 10 per cent or 20 per cent cut in the Brahmaputra's water flow is unlikely to cause water scarcity of any nature in the Indian part of the basin.

Quite clearly, the "water wars" scenario is unfounded in the case of Brahmaputra. We need to think of ways to harness more of the mighty Brahmaputra for power and agriculture to help the people of India (and Bangladesh), rather than let 96 per cent of it to just flow into the Bay of Bengal. We must work with Bangladesh closely rather than just keep pointing fingers at China.

The writer, a policy analyst studying economic and security issues, held senior positions in government and industry. He also specialises in the Chinese economy.

LETTERS

ILLEGAL CRACKDOWN

December 6 is the blackest day in the post-Independence history of India, a day on which anti-social mobs supported by the Sangh Parivar demolished the 600-year-old Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. On Sunday, 17 social organisations staged a demonstration against this act at Mandi House in New Delhi. Around 200 people were part of this protest. However, the police dispersed the gathering and arrested 25 activists who were kept in unlawful detention for a long time. We condemn the police action.

N.D. Pancholi
New Delhi

RIGHT TO PROTEST

COMMENTS BY some senior Canadian politicians and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on the farmers' protests in India were rightly criticised by the Indian media and the government. They termed these comments unwarranted. Now a statement has been issued by Stephane Dujarric, a spokesperson for UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, saying that people in all countries have the right to demonstrate peacefully and the authorities need to let them do the same. Is that unwarranted too? After all, the farmers are agitating freely and the government is actively engaged with them to resolve the dispute.

M.C. Joshi
Lucknow

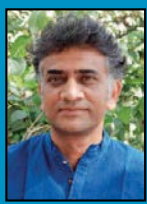
ACTOR'S U-TURN

MNM CHIEF Kamal Haasan has come out in full support of Anna University vice-chancellor M.K. Surappa and lashed out at the Tamil Nadu government. Mr Surappa is accused of accepting bribes to the tune of ₹80 crore and committing examination fraud. However, this is a volte face by Mr Haasan. He had earlier attacked the state government for appointing Mr Surappa. This begs the question: is Mr Surappa joining the MNM? Also, why is he afraid of a probe?

Capt. N. Viswanathan
Coimbatore

₹500 for the best letter of the week goes to Deepak Singhal (Dec. 6). Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

Aakar Patel



Will Centre be forced to give in to the farmers?

Once again, the Narendra Modi government has shown that it will ignore the concerns of large numbers of Indians till it becomes a national crisis. Exactly a year ago, after a series of threats from the Union home minister to India's minorities, the government passed legislation that Amit Shah said would be the first step of his chronology on citizenship. We know what happened immediately after that — protests by those whom the laws were victimising, no support for them from India's internal democratic structure, international condemnation of India's actions, and then violence instigated and encouraged by the ruling party.

Earlier this year, the government passed, by ordinance during the Covid-19 pandemic, a set of laws that would change the way that agriculture would be done, especially in the northwest. Nobody had asked for these laws, no farmers' groups were consulted and there was no explanation on why these had been brought into force

through the ordinance route. Of course, this government follows the adage of "never apologise, never explain". It has never apologised, and it has never explained.

For most of the media, which is urban and middle class, the farmers' laws made no sense. Google will throw up dozens of reports, often from the same publication, with the headline "farmers bills explained". Few of us have seen a mandi, know what APMC stands for or does and what the issue of MSP means to the average Punjabi. For this reason, the issue was off the headlines very soon.

Predictably, the farmers began a protest that soon developed into a mass movement but appeared small because it was ignored by the national media and was localised in a couple of states. The government in New Delhi also ignored it and in fact escalated its confrontation by disallowing the Indian Railways from operating trains to Punjab even after the protesters had said they would not disrupt traffic. No railway property was damaged in the peaceful protest, but for two

months no train went through even after the protesters had left the railway tracks.

It was clear that the government was not going to back off its legislation unless it was forced to. At this point, the farmers began their march to besiege the national capital. The BJP made a few attempts to hold them back in Haryana, a state that it controls, but was unable to because of the resolve of the farmers. We are now seeing the consequences of arrogance and hardness. The government has no option but to negotiate with the farmers. It is about to rewrite the laws that it should have written up after consulting them in the first place. Prime Minister Narendra Modi will say that he means well and wants to double the farmers' incomes, but he will not concede that he needs to consult them before coming up with his genius idea that will help them do this.

Notice the similarities between the farmers' movement and the protests across the country against the citizenship amendment laws. First, that these laws were passed

without anyone having asked for them. Second, that the minorities they affected went on to protest immediately because they sensed the danger to them that the rest of the population did not, and third, that the rest of us did not care about the laws and had little or no empathy for those who were affected. It was the Muslims in the lead in the protests against being sent to concentration camps, and it was the Sikhs in the lead on the issue of the controversial farm laws. Fourth, that the government recklessly and deliberately demonised the protesters, calling them terrorists, separatists and "Khalistanis".

Fifth, that the rest of the world was alarmed by what the government was doing and intervened. India does not like to be lectured by other nations but if you do something dumb then you have to face the consequences. The European Union's members of Parliament wrote up a very strong motion against India's citizenship laws, and India was able to only delay the tabling of the motion with difficulty. Canada, which has a large and

influential Sikh population, told India that it was "concerned". India objected to this interference but could do little because we have no real leverage. If thousands of Canadians were migrating to India monthly instead of the other way around, we might have had some say.

The sixth thing that will likely be common to both these issues is that they will end in the same way. Mr Modi made Amit Shah eat his brave words on his chronology and said that the issue of the National Register of Citizens had not been discussed. That lay the matter to rest. On the issue of the three farm laws, something similar will come. The government has used all the tricks it has on the farmers. But they are still standing there blockading Delhi, prepared to be there for months. Their demands will have to be met, of course, and this government will move on to the next great idea, without an apology or an explanation.

The writer is a columnist and a senior journalist

SHORT TAKES NEW MT EVEREST HEIGHT TODAY: NEPAL, CHINA

Kathmandu, Dec. 7: Nepal and China are set to jointly announce the revised height of Mount Everest, the world's highest peak. The Nepal government decided to measure the exact height of the mountain amid debates that there might have been a change in its height due to various reasons, including the devastating earthquake of 2015.

According to the measurement done in 1954 by Survey of India, the height of Mt. Everest is 8,848 metres. According to a spokesperson at the Ministry of Land Management, Cooperatives and Poverty Alleviation, Nepal will announce the new height of the Everest on Tuesday along with China.

"The Chinese side has also agreed to announce the height of the Everest jointly," the ministry official said. The department had started measuring the height of the Everest two years ago.

CHINA, PAK AIR FORCES TO HOLD JOINT DRILL

Beijing, Dec. 7: A batch of Chinese air force personnel left for Pakistan on Monday to participate in a joint exercises to deepen practical cooperation and improve the actual-combat training level of the two sides, the Chinese military said. The troops left for Pakistani Air Force's air base in Bholari at Thatta district in Sindh, north-east of Pakistan's port city of Karachi, to participate in the drills named "Shaheen (Eagle)-IX", a statement issued by China's defence ministry said.

The joint air force exercise, which will conclude in late December, is a project within the 2020 cooperation plan of the two militaries, it said. It will promote the development of China-Pakistan military-to-military relationships, deepen practical cooperation between the two air forces, and improve the actual-combat training level of the two sides, it said.

The first such drill was held in Pakistan in March 2011. All weather friends, China and Pakistan share close military ties. China helps Pakistan to jointly produce JF-17 fighter jets and other armaments.

UNIVERSITY PROTEST IN HK: EIGHT ARRESTED

Hong Kong, Dec. 7: Hong Kong authorities on Monday arrested eight people in connection with an unauthorised protest at a university campus last month, police and local media said, amid a widening crackdown on dissent in the semi-autonomous Chinese territory.

The arrests were reportedly made in relation to a demonstration at the Chinese University of Hong Kong in which over 100 people protested a decision to hold graduation ceremonies online.

Such ceremonies are often used as a way for students to express political views.

Some protesters had called for Hong Kong's independence, and held up signs that read "Liberate Hong Kong, Revolution of our times," which are considered to have secessionist notions and are outlawed under the city's national security law. Police said they arrested eight people for an unauthorised protest and inciting secession, but did not specify who they were or whether the arrests were related to the university protest.

Arthur Yeung, a graduate from the university who also ran in the city's district council elections last year, is suspected to be among those arrested.

A post on Yeung's Facebook page said he was arrested at his home on Monday morning. Two district councillors, Isaac Lee and Eason Chan, were also arrested, according to posts on their respective Facebook pages. The eight arrested are currently being investigated by national security officers, according to local newspaper *South China Morning Post*, which cited unnamed sources.

The arrests come as Hong Kong and Beijing have increasingly clamped down on dissent in the city, following Beijing's imposition of a national security law in Hong Kong in June aimed at curbing months of political unrest and anti-government protests last year.

The crackdown has prompted accusations that Beijing is violating the autonomy it promised when the former British colony was returned to China in 1997.

It also has triggered warnings that the ruling Communist Party is damaging Hong Kong's appeal as a global business center and one of Asia's most dynamic cities.

Becerra named health secy, Murthy is surgeon general

Fauci Chief Medical Adviser to Prez on Covid-19, Walensky CDC Director

Washington, Dec. 7: US President-elect Joe Biden unveiled his health team on Monday, naming Xavier Becerra as Secretary of Health and Human Services, and Indian-American Dr Vivek Murthy as his Surgeon General.

Dr Anthony Fauci has been named as Chief Medical Adviser to the President on Covid-19, while Dr Rochelle Walensky has been named as Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; and Dr Marcella Nunez-Smith as Covid-19 Equity Task Force Chair. "This trusted and accomplished team of leaders will bring the highest level of integrity, scientific rigor, and crisis-management experience to one of the toughest challenges America has ever faced — getting the pandemic under control so that the American people can get back to work, back to their lives, and back to their loved ones," Biden said. This team of world-class medical experts and public servants will be ready on day one to mobilise every resource of the federal government to expand testing and masking, oversee the safe, equitable, and

free distribution of treatments and vaccines, reopen schools and businesses safely, lower prescription drug and other health costs and expand affordable health care to all Americans, and rally the country and restore the belief that there is nothing beyond America's capacity if we do it together, he said.

"Containing this Coronavirus pandemic and opening our economy responsibly require listening to experts and leaders like the ones we are bringing together on this health care team," Vice President-elect Kamala Harris said, adding that they are some of America's top physicians, public health experts, and crisis-tested public servants, and they reflect the very best of the nation.

This is the team that the American people need and deserve to make quality, affordable health care available to all and to help make sure safe and effective vaccines — as well as testing and treatment — are free and equitably distributed, Harris said.

Becerra is currently the Attorney General of California and a former member of Congress. —PTI

Trump cementing death penalty legacy

Chicago, Dec. 7: As Donald Trump's presidency winds down, his administration is throttling up the pace of federal executions despite a surge of Coronavirus cases in prisons, announcing plans for five starting Thursday and concluding just days before the Jan 20 inauguration of President-elect Joe Biden.

If the five go off as planned, it will make 13 executions since July when the Republican administration resumed putting inmates to death after a 17-year hiatus and will cement Trump's legacy as the most prolific execution president in over 130 years.

He'll leave office having executed about a quarter of all federal death-row prisoners, despite waning support for capital punishment among both Democrats and Republicans.

In a recent interview with *The Associated Press*, Attorney General William Barr defended the

extension of executions into the post-election period, saying he'll likely schedule more before he departs the Justice Department. A Biden administration, he said, should keep it up.

"I think the way to stop the death penalty is to repeal the death penalty," Barr said. "But if you ask juries to impose and juries impose it, then it should be carried out." The plan breaks a tradition of lame-duck presidents deferring to incoming presidents on policy about which they differ so starkly, said Robert Durham, director of the non-partisan Death Penalty Information Center.

Biden, a Democrat, is a death penalty foe, and his spokesman said that he'd work to end the death penalty when he is in office. "It's hard to understand why anybody at this stage of a presidency feels compelled to kill this many people," Durham said.

EU WEIGHS NEW DAWN FOR TIES UNDER BIDEN

Brussels, Dec. 7: European Union foreign ministers were debating Monday ways to work together more closely with the United States on global diplomacy, with the bloc hopeful that the arrival of President-elect Joe Biden will breathe new life into trans-Atlantic relations.

"With Joe Biden's election as the new American president, there are a lot of major opportunities that we as Europe want to take," said German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas, whose country holds the EU's rotating presidency until the end of the month. "Not everything will be different, but a lot will be better, and we must be clear what part of our responsibility we will take, and where we will cooperate with the United States — be it in our direct or indirect neighbourhood, in the western Balkans, in eastern Europe, but also in Africa," he said. —AP

ACTIVISTS FUME OVER EL-SISSI'S FRANCE VISIT

Paris, Dec. 7: Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi is paying a state visit to France for talks on fighting terrorism, the conflict in Libya and other regional issues, amid criticism from human rights groups over the Egyptian leader's crackdown on dissent.

French President Emmanuel Macron will host el-Sissi at the Elysee Palace on Monday, and is expected to raise human rights concerns among the other topics on the agenda, according to Macron's office. El-Sissi has overseen the largest crackdown on critics in Egypt in living memory, jailing thousands of Islamists along with pro-democracy activists, reversing freedoms won in the 2011 Arab Spring uprising, silencing critics and placing draconian rules on rights groups.

Days before his arrival in France, amid pressure from UN and Western activists, Egyptian authorities released three workers at one of the last rights groups still functioning in Egypt. The three staffers of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, detained in November, were released Thursday. —AP

Hectic day for EU negotiator to seal final Brexit trade deal

Brussels, Dec. 7: European Union chief negotiator Michel Barnier on Monday set off one of the most intense days in the long-running Brexit trade negotiations with a pre-dawn debriefing of the 27 member states to see if a deal is still possible with London ahead of the Jan. 1 deadline.

In the evening, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson will have his second phone call with EU Com-

Anthony Fauci's 'Wear a mask' tops quotes list

New Haven (US), Dec. 7: A plea from Dr Anthony Fauci for people to "wear a mask" to slow the spread of the Coronavirus tops a Yale Law School librarian's list of the most notable quotes of 2020.

The list assembled by Fred Shapiro, an associate director at the library, is an annual update to "The Yale Book of Quotations," which was first published in 2006. Also on the list is "I can't breathe," the plea George Floyd made repeatedly to police officers holding him down on a Minneapolis street corner. Several quotes from the presidential campaign appear including Joe Biden telling a student: "You're a lying dog-faced pony soldier."

Shapiro said he picks quotes that are not necessarily admirable or eloquent, but rather because they are famous or particularly revealing of the spirit of the times.

THE LIST 1. "Wear a mask." — Dr. Anthony Fauci, CNN interview, May 21. 2. "I can't breathe." — George Floyd, plea to police officer, Minneapolis, May 25. 3.

"One day — it's like a miracle — it will disappear," President Donald Trump, referring to the coronavirus in remarks at an African American History Month reception at the White House, Feb. 27. 4. "I see the disinfectant that knocks it out in a minute, one minute. And is there a way we can do something like that by injection inside or almost a cleaning?" — Trump, in remarks at a White House Coronavirus Task Force news briefing, April 23. 5. "I will never lie to you. You have my word on that." — White House Press Secretary Kayleigh McEnany, at her first press briefing, May 1. 6. "My most fervent wish is that I will not be replaced until a new president is installed." — Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, statement dictated to granddaughter Clara Spera, September 7. "If you have a problem figuring out whether you're for me or Trump, then you ain't Black." — Joe Biden, in an interview with "The Breakfast Club" radio programme, May 22. 8. —AP

Stir over India farm laws: Many arrested

London, Dec. 7: Scotland Yard has reportedly made a number of arrests after it warned of enforcement action ahead of thousands of protesters from different parts of the UK gathering outside the Indian High Commission in central London on Sunday, as a show of support for farmers demonstrating against agricultural reforms in India.

Several police officers in face masks descended upon Aldwych to police the "We stand with farmers of Punjab" demonstration, having warned that strict regulations remain in place to help prevent the spread of Coronavirus and therefore demonstrations of larger than 30 risk arrests and fines.

The Metropolitan Police had said a "robust" policing plan will be in place throughout Sunday and officers will take action if they witness breaches of the regulations.

The Metropolitan Police said that 13 people in total were arrested for breach of Covid-19 regulations. Four of them were subsequently de-arrested after they provided their details to officers and were issued a fine. The other nine remain in custody. Three teenagers who were seen to set off a firework towards a crowd were spoken to by police and the fireworks were confiscated from them.

They were not arrested and police said that there had been no reported injuries from the demon-

We had issued a reminder urging those who were planning to attend to reconsider but, unfortunately, a number of people decided not to follow that advice. A proportionate policing plan was in place, the demonstration has now concluded and those in attendance have begun to leave.

— PAUL BROGDEN
Met Police Commander

stration. "We had issued a reminder urging those who were planning to attend to reconsider but, unfortunately, a number of people decided not to follow that advice. A proportionate policing plan was in place, the demonstration has now concluded and those in attendance have begun to leave," said Met Police Commander Paul Brogden.

"If you attend a gathering that breaches the regulations, you may be committing an offence, which is punishable by a fine. In certain circumstances, if you hold a gathering of over 30 persons and you do not meet the requirements of the regulations you might be committing a different offence, which is also punishable by a fine," he said.

The demonstration, largely made up of British Sikhs, involved placard waving with messages such as "Justice for Farmers" and sloganeering as well as several cars blocking roads. —PTI

Snowman on summit



A snowman with mouth and nose protection stands on the snow-covered summit plateau of the Grosser Feldberg in the Taunus Mountains, Germany, on Monday.

— AP

Nawaz rues none of Pak PMs have been able to complete their terms

Islamabad, Dec. 7: Pakistan's former prime minister Nawaz Sharif on Sunday regretted that none of the country's elected premiers have been able to complete their terms, saying "Iqbal did not dream of this Pakistan".

Sharif, 70, the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) supreme, has been living in London since November last year after the Lahore High Court granted him permission to go abroad for four weeks for treatment. Speaking at the PML-N's social media convention, he said that "again and again, the constitution was violated... those who created the country were termed traitors, popular leaders were jailed and leaders were made out to be robbers."

Sharif said that the votes of the public had been "stolen", accusing the government led by Prime Minister Imran Khan of indulging in rigging in the 2018 elections. *Dawn* news reported. "Until now, none of the (elected) prime ministers have been allowed to complete their constitutional term. Every few years, democracy is attacked and martial law is imposed," Sharif was quoted as saying in the report.

"Tell me, hand on your

heart, is this Quaid-i-Azam's Pakistan?" he asked. Pakistan's powerful Army, which has ruled the country for more than half of its 70 plus years of existence, has hitherto wielded considerable power in the matters of security and foreign policy. Sharif, while referring to the criticism over his speeches critical of the military, said if it was "treason to expose those who have formed a state above a state".

"Undemocratic forces have started propaganda through social media that Nawaz Sharif's narrative is empowering enemies of the country. "These unde-

mocratic forces have choked freedom of expression in the country, choked the poor and unemployment, have crushed them with inflation... these are painful things but all they are worried about is how to stop Nawaz Sharif," he said. Sharif, living in London since November last year after he was allowed by the courts and the government to go there for medical treatment, has accused army chief Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa and spy agency ISI head Lt Gen Faiz Hameed for interfering in the 2018 polls and installing Imran Khan's "puppet government". —PTI

BIGGER VERSION

It will mark the first time that the company will have two capsules aloft at the same time

Double Dragons: SpaceX launches space station supplies

Cape Canaveral, Dec. 7: SpaceX launched a newer, bigger version of its Dragon supply ship to the International Space Station on Sunday, marking the first time the company has two capsules aloft at the same time.

The Dragon — packed with Christmas treats and presents — should reach the space station on Monday, joining the Dragon that delivered four astronauts last month. "Dragons

everywhere you look," said Kenny Todd, NASA's deputy space station program manager.

With NASA's commercial crew programme officially under way, SpaceX expects to always have at least one Dragon capsule at the space station. SpaceX's Falcon 9 rocket blasted off with the latest Dragon from NASA's Kennedy Space Center, where Coronavirus precautions kept staff to a minimum.

● **SPACEX'S FALCON 9** rocket blasted off with the latest Dragon from NASA's Kennedy Space Center, where Coronavirus precautions kept staff to a minimum.

The first-stage booster — making its fourth flight — was aiming for a touchdown on an ocean platform several minutes after liftoff. It was first used

back in May for the first astronaut launch by Elon Musk's company.

The 6,400-pound (2,900-kilogram) shipment includes billions of microbes and crushed asteroid samples for a biomining study, a new medical device to provide rapid blood test results for astronauts in space, and a privately owned and operated chamber to move experiments as big as refrigerators outside the orbiting lab.

Forty mice also are flying for bone and eye studies, two areas of weaknesses for astronauts during long space stays. Todd said all this research is "the ultimate Christmas present" for NASA astronaut Kate Rubins, a virus hunter who performed the first DNA sequencing in space a few years ago.

As for more personal presents for the four Americans, two Russians and one Japanese on board, "I don't

like to get out in front of Santa Claus. I fear it might mess up my own Christmas." Todd said late last week. "Let's see what happens when they open the hatch ... I'm optimistic."

For the astronauts' Christmas feast, the Dragon is carrying roasted turkey, cornbread dressing, cranberry sauce, shortbread cookies and tubes of icing. This updated cargo-carrying model — as large as the SpaceX crew capsule —

will dock to the orbiting lab by itself.

Previous SpaceX cargo ships needed the station's robot arm for anchoring. The capsule will remain at the space station for about a month as usual before undocking with experiments and old equipment, and splashing into the Atlantic. That's another change from SpaceX's older cargo ships, which parachuted into the Pacific. —AP

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	45,426.97	0.77
Nifty 50	13,355.75	0.73
S&P 500*	3,695.77	-0.09
Dollar (₹)	73.90	-0.14
Pound Sterling (₹)	97.85	1.66
Euro (₹)	89.36	0.47
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	48,703.104	0.21
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	49.16	-0.09
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.924	0.026
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.939	-0.030

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Hindalco to set up ₹730 cr plant in Silvassa

Aditya Birla group firm Hindalco Industries said it plans to set up a 34,000-tonne aluminium extrusion plant at Silvassa, in Dadra and Nagar Haveli, at an investment of Rs 730 crore. In a regulatory filing, it said the new plant will service the fast-growing market for extruded aluminium products in the western and southern regions. It said the project signals a big step forward in Hindalco's downstream strategy.

IndiGo to refund all passengers by January 31



IndiGo said it will refund all customer credit shells, which were created when flights were cancelled due to the coronavirus lockdown earlier this year, by January 31. The airline said it has processed close to Rs 1,000 crore of refunds, which is about 90 per cent of the total amount it owed to its customers. CEO Ronjoy Dutta said, "As our incoming cash flow dried up, we were unable to immediately process refunds."

NSE starts weekly F&O contracts in 3 currency pairs

The NSE launched weekly futures and options contracts on three currency pairs-- euro-rupee, yen-rupee and pound sterling-rupee. "NSE is launching a weekly futures contract for the first time, while we have already seen market acceptance in weekly options contracts across asset classes," the exchange's MD and CEO Vikram Limaye said. The weekly derivatives on currency pairs will reduce time-related costs, he said.

Nissan receives 5,000 bookings for Magnite

Nissan Motor India said it has received 5,000 bookings for its newly launched compact SUV, Magnite in five days. The firm also received over 50,000 enquiries for the vehicle launched on Dec. 2 at an introductory price of Rs 4.99 lakh, with over 20 variants. Over 60 per cent of the bookings have been received for the top 2 grades (XV and XV Premium), and more than 35 per cent are for CVT Automatic, Nissan said.

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■ Growth in tier-I cities and metros came to 20% Online festive sales double in small cities

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, DEC. 7

Smaller cities played a key role in driving e-commerce festive season sales this year. Online sales almost doubled in volume terms in smaller cities this festive season. The tier-II and III cities have been growing way faster than metropolitan cities and its impact is visible in the festive season sale as well, finds Unicommerce, e-commerce focused SaaS platform. Tier-II and beyond cities have witnessed a growth of 99 per cent as compared to last year's festive season. The growth in tier-I and metropolitan cities remained around 20 per cent. According to Amazon, initial days of the festive season saw 91 per cent of new customers coming



from smaller cities.

However, states like Delhi, Maharashtra and Karnataka with metropolitan cities continued to dominate e-commerce sales. These three states contribute 55 per cent of India's e-commerce volume in the festive month. Personal care category emerged as the biggest gainer, with 176 per cent

order volume growth over last year's festive month. Beauty and wellness reported 52 per cent order volume growth. Fashion and accessories witnessed an order volume growth of 71 per cent. Electronics continued to be the highlight of festive sales, with all marketplaces extensively promoting discounts and offers on

electronic products. The segment saw a substantial growth of 65 per cent in order volume. RedSeer Consulting too found that mobiles and appliances remained strong this year driven by new launches, discounts, bank offers and smart upgrade plans of brands. Returns remained a concern for e-tailers despite automation, though the industry overall observed a 35 per cent decrease in return orders this season compared to last year. Fashion and accessories remained the category with maximum return orders. This year brands got serious about online selling by developing own websites. Brand websites witnessed 77 per cent order volume growth compared to 60 per cent for marketplaces.

PSU insurers go slow with crop insurance

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO NEW DELHI, DEC. 7

Major general insurers, especially public sector players, are learnt to be shying away from insuring their crops through the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana, or PMFBY, scheme. They feel the current crop insurance scheme is not lucrative enough for them to focus on it. However, a few private players have been looking at the scheme for widening their market reach. For

instance, Bajaj Allianz General Insurance Company has increased its presence in the segment and has gone ahead of its peers. Its exposure to the sector currently stands at Rs 1,700 crore. "All the major players, who are active on the non-life insurance space in the country, have reportedly reduced their exposure to the crop insurance, as they don't find the PMFBY scheme lucrative any more in its revised form. Therefore, they are slightly

pushing away from this scheme to avoid losses," a senior official of a public sector general insurance company told *Financial Chronicle* on condition of anonymity. Data with sector regulator Irdai shows private insurer's exposure to crop insurance stands at Rs 1,615 crore for HDFC ERGO, Rs 1,605 crore for Reliance General Insurance, Rs 1,370 crore for SBI General Insurance and Rs 843 crore for Iffco Tokio. In contrast, the

exposure of the largest state-run non-life insurer, New India Assurance, is Rs 675 crore. Ashish Agarwal, head-agri business & CSC, Bajaj Allianz General Insurance, said the firm has been participating in the PMFBY scheme from its launch in 2016. "We have been authorised to enrol farmers under the PMFBY by the governments of Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Rajasthan during the kharif 2020 season."

Only 4 sales returns for small biz next yr

New Delhi, Dec. 7: Businesses with up to Rs 5 crore turnover will have to file only four GST sales returns, or GSTR-3B, from January instead of 12 at present, according to sources. The Quarterly filing of Return with Monthly Payment (QRMP) Scheme would impact almost 94 lakh taxpayers, about 92 per cent of the total tax base of the goods and services tax (GST), the source added. With this, from January onwards, small taxpayers would need to file only eight returns (four GSTR-3B and four GSTR-1 returns) in a year, one of the sources said. The source further said the scheme also brings in the concept of providing input tax credit (ITC) only on the reported invoices, thereby putting a curb on the menace of fake invoice frauds. Sources said the QRMP scheme has an optional invoice filing facility (IFF) to mitigate business-related hardships for the small and medium-sized taxpayers.

Under the facility of IFF, the small taxpayers who opt to be quarterly return filers under the QRMP scheme would be able to upload and file such invoices even in the first and second month of the quarter for which there is a demand from the recipients. Further, this would engage buyers who earlier used to avoid purchase from the small taxpayers for want of uploading invoices in the system on a monthly basis, the sources said. According to the sources, the taxpayers would need not upload and file all the invoices for the month and could upload and file only those invoices required to be filed in IFF as per demand of the recipients. The remaining invoices of the first and second months can be uploaded in the quarterly GSTR-1 return. The IFF would be available up to a cut-off date and credit would flow to the recipient after the cut-off date on filing of the IFF, they added.

—PTI

Full recovery in US seen by 2022

New York, Dec. 7: The US economy's growth is likely slowing as 2020 comes to a close, but a growing number of economists expect it to claw back to its pre-pandemic strength by the second half of next year. That's the view from the latest survey of the National Association for Business Economics. It found that 73 per cent of surveyed forecasters say the economy will return to its pre-pandemic level by late 2021. That's more optimism than they were showing a couple months ago, when just 38 per cent of forecasters said a full recovery could occur before 2022. Hopes that one or more coronavirus vaccines will roll out soon are helping drive expectations higher, said the survey's chair, Holly Wade.

—AP

CEO of fashion retailer quits to prioritise wife's career

Berlin, Dec. 7: The chief executive of online fashion retailer Zalando is stepping down to focus on his family, saying his wife's career should take priority in the coming years. Rubin Ritter, one of three co-chief executives at Zalando, has been in the job since 2010. Tasked with overseeing strategy and communications, the 38-year-old helped turn the Berlin-based start-up into one of the world's top online fashion retailers with 14,000 employees and net profit of almost 100 million euros (\$121 million) in 2019.



Rubin Ritter

In a statement, Zalando said Ritter had informed

the company on Sunday of his decision to step down in 2021, more than two years before his contract ends. "I feel that it is time to give my life a new direction," Ritter was quoted as saying. I want to devote more time to my growing family, he added. My wife and I have

agreed that for the coming years, her professional ambitions should take priority. The head of Zalando's supervisory board, Cristina Stenbeck, said the company regretted Ritter's decision but we have the highest respect for the underlying personal motivation. Last month, Ritter published the company's first report on diversity and inclusion, saying these should be seen as an opportunity rather than a challenge. The company has been criticised for currently having only men on its five-member management board.

—AP

HOTELS SEEK LOAN RESTRUCTURING

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, DEC. 7

Fearing a second wave of the pandemic, the hospitality sector, which is already weighed down by massive losses and mounting debt, is seeking a sector-specific loan restructuring plan. The Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Associations of India said the sector suffered revenue loss of Rs 1.14 lakh crore this year. Pradeep Shetty, honorary joint secretary, FHRAI, said if a favourable policy is not drawn for survival of the sector, at least 40 to 50 per cent restaurants and 30 to 40 per cent hotels in the country will shut down, resulting into millions of job losses.

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, DEC. 7

The Trustee of Franklin Templeton Mutual Fund in India has sought unitholders consent for the orderly winding up of the six fixed income schemes, abiding with the December 3 interim order of the Supreme Court. "Voting 'Yes' will allow schemes to monetise assets without resorting to distress sales and will maximise value to Unitholders," the fund house said in a release. Voting will take place during December 26-28. Santosh Kamath, CIO, Franklin Templeton Fixed

Income India, said, "From April 24, 2020 to November 27, 2020, the six schemes under winding up have received Rs 11,576 crore from maturities, pre-payments, and coupons. Four out of the six schemes are already cash positive and have close to Rs 7,226 crore available to return to unitholders, subject to fund running expenses. All of this cash has been received without any secondary market sale (active monetisation) of the securities in these six schemes." He said of the Rs 11,576 crore received, nearly half has come from securities rated 'A'.

Dip in wages of informal workers: ILO

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, DEC. 7

While the pandemic saw workers' wages shrinking, informal workers in India experienced a sharper fall than formal workers, finds the International Labour Organisation. ILO also found that the gap between real and nominal minimum wages of unskilled workers in India has become significantly wider in the past 10 years. Post-pandemic, formal workers' wages have been cut by 3.6 per cent in India, while informal workers have experienced a much sharper fall in wages of 22.6 per cent, finds ILO's Global Wage Report. Around two-thirds of countries whose short-term statistics are available showed



decreasing wages or slower average wage growth. In India, delayed increase or freeze in minimum wages because of the Covid-19 crisis have taken place at the local or sectoral level. For example, in the Punjab region, the local government reversed its order announcing a minimum wage increase, says the report. Further, the report also found that the gap between

real and nominal minimum wages of unskilled workers in India has significantly become wider in the past 10 years. Real wages have grown much lesser than nominal wages during the decade. Both real and nominal national median daily wages of unskilled workers stood at Rs 79.5 in 2008. Since then, the rates have been growing differently over the decade. By 2015,

the nominal wages grew to Rs 180.9, whereas real wages grew at Rs 104.5. By 2019, this gap became wider. The nominal wages touched Rs 270, while the real wage was lagging behind at Rs 135.3. In the past one decade, nominal wages grew by 239.6 per cent, whereas real wages grew by only 70.2 per cent. Minimum wage rates vary widely in the country and the variations across states in the number of wage rates indicates the high complexity of the minimum wage system. Minimum wages of unskilled workers ranges between Rs 115 and Rs 538 across states. Rajasthan and Maharashtra are at the lower end of the range and Delhi and Karnataka at the upper end.

Xiaomi ramps up smart TV production in India

New Delhi, Dec. 7: Chinese tech major Xiaomi on Monday said it has partnered with Hyderabad-based Radiant Appliances as it ramps up production of its smart TVs in India. The move comes ahead of Xiaomi's foray into the premium QLED TV segment in India.

Xiaomi India category lead (smart TV) Eashwar Nilakantan said when the company had launched its smart TVs in 2018, there were two key trends—Internet tariffs were getting cheaper and speed was faster, and there was a proliferation of content. "Since then, we have

already sold over 5 million smart TVs and continue to be No. 1 in the segment. Last year, we started with 4K TVs and that has also seen strong growth. In the pandemic, content consumption has gone up drastically and people are also looking for movie theatre-like experiences at

home," he said. With the QLED TV, Xiaomi wants to offer premium viewing experience to customers, he added. While Nilakantan did not disclose details of the pricing, he said the first 55-inch QLED TV will be launched on December 16.

—PTI

HIGH-TECH ASSISTANCE Pilot project running across 100 locations in MP, Maharashtra

Voda, Nokia team up for SmartAgri solution

New Delhi, Dec. 7: Vodafone India Foundation, the corporate social responsibility (CSR) arm of Vi, has, in partnership with Nokia, deployed a smart agriculture solution that aims to enhance farming practices and improve productivity of farmers. Vodafone Idea CSR has deployed Nokia's World-wide IoT Network Grid (Wing) solution to equip farmers in the country with precise and practical data to help them achieve better yields. "Deployment of the smart agriculture-as-a-service solution includes soil probes, weather stations, insect traps and crop cameras to help drive productivity of soy



and cotton crops," a press release said. A pilot project, being implemented across 100 locations in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, aims to benefit over 50,000 farmers in the region by enhancing their productivity and income. "The SmartAgri project aims to enhance the liveli-

hoods of small farmers through sustainable farming approaches, deployment of IoT (Internet of Things) solutions and by improving their access to information, using technology," it added. Under the project, over 400 sensors have been deployed over 1,00,000

hectares of farmland to collect various data points, which are then analysed by a cloud-based and localised Smart Agriculture app. The app offers local language support as well as weather forecast and irrigation management information. "The sensors generate insights that is helping to improve soy and cotton crop yields. Crop management through Wing can include smart irrigation, smart pesticide control, and proactive information sharing frameworks on crops and weather, as well as a platform for commodity exchange," the release added. The use case can also employ Remotely Piloted Aircraft System (RPAS) technology, or drones, instead of traditional sensors for crop management. "To demonstrate the impact of technology in transforming agricultural practices in India, Vi CSR chose the agri-heartlands of Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, and on-boarded Nokia as the IoT solutions provider, and Solidaridad for field implementation," it said. The CSR initiative will be showcased at the Voda Idea booth during India Mobile Congress 2020 from December 8 to 10. Telecom operator, Vodafone Idea, offers products and services to its customers under the brand name 'Vi'. —PTI

DLF TO EQUIP OFFICES WITH AIR FILTRATION

New Delhi, Dec. 7: DLF will invest Rs 30 crore over the next six months to install new air-filtration technology, MERV-14, in all its office buildings to ensure safe re-entry of tenants and their employees in its office buildings, the company said.

LEAD SCHOOL TO HAVE AI-LED ASSESSMENT

Mumbai, Dec. 7: LEAD School, an EdTech player in K-12 education, has acquired QuizNext, an AI-powered gamified student assessment and practice platform. Commenting, LEAD School co-founder and COO Smita Deorah said, "Beyond online classes, students need a lot of support in a remote learning environment for a full schooling impact."

SHORT TAKES

Reds join Spurs at top of EPL

London: Liverpool turned on the style for their returning fans on Sunday, beating Wolves 4-0 to join Tottenham at the top of the Premier League after another episode of the Son Heung-min and Harry Kane show. Jurgen Klopp's men had not had the chance to play in front of their supporters since they ended their 30-year wait to be crowned English champions but made up for lost time. "You'll Never Walk Alone" rang out around Anfield as 2,000 home fans — the maximum allowed under coronavirus rules — witnessed strikes from Mohamed Salah, Georginio Wijnaldum, Joel Matip and an own goal. Liverpool have now won 31 of their past 32 home league games, scoring 93 goals while conceding just 25. Earlier, Jose Mourinho's Spurs beat faltering Arsenal 2-0 at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium and Leicester, who ended the day in fourth spot, struck late to beat rock-bottom Sheffield United 2-1. — *AFP*

Milan pip Samp to maintain lead

Rome: AC Milan kept hold of their five-point lead at the top of Serie 'A' on Sunday after a hard-fought 2-1 win at Sampdoria, while Napoli moved third after strolling to victory over bottom side Crotone. Franck Kessie's penalty on the stroke of half-time and Samu Castillejo's 77th-minute strike were just enough for the seven-time European champions, who were without injured talisman Zlatan Ibrahimovic, to move up to 26 points and keep second-placed local rivals Inter Milan at arm's length. Napoli are six points back in third after goals from Lorenzo Insigne, Hirving Lozano, Diego Demme and Andrea Petagna earned the away side a 4-0 win at Crotone. Ivory Coast midfielder Kessie coolly struck home his spot-kick after Jakub Jankto unluckily handled while challenging for the ball with Theo Hernandez. — *AFP*

Sociedad held, cede La Liga lead

Madrid: Real Sociedad were unable to regain first place in La Liga on Sunday night when they were held to a goalless draw at Basque rivals Alaves. Deprived of injured captain Mikel Oyarzabal, top scorer in La Liga with seven goals, Sociedad were unable to breach the home defence. The draw dropped them one point behind Atletico, who on Saturday beat Valladolid 2-0 for a seventh straight Liga victory. Earlier on Sunday, Villarreal also lost ground with a 0-0 draw at home to Elche. Villarreal regained third place but fell five points behind Diego Simeone's league leaders. Sociedad and Villarreal have both played two games more than Atletico and one more than fourth-placed Real Madrid. Real Madrid reversed a recent slide with a 1-0 victory at Sevilla on Saturday. — *AFP*

Jamshedpur halt Mariners' sail

Goa: A fine brace from Nerijus Valskis ensured Jamshedpur FC bagged their first win in the Hero Indian Super League Season 7 as they beat early pace-setters ATK Mohun Bagan 2-1 at the Tilak Maidan Stadium, here on Monday. Valskis (30', 66') scored in either half for Owen Coyle's side, while Krishna pulled a late goal back for ATKMB. The result also meant ATKMB's perfect run in the campaign came to an end following the defeat. — *Agencies*

Live on TV

CRICKET

Australia vs India: Third T20 from 1.40 pm on Sony Six, Ten 1, HD

FOOTBALL

Indian Super League: Bengaluru vs NorthEast United from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

Champions League: Zenit vs Dortmund from 11.25 pm on Sony Ten 2; Barcelona vs Juventus from 1.30 am (Wednesday) on Sony Six; Leipzig vs Manchester United from 1.30 am (Wednesday) on Sony Ten 1; PSG vs Istanbul Basaksehir from 1.30 am (Wednesday) on Sony Ten 3

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India eye clean sweep

Kohli's men look to extend unbeaten run in last T20 against Oz

Sydney, Dec. 7: The series pocketed and their confidence restored, India would eye nothing less than a clean sweep when they take on an Australian side significantly weakened by injury blows, in the third and final T20 International here on Tuesday.

Skipper Virat Kohli and his main protagonist of the white-ball leg, Hardik Pandya, will feel a sense of *deja vu* given that the script has panned out exactly like 2016 when the team got walloped in the ODIs but came back strongly to rout the Aussies 3-0 in the T20 International series.

After a couple of crushing defeats in the first two ODIs, the Indians have turned a corner starting with the final ODI in Canberra.

Even the absence of a white-ball pro like Ravindra Jadeja didn't have an impact during their convincing six-wicket win in the series-clinching second T20 on Sunday.

What will boost the Indian team's morale manifold is the fact that it had the confidence to rest both Mohammed Shami and Jasprit Bumrah, relying on a troika of pacers, who between them haven't played even 40 games collectively.

India's new white-ball sensation Thangarasu Natarajan has had a superb initiation in international cricket with Australian batsmen still finding it difficult to read him.

As Pandya so rightly put it, Natarajan's spell and the 10 runs that Australia failed to score became the difference between winning and losing on Sunday.

The difference between India and Australia during the last game was the batting of the two teams during the middle overs.

Australia lost a bit of momentum after stand-in skipper Matthew Wade was dismissed while his opposite number Kohli played some outrageous shots after the Powerplay to up the ante. — *PTI*

Jadeja may miss first Test

New Delhi, Dec. 7: Indian all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja is likely to miss the opening Test against Australia owing to the concussion and a hamstring injury that he sustained during the opening T20 International in Canberra.

The 32-year-old, who is on the cusp of his 50th Test, is likely to be out for at least three weeks which certainly rules him out of the first Day/Night Test in Adelaide starting December 17.

In case it turns out to be a hamstring tear, it could well rule him out of the second Boxing Day Test in Melbourne from December 26.

"As per ICC's concussion protocols, after any head injury, a player needs to be rested for 7 to 10 days, which effectively rules Jadeja out of the three-day day/night warm-up game at the SCG from December 11," a BCCI source said on



Members of the Indian team celebrate their T20 series victory over Australia at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Sunday. India are leading the three-match series 2-0. — *AFP*

Umesh, Ashwin impress in warm-up

Sydney, Dec. 7: Senior pros Umesh Yadav and Ravichandran Ashwin staked strong claims to be included in India's playing XI for the first Test with impressive performances against Australia A, who scored 286 for 8 on the second day, riding on Cameron Green's unbeaten century.

Australia now have a 39-run lead after India A declared their innings at 247 for 9 in the first hour of the second day, with

skipper Ajinkya Rahane remaining unbeaten on 117.

With Mohammed Shami and Jasprit Bumrah being automatic choices, Umesh (18-3-44-3), fighting for third pacer's slot, certainly looked more penetrative compared to Mohammed Siraj (19-4-71-2) with the new ball.

Yadav removed both rival Test team openers Will Pucovski (1) and Joe Burns (4) in his third and fourth over with the new

ball to make initial inroads.

Ashwin (19-2-58-2) also did his Test chances no harm as he reminded old timers of Australian off-spinner of 80's Greg Mathews (hero of 'Madras' tied Test) bowling with his cap on.

Only that Mathews was protecting himself from Chennai heat while Ashwin was reluctant to give it to fellow fielders.

For Australia A, the giant all-rounder Green

continued his rich vein of Sheffield Shield form with an unbeaten 114 off 173 that had 10 fours and a six. He showed good temperament against the Indian attack while adding 104 runs for the sixth wicket with his national skipper Tim Paine (44) after being reduced to 98 for 5. — *PTI*
Brief scores: Indian A 247/9 decl. (Rahane 117*, Pujara 54) vs Australia A 286/8 (Green 114*, Paine 44, Yadav 3/44, Ashwin 2/58).



Ravindra Jadeja

conditions of anonymity.

"Therefore, it is next to impossible that the Indian team management would field Jadeja, without any warm-up game time ahead of the opening Test," the

source added.

However, more than concussion, it is understood that the hamstring injury is likely to keep Jadeja out of action for at least one Test if not two. — *PTI*

PAK SQUAD CLEARS 5TH COVID TEST IN NZ

Christchurch, Dec. 7:

The touring Pakistan squad has returned negative in a fifth round of Covid-19 tests and will now be able to leave their managed isolation on Tuesday, subject to clearance from the health ministry, New Zealand Cricket said on Monday.

The 53-member Pakistan team was denied the right to train while in managed isolation in New Zealand after eight members of the touring squad had tested positive for Covid-19.

"This is to advise the Pakistan squad's fifth and final day 12, Covid-19 tests have all been returned as negative," NZC said in a

statement.

"As a consequence, and pending final Ministry of Health approval, the squad will leave managed isolation tomorrow and fly to Queenstown, where they will train ahead of the T20 and Test series against the BLACKCAPS."

Pakistan are scheduled to play three T20Is, beginning in Auckland on December 18 followed by two Tests starting December 26.

Six members of the Pakistan team had tested positive on arrival, while two more returned positive tests later and all eight are now in quarantine. — *PTI*

Anju won medals with one kidney

Kochi, Dec. 7: Olympian Anju Bobby George, who secured a historic bronze medal in the 2003 World Athletics Championship in Paris, on Monday said she achieved success and reached the top with a single kidney.

In a tweet, the ace athlete, a gold medalist in the IAAF World Athletics Finals (Monaco, 2005), said she had many limitations, including being allergic to even a painkiller, but still made it.

"Believe it or not, I'm one of the fortunate, among very few who reached the world top with a single KIDNEY, allergic with even a painkiller, with a dead takeoff leg... Many limitations...Still made it. Can we call, magic of a coach or his talent," Anju tweeted.

Her career blossomed under the coaching of husband Robert Bobby George. Anju said she chose the pandemic season to make this revelation to "motivate" all the sportspersons in the current generation, who are missing their practice and competitions due to the spread of the deadly virus.

"The general perception of the people is that I have a perfect body. But the fact is that I achieved all the success in my field by overcoming all difficulties. I hope that sharing of my experience will help motivate all aspiring sportspersons," she said.

She said she complained of fatigue while in Germany for a competition in 2003 and doctors there advised her rest for six months and not to even think about sports "It was just 20 days ahead of the Paris World Athletics Championship. I overcame all the issues and won a medal in Paris," she said.

Anju came to know she was living with a single kidney during an overall health check-up in Bengaluru 2001 due to some health issues before starting her international career. "It was shocking news for me. But Bobby (husband) motivated me to continue my career and achieve success. He even offered his kidney if I face any problem," she said.

Anju said she was now mature enough to handle



Anju Bobby George

● **In a tweet, the ace athlete, a gold medalist in the IAAF World Athletics Finals (Monaco, 2005), said she had many limitations, including being allergic to even a painkiller, but still made it.**

the situation brought about by her health issues.

"If I had gone public with my health then, the situation would have been different," Anju said.

Responding to her tweet, Union Sports Minister Kiren Rijiju said she brought laurels to India through her hard work, grit and determination. "Anju, it's your hard work, grit and determination to bring laurels for India, supported by the dedicated coaches and the whole technical backup team. We are so proud of you being the only Indian so far to win a medal in the World Athletic Championship!" the minister said in his response to her tweet.

The Athletics Federation of India said as India's only medalist at the IAAF World Championships (Paris, 2003), a gold medalist in the IAAF World Athletics Finals (Monaco, 2005) and a remarkably consistent performer, Anju is among the country's most inspirational track and field stars.

She finished sixth at the 2004 Olympics with a personal best leap of 6.83m, but was elevated to fifth place in 2007 when USA's Marion Jones was disqualified for a doping offence. — *PTI*

England tour off after Covid strike

Johannesburg, Dec. 7: England's cricket tour of South Africa has been called off after a Covid-19 outbreak in the England touring party, both countries said on Monday.

The joint announcement from the two boards, which alluded to the "mental and physical health" of the players, came after the rearranged first match in the three-match series on Sunday was cancelled after two members of the England touring party tested positive for the virus.

England will return home having played all three matches in the T20 series but none of three scheduled ODIs.

"Cricket South Africa and the England and Wales Cricket Board have agreed

to postpone the remaining matches in the current ODI Series. The decision was taken jointly by the two Boards to ensure the mental and physical health and welfare of players from both teams," a joint statement said.

Many of the England players spent long stretches during the summer in a bio-secure bubble and some were also confined during the Indian Premier League in the Emirates which followed.

Two of the younger members of the squad, Tom Banton and Tom Curran have pulled out of contracts in Australia's Big Bash League in the last week, citing the pressure of living in the bio-secure bubbles. — *AFP*

Jadeja absence throws conspiracy theories out of window



Hemant Kenkre
Silly Point

The Australians don't take defeat on their chin and move on. Their last setback, in the first Twenty20 match (T20) coming on the back of another loss in the final One Day International (ODI) at Canberra has put them in a bit of a spot. The reactions of their cricketers, both current and former, to the losses, shows that the confidence they had gained after wins in the first two ODIs has been shaken and that's good news for India.

The concussion substitute issue, which has

opened debates across platforms, where Yuzvendra Chahal replaced Ravindra Jadeja and bowled India to a win in the first T20 saw responses from the hosts which affirmed their discomfort. Coach Justin Langer's head-shaking argument with match referee David Boon during the innings break was followed by Aussie all-rounder Moises Henriques doubts whether Chahal's was a "like-for-like" replacement for the injured Jadeja.

Former Aussie international Tom Moody commented that he had no

issues with the substitution but raised a question if the correct 'protocol' was followed since no physio or doctor came on to the middle when the Indian left-hander was struck on the helmet by a Mitchell Starc bouncer. Though these reactions were aimed at officials (match referee and umpires — as the decisions would ideally remain in their domains) they did lead to the perception that the replacement by India wasn't 'fair dinkum' to put it in Aussie slang.

The 'issue' unnecessarily raised by the Aussies was because Jadeja suffered a hamstring injury after he was hit on the head and their reactions were bordering on that fact. Coming back, the questions one could ask Moody will be about protocols that need to be followed.

Would coach Langer's act of arguing with match referee Boon, a veteran cricketer and an Australian to boot, in full public with cameras focussed on them be considered as correct protocol? Would Moody have done the same while coaching a team in the Indian Premier League?

As someone who has been a frontline coach Moody should know what is and isn't part of cricket's covenant. It just maybe that the former coach may have suffered a moment of 'brain fade' just the way former Aussie skipper Steve Smith did while touring India in the 2017 series.

Cricketers were always taught to respect the umpires decisions as final and any argument about the same was abhorred upon. In today's parlance, arguments with referees

and umpires are taken as part of cricket's changing scenario which makes for great viewing and juicy stories but is terrible if looked at from the point of view of the spirit of the game.

Looking back, Chahal replacing Jadeja wasn't exactly a major achievement by India but a mere opportunity for them to get a leg spinner in a game that was helping that genre of bowling. Calling it a masterstroke by India would be a misnomer. Indian captain Virat Kohli was honest enough to admit that there were no plans to play Chahal in the match and the decision they took worked for them this time and may not work in the future. Also, Jadeja being ruled out of the remainder of the T20 series and put under medical observation throws all

conspiracy theories out of the window.

The reactions from the Australians will now put Kohli and team India in a better frame of mind as they approach the crucial Test series. They know that the Aussies are riled after two consecutive losses and have given them a foot in the door. The host team's decision to rest their star bowler Pat Cummins and all-rounder Marcus Stoinis showed that they missed their opportunity for a clean sweep and gave the visitors a much needed lifeline.

The Aussies hate for anyone to get under their skin. We saw how former Indian skipper Sourav Ganguly irritated his counterpart Steve Waugh (by keeping him waiting for the toss) in 2001 taking Waugh away from his objective of beat-

ing India and conquering the last frontier. This time, they have inadvertently allowed the Indians to affect their psyche. Their adverse reactions to a superficial incident shows that they got complacent, effectively masking their failure to keep dominating over the visitors.

If India do keep up the momentum and win the T20 series (this is written before the second T20 match at Sydney) it will put them in a great position for the Test series. With Ajinkya Rahane's century and Cheteshwar Pujara's fifty for India 'A' against Australia 'A' in the ongoing practice match at the Drummoyne Oval in Sydney, the mood in the team India's camp will be upbeat and more positive than it was a week ago — a great build up for the Test series.