





SHORT TAKES

### Direct Shillong, Delhi flight begins

**Shillong:** Meghalaya was connected with the national capital by direct flight services on Monday, coinciding with the state reopening for tourists after remaining closed for nine months due to Covid-19 outbreak. State transport minister S. Dhar took the Flybig.in flight from Delhi which landed at Shillong airport, 25 km from the state capital, in the afternoon. Flybig.in is a new entrant in the aero industry and will be operating the flights twice a week, the official said. "It is a momentous occasion for the state and it will go down in history as the day when Delhi-Shillong direct flight started," Dhar told reporters at the airport. He thanked CM Conrad Sangma for taking the initiative for the direct flight from Shillong to Delhi and Delhi to Shillong. Flybig was awarded the contract for this route through a tender floated at the beginning of the year, a transport official said. — PTI

### Sisodia distributes 230 smartphones

**New Delhi:** Delhi deputy chief Minister Manish Sisodia distributed 230 smartphones, collected with the help of civil society, among students of a government school in Rohini to help them attend online classes. The devices have been collected by the Government Sarvodaya co-ed Secondary Vidyalaya in Rohini with the help from civil society members to facilitate students in attending online classes during Covid-19 pandemic. "Through the efforts of the school's principal Awadhesh Kumar Jha and vice-principal Bharti Kalra, 230 smartphones were collected for the students in need, with the help of the civil society," Mr Sisodia said. — PTI

## BJP MP's wife

■ **Continued from Page 1** his party. He is an opportunist." Hailing Ms Banerjee and his MP nephew Abhishek Banerjee, Ms Khan said: "I want honour. I wish to work in my favourite party and its leader. I worked tirelessly for my husband's victory. But the BJP did not value my contribution. It gives place to some incompetent by poaching them from other parties. When good sense will prevail upon Mr Khan, he will return to TMC also." In an explosive claim, she added: "The BJP already has a list of six CM candidates and 13 deputy CMs." With tearful eyes Mr Khan, also the state BJYM chief, said: "Our relations were of 10 years. But I did not know that politics could end it. I am not stopping her. Love is above politics. I quit the TMC for the development of Bengal. I knew the TMC steals cattle and coal. But I never thought the TMC would steal someone's wife."

## Didi accuses Shah of 'lies'

■ **Continued from Page 1** digits" in the next year's Assembly elections. He also promised he would quit Twitter if proved wrong. In a blistering attack on the BJP over communal politics, the CM said: "We love our Constitution. It is our pillar. But can you tell me if it thoroughly nurtured, and accepted the in real sense, secularism in India? No. It is typical politics of hatred that is going on. I condemn it." Earlier, at Nabanna, the state secretariat, Ms Banerjee boasted of West Bengal's achievements in all sectors with facts and figures, and attacked Mr Shah and his party. She alleged: "The BJP is a party of cheats. For politics, they can do and say anything. Hope Mr Shah knows what is gold or not. Speaking for a political party and furnishing false information does not suit a home minister. Amitji, yeh aapko shobha nehi deti hai. It is not right for you to talk of false and wrong information which were prepared by your party workers. You do not have an idea of it. Please cross check what you say. I have the evidence against whatever you claimed." Reaffirming her fierce opposition to the CAA, NRC and the National Population Register, she added: "When the CAA was passed, I started opposing it. They (BJP) cannot decide the fate of citizens. Let them decide their own fate. We are against the CAA, NRC and NPR. Nothing has been withdrawn."

# BJP-JDS merger on cards in Karnataka?

*Karnataka CM BSY asks party members to remain mum, Kumaraswamy junks speculation*

**Bengaluru, Dec. 21:** Chief minister B.S. Yediyurappa on Monday asked his BJP party members not to comment on rumours about possible merger of JD(S) with the saffron party, even as JD(S) leader H.D. Kumaraswamy dismissed such reports and expressed confidence about coming to power independently. "My real politics will begin in 2023," Mr Kumaraswamy said and asserted that no one can finish the JD(S). Amid rumours of a possible merger of the JD(S) with BJP, both leaders had on Sunday too issued statements dismissing them as far from the truth.

"JD(S) is a party built by former Prime Minister Deve Gowda and former chief minister Kumaraswamy is its leader. "At the time when they are trying to strengthen the party and build it across the state, talking about that party's merger with another party is like insulting them," Mr Yediyurappa said on Monday. Speaking to reporters, the CM said, neither he nor others should speak on such issues, while maintaining that JD(S) has given cooperation on the issue of removing the legislative council chairman. "...in the coming days too they may give us coopera-

■ **There have been rumours and reports in certain sections of the media for a couple of months now about the merger, with Mr Kumaraswamy twice meeting Mr Yediyurappa personally at his official residence and JD(S)' alleged softening of stand towards the ruling party**

tion if needed, but at the time they are building their party, talks about its merger are not right. "There is still two and a half years for election. They will build their party, we will build ours. So no one, including those from our party, should speak about such things," he added. There have been rumours and reports in certain sections of the

media for a couple of months now about the merger, with Mr Kumaraswamy twice meeting Mr Yediyurappa personally at his official residence and JD(S)' alleged softening of stand towards the ruling party. Also JD(S) extending support for the passage of the land reforms bill in the council after initially opposing it and the regional party's support to BJP

in its no-confidence motion against Council Chairman did add to the speculation. Senior BJP legislator Arvind Limbavali's reply to a question about merger on Sunday was seen as adding credence to the speculation. "I too have heard about it (merger), I will try to know about it. I have got to know through the media," he said. Political polarisation will happen more in the days to come and there is a clear wave in favour of PM Narendra Modi and BJP in the country and in Karnataka too it will happen, he had said, pointing at a fight between two for-

mer coalition partners Congress and JD(S). Ruling out any merger proposals before him, Mr Kumaraswamy, hitting out at Congress and its leader Siddaramaiah, asserted that his aim is to bring JD(S) to power independently in 2023, and blamed those who are on their way out from the party for spreading such rumours. "I have already spoken about JD(S)' stand. There is no question of merging JD(S) with any other party until we are alive. We are not here for power. For the last 10 years we have worked in the opposition," Mr Kumaraswamy said. — PTI

# Social media crucial for our fight, say agitating farmers

**New Delhi, Dec. 21:** A day after Facebook temporarily shut down a page on the ongoing farmers agitation against the Centre's new farm laws, the protestors on Monday said social media was crucial for their movement as it allowed them to tell the truth in their own words.

The social media giant had Sunday evening shut down the page of Kisan Ekta Morcha' that shares official updates on the agitation, only to restore it three hours later following social media outrage. The Kisan Ekta Morcha's Instagram page was also temporarily suspended. Social media plays an important role in our movement. While all kinds of media are writing about us, social media helps us tell our truth in our own words. The godi media will never show the reality, but on social media, we can share what is actually happening, Himmat Singh, a farmer camping at Singhu border, said. He came to the



A farmer at Singhu Border in New Delhi writes a letter with blood to be sent to the Prime Minister. — PTI

protest site from Punjab's Kapurthala four days ago. Before arriving here, he said his main source of information about the agitation was social media. Himmat said he used to take the help of social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to stay abreast of the various developments of the protest. The farmer added that ever since he came to the protest site, he has been posting short videos of the agitation on his Facebook page. He also termed the shutting down of the Facebook

page of Kisan Ekta Morcha as an attempt to silence them. I think it was done by the government. It is not a big deal for them to shut down something they do not like, the protestor rued. Facebook had on Sunday said the farmers protest community page was blocked because it violated the virtual platform's community standards. The social media site, however, clarified on Monday that it was an automated action which happened because of increased activity on the page. — PTI

## ■ Hans Raj, Bidhuri visit rural pockets in Delhi, talk to farmers BJP MPs roll out farm outreach plan

**SHASHI BHUSHAN**  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 21

Two Delhi BJP MPs — Ramesh Bidhuri and Sufi singer Hans Raj Hans — have launched an awareness campaign to sensitise farmers about the benefits of the new farm laws in their constituencies. Singhu and Tikri borders in Mr Hans' Northwest constituency have emerged as the epicentre of the farmers' protests against the new laws. On Monday, Mr Bidhuri visited the Kalkaji

Assembly constituency and explained about the benefits of the new farm laws. Mr Bidhuri planned to cover all the villages in the next few days. He also stayed with the famers in the village. Mr Bidhuri on Sunday took out a 9-km "Kisan Kanoon Kalyan Samarthan Yatra" covering many villages, including Jaitpur, Badarpur, Meethapur and Molarband, in his constituency. Mr Hans is visiting the rural pockets of his constituency, including Narela, Bawana, and

Mundka, meeting farmers and distributing Union agriculture minister Narendra Tomar's recent letter addressed to the protesting farmers. "There are around 100 villages in Northwest Delhi bordering Haryana and they have an impact on the villages and people living there in the neighbouring states. The farmers should read the leaflets of Mr Tomar's letter to understand how the new farm laws are beneficial to them and how some people are taking advantage of

the current situation and creating confusion among them," said Mr Hans. "I am sure that farmers will read the leaflets. The farmers will be able to know how many benefits the new laws have and that its opponents are working to harm everyone under the cover of the farmers' protests," Mr Hans added. Thousands of farmers from Punjab, Haryana, UP and other states have been camping at Delhi borders for over three weeks, demanding the Centre to scrap the three farm laws.

## Tiger state MP is now earns tag of leopard state

**RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY**  
BHOPAL, DEC. 21

Madhya Pradesh has added another feather to its much-feathered crown by being home to the largest number of leopards in the country. The latest leopard census released by the Centre on Monday counted the wild animal species in the state at 3,421. The number of leopards in MP has almost doubled from 1,830 in 2014 to 3,421 in 2018. The 2018 census of leopards in the country was released on Monday. India's leopard population increased from 8,000 to over 12,500 in four years since 2014, environment minister Prakash Javadekar said, asserting the rise in their numbers following similar reports on tiger and lion shows the country is protecting its ecology and biodiversity well. "More than 60 per cent increase in their population has been recorded," the minister said. Maharashtra followed MP having a leopard population of 1690. MP has earlier earned the tag of tiger state by being the home to the largest number of big cats at 526 as per the 2018 census. The state is also home to the largest number of "gharials" and vultures. While the number of "gharials" in the state has been counted at 1,800, the number of vultures has been counted at 8,200, as per the latest census of these species.

# 65-yr-old farmer attempts suicide

*Admitted to Rohtak's PGIMS, stable*

**Chandigarh, Dec. 21:** A 65-year-old Punjab farmer protesting against the Centre's agriculture laws attempted suicide by taking some poisonous substance near the Delhi's Singhu border on Monday, a police official said. Niranjn Singh, who hails from Punjab's Tarn Taran, was admitted to the Rohtak's PGIMS and his condition is stated to be stable, the official said. Before the suicide bid, the farmer left a note behind, which is being verified by police. We are in the process of recording his statement, the official said when asked about the reason behind the suicide attempt. The incident comes close on the heels of a Sikh preacher, Sant Ram Singh, allegedly committing suicide near the Singhu border last week as he was unable to bear the pain of the farmers. On Saturday, a 22-year-old farmer had allegedly committed suicide in Punjab's Bathinda after returning from a protest site near the Delhi border. Farmers are protesting against the Centre's three contentious laws enacted in September this year. The government has projected the laws as major reforms in the agriculture sector that will remove middlemen and allow farmers to sell their produce anywhere in the country. However, the protesting farmers have expressed apprehension that the new laws would pave the way for eliminating the safety cushion of the minimum support price and do away with the mandis, leaving them at the mercy of big corporates. — PTI

# Owner of 'Baba Ka Dhaba' opens another restaurant

**BHASKAR HARI SHARMA**  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 21

Kanta Prasad, the owner of 'Baba ka Dhaba' eatery, on Monday, opened a new restaurant in South Delhi's Malviya Nagar area. The new restaurant too has been named 'Baba Ka Dhaba.' "We have opened a restaurant today which is near my old eatery. We will serve Indian and Chinese cuisines and have hired two chefs for the same. I will keep running my eatery as well," Mr Prasad said. He has opened the restaurant at a rented accommodation. Tushant Adlakha, a social worker who works with Mr Prasad also, said



that the restaurant will start functioning from Wednesday. "Today, it was the opening of the restaurant. Prasad will take two days to set up the kitchen and from Wednesday they will start serving food to customers. They have both dine-in and takeaway options. They have hired two chefs and the rest of their family members are helping in the restaurant," Mr Adlakha said. Mr Prasad had shot to

fame after a video of him tearfully recounting the desperation of the months since the lockdown was shot by YouTuber Gaurav Wasan and shared widely across social media platforms. Nearly a month after his video went viral, the 80-year-old filed a complaint against the YouTuber for misappropriation of funds. In his complaint to the police, Mr Prasad had alleged that Mr Wasan "intentionally and deliberately shared only his and his family/friends' bank details and mobile numbers with the donors and collected a huge amount of donation without providing any information to the complainant."

# Night curfew in Mumbai till Jan. 5

**BHAGWAN PARAB**  
MUMBAI, DEC. 21

Amidst the reports of new coronavirus variant spreading rapidly in Britain, the Maharashtra Government, as a precautionary measure, announced a night curfew in metropolis areas of the state from December 22 to January 5. We need to remain more alert during the fortnight, said Chief

Minister Uddhav Thackeray. According to the measures announced by the state government, a night curfew will be imposed in municipal corporation areas between 11 and 6 am from December 22 to January 5 as a precautionary measure. In addition to this, all passengers arriving from at the state airports from European and Middle-East Asian

countries will be put under institutional quarantine. Those coming from other countries will be home quarantines. The decision to impose night curfew was taken in a meeting held by Mr Thackeray on the backdrop of alarming situation in the UK. "The new coronavirus variant is spreading rapidly in Britain and its lethality will be known in coming

days. Hence, we need to exercise restraint," the CM said. The corona test of people, who will be put under 14-day institutional quarantine, will be done on the fifth and seventh day. They will be released after completing the quarantine period. Passengers coming from other countries will be home quarantined by putting a stamp on their hands.

## Haasan assures 'payment' to women for their work at home

**Kancheepuram (TN), Dec. 21:**



Actor-politician Kamal Haasan on Monday assured, "payment" to homemakers for their work at home, computer with high-speed internet to all households and transformation of farmers to agri-entrepreneurs if his party MNM was voted to power in the 2021 Tamil Nadu assembly elections. Unveiling his party's seven-point "Governance and Economic Agenda", he also said people below the poverty line would be taken to "prosperity line". "Homemakers will get their due recognition through payment for their work at home which hitherto has been unrecognised and unmonetised, thus raising the dignity of our womenfolk," the agenda said. It was released by Haasan in the presence of former IAS officer Santhosh Babu, who recently joined the Makkal Needhi Maiam (MNM), in this temple town, close to Chennai. On his campaign trail in northern Tamil Nadu for the second day on Monday, the 66-year old MNM founder leader asserted that remittance to women at home was possible. "It is definitely possible," he said, when reporters asked him about the assurance for 'payment' to the womenfolk in the agenda, virtually a mini manifesto of the party. By avoiding corruption, the state could be made prosperous, he added. To a question, Haasan ruled out joining hands with the Dravidian majors — the ruling AIADMK and the DMK. — PTI

## India halts UK flights

■ **Continued from Page 1** Rajesh Bhushan said as a measure of abundant caution, all passengers coming from the UK on all international flights (including flights in transit) should be subjected to mandatory RT-PCR tests at airports upon their arrival. Those found positive will be sent to institutional quarantine centres set up by states and Union territories, while those testing negative have to be under home isolation for seven days, when they will be monitored by government health agencies. States have been asked to create separate desks at airports to facilitate the entire process. As per present norms, international passengers had to only carry a Covid-negative certificate from a test done 72 hours prior to the journey. India's ban comes in line with several countries like Germany, the Netherlands, Canada, Turkey, Belgium, Italy and Israel that have already banned flights to and from the United Kingdom. The Eurostar train between Brussels and London too will stop from Monday night for at least 24 hours. "As you are aware India has been seeing a sustained decline in the number of fresh Covid-19 cases for over two-and-a-half months now accompanied by a decline in the number of deaths. In this scenario, any interjection

of a Sars-CoV-2 variant virus through passengers with a travel history could pose critical risk for pandemic management in India," said Mr Bhushan said in a note to the civil aviation secretary. The Maharashtra government on Monday said 14 days' institutional quarantine was mandatory for flyers coming from Europe and the Middle East. The state has also imposed night curfew from 11 pm to 6 am from Tuesday. According to media reports, UK health secretary Matt Hancock has warned that the new Covid-19 strain is "out of control" and suggested that parts of England will be stuck in the new, highest tier of restrictions until a vaccine is rolled out. The UK reported 35,928 new positive cases, and 326 deaths within 28 days of a positive test. "Today's stark figures are very worrying. This will get worse before it gets better - but it will get better. We all need to do our bit to keep the virus under control while we accelerate the vaccination programme," Mr Hancock said as several parts of London went under a strict lockdown. India on Monday registered 24,337 new Covid-19 cases though the active caseload dropped to 3.03 lakh, the lowest in 161 days.

## Farmers...

■ **Continued from Page 1** Five round of talks between the union leaders and the government have remained inconclusive. The sixth round of talks due on December 9 had to be cancelled as the farmers said they would call off their agitation only after the three laws were repealed. The farmers intensified their protest with a day-long relay hunger-strike on Monday at all protest sites against the new laws. They plan to halt all toll collections on the highways in Haryana for three days from Friday. The union leaders have urged people to skip a meal on "Kisan Diwas" on Wednesday. They have also urged people to beat "thalis" during the relay of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "Mann ki Baat" on Sunday. As the protests at the Singhu border crossed three weeks amid the falling temperatures, many farmers have converted their tractor-trolleys into mini-homes — complete with beds, blankets, music systems, groceries, water and other essentials. The protest site has hundreds of tractors and trolleys parked on the road. Some tractors are being used by the farmers to make announcements and play songs in the evening.





## SHORT TAKES

## TEMPLE DEDICATED TO ACTOR SONU SOOD IN T'GANA

Siddipet (Telangana), Dec. 21: Hailing actor Sonu Sood as a "Real Hero", villagers of Dubba Tanda of Siddipet district have built a temple and installed a bust admiring him for his work in helping migrants reach their homes amid the Covid-19 pandemic. The temple and the actor's bust were inaugurated on Sunday in the village with tribal women dressed in traditional attire attending the inaugural ceremony and dancing and singing traditional folk songs. Some villagers, after unveiling the bust, applied "tilak" and performed "aarti" even as they said Sonu Sood is an inspiration for all. Banners with Sonu Sood's photos that read "Real Hero Sonu Sood Temple" and "Real Hero of India — Sonu Sood" were also put up near the bust. According to Giri Kondalreddy Zilla, a Zilla Parishad Territorial Constituency member, the temple has been built, recognising and thanking Sonu Sood for the good work done by him for the people during the pandemic. "He helped many people. There are several people who are very rich but it was Sonu Sood, who has a big heart," Giri said. — PTI

## MODI PROPOSES TO SET UP LIBRARY ON BUDDHIST TEXTS

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 21

The Prime Minister on Monday proposed setting up of a library in India dedicated to traditional Buddhist literature and scriptures, asserting that it would be a platform for research and dialogue. Addressing the 6th Indo-Japan Samwad Conference via video conferencing, Mr Narendra Modi lauded the forum for doing great work to promote the ideas and ideals of Lord Buddha, especially among the youth. "Today, I would like to propose the creation of a library of all such traditional Buddhist literature and scriptures. We will be happy to create such a facility in India and will provide appropriate resources for it," he said. The library will collect digital copies of all such Buddhist literature from different countries, it will aim to translate them, and make them freely available for all monks and scholars of Buddhism, he said. The library will not only be a depository of literature, it will also be a platform for research and dialogue — a true 'SAMWAD' between human beings, between societies, and between man and nature, Mr Modi said. "Its research mandate will also include examining how Buddha's message can guide our modern world against contemporary challenges," he said and cited challenges like poverty, racism, extremism, gender discrimination, climate change among others.

## PRIYANKA RAISES CONCERNS OVER PLIGHT OF COWS

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 21

Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi on Monday shot off a letter to Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath over the plight of cows in his state and asked the chief minister to take a cue from her party-led government in Chhattisgarh on their protection. In a two-page letter, she cited pictures of dead cows at Saujana in Lalitpur district of the state and said they were "heart-wrenching and disturbing".

Sharing the letter on her twitter handle, she wrote, "This is not the first photograph of the kind. Earlier too, we have seen photographs from different parts of the state highlighting the plight of cows. Concrete steps need to be taken for their welfare and accountability also needs to be fixed." She added that though it is not clear what lead to the death of cows, but it appears they died due to lack of food and water. The AICC general secretary asked the chief minister to take a cue from the Congress government in Chhattisgarh on cow protection. "Chhattisgarh has solved the matter very well by implementing the 'Godan Nyay Yojana'," she said.

OBIT | 1928-2010

## Day after 93rd birthday, Cong's Motilal Vora dies

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 21

A day after celebrating his 93rd birthday, veteran Congress leader Motilal Vora passed away in a private hospital in New Delhi. He was admitted in the hospital a few days ago with post Covid-19 complications. He was suffering from urinary infection. He also had lung infection and was put on ventilator support, his family said.

His last rites would be performed in Durg in Chhattisgarh on Tuesday, his family said.

Born on December 20, 1928, in Nagour district in Rajasthan, Vora began his profession in journalism and made debut in electoral politics by being elected to Durg municipality in Chhattisgarh as a corporator in 1968.

He was elected to undivided MP Assembly from Durg in 1972. He became chief minister of undivided MP in 1985 and was shifted to the Centre to serve as Union health and family welfare and civil aviation minister in 1988. He became CM of undivided MP again for a brief period in 1989.

He was appointed governor of Uttar Pradesh in 1993. He was admired as a gentleman politician by his fraternity for his soft spoken nature and suave manner. He had served as a Rajya Sabha member four times and as a Lok Sabha member once.

## Over 60 Ulfa rebels surrender in Assam

MANOJ ANAND  
GUWAHATI, DEC. 21

In a major breakthrough, more than 60 militants including 18 from outlawed Ulfa (I) laid down arms in front of Assam chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal here on Monday.

Informing that the surrender of militants belonging to various outfits would go a long way in restoring peace in the state, security sources said that the multi-pronged approach adopted by the government to restore peace in the state was paying dividends as more and more militants are coming forward to join the mainstream.

Pointing out that relentless counter-insurgency operations have also mounted immense pressure on militants, security sources said that the rehabilitation policy adopted by the government for surrendered militants is also encouraging the militants to give up the path of violence.

Of the militants who laid down arms, 18 belong to the United Liberation Front of Asom (Independent); 32 are members of the United People's Revolutionary Front, a Kuki militant outfit; and the rest are from the Dimasas National Liberation Army and People's Democratic Council of Karbi Longri.

As all four factions of the National Democratic Front of Boroland signed a peace pact with the Central and state governments in January this year, the surrender of 63 militants will go a long way in the restoration of peace in Assam, security sources said.

Sources said that after the surrender, the credentials of surrendered militants would be verified and checked by a screening committee headed by the IGP of the special branch. The committee will first check the cases the militants have against them and also determine whether they were really active members of militant groups before they get the benefits of the rehabilitation package of the government.

He was in hospital with post-Covid complications



In this file photo, Congress chief Sonia Gandhi being greeted by senior party leader Motilal Vora during the party's 135th Foundation Day at the AICC HQ in New Delhi. — PTI

Condoling the death of the Congress veteran, senior party leader Rahul Gandhi said, "Vora ji was a true congressman and a wonderful human being. We will miss him very much. My love and condolences to his family and friends."

Prime Minister Narendra Modi also condoled the death and said, "Shri Motilal Vora Ji was among the senior-most Congress leaders who had vast administrative and organisational experience in a political career that

spanned decades. Saddened by his demise. Condolences to his family and well-wishers. Om Shanti."

Priyanka Gandhi said every Congress leader and worker is feeling personally pained over Vora's death. "Vora ji was a symbol of loyalty, dedication, and patience towards the ideology of Congress," she said.

She also said Vora was present at every party meeting even at the advanced age of 92 and expressed his views openly on every issue.

## Leaders condole death; 3-day mourning in MP

Bhopal, Dec. 21: Leaders from the Congress and the BJP in Madhya Pradesh on Monday expressed grief over the demise of Congress veteran Motilal Vora, who had served as a chief minister of undivided Madhya Pradesh for two terms in the 1980s.

The state government also declared a three-day mourning from December 21 to 23, an official said.

Vora died at a hospital in New Delhi on Monday.

Condolences poured in for Vora from Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan of BJP and his predecessors Kamal Nath and Digvijay Singh, both from the Congress.

"Motilal Vora has served the party for the life time by remaining on different posts and worked for strengthening the organisation. A day before only he turned 93," Mr Nath said in a message.

Mr Chouhan also expressed deep sorrow and prayed for the departed soul.

Describing Vora as a dedicated and sensitive leader for the people, Digvijay Singh said the former's demise was an "irreparable loss" to the Congress.

— PTI

## COURT ORDERS FRAMING OF CHARGES AGAINST J&amp;K SEPARATIST

New Delhi, Dec. 21: A Delhi court ordered framing of charges against Kashmiri separatist Aasiya Andrabi and her two associates for allegedly waging war against India, sedition and conspiracy to commit acts of terror in the country. The case relates to allegedly waging war against the country with support from Pakistan, including terror entities there.

Special Judge Parveen Singh ordered putting Andrabi and her associates — Sofi Fehmeeda and Nahida Nasreen — on trial for various offences punishable under IPC and stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). They were arrested in April 2018.

The court order the framing of charges under IPC Sections 120-B (criminal conspiracy), 121 (waging war against the Government of India), 121-A (conspiracy to wage war against Government of India), 124-A (sedition), 153-A (promoting enmity between different groups), 153-B (imputations, assertions prejudicial to national-integration) and 505 (statements conducing to public mischief).

Andrabi, who was chief of the banned outfit Dukhtar-e-Milat (Daughters of Nation), was accused of being involved in conspiracy and acts to "severely destabilise the sovereignty and integrity of India". — PTI

## Russia will not take sides in India, China disputes

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 21

Russia will "not take sides" in the Sino-Indian border dispute but wants an atmosphere of cooperation and enhanced dialogue between the two Asian giants, top Russian diplomats said on Monday, adding that "non-inclusive" Indo-Pacific concepts like the four-nation Quad can be "detrimental" to regional stability and inclusive cooperation in the region.

However, in what is being seen as a balancing act, Russia said it supports both the "growing Indian profile" globally as well as "Indian sentiments" and that it also "supports the Indian vision for the Indo-Pacific". Moscow also said the sale of the S-400 missile systems to India is "advancing well".

At an annual year-end media briefing in the national capital on Monday in the Virtual format, Russian Ambassador to India Nikolay R. Kudashev — while commenting on the recent Sino-Indian military tensions in the Ladakh sector, said, "It is vital to ensure an atmosphere of cooperation between the two Asian giants. As a friend to both India and China, we would encourage enhanced dialogue between both the governments. Between New Delhi and Beijing, we believe this is the key for the future progress in ties and to the regional security and stability."

Pointing out that the sale of the S-400 missile systems to India is "advancing well", the Russian Ambassador also said that if the K-226 helicopter and AK-47 203 rifle deal processes are expedited, "we will see good progress".

## Cong netas hand over Sonia's letter to Uddhav

Mumbai: Indicating that the Congress is not happy with the Sena-led government, party leader Prithviraj Chavan said the state government must implement the common minimum programme.

He said the CMP is not a manifesto of any particular party.

A Congress delegation led by state party chief Balasaheb Thorat met CM Uddhav Thackeray and gave him a letter written by Congress president Sonia Gandhi seeking implementation of common minimum programme (CMP) and welfare measures for Dalits and tribals.

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 21

Aggressive Chinese military behaviour in Asia — from the maritime region of the South China Sea to the Ladakh sector on India's land border — was one of the key issues discussed during an hour-long Virtual Summit between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Vietnamese counterpart Nguyen Xuan Phuc on Monday evening.

Stressing that Vietnam as an important partner in India's Indo-Pacific vision, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said cooperation between the two countries can contribute to maintaining peace and stability in the region.

It may be recalled that these negotiations are being carried out between China and the southeast Asian nations, but India too has key interests in the region such as energy exploration with Vietnam in Vietnamese waters. Not surprisingly, therefore, both leaders "affirmed that a peaceful, stable, secure, free, open, inclu-

sive and rules-based region is in the common interest of all countries".

The leaders also "spoke of the importance of promoting a rules-based order in the region, including by upholding international law, especially the UNCLOS", which is being seen as a strong signal to China with whom Vietnam has a maritime territorial dispute. When asked if the Chinese military behaviour in the region was discussed, the ministry of external affairs (MEA) said "both leaders exchanged views on wide-ranging bilateral, regional and global issues". With defence cooperation being "one of the key pillars of our comprehensive strategic partnership", the Summit "provided an opportunity to handover one high-speed-guard boat to Vietnam, the launch of two other vessels manufactured in India, and keel-laying seven vessels being manufactured in Vietnam, under the \$100 million defence line of credit extended by Government of India for high-speed Guard Boats Manufacturing Project with Vietnam".

NORTHERN RAILWAY	
E-TENDER NOTICE	
The Divisional Railway Manager (Medical), Northern Railway, Moradabad for & on behalf of the President of India, invites open E-Tender for the under noted work:-	
N.I.T. No.	No. 146-Med/C./S.T./H.W./2020 Dated: 18.12.2020
Name of work	Mechanized cleaning and de-silting of Septic and Bio tanks under the jurisdiction of Chief Health Inspector, Haridwar on one time payment basis.
Approx. cost	Rs. 8,60,962.74 Paise. (including GST & Dumping charge)
Earnest Money	Rs. 17,200/- online Payment mode <a href="http://www.ireps.gov.in">www.ireps.gov.in</a>
Completion period	45 days
Date & Time of opening of Tender	E-Tender shall be opened on Dt. 11.01.2021 at 15:00 hrs. If date of opening happens to be a holiday the tender shall be opened on the same time on next working day.
Indian Railway Website	Additional relevant information may be checked on the Website: <a href="http://www.ireps.gov.in">www.ireps.gov.in</a>
Cost of E-Tender Document	00.00
Note:- Payment of earnest money deposit (EMD) in respect of E-Tendering shall be accepted IREPS Portal through net banking Debit and credit card only.	
No.: 146-Med/C./S.T./H.W./2020	Date: 19.12.2020 2830/2020
Serving Customers with a Smile	

## IMPORTANT NOTICE

This is notified for the information of passengers that Railways has decided to change the timings of Train No. 02431 Thiruvananthapuram Central-New Delhi/Hazrat Nizamuddin Tri-Weekly Rajdhani Special Train at Vadodara Railway Station as under:-

Revised Timings of Train No. 02431 Thiruvananthapuram Central-New Delhi/Hazrat Nizamuddin Tri-Weekly Rajdhani Special Train at Vadodara Jn. Railway Station				
STATIONS	TRAIN No. 02431		With Effect From	
	Existing Timings	Revised Timings	22.12.2020	
	ARR.	DEP.	ARR.	DEP.
VADODARA JN.	00:06	00:26	00:01	00:06

**Beware of Touts** Always Buy Train Tickets from Railway Counters/Authorised Railway Travel Agents only

NOTE: 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.

Note:- 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.

Security Helpline No. 182
Integrated Helpline No. 139

**NORTHERN RAILWAY**  
Your Convenience - Our Concern  
Visit us at : [www.nr.indianrailways.gov.in](http://www.nr.indianrailways.gov.in)  
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

## SEARCH OF MISSING

General public is hereby informed that one person (depicted in the photo), Namely: Ram Sagar, S/o: Munsu Ram, R/o: H.No.D-3, Mahavir Campus, Rajpur Khurd Extn. New Delhi Aged: 57 years, has been missing from his house since 19.08.2020 In this regard, a Case Vide DD No. 42A, Dated 20.08.2020, has been lodged at P.S. Maidan Garhi, New Delhi. His physical description is as under:



Ram Sagar

Height: 5' Feet, Complexion: Wheatish, Face: Long, Build: Medium, Wearing: White Colour Lining Shirt, Black Colour Pant and Chappal in his feet.

Any person is having any information/clue about this missing person, may inform SHO, Maidan Garhi, New Delhi at E-mail: [cic@cbi.gov.in](mailto:cic@cbi.gov.in) or website : <http://cbi.nic.in> Fax No. 011-24368639, Tele No. : 011-24368638 or 24368641

S.H.O  
P.S. Maidan Garhi, New Delhi  
Ph.: 7827710234, 8750870825

DP/213/SD/2020.

## SEARCH FOR MISSING GIRL



General public is here by informed that one girl Namely: Wahista, W/o Asfque Ahmead, R/o H.No. E-550, Gali No. 17, Shastri Park, Delhi. Age: About 20 Years, Height: 5'5", Face: Long, Complexion: Fair, Built: Thin, Wearing: Yellow Colour Suit-Salwar and Chappal in Feet, has been missing since 30.11.2020 from the her house, Delhi.

In this regard a DD No. 38-A, dated 01.12.2020 has been lodged at P.S. New Usmanpur, Delhi.

Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out information about this girl but no clue has come to light so far. Any person having any information or clue about this girl kindly inform to the following.

E-Mail: [cic@cbi.gov.in](mailto:cic@cbi.gov.in) SHO  
Website: <http://cbi.nic.in> P.S. New Usmanpur, Delhi  
Fax: 011-24368639 Ph. 011-22962735, 8750870727  
Ph: 011-24368638, 24368641 DP/458/NE/2020



quick  
BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	45,553.96	-3.00
Nifty 50	13,328.40	-3.14
S&P 500*	3,669.42	-1.08
Dollar (₹)	73.79	-0.29
Pound Sterling (₹)	97.54	1.75
Euro (₹)	89.84	0.30
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	50,421▲117	0.23
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	50.11	-2.15
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.957	-0.003
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.930	-0.018

\* As of 9:30 PM IST

FinMin releases  
₹6K cr to states  
for GST shortfall

The finance ministry on Monday released the eighth weekly instalment of ₹6,000 crore to the states to meet the GST compensation shortfall, taking the total amount released so far under this window to ₹48,000 crore. The Centre had set up a special borrowing window in October, 2020 to meet the estimated shortfall of ₹1.10 lakh crore in revenue arising on account of implementation of GST.

Booking for new  
Audi A4 sedan  
begins in India



German luxury carmaker Audi on Monday announced opening of bookings for its upcoming new version of A4 sedan in India. The fifth-generation Audi A4 powered by a 2.0-litre four-cylinder petrol engine can be booked with a booking amount of ₹2 lakh, either through online mode or at the company's dealerships. "This will be our first product launch for 2021," Audi India head Balbir Singh Dhillon said.

AstraZeneca gets  
nod to market  
asthma drug

Drug firm AstraZeneca Pharma on Monday said that it has received marketing authorisation from Drug Controller General of India (DGC) for Benralizumab solution, indicated as an add-on maintenance treatment for severe asthma. Benralizumab (Fasenra) is indicated as an add-on maintenance treatment for severe asthma with an eosinophilic phenotype in adult patients, the company said.

Vineet Agarwal  
takes over as  
Assocham chief

Logistics major Transport Corporation of India Limited managing director Vineet Agarwal has taken over as the new president of The Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (Assocham). He replaces Niranj Hiranandani, Co-Founder and Managing Director, Hiranandani Group of Companies. Sumant Sinha, CMD of ReNew Power, is the new senior vice-president of Assocham.

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

Corporate profits hit  
an all-time high in Q2

Margins widen on lower input costs, better utilisation

**Mumbai, Dec. 21:** Corporate profits rose 15 per cent to touch an all-time high in the September quarter as margins widened on softer input costs and better utilisation levels, the research arm of leading rating agency Crisil said on Monday. From an absolute perspective, the earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation (Ebitda) touched an all-time high ₹1.60 lakh crore in the September quarter, as against ₹1.02 lakh crore in the preceding June quarter, it said. It can be noted that the trend of companies' profits growing even as the economy contracts as a result of the pandemic has led some watchers to express concern claiming this is illustrative of widening inequalities. Crisil, which analysed a sample of 800 listed entities comprising 85 per cent of NSE's market cap

FPI inflows touch  
12-yr high in Nov.

**Mumbai, Dec. 21:** Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs), which own more than 24 per cent of the domestic market, pumped in a record \$8.1 billion last month, highest in 12 years, and at \$5 billion to date, December also looks to get record inflows, says a foreign brokerage report. At \$8.1 billion, India has received the highest FPI inflows among the emerging markets in November, as Brazil got only \$6.2 billion, South Korea (\$5.2 billion), Taiwan (\$4.5 billion) and Thailand at \$1.1 billion. This inflow had the valuation premium of India to other emerging markets in the MSCI Index shooting up by 5 percentage point to 46 per cent and is five per cent above the long-term average, says Bank of America Securities in a report. — PTI

in sectors excluding banking and finance and oil and gas, said improving utilisation levels, along with better management of power, fuel and raw material cost by large companies contributed to the handsome profit growth. Aggregate operating profit margins improved by over one per cent despite a rise in raw mate-

rial cost during the quarter, it said. From an employee costs perspective, which is leading to the concerns, it said 370 manufacturing firms in its sample showed a contraction of four per cent while the same for the service sector reported a moderate growth. The growth in profits came even as the revenues did not go up, the report said, pointing out that the topline was "stable" in Q2 as compared to the year-ago period after falling 29 per cent in the April-June quarter. The small enterprises have taken a brunt of the hit in revenue impact as compared to the large ones, it said. "Large players saw muted revenue growth. However, small players, which are typically low on bargaining power and cash crunched remained in the red. The smaller the company, the more excruciating the pain," it said. — PTI

Delhi High Court refuses to restrain Amazon

**SANGEETHA G. CHENNAI, DEC. 21**  
In a relief to Amazon Inc, the Delhi High Court on Monday declined to grant an interim injunction to Future Group which had sought an order to restrain the global e-commerce company from interfering in the \$3.4-billion deal between Future

Group and RIL. However, the court found that the board resolution approving the Future-RIL deal was not prima facie void. "...the present application is disposed off, declining the grant of interim injunction as prayed for by Future Retail, however, the statutory authorities/regulators are directed to take the decision on the applications/objections in accordance with the law," the court said. After Future Group announced the sale of its retail and wholesale business to Reliance Retail in August, Amazon had filed an arbitration petition with Emergency Arbitrator at Singapore International Arbitration Centre (SIAC) in October, claim-

ing that Future breached the contract which was entered while taking an indirect stake in their retail business by buying shares in Future Coupons. The High Court also observed that the parties have expressly chosen the SIAC rules as the curial law governing the conduct of arbitration proceedings. According to the survey,

83% PEOPLE ARE  
KEEN TO RESUME  
TRAVEL: SURVEY

**New Delhi, Dec. 21:** Travel services firm Thomas Cook India and its Group Firm SOTC Travel on Monday said that 89 per cent of respondents in a survey conducted by them across tier-1 and 2 cities in India displayed keen interest to resume travel, revealing resurgence of consumer confidence. Thomas Cook India and its group company surveyed over 2,700 customers to identify emerging consumer behaviours and trends that will drive travel preferences during the COVID-19 era, a joint survey report, enclosed with a regulatory filing, said. "A combination of lockdown fatigue and strong pent-up demand, coupled with positive sentiment due to announcements on the vaccine saw 89 per cent respondents displaying keen interest to resume travel," it added. About 67 per cent respondents are willing to travel in the next 6 months while 33 per cent indicated that they would wait for the launch of the vaccine, according to the survey. — PTI

GMR gets nod for  
demerger plan

**New Delhi, Dec. 21:** GMR Infrastructure on Monday said that it has received consent from stock exchanges, with no adverse observations, on its proposed restructuring involving demerger of its non-airport vertical business. The company said it will file the scheme with the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) within six months. The company said it had filed an application to "the BSE and National Stock Exchange of India towards the composite scheme of amalgamation and arrangement amongst GMR Power Infra (GPIL), GMR Infrastructure, GMR Power and Urban Infra and their respective shareholders (scheme)". In August this year, GMR Infrastructure unveiled a strategic group restructuring plan involving demerger of non-airport vertical business as part of efforts to simplify the corporate holding structure. The restructuring is a step in the right direction towards creating pure plays in different businesses of the group thereby attracting sector-specific global investors and unlocking value for the current shareholders of GMR Infrastructure, the company had then said in a statement. Separate listing of both the airport and non-airport businesses will also help in simplifying the corporate holding structure, the statement said. The vertical split demerger will go a long way in facilitating deeper understanding of the airport business independently as compared to other business verticals within the group, the statement added. Currently, GMR group operates the country's busiest aerodrome, Indira Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi, and Hyderabad's Rajiv Gandhi International Airport. Also, it operates Cebu airport in the Philippines. — PTI

Global pharma may  
look at India for APIs

**SANGEETHA G. CHENNAI, DEC. 21**  
Global pharma companies are actively looking at de-risking their supply chain from China by adding new suppliers of active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) and India, which is increasing its production, is in a sweet spot. Global companies, especially those based in the US and Europe, are actively looking at de-risking their supply chain from China. "They have three options: They can either produce APIs in-house or outsource manufacturing to other US or Europe-based companies. The third option is to choose a supplier from a developing country ex-China. However, the first two options are not viable for their entire portfolio, leaving the third option," finds Emkay Global Financial Services. Indian companies have an edge, given their long history of supplying formulations and APIs globally, better quality and regulatory compliance and better supply reliability. However, the financial

Sensex tanks 1,400 pts  
on new Covid worries

**RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, DEC. 21**  
Mirroring the global markets, the Sensex on Monday plunged 1,400 points, wiping out ₹6.7 lakh crore investor wealth, following a global scare from a new strain of coronavirus found in the United Kingdom. Soon after the UK made an announcement about a new strain of coronavirus in the UK which is far more infectious than one that the world is already fighting, global markets began to fall. European markets opened in the red following travel to the UK by several mainland European countries. The fall in the Indian market commenced around 12 noon and peaked around 2.30 pm with the Sensex and the Nifty hitting the day's low followed by partial recovery. The Sensex finally closed 1,406.73 points or

**THE FALL** in the Indian market commenced around 12 noon and peaked around 2.30 pm with the Sensex and the Nifty hitting the day's low followed by partial recovery. The Sensex finally closed 1,406.73 points or three per cent down at 45,553.9 with all Sensex and Nifty-50 stocks in the red. The Nifty-50 closed 432 points or 3.14 per cent down at 13,328.40. Broader market fall was steeper with BSE Mid-cap index down 4.14 and BSE Small-cap index fell 4.57 per cent. BSE's market capitalisation fell over Rs 6.70 lakh crore from all time high of over Rs 185.38 lakh crore on Friday to over Rs 178.67 lakh crore. "India's equity benchmark indices fell the hardest in seven months as resurgent fears over a new

strain of Covid-19 virus found in the UK spread panic across the globe. Basket selling by FPIs likely triggered the sharp fall in Indian markets," said Deepak Jasani, head of retail research, HDFC Securities. On the BSE against 564 stocks, advancing 2,472 stocks declined. "The advance decline ratio on the NSE on December 21 was the worst since March 23, 2020 when the Covid fears were at the peak. This suggests across the board panic selling/profit booking," Jasani said. NSE's volatility index India VIX shot up 24.54 per cent to 23.19 per cent indicating higher market volatility in the near future. Provisional data released by stock exchanges showed foreign investors selling equities worth ₹323.55 crore while the domestic institutional investors were net buyers by ₹1486.12 crore.

Most Indians seek to buy  
5G ready smartphones

**New Delhi, Dec. 21:** Around 83 per cent people in a survey in India shared that 5G is one of the factors that they consider while buying a new phone and nearly three in every five existing premium smartphone users are looking to upgrade their device to the next generation technology, according to a report released by Cybermedia Research. According to the survey,

81 per cent respondents prefer Oppo for 5G smartphone and 79 per cent opted for Samsung. The global survey conducted in India, China and West Europe found that 5G users, where the service is available, have experienced better video calls, faster downloads and ability to stream ultra high definition videos and satisfaction level from 5G is around 80 per cent.

The technology is pushing growth of video content creation in markets where it is available and the same is expected to follow in India, it said. "In global markets, 5G smartphones are fuelling video content creation and consumption, video calling, as well as use cases such as mobile gaming, among others," CMR industry intelligence group head Prabhu Ram said. — PTI



impact of the decision of global companies will take time as adding an API supplier will take 6-18 months, depending on regulatory pathway. Production-linked incentive schemes and bulk drug parks will increase production of APIs, especially the 53 APIs included in the PLI scheme. They will also lower the cost differential between India and China to close to zero. According to Ravi Uday Bhaskar, director general of the Pharmaceuticals Export Promotion Council of India (Pharmexcil), the schemes will help increase India's production of chemicals and intermediates. "We are trying to consolidate our position in generic formulations as well as APIs. Currently, China is the largest supplier of APIs. We need to work on improving our cost efficiency as well," he said. The PLI scheme and bulk drug parks will address most of the key elements needed to improve cost efficiency. Higher volumes, lower cost of utilities such as electricity, steam, warehousing, lower effluent treatment costs, cost of labour and technology are the key drivers of efficiency. Bulk drug park scheme will address utilities costs and effluent treatment costs, while PLI scheme's 20 per cent incentive on fermentation based APIs and 10 per cent for chemical-based API will further bridge the cost gap.

US CONGRESS  
SEALS NEARLY  
\$1-TR AGREEMENT  
ON COVID RELIEF

**Washington, Dec. 21:** Top Capitol Hill negotiators sealed a deal on Sunday on an almost \$1 trillion Covid-19 economic relief package, finally delivering long-overdue help to businesses and individuals and providing money to deliver vaccines to a nation eager for them. The agreement, announced by Senate leaders, would establish a temporary \$300 per week supplemental jobless benefits and \$600 direct stimulus payments to most Americans, along with a new round of subsidies for hard-hit businesses and money for schools, health care providers and renters facing eviction. The House was expected to vote on the legislation on very late Sunday or Monday and Senate action would follow. Lawmakers are eager to leave Washington and close out a tumultuous year. A breakthrough came on late Saturday in a fight over Federal Reserve emergency powers that was resolved by the Senate's top Democrat, Chuck Schumer of New York, and conservative Republican Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania. That led to a final round of negotiations. The final agreement is the largest spending measure yet. It combines COVID-19 relief with a \$1.4 trillion government-wide funding plan and lots of other unrelated measures on taxes, health, infrastructure and education. Passage is nearing as coronavirus cases and deaths spike and evidence piles up that the economy is struggling. Late-breaking decisions would limit the \$300 per week bonus jobless benefits — one half the supplemental federal unemployment benefit provided under the CARES Act in March — to 10 weeks instead of 16 weeks as before. The direct \$600 stimulus payment to most people is also half the March payment, subject to the same income limits in which an individual's payment begins to phase out after \$75,000. — AP

Centre plans tough annual targets for PSUs

**FOCUS | PROFIT**  
**Government is keen on increasing profitability to realise more value during stake sale**  
**New Delhi, Dec. 21:** India plans to set tough financial targets for state-run firms to try to improve their valuations ahead of a push by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to privatise some companies, according to a draft government document and sources. The government, which is trying to rein in its fiscal deficit, wants state-run firms to focus on improving market capitalisation and dividend payouts from the 2021-22 fiscal year, starting April, as well as ramping up the sale of non-core assets, the sources said. State-run companies have traditionally largely targeted raising output

and increasing revenues, rather than improving efficiency and valuations, contributing to years of share price underperformance versus the broader market. "The companies need to raise their valuation and profitability in a changing business environment. Then only we will be able to get a better price (from stake sales). Shareholders and investors should be rewarded," said a government source with knowledge of the plan. After regaining power in 2019, Modi's government prepared a plan to raise as much as ₹3.25 lakh crore over five years by selling down its stakes

in companies including Oil and Natural Gas Corp, Indian Oil Corp, NMDC Ltd, Coal India, Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd and BEML Ltd. It announced moves to privatise companies in non-strategic parts of the economy and reduce the number of firms in key sectors. The government has already initiated steps to privatise Bharat Petroleum, Container Corporation and Shipping Corp. However, weak investor sentiment and limited demand have led to delays. So far this fiscal year to end-March 2021, the government has raised only a tenth of its targeted ₹1.2 lakh crore

and a document on the draft guidelines, which is currently before a government committee. Other targets will include increasing market capitalisation or share price, as well as measures such as return on net worth and capital employed, they said. For unlisted companies an improvement in earnings per share will be a key parameter instead of market capitalisation, the document showed. Indian companies have an edge, given their long history of supplying formulations and APIs globally, better quality and regulatory compliance and better supply reliability. However, the financial

stake sales. The planned changes in annual targets could be announced in next year's federal budget, due in February, a second government source said. "The state-run companies will need to deploy funds raised through asset monetisation for issues like debt repayment. They should have return on capital employed and return on equity quite high on the margin," the source said. For the first time, India will include annual targets for state-run companies on metrics such as earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation (EBITDA), according to the sources



# THE ASIAN AGE

22 DECEMBER 2020

## Battleground Bengal: Didi faces a huge test

**M**amata Banerjee and her Trinamul Congress are facing an epic battle for political survival as Union home minister Amit Shah virtually launched the BJP's campaign for the April-May elections during his two-day visit that ended Sunday. While it can't be denied that the departure of Suwendu Adhikari, a key aide and onetime Nandigram pointperson, who joined the saffron party along with several MLAs on Saturday, is a major blow to the TMC supremo, if she takes it as a wake-up call and tries rectification measures, changing the way her government and party function, all may still not be lost.

The BJP as a challenger has many advantages — the virtually limitless funds it has access to, which neither the TMC nor any other party in India can match. Add to this is the dominance due to its control of the Central government and of several states, most of which made possible by the election machine Mr Shah and his boss Narendra Modi have devised since 2014.

However, West Bengal isn't quite the fertile ground the Modi-Shah duo are familiar with in northern India. Mr Shah had to acknowledge, during his just-completed visit, that here the Bengali identity transcends all the different ways the BJP slices and splices Hindutva-related issues elsewhere to produce electoral victories with remarkable regularity. The cries of "Jai Shri Ram" at Mr Shah's impressive roadshow at Bolpur did elicit roars of approval, but it later transpired the crowd was brought in from a neighbouring Hindi-speaking state. If the BJP is wise, it won't repeat that exercise in a hurry.

The BJP's posters in Bolpur and Santiniketan, home to Rabindranath Tagore's Visvabharati, in which the home minister's photo was placed above Gurudev's, which set off widespread protests, was yet another ill-advised move by a party whose local leadership seems singularly clueless about how it would hurt Bengali sentiments. Likewise, to speak of the homogenisation and standardisation of Indian culture, there couldn't be a more inappropriate spot than Gurudev's campus celebrating diversity, where "narrow domestic walls" have no place.

The "outsider" tag Ms Banerjee sought to paint Mr Shah with seems to have rankled, with the minister declaring no one could be an "outsider" as everyone was an Indian, with references to Indira Gandhi and others, but contradicted himself by virtually anointing Mr Adhikari as a "bhoomi putra" and possible CM face. It remains to be seen, though, if Bengalis are ready to accept the somewhat rustic and rough-spoken Mr Adhikari in that role, once filled by the likes of Bidhan Chandra Roy, Jyoti Basu and Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee. Even Ms Banerjee, before becoming CM, had served multiple terms as a Union minister. It is undeniable that there is widespread disenchantment with Mamata Banerjee and her government on several counts. Her mismanagement on several fronts, the rising corruption and extortion that her partymen are accused of and the minority appeasement that has cost her significant support. Bringing in Prashant Kishor to firefight isn't enough — in fact he is blamed for some of the recent exodus from the party. But what does the BJP promise? How will it end corruption by inducting TMC leaders accused of multiple offences into its fold? Given the Centre's mismanagement of the nation's economy, how will it end Bengal's mess? And with what magic wand will Mr Shah create the "Sonar Bangla" that he has promised?

## Is China behind Oli's move?

**N**epalese President Bidya Devi Bhandari's consent to Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli's recommendation, after a Cabinet meeting, to dissolve Parliament on Sunday and call elections in April, two years ahead of time, came after 91 ruling party MPs in a House of 275 moved a no-confidence motion against the PM. This has raised a Constitutional question in Kathmandu, and the matter is before the Supreme Court.

Whatever the court's verdict, it is evident the Himalayan nation is in the throes of a political crisis. The dissonance within the ruling establishment had been brewing for eight months. Mr Oli was PM and co-chairman of the Nepal Communist Party along with Pushpa Kumar Dahal Prachanda, a former PM.

He was not willing to let go of either post. The tussle at the top has riven the ruling NCP down the middle. Seven Cabinet ministers resigned when the PM recommended dissolution prior to fresh polls. It's not clear if the turbulence will spill over on to the streets. There can be no guarantee of orderly elections in April-May next.

This is a situation that is tailor-made for sub-rosa intervention by Beijing, which had invested considerable political capital in Mr Oli, shoring up his government with financial support and political guidance at a time when India-China relations have plummeted with the Chinese Army pushing inside India's frontier region in Ladakh. New Delhi needs to be watchful.

Nepal is of strategic value to India. From New Delhi's perspective, it is important that Kathmandu at least remain neutral even as Beijing has been on a heavy wooing spree, with Chinese President Xi Jinping paying a high-profile visit to Kathmandu not long ago. The Oli government had even begun the "study" of Xi Jinping "thought" in Nepal. The best that India can do is to attempt to play a stabilising role. This had been started with the recent visit to Kathmandu of the foreign secretary and the Army Chief. The process can be sought to be bolstered.

### THE ASIAN AGE

T. VENKATRAM REDDY  
Editor in Chief

Printer & Publisher: K. SUDHAKAR

The Asian Age office is located at:

New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Phone: (011) 23211124.

Published and Printed on behalf of and for

Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited, Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi 110 002 at BFL Infotech Ltd., C-9, Sector-III, Noida -201301.

London: Quickmarsh Ltd, 8th Floor, Block 2, Elizabeth House, 39 York Road, London, SE1 7NQ.

RNI Registration number: 57290/94

Subhani



## Congress drifts as real issues are left ignored



Parsa Venkateshwar Rao Jr

**T**he faction-ridden, intrigues-infested Congress Party, even in its decrepit state, remains more interesting for political observer than the regimented Bharatiya Janata Party, with the monotonous hectoring of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the few chosen leaders who are licensed to speak. There are more voices inside the Congress despite the dominance of the Nehru-Gandhis, with its camp followers in tow. The meeting convened by party president Sonia Gandhi, which included Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and the 23 "dissidents" who dared to raise doubts about the party's leadership held on Saturday seems to have been a cloak and dagger affair.

The Gandhis seem to have said that the party was "like a family" and that they should all work together, and the family loyalists intoned that Rahul Gandhi was the right man to become party president once again because he enjoys enormous support in the organisation.

The dissidents wanted a decision on the issue of who will lead the party and how, and Rahul Gandhi deflected the question, saying that the meeting was not convened to discuss who will be president but to strengthen the party. He had also clarified that he had nothing against the seniors in the party as it was made out. Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said there was a real need to take to the streets and that just submitting memorandums would not suffice. There was an assurance from the Gandhis that the process of organisational elections was on.

The dissidents said that there would be another

**It looks like procrastination is the chosen path of the Congress even now. It might have been the secret of the party's success in the past, but it does not look like it is effective any longer.**

meeting soon like the one on Saturday — for brainstorming on the lines of the meetings at Pachmarhi (held in 1998) and Shimla (2003) in the first decade of Sonia Gandhi as president. But there was no official announcement that there would be such a meeting. At the end of the day, there was no clarity on whether peace was made with the dissidents who wrote the letter or whether they have been left high and dry with vague assurances that the Gandhis recognise their importance.

This has always been the way of the Congress, in the party as well as in the days when it was in power, not to face up to problems or to solve them. The issues are left unaddressed. At the most, consultations without outcomes are held. It looks like procrastination is the chosen path of the Congress even now. It might have been the secret of the party's success in the past, but it does not look like it is effective any longer. An aggressive BJP is not marginalising the Congress as much as the Congress is busy making itself irrelevant.

Interestingly, neither the Gandhis' camp nor the dissidents have any clear idea of how to oppose the BJP, either on the issue of Hindu communalism or that of managing the economy. Rahul Gandhi has instinctively

embraced old-fashioned and discredited secularism, and socialism, which was what was abandoned by Rajiv Gandhi in the 1988 Congress session at the Kamaraj Nagar venue in Chennai. Rahul Gandhi may have his own logic behind his socialist stance. He might say that it was necessary in 1988 to abandon Nehru's socialism of the 1950s, but it is necessary to go back to some kind of socialism in 2020, with globalisation at the end of its tether. And in a certain sense, Rahul Gandhi might be right — that the only way to fight the BJP's Hindu majoritarianism is to stick to one's secularism stance with conviction. But the critics of Congress, including religious minorities, are not convinced that the Congress is standing up for secularism with enough conviction.

The challenge before the Congress is to sense the political winds as well, which is what it tries to do half-heartedly, and becomes an easy target of both the majority communalists as well as the minority communalists. There is no one in the Congress and in the liberal intelligentsia outside to forge a plank which will win over ordinary Hindus who are religious, and tell them that Hindutva is anti-Hindu, which it is.

The new rationale of secularism should be formulated as defending the rights of religious minorities along with the majority's religious rights. The party is indeed moving in this direction, but there is no one really of any standing to articulate this calibrated stance.

The real crisis in the

**Interestingly, neither the Gandhis' camp nor the dissidents have any clear idea of how to oppose the BJP, either on the issue of Hindu communalism or that of managing the economy.**

Congress is that of the party's second- and third-rung leaders depending on the Gandhis to win elections for them in the way they used to, and to sing praises of the Gandhis as their saviours.

The Gandhis are now unable to deliver electoral victories, and this is no fault of Rahul Gandhi. The country has changed, and people are not looking up to charismatic leaders.

Of course, the BJP leaders are acting like the Congress when they praise Narendra Modi as the talisman of their party, and that Mr Modi is winning the elections for them. It is of course an illusion, not much different from the Congress' that the Gandhis are the mascots.

The dissidents are critical of the monopoly of the Gandhis' followers in the party, who are blocking everyone's way. But the dissidents also do not have any bright ideas to fashion a political vision for the party and the country. But there is something common that unites the Congress establishment (the Gandhis' camp holding party positions) and the dissidents. They are not perturbed by electoral defeats. They have played the game of power much longer than anyone else, and they believe that electoral setbacks are seasonal and that it is not necessary to lose sleep over it.

The many people who do not like Congress and its wily ways but who feel that it is a necessary evil to fight the BJP, which is more dangerous because of its authoritarian and totalitarian regime, are agonising over the present dilapidated state of the grand old party.

They are forever suggesting solutions to the Congress' problems, which are given short shrift by the party itself. The Congress isn't going its mend its ways anytime soon, and its leaders also feel that they do not have to do so.

*The writer is a Delhi-based commentator and analyst*

### LETTERS

#### GOVT STOOGES

The media has a big role to play in a democracy. It is the bridge between citizens and the government as well as a watchdog for both. Yet notice the spate of fake news favouring various parties at the state or at the Centre. Or the abundance of misleading commentary on the three farm laws. One wonders how things ever came to such a pass that farmers striking had to publish their own newspaper to high-light agro-issues. This proves that a large section of people has lost faith in the media.

**M.N. Musaeed**  
Mumbai

#### COME CLEAN

**OMAR ABDULLAH**, son of NC chairman Farooq Abdullah, has declared that the properties of his father recently attached by the Enforcement Directorate are mostly ancestral, dating from the 1970s, with the most recent one built before 2003. If so, their records will show this. However, earlier, the CBI had reported that he had built a bungalow in Sunjwan after illegally occupying forest land. His sister, Suraya, is also named in lists pertaining to the now-scrapped Roshni Act, passed by Farooq's government in 2001 in order to legalise encroachments. The general perception, therefore, is that he has a lot to answer for.

**K.V. Seetharamaiah**  
Hassan, Karnataka

#### ELECTION GOAL

**GLAD TO** read that the Congress appointed Ashok Jagtap as Mumbai Congress president and Charan Singh Sapra as working president. Mr Jagtap, who is known as "Bhai Jagtap" in political circles, is a trade union leader and former legislator. Mr Sapra, on the other hand, started his innings with the party as a student leader. Mr Jagtap's priority is to rejuvenate the party and wins the forthcoming Mumbai civic polls. It is high time all divisions within the Congress forget their differences of opinion and come together to strategise for the election.

**Bhagwan Thadani**  
Mumbai

₹500 for the best letter of the week goes to **R. Narayanan** (Dec. 14). Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

Aakar Patel



## 'Time bombs' ticking in the Constitution are a worry

**T**here are some time bombs ticking in our Constitution that worry me. These are in Part 4 of the document, about which we are assured by the Constitution's writers that "the provisions contained in this Part shall not be enforceable by any court, but the principles therein laid down are nevertheless fundamental in the governance of the country and it shall be the duty of the State to apply these principles in making laws".

So, these are only principles then. But our experience has been that these are akin to gospel. How many literate Indians will assume that the government is obliged to constitutionally bring about the prohibition of cow slaughter (Part 4's Article 48)? I would say the vast majority would think that.

The insistence with which the ban is pushed might lead one to forget that there is a distinction between a principle not meant to be enforceable and an obligation which must be legislated forthwith ("it's in the Constitution!").

Fewer Indians are likely know about Article 47, which nudges the

State towards making its citizens teetotalers ("the State shall endeavour to bring about prohibition of the consumption except for medicinal purposes of intoxicating drinks and of drugs which are injurious to health").

The insistence, seen most recently in Bihar, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, on creating better, more moral Indians through sobriety is also underpinned by what is seen as the same constitutional obligation on legislators.

The time bombs that worry me are a little further down, in Article 51A, which specifies fundamental duties. It is instructive to read them in full because, and I fear this is already happening, we are moving in the direction of turning these things into laws. The list reads:

"Fundamental duties. It shall be the duty of every citizen of India:

(a) to abide by the Constitution and respect its ideals and institutions, the National Flag and the National Anthem;

(b) to cherish and follow the noble ideals which inspired our national struggle for freedom;

(c) to uphold and protect the sover-

eignty, unity and integrity of India;

(d) to defend the country and render national service when called upon to do so;

(e) to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India, transcending religious, linguistic and regional or sectional diversities; to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women;

(f) to value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture;

(g) to protect and improve the natural environment, including forests, lakes, rivers and wildlife, and to have compassion for living creatures;

(h) to develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform;

(i) to safeguard public property and to abjure violence;

(j) to strive towards excellence in all spheres of individual and collective activity so that the nation constantly rises to higher levels of endeavour and achievement."

Almost everything here fills me with a sense of dread. Example: the bit in (c) saying it is our duty to uphold and protect India's sovereign-

ty, unity and integrity. Are those who raise their voice against, say, the use of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act in Kashmir and the Northeast violating this duty? If so, should they be punished? One might say, no, it is only a general principle offset by other rights. But then, so is a ban on cow slaughter and a ban on alcohol.

What about (a), which requires us to respect the national flag and anthem? Violation of this has already been criminalised, and it happened long before Narendra Modi. We are, however, living in times when the flag and nationalism have been conflated. Are you worried something coercive is around the corner that might equate even inaction with insult? I am. There is talk of a ₹100 crore fine for mistakes in maps.

The inability of our courts to often weed out majoritarian sentiment (as witnessed in the matter of cow slaughter) leads me to think that there is no proper safeguard available there either. The Constitution is a terrific document, but it is also one that has suppressed the Hindu majoritarian sentiment. We are living through times when this suppress-

sion is being popularly rejected. The path to getting everyone to fall in line is open and it lies through such provisions as we have seen. It is no good to say these are only directive principles or whatever else because our experience shows that this is no defence. If something is "in the Constitution", that is the end of it.

Going through the list, some of the clauses are quite chilling, such as 38(1): "The State shall strive to promote the welfare of the people by securing and protecting as effectively as it may a social order in which justice, social, economic and political, shall inform all the institutions of the national life."

Chilling, I accept, given the current mood more than anything else, but chilling nonetheless.

There are several (equal pay for women — Article 39d) that I suspect will not be taken up with any degree of seriousness. It is the ones that touch our current high-intensity nationalism that worry me, and these are the ones I call time bombs.

*The writer is a columnist and a senior journalist*



## SHORT TAKES

## ARMY TO RUN MAYA TRAIN: MEXICAN PREZ

**Mexico City, Dec. 21:** Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said Sunday the army will run the Maya train project and several airports, and use any profits to finance military pensions.

The army is already overseeing construction on some parts of the controversial project, while private firms build the rest. Obrador said Sunday that "so there won't be the temptation to privatize" the \$6.8 billion project, the army will operate it once built.

The proceeds from that — and several airports, some of which the army is constructing — will be used to provide pensions for soldiers and sailors.

López Obrador has already given the army more tasks than any other recent Mexican president.

## RARE SALES OF CHRISTMAS ITEMS IN SAUDI ARABIA

**Riyadh, Dec. 20:** Christmas trees and glittery ornaments are for sale at a Saudi gift shop, a once unthinkable sight in the cradle of Islam where all public non-Muslim worship is banned.

In recent years, festive sales have gradually crept into the capital Riyadh, a sign of loosening social restrictions after Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman pledged to steer the conservative Gulf kingdom towards an "open, moderate Islam". "I didn't ever imagine I'd see this" in Saudi Arabia, a Riyadh resident said at the shop selling trees, Santa Claus outfits as well as tinsel, baubles and other ornaments.

"I am surprised," said the resident, declining to be identified. Until barely three years ago, it was almost impossible to sell such items openly in Saudi Arabia, but authorities have been clipping the powers of the clerical establishment long notorious for enforcing Islamic traditions.

## ISRAELI PARL TO VOTE ON BILL TO DELAY POLL CALL

**Jerusalem, Dec. 21:** Israel's parliament was set to vote Monday on a proposal from its fraught coalition that would temporarily put off the call for a fourth election in less than two years in the country.

Israel's coalition government — a broken marriage between Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his political rival, Defence Minister Benny Gantz — has been inching towards collapse for weeks.

Under the current arrangement between Netanyahu's right-wing Likud and Gantz's centre-left Blue and White, the coalition has until one minute past midnight on Wednesday to agree a budget for the current year.

If a 2020 budget is not passed, Israel's parliament, the Knesset, would dissolve, with new elections held as early as March.

The three-year coalition deal stipulates that Netanyahu serves as premier for 18 months, with Gantz, currently the alternate prime minister, taking over in November 2021.

## RWANDAN TROOPS DEPLOYED IN C. AFRICAN REP.

**Kigali, Dec. 21:** Rwanda has deployed troops to the Central African Republic, where its soldiers serving in the UN peacekeeping force have been targeted by rebels, the defence ministry in Kigali said.

"The Government of Rwanda has deployed force protection troops to the Central African Republic, under an existing bilateral agreement on defence," said a statement issued late Sunday.

"The deployment is in response to the targeting of the Rwanda Defence Force (RDF) contingent under the UN Peacekeeping force by rebels supported by (former president) Francois Bozize." On Saturday, the Central African Republic's government accused Bozize of leading an attempted coup as tensions mount ahead of key presidential and legislative elections on Sunday.

A spokesman for the UN's MINUSCA peacekeeping force in CAR said Sunday that armed rebels that had been advancing on the capital Bangui had been pushed back.

No details were given but the defence ministry said they would "also ensure a peaceful and secure general elections scheduled on Sunday".

## Countries begin to seal off UK

Growing concerns of an 'out of control' new Coronavirus variant force nations to suspend flights

**London, Dec. 21:** France became the latest European country to close all its borders with the UK after Germany, Italy, Belgium, Denmark, Bulgaria, the Irish Republic, Turkey and Canada suspended flights amid growing concerns of an "out of control" new variant of Coronavirus spreading at a much faster pace in parts of England. India, so far, remains in the travel bubble with the UK, with strict testing and self-isolation rules in place. But with most of Britain now in the strictest Tier 4 lockdown, all non-essential travel remains banned for the majority.

Other countries and territories to announce restrictions on UK travel include Hong Kong, Israel, Iran, Croatia, Argentina, Chile, Morocco and Kuwait. UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson will chair a meeting of the government's emergency committee on Monday to take stock of the situation as a huge backlog build up on the border with France after even trucks and ferries were blocked entry at the ports.

European Union (EU) member states are also due for a meeting in Brussels to discuss a more coordinated response as the number of Coronavirus infections in the UK jumped to 35,928 on Sunday, down to the much faster spreading new mutation of the novel Coronavirus, with the country's death toll rising by 326 to hit 67,401. "Everybody, particularly people in Tier 4 areas, needs to behave as if they might well have the virus — that is the only way we are going to get it under control," UK Health Secretary Matt Hancock said, adding that the situation is "deadly serious" as the government tries to contain the rapid strain of an "out of control" virus.

"This is a deadly disease, we need to keep it under control, and it has been made more difficult by this new variant," he said. The new variant is said to be 70 per cent more transmissible, though health experts say there is no evidence that it is more deadly or would react differently to vaccines. "It is really too early to tell... but from what we see so far it is growing very quickly, it is growing faster than [a previous variant] ever grew, but it is important to keep an eye on this," said Dr Erik Volz from Imperial College London.

"The amount of evidence in the public domain is woefully inadequate to draw strong or firm opinions on whether the virus has truly increased transmission," added Professor Jonathan Ball, a virologist at the University of Nottingham. It is thought the variant either emerged in a patient in the UK or has been imported from a country with a lower ability to monitor Coronavirus mutations. The variant can be found across the UK, except Northern Ireland, but it is heavily concentrated in London, the South East and eastern England. Cases elsewhere in the country do not seem to have shot up in a similar way so far.

The government's New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group (Nervtag) estimates the variant could increase the R number — or rate of



A sign on the M56 motorway informs drivers that all routes into France are closed at the junction with the M6 at Lower Stretton near Warrington, northwest England, on Monday. Crucial transit country France moved to block people and goods crossing the Channel, while the Netherlands said passengers arriving by ferry would be denied entry.

## EU regulator approves vaccine

**Amsterdam, Dec. 21:** The European Medicines Agency recommended conditional approval for a Coronavirus vaccine developed by BioNTech and Pfizer to be used across the European Union, weeks after the shot was first granted permission under emergency provisions in Britain and the United States.

Following a closed-doors expert meeting Monday, the EU drug regulator said it was recommending the

shot be licensed for use in people over 16 years of age, with some exceptions. The pharmaceutical companies will need to submit follow-up data on their

vaccine for the next year.

"This is really a historic scientific achievement," said Emer Cooke, the head of the agency. "It is a significant step forward in our fight against the pandemic." The approval needs to be rubber-stamped by the EU's executive branch on Monday evening, a move its chief said is likely to happen Monday evening. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen tweeted that the EMA's approval was "a

decisive moment in our efforts to deliver safe & effective vaccines to Europeans!" "Now we will act fast. I expect a @EU\_Commission decision by this evening," she said.

The EU's executive arm had been expected to require two or three days to approve the EMA's decision. Authorities in Germany and several other European countries have said they hope to begin vaccinating people on Dec. 27.

## Oz detects new UK strain; HK cancels Britain flights

**Singapore, Dec. 21:** Australia said on Monday it had detected cases of the new fast-spreading coronavirus strain identified in the United Kingdom, while Hong Kong and India said they would suspend flights from Britain.

Two travellers from the United Kingdom to Australia's New South Wales state were found carrying the mutated variant of the virus that Britain has said could be up to 70% more infectious. Both are in hotel quarantine, and the recent spike in infections in Sydney is not linked to this, authorities said.

The new strain has prompted Britain's European neighbours and several others including Canada and Iran to close their doors to travellers from the country.

Much is unknown about

the strain, but experts said current vaccines should still be effective against it.

Asian nations, including Japan and South Korea, said they were monitoring the new strain even as they battle a rise in infections at home.

Hong Kong banned flights from Britain in a bid to curb already rising case numbers in the dense financial hub. The Chinese special administrative region said on Monday that people arriving from Britain before Dec. 22 would have to quarantine for three weeks instead of two.

India announced a suspension of all flights from the UK until the end of the year and said all passengers arriving from the UK before then will be tested on arrival at airports.

Taiwan, which also has a 14-day quarantine, said on

Sunday there were no plans at present to stop flights from Britain.

Britain is one of 23 countries that India shares an "air bubble" with, India's health minister said the country was prepared to deal with the new strain and that there was no need to panic.

Japan, where entry from Britain is already banned in principle, said it would keep in close touch with other countries as well as the World Health Organisation to see how the new type of virus was spreading. The new strain in Britain comes as cases have surged recently in several Asian countries that successfully contained the pandemic earlier. The spikes have prompted localised lockdowns in some countries.

— Reuters

## PUBLIC MEETINGS BEING CURBED IN S. KOREAN CAPITAL

**Seoul, Dec. 21:** Gatherings of more than five people will be banned in South Korea's capital region as an elevated step to suppress what authorities call an "explosive" surge in Coronavirus infections.

The Seoul region is home to half of South Korea's 51 million people and has been at the centre of a recent viral resurgence. The country averaged about 960 new virus cases each day in the past week, more than 70 per cent of them in the Seoul metropolitan area. Acting Seoul mayor Seo Jung-hyp said Monday the ban will apply to any type of meetings, including year-end parties, office dinners, birthday parties and picnics. Only weddings and funerals can follow the current rule of not more than 50 people.

— AP

gise for his handling of the pandemic. He said the British people were paying the price for Johnson's "incompetence", "indecision" and "weak leadership" that was "costing lives and costing jobs".

— PTI

## Biden to receive Coronavirus shot

**Washington, Dec. 21:** President-elect Joe Biden will receive his first dose of the Coronavirus vaccine on live television as part of a growing effort to convince the American public the inoculations are safe. Monday's event will come the same day that a second vaccine, produced by Moderna, will start arriving in states, joining Pfizer's in the nation's arsenal against the Covid-19 pandemic, which has now killed more than 317,000 people in the United States and upended life around the globe. "I don't want to get ahead of the line, but I want to make sure we demonstrate to the American people that it is safe to take," Biden has said of his decision.

Biden and his wife, Jill, will also thank health care workers at the facility where they receive the shots, his incoming press secretary has said. Top government officials last week joined the first Americans to be inoculated against Covid-19 as part of the largest largest vaccination campaign in the nation's history. Vice President Mike Pence, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., and other lawmakers were given doses Friday.

They chose to publicise their injections as part of a campaign to convince Americans that the vaccines are safe and effective amid skepticism, especially among Republicans.

— AP

## Congress deal on Covid-19 reprieve

**Washington, Dec. 21:** Top Capitol Hill negotiators sealed a deal Sunday on an almost \$1 trillion Covid-19 economic relief package, finally delivering long-overdue help to businesses and individuals and providing money to deliver vaccines to a nation eager for them. The agreement, announced by Senate leaders, would establish a temporary \$300 per week supplemental jobless benefits and \$600 direct stimulus payments to most Americans, along with a new round of subsidies for hard-hit businesses and money for schools, health care providers and renters facing eviction.

The House was expected to vote on the legislation very late Sunday or Monday and Senate action would follow. Lawmakers are

eager to leave Washington and close out a tumultuous year. A breakthrough came late Saturday in a fight over Federal Reserve emergency powers that was resolved by the Senate's top Democrat, Chuck Schumer of New York, and conservative Republican Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania.

— AP

## MAJOR OUTBREAK More than 1,100 prisoners were infected while seven have died

## Virus spikes after jail inmate transfers

**Detroit, Dec. 21:** Families of men incarcerated at Michigan's Kinross Correctional Facility believed its remote location would spare it from a deadly Covid-19 outbreak. For a while, they seemed to be right.

Kinross, built on the grounds of a former Air Force base in the Upper Peninsula, is closer to Canada than it is to Detroit. Unlike most prisons in Michigan, Kinross had remained almost unscathed by the novel coronavirus with only one case between March and October. But on Oct. 28, corrections officials transferred nine prisoners to Kinross from Marquette Branch Prison, several

hours west, where Covid-19 was running rampant. There were 837 confirmed cases by late October, 350 of which were still active when the men were transferred. Roughly three weeks later, Kinross had its first major outbreak, corrections department data showed.

Though agency officials say it's not because of the transfers, more than 1,100 prisoners have now been infected, at least seven have died and more than 100 guards have fallen ill. The prisoners who came to Kinross had been transferred twice, sent first to Marquette after a riot where they were held, and then had tested positive for Covid-19 there before

leaving for Kinross, officials said. In prisons around the country, Covid-19 outbreaks have followed transfers of prisoners or prison workers.

Nearly all of the 25 state prison systems and the federal Bureau of Prisons that responded to a survey conducted by The Marsha-

ll Project and *The Associated Press* said they had reduced or limited the number of prisoners they moved due to the pandemic. Eight states halted the practice except in special circumstances. The reductions were keeping in line with medical guidelines. But most of

those states lifted their restrictions by September and few prison systems heeded the earlier lessons as the pandemic worsened this winter, worrying families of prisoners and correctional officers who work in the prisons.

Meanwhile, Interpol chief Juergen Stock predicted Monday a sharp rise in crimes with robbers seeking to get their hands on precious vaccines aimed at stopping the Coronavirus pandemic. "With vaccines rolling out, crime will increase dramatically," Stock told business weekly *WirtschaftsWoche*. "We will see thefts and warehouse break-ins and attacks on vaccine shipments."

— AFP



## SHORT TAKES

GRENADE KILLS  
3 'CHILDREN'  
IN ETHIOPIA

**Addis Ababa, Dec. 21:** A grenade explosion killed three children and injured five in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa on Sunday, the Fana BC broadcaster reported.

"A grenade abandoned in an open area by as of yet unidentified people" exploded after the children handled it, Alemayehu Ayalqe, director of the Addis police organised crime division, was quoted as saying. He described the victims as "street children".

KILAUEA  
VOLCANO IN  
HAWAII ERUPTS

**Honolulu, Dec. 21:** The Kilauea volcano on Hawaii's Big Island erupted late Sunday, authorities said, warning of a possible "significant emission" of volcanic ash into the atmosphere.

"An eruption has commenced within Kilauea's summit caldera," shortly after 9:30 pm local time (0730 GMT), said the United States Geological Survey (USGS).

"The situation is rapidly evolving and HVO (Hawaiian Volcano Observatory) will issue another statement when more information is available." Images posted by the Hawaii Volcanoes National Park showed billows of red smoke rising into the night sky.

The USGS warned of a "significant emission of volcanic ash into the atmosphere" and upgraded its aviation color code to red, advising pilots to avoid the area around Kilauea.

The National Weather Service reported prevailing winds could push the ashfall towards communities on the southwest of Big Island and said people with respiratory problems should take "extra precaution".

THAI ACTRESS  
FACES INSULT TO  
MONARCHY

**Bangkok, Dec. 21:** A well-known actress who is one of the most high-profile supporters of Thailand's pro-democracy protest movement answered a police summons Monday charging her with violating the country's harsh law against defaming the monarchy, even though she is not known to have spoken publicly about the royal institution.

Inthira "Sai" Charoenpura, who is also a singer, has drawn both praise and criticism for giving material support and raising funds for the student-led movement.

Along with seven protest leaders, she presented herself at a police station in Bangkok to hear charges that they had violated the country's lese majeste law, which calls for a prison term of three to 15 years for defaming the king or members of his immediate family.

The law, known as Article 112, has long drawn criticism for its harshness and terms that let anyone file a complaint, allowing its use for partisan political purposes. Its use against

Inthira appeared to be unprecedented since she was not directly tied to any comments about the monarchy.

KURDISH EX-MP  
GETS 22 YEARS  
IN PRISON

**Diyarbakir, Turkey, Dec. 21:** A Turkish court on Monday sentenced a prominent Kurdish former lawmaker who went on a months-long hunger strike to more than 22 years in jail on terror-related charges.

Leyla Guven, an opposition Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) deputy who was stripped of her parliamentary immunity in June, was convicted of membership of a terror group and disseminating terror propaganda for outlawed Kurdish militants.

The 56-year-old gained international attention by launching a 200-day hunger strike in 2018 in a bid to end jailed Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan's isolation by securing him access to his family and lawyers.

Ocalan's Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which is black-listed by Ankara and its Western allies as a terror group, has been waging an insurgency against the Turkish state since 1984 that has killed tens of thousands.

The government has jailed dozens of mayors and other HDP officials in the past year over the party's suspected links to the PKK, which it strongly denies.

## Tokyo dazzles under lights



People walk under winter-themed illumination, lit by approximately 1.2 million "champagne gold" LED lights as part of seasonal decorations, in the Marunouchi business district of Tokyo on Monday.

Rockets strike near US  
embassy in Baghdad

Attacks cause material damage, no casualty: Iraq's security

**Baghdad, Dec. 21:** A volley of rockets exploded near the US embassy in Baghdad Sunday, as tensions mount ahead of the anniversary of the US killing top Iranian general Qasem Soleimani on Iraqi soil. AFP reporters in the capital's east heard at least five booms on Sunday night, followed by whistling sounds.

A few moments later, they heard thunderous rapid-fire sounds and saw streams of red flares in the dark sky, indicating the US embassy's C-RAM rocket defence system had been activated. Iraq's security forces issued a statement saying the attacks caused material damage, but no casualties.

A security source said at least three rockets landed near the US embassy in

the high-security Green Zone, while two others hit separate residential neighbourhoods.

An Iraqi man living across the street from the US diplomatic mission in a high-security residential compound said that his building was hit.

"Everyone is screaming and crying. My wife is losing it from all the terrifying sounds," he said, preferring to speak anonymously.

A member of parliament said that his home had been hit by a rocket fragment, likely caused by the C-RAM's deflection or explosion of incoming rockets. The US embassy and other foreign military and diplomatic sites have been targeted by dozens of rockets and roadside bomb attacks since the autumn of 2019.

Western and Iraqi officials have blamed hard-line groups, including the pro-Iran faction Kataeb Hezbollah. In October, these groups agreed to an indefinite truce, but Sunday's attack is the third apparent violation.

The first, on November 17, saw a volley of rockets slam into the US embassy and various parts of the Iraqi capital, killing one young woman.

On December 10, two convoys transporting logistical equipment for the US-led coalition helping Iraqi troops fight jihadists were targeted with roadside bombs.

The attacks have been claimed by groups that both US and Iraqi officials have described as smoke-screens for well-known Iran-aligned armed fac-

tions in Iraq.

But in an unusual move, several factions condemned Sunday's attack.

Muqtada Sadr, a populist cleric and former militia leader, tweeted that "no one has the right to use weapons outside of the state." Even Kataeb Hezbollah, which has been blamed for other attacks, issued an online statement.

"Bombing the (US) embassy of evil at this time is considered out of order," it said, while also condemning the US embassy's use of the C-RAM system.

The statement could be an attempt to calm tensions ahead of the anniversary on January 3 of the US drone strike that killed Soleimani and leading Iraqi paramilitary figure Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis.

— AFP

ANTI-SEMITIC  
RAMPAGE: LIFE  
TERM TO GERMAN

**Magdeburg, Germany, Dec. 21:** A German court on Monday handed down a life sentence to a neo-Nazi behind a deadly attack last year that nearly became the country's worst anti-Semitic atrocity since World War II.

A bolted door at the synagogue in the eastern city of Halle with 52 worshippers inside marking Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish year, was the only thing that prevented the heavily armed attacker from carrying out a planned bloodbath.

After failing to storm the temple on October 9, 2019, Stephan Balliet, 28, shot dead a female passer-by and a man at a kebab shop.

"Without that famous reinforced door, he would have committed a massacre," presiding judge Ursula Mertens said.

— AFP

US will 'react' if Iran seeks  
to avenge Soleimani killing

**Washington, Dec. 21:** Washington is "prepared to react" if Tehran launches an attack to mark the first anniversary of the killing of powerful Iranian General Qasem Soleimani, the head of US forces in the Middle East warned Sunday.

"We are prepared to defend ourselves, our friends and partners in the region, and we're prepared to react if necessary," General Kenneth McKenzie, who heads the US Central Command (Centcom), told journalists.

He was touring the region weeks before the anniversary of the January 3, 2020 killing of Soleimani by a US drone strike near the Baghdad airport.

"My assessment is we are in a very good position and we'll be prepared for anything the Iranians or their proxies acting for them might choose to do," McKenzie, a four-star marine general, told a small

Oli defends move  
to dissolve Parl,  
blames own party

**Kathmandu, Dec. 21:** Nepal's embattled Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli on Monday defended his move to abruptly dissolve Parliament, saying he was forced to seek a fresh mandate through elections as the rift within the ruling Nepal Communist Party severely affected his government's functioning.

Oli on Sunday sprang a surprise on his rivals and got the President to dissolve Parliament, a controversial move amidst a prolonged tussle for power between him and former premier Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' within the ruling dispensation. In a special address to the nation, Prime Minister Oli said that he was forced to dissolve Parliament and announce mid-term elections after he learnt about a plan to move a vote of no-confidence against him.

"I was forced to seek a fresh mandate through elections as attempts were made against my government, not to allow it to function properly," the prime minister said while defending his decision to dissolve Parliament and announce dates for mid-term elections.

Oli said that the intra-party rift in the ruling Nepal Communist Party severely affected the government's functioning.

"The elected government was pushed to a corner and picketed against and was not allowed to work so I decided to dissolve the house." "Against the people's mandate and their will, national politics was dragged into an endless and goalless direction by creating controversy, making Parliament meaningless as the elected government could not receive its support but always faced opposition and dragged into the controversy," Oli said.

He accused some of his own party leaders of being responsible for forcing him to take this step. "When the prime minister of the majority government was not allowed to

● **OLI ON Sunday sprang a surprise on his rivals and got the President to dissolve Parliament, a controversial move amidst a prolonged tussle for power between him and former premier Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' within the ruling dispensation.**

● **IN A special address to the nation, Prime Minister Oli said that he was forced to dissolve Parliament and announce mid-term elections after he learnt about a plan to move a vote of no-confidence against him.**

● **EARLIER, Oli rejected his party's decision to take disciplinary action against him. The Nepal Communist Party's Standing Committee meeting termed Oli's move as "unconstitutional, undemocratic and based on his personal whim".**

work, I did not want to indulge in unfair practices behind closed doors and reach a compromise with them," Oli said, adding that giving a chance to the people for a fresh mandate is "the best democratic alternative."

"This move could be seen as an abrupt step for now, but some of my party leaders should be held responsible for creating this situation who did not cooperate with my government," Oli said.

The prime minister also insisted that his government had done well in terms of safeguarding the country's territorial integrity and sovereignty. Earlier, Oli rejected his party's decision to take disciplinary action against him. The Nepal Communist Party's Standing Committee meeting termed Oli's move as "unconstitutional, undemocratic and based on his personal whim", and recommended to take disciplinary action against the prime minister.

— PTI

CYBERATTACK  
CLAIMS BY DON  
'FARCE': CHINA

**Beijing, Dec. 21:** China on Monday said tweets by President Donald Trump suggesting Beijing was involved in a massive cyberattack on the US government were "a farce" concocted for political motives.

A large-scale hack of US government agencies including the Treasury was "under control" as of Saturday, according to the outgoing US President.

But in a tweet thread he undercut his own administration's assessment that Russia was behind the cyberattack, instead saying China "may" also have been involved, without providing any evidence.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin stopped short of directly denying Beijing's involvement, but called US accusations of cyberattacks "not serious, and self-contradictory." "The accusations made by the US against China have always been a farce, out of political motives," Wang told a press briefing.

"The US has politicised cybersecurity issues, continuously spread false information without conclusive evidence... in an attempt to destroy China's image and mislead the international community," he added.

In July, the US indicted two Chinese nationals for seeking to steal virus vaccine research and hacking hundreds of companies.

— AFP

SPYWARE HACKS  
AL-JAZEERA'S  
STAFF PHONES

**Dubai, Dec. 21:** Dozens of journalists at Al-Jazeera, the Qatari state-owned media company, have been targeted by advanced spyware in an attack likely linked to the governments of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, a cybersecurity watchdog has said. Citizen Lab at the University of Toronto said on Sunday it traced malware that infected the personal phones of 36 journalists, producers, anchors and executives at Al-Jazeera back to the Israel-based NSO Group, which has been widely condemned for selling spyware to repressive governments.

Most unnerving to the investigators was that iMessages were infecting targeted cellphones without the users taking any action — what's known as a zero-click vulnerability. Through push notifications alone, the malware instructed the phones to upload their content to servers linked to the NSO Group, turning journalists' iPhones into powerful surveillance tools without even luring users to click on suspicious links or threatening texts.

The attacks, which Citizen Lab described as the largest concentration of phone hacks targeting a single organisation, occurred in July, just weeks before the Trump administration announced normalisation of ties between Israel and the UAE, the archival to Qatar.

— AP

RAISING | SUSPICION The scandal started in summer, saw the Tunisian environment minister sacked at the weekend

## Waste shipments from Italy kick up a stink in Tunisia

**Sousse, Tunisia, Dec. 21:** Hundreds of containers of household waste shipped from Italy to Tunisia have raised suspicions of dirty dealings in the North African country that already struggles to manage its own garbage disposal.

The scandal, which saw the Tunisian environment minister sacked at the weekend, started in the summer when Customs officials seized 282 containers in the Mediterranean port city of Sousse.

They were declared as carrying plastic scraps for industrial recycling — but were instead full of mixed, putrid household waste, which is barred from import under Tunisian law.

The case shines a spot-

light on the global trade in waste, which has grown despite stricter regulations aimed at preventing rich countries from dumping their hazardous refuse on poorer countries.

The containers were imported by Tunisian firm Soreplast, which claimed to have government permission to import and recycle industrial plastic scraps. A copy of Soreplast's request to bring the containers into the country seen by AFP stated that the company would "temporarily" import the waste "in non-hazardous bales... for sorting, recycling and re-export operations to European territory".

AFP has seen the contract which Soreplast signed

with the Italian firm that sold the refuse, Sviluppo Risorse Ambientali Srl. It explicitly tasked Soreplast with "recovery of the waste and its subsequent disposal" in Tunisia.

Neither company was available for comment despite numerous efforts to contact them by AFP.

According to a customs official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, these documents show that Soreplast made a false declaration on the nature of the imported material.

As the scandal grew, Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi sacked the environment minister, Mustapha Aroui, late on Sunday without giving an official reason. But a government

source, also speaking on condition of anonymity, said he was fired in connection with the waste issue.

The global waste trade has been growing as more highly industrialised and urbanised countries get rid of their garbage in developing countries.

Interpol warned in August that criminal organisations have profited from an "overwhelming" surge in illegal waste shipments, particularly to Asia but also other parts of the world. The garbage often ends up in countries that are ill-equipped to cope with it and endure heavy pollution when waste is burned and dumped in landfills instead of being recycled. Soreplast's contra-

ct with the Italian firm, which collects and processes waste in the southern region of Campania, stipulated that it would dispose of up to 120,000 tonnes of waste at 48 euros (\$59) per tonne — more than five million euros.

On July 8, Tunisian officials decided to confiscate the containers and send them back to Italy, the customs official said. But they remain in Tunisia.

The case has set off alarm bells in Tunisia, which lies only a few hundred kilometres from Europe and struggles to deal with its own waste.

Just 61 per cent of waste in Tunis is collected, according to a recent World Bank report.

— AFP



Cats sit in waiting behind men casting their lines while fishing at the port of Sousse, about 140 kilometres south of Tunisia's capital, where Customs officials seized 70 shipping containers of trash in summer, followed by another 212 containers.

— AFP



## SHORT TAKES

## Man Utd revel in 6-2 win vs Leeds

**Manchester:** Manchester United waited 16 years to play old rivals Leeds in the English Premier League, and then made it look distinctly second-class. United charged to a 6-2 victory on Sunday, though both teams could easily have scored more, as they roared back into the EPL title race in third. The easy win put United ahead of Tottenham, which swept United aside 6-1 in October. Scott McTominay looked like one of the Premier League's top scorers as Man United swept into an early lead over Leeds.

Defensive midfielder McTominay who hadn't scored in the EPL since March netted in the second and third minutes after he was left plenty of space to run through the Leeds defense. Bruno Fernandes and Victor Lindelof extended United's lead amid more static defending from Leeds, with more goals from Daniel James and Fernandes in the second half. — AP

## Mariners give BFC the blues

**Goa:** David Williams' 33rd-minute strike proved the difference as ATK Mohun Bagan got the better of Bengaluru FC in the Indian Super League at the Fatorda Stadium on Monday. The Australian scored his first goal of the campaign with a stunner which was enough to inflict on Bengaluru, their first defeat of the season. The win took the Kolkata side level to 16 points from seven matches, the same as Mumbai City FC. Bengaluru stayed third with 12 points.

ATKMB looked threatening from the start and had good opportunities to convert their dominance into goals. But Manvir Singh saw both his efforts easily saved by the keeper during the first quarter. ATKMB deservedly took the lead at the half-hour mark.

## Benzema leads Madrid to win

**Barcelona:** Karim Benzema scored one goal and set up another to lead Real Madrid to a 3-1 win at Elbar, keeping the defending champions level on points with Atletico Madrid at the top of the Spanish league. Zinedine Zidane's side is behind Atletico on goal difference. The city rivals are three points ahead of Real Sociedad and eight points ahead of Barcelona, who are in fifth place behind Villarreal. Benzema opened the scoring in the sixth minute on Sunday when he controlled an expert pass from Rodrygo before knocking the ball past goalkeeper Marko Dmitrovic. The French striker assisted Luka Modric in the 12th after he found the Croatia midfielder arriving unmarked at the edge of the area. Modric fired a right-footed strike into the net to score what proved to be the winning goal. — AP

## AC Milan's Leao scores in 6 secs!

**Milan:** AC Milan forward Rafael Leao scored the fastest-ever goal in Serie A history on Sunday, netting after just six seconds in a 2-1 win at Sassuolo which kept his side top of the table ahead of city rivals Inter Milan. Milan, chasing a first Serie A title since 2011, launched straight into attack from kick-off, with Turkish midfielder Hakan Calhanoglu setting up Leao to slot home the rapid opener. The previous fastest goal in the Italian top flight had been Paolo Poggini's for Piacenza against Fiorentina in December 2001 after eight seconds. — AFP

## Live on TV

## FOOTBALL

**Italian League:** Crotone vs Parma from 11 pm, Juventus vs Fiorentina from 1.45 am (Wednesday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

**Indian Super League:** Odisha vs North East United from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

## WWE

**WWE Raw:** Bouts from 6.30 am on Sony Ten 1, HD

Published by K. Sudhakar for and on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited at Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi 110 002. and Printed by him at BFL Infotech Limited, C-9, Sector-111, Noida-201301.  
Editor — T. Venkatram Reddy, RNI Registration number 57290/94, Price in Nepal - Nep. Rs. 20.00 per copy.

## All eyes on Jadeja

## Ravindra likely to replace Vihari in playing XI for second Test

**Adelaide, Dec. 21:** The Indian team management will be keenly monitoring Ravindra Jadeja's progress leading up to the Boxing Day Test against Australia this weekend as, if fit, the all-rounder could walk into the playing XI in place of Hanuma Vihari.

Jadeja, who suffered a concussion during the first T20 international, also sustained a hamstring injury which ruled him out of the first Test.

However, over the past few days when India were playing the Test match, Jadeja has slowly returned to the nets.

It has been learnt that the senior all-rounder is recovering well but it can't be said with certainty that he will be 100 per cent fit for the second Test in Melbourne starting on December 26.

But if fit, the axe will fall on Andhra Pradesh batsman Vihari, not because of his low scores in the Adelaide Test but purely based on the best combination that Ajinkya Rahane and Ravi Shastri can put on the field.

"If Jadeja gets fit to bowl long spells, then there is no debate at all. Jadeja replaces Vihari on the basis of his all-round skills. Also it gives us an option to play five bowlers at the MCG," a senior BCCI source told PTI on conditions of anonymity.

With Mohammed Shami already ruled out of the series because of a wrist fracture, India might just be tempted to go in with five specialist bowlers instead of the usual four, which has been their template for years.

## INDIA'S PRACTICE CANCELLED

The Indian team had a scheduled practice session at the Adelaide Oval on Monday but due to steady rain, it had to be cancelled.

With skipper Virat



India's Ravindra Jadeja stretches during a practice session in Adelaide on December 16, ahead of the first Test against Australia. — AFP

Kohli set to leave for India on Tuesday and the squad travelling to Melbourne, the skipper apparently had a chat with his team on the way forward after the 36 all-out debacle here.

## ROHIT QUARANTINING IN SYDNEY

Senior batsman Rohit Sharma can start training from January 3 ahead of the Sydney Test. He is currently locked in a hard quarantine in a two-room apartment in Sydney.

The BCCI, at the moment, can't shift Rohit in the middle of quarantine.

— PTI

## BOXING DAY TEST IS CRUCIAL, SAYS BURNS

**Adelaide, Dec. 21:** If opener Joe Burns' views are any indication, another onerous task awaits an embattled Indian team, as Australia are entering the second Test believing that a favourable result for them in Melbourne could "decide the fate" of the four-match series.

"We have got some scars as well, we just have to prepare well, start well and carry on the momentum from the last game," Burns said during a virtual press conference on Monday. "We know that Indians are going to bounce back in

**We know that Indians are going to bounce back in the next Test, which is going to play a crucial role in (deciding the) fate of the series.**

— JOE BURNS  
Australia opener

the next Test, which is going to play a crucial role in (deciding the) fate of the series."

The absence of Kohli and Mohammed Shami will be "big losses" but Burns is expecting a strong comeback by the visitors. "I think Shami and Virat

are obviously big losses for India. In saying that the Indian team does have very good depth as well. So, they are still going to be very challenging," Burns said. "It is always hard to replace world class players like that, but when we look (at the guys) that they got to come in, we are going to prepare well for the next game. We know that Indians are going to bounce back strongly." Shami was ruled out of the remainder of the Test series after a nasty blow on his hand led to a wrist fracture. — PTI

## KALLIS NAMED ENG BATTING CONSULTANT

**London, Dec. 21:** South African legend Jacques Kallis was on Monday appointed as the batting consultant of the England team for next month's two-match Test tour of Sri Lanka.

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) said in a statement that the team will depart for Sri Lanka on January 2.

"Seven coaches will join the squad for the two-Test tour," the ECB said.

"Former South Africa all-rounder Jacques Kallis joins the England setup for the first time as batting coaching consultant," it added.

The 45-year-old Kallis worked in a similar role with the Proteas last year in the Test series against England. — PTI

## Haddin feels India can't recover

**Melbourne, Dec. 21:** Former Australia wicket-keeper Brad Haddin reckons the opening day/night Test was India's best shot at winning in the ongoing series as it will be very difficult for the visitors to script a turnaround after demoralizing eight-wicket loss in Adelaide.

India were bundled out for their lowest-ever Test score of 36 in their second innings as Australia claimed an eight-wicket win in the pink-ball Test to take a 1-0 lead in the Border-Gavaskar trophy. "I don't think they will (recover from the loss)," Haddin told *SEN Radio*.

The 43-year-old, who featured in 66 Tests for Australia, feels the conditions at the Adelaide Oval were conducive to the Indian bowling attack.

"I thought their only



Brad Haddin

opportunity to win a Test match was the first Test at Adelaide.

"I thought the conditions suited their bowling and I thought they'd get enough runs. But I don't think they'll be able to

turn it around. "You've got one Test up at Brisbane where no one beats Australia. These next two wickets will be suited to Indian cricket, but I don't think they'll be able to turn it around,"

Haddin added.

India created history by registering their maiden series win Down Under in 2018-19 on the back of a lethal pace-bowling attack.

However, the visitor's are without the experienced Ishant Sharma and Mohammed Shami.

"They had a great bowling attack the last time they came out here, and now with Shami out with a broken arm they don't have enough depth to cover that," Haddin said.

Reflecting on the Indian batting collapse Haddin said "I think it's really concerning".

"Yes India were driving the game and we were talking at the start of day three about how Australia would get back into it, but the collapse they had has to leave some marks." — PTI

## Chappell bats for on-field safety rules

**Adelaide, Dec. 21:** Former Australia captain Ian Chappell has advocated a review of on-field safety measures in cricket, saying it would be a good idea to "strengthen any law" that can protect tailenders when they face short-pitched bowling.

The run-up to the Test series between India and Australia was marked by a series of blows to head and concussion-related substitutes, reviving the debate around the use of bouncers by fast bowlers. Chappell rejected the idea of banning the delivery altogether.

"Any talk of completely banning the bouncer should be dismissed as quickly as bowlers removed New Zealand batting bunny Chris Martin,"

Chappell wrote in *ESPNcricinfo*.

Instead, the batting great added, "The time is ripe for a worldwide review into on-field safety, including batsmen, bowlers and umpires, with batting technique a top priority."

"In conducting this review it would be appropriate to strengthen any law regarding the protection of tailenders in facing short-pitched bowling."

Being one of the finest experts of the game, Chappell is very much mindful of the fact that it is meant for the protection of players, especially the tailenders.

He said complaining about a player not being a like-for-like replacement



"seems pointless". A concussion Ravindra Jadeja being replaced by leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal in the T20 series is a case in point.

"The heat rose in this argument when Chahal claimed three wickets and the player-of-the-match award in India's narrow victory. Complaining about a player not being a like-for-like replacement

**The time is ripe for a worldwide review into on-field safety, including batsmen, bowlers and umpires, with batting technique a top priority.**

— IAN CHAPPELL  
Former Australia captain

seems pointless: it's always going to be difficult to please all parties." Chappell also stressed on improving the batsmen's technique to face the bouncer.

"... Just addressing the concussion-sub issue doesn't get to the heart of the matter — it's the rising number of batsmen hit on the head that then leads to the need for a

replacement player.

"Following the tragic death of Phil Hughes, Cricket Australia conducted a safety review. Incredibly, this process didn't include a look at technique, which is the most important aspect in ensuring fewer batsmen receive blows to the head," Chappell said.

"Often batsmen duck into a short ball and get hit. Many times a ball only bounces between waist and chest height but still hits a batsman in the head because he has taken his eye off the ball and ducked. Will Pucovski's latest concussion is a case in point."

He said "replacing a concussion player is not such a perplexing problem" during the pandemic. — PTI

## Sindhu, Saina ready for action

**New Delhi, Dec. 21:** India's top shuttlers P.V. Sindhu and Saina Nehwal will be seen in action for the first time since the coronavirus-forced break when they compete in three upcoming tournaments in Bangkok, including the prestigious BWF World Tour Finals.

With Olympic qualifications in mind, the Badminton Association of India (BAI) on Monday announced a strong eight-member squad to participate in the three upcoming tournaments, scheduled in January.

The team, consisting of Olympic-bound shuttlers Sindhu, Saina, B. Sai Praneeth, Kidambi Srikanth, Satwiksairaj Rankireddy, Chirag Shetty, Ashwini Ponappa and N. Sikki Reddy, will begin their campaign with Yonex Thailand Open from January 12-17.

That will be followed by Toyota Thailand Open (January 19-24) and the prestigious HSBC BWF World Tour Finals which is rescheduled for January 27-31.

After the coronavirus outbreak in March disrupted the sporting world resulting in cancellation or postponement of a number of tournaments, this will be the first time that top Indian players, apart from Srikanth, will feature in any international tournament.

The former World No. 1, Srikanth had made a comeback when he played the

● **With Olympic qualifications in mind, the Badminton Association of India (BAI) on Monday announced a strong eight-member squad to participate in the three upcoming tournaments, scheduled in January.**

Denmark Open in October. "We are very happy to see badminton finally getting back on the court. It gives us hope that tournaments can eventually make a steady comeback in near future. Most of our players haven't played tournaments in the last 7-8 months," BAI general secretary Ajay Singhania said.

"However, they have been training to the best of their abilities at the camp. The purpose of sending a full-strength team in these tournaments so that players can get the much-needed tournament practice ahead of the Olympic qualifiers," he added.

The team will also be accompanied by singles foreign coaches Agus Dwi Santoso and Park Tae Sang and doubles coach Dwi Kristiawan alongside support staff consisting of Kiran Challagundla, Johnson, Evangelina Baddam and M. Srikanth. — PTI

## GOLFER KO CAPS YEAR WITH CME GROUP TITLE

**Naples, Dec. 21:** Jin Young Ko missed most of the season, LPGA Tour season and still won the yearlong money title. "That's what a \$1.1 million check does."

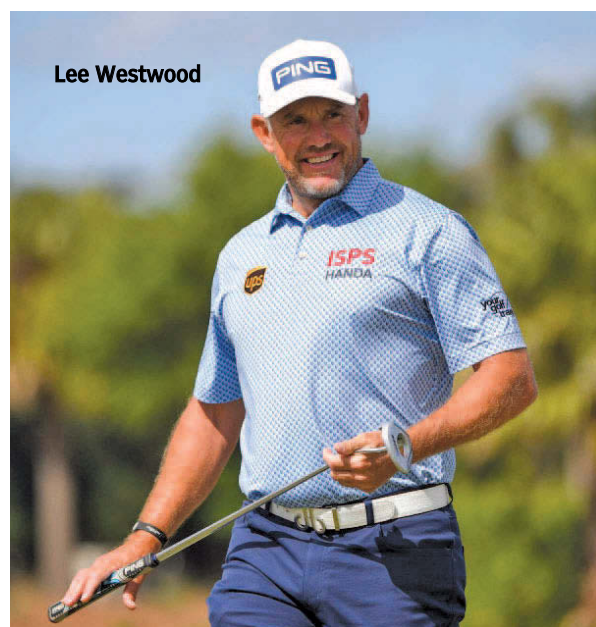
Ko, the No. 1 player in the world, put an emphatic capper on her truncated year on Sunday by shooting a final-round 6-under 66 and winning the CME Group Tour Championship by five strokes over Hannah Green and Sei Young Kim.

"I still can't believe it, that I'm here, that I won this tournament," Ko said. With a birdie on the

final hole, the LPGA's final putt of the season, Ko finished at 18 under for her seventh career LPGA win. Green's final-round 67 — on her 24th birthday — helped push her into the second-place tie.

Kim, who took a one-shot lead into the final round, shot 72 and that was good enough for her to clinch Rolex Player of the Year honours. Danielle Kang won the Vare Trophy for the lowest scoring average.

The win wrapped up a wire-to-wire year in the No. 1 spot for Ko, who has held the ranking since July 29, 2019. — AP



## Westwood voted golfer of the year

**Virginia Water (UK), Dec. 21:** Lee Westwood was voted as the European Tour's golfer of the year for 2020 on Monday, winning the award for the fourth time in his career after ending the season as the Race to Dubai champion at the age of 47.

Westwood started the 27th year of his professional career by winning the Abu Dhabi Championship to become the first active golfer to win a title across four separate decades.

He ended 2020 by being crowned the tour's No. 1 player for the third time and 20 years after he first won what was formerly known as the Order of Merit title.

"I am very honoured and extremely flattered to have been named European Tour's golfer of the year as

I know the competition for the award this year would have been extremely high," said Westwood, who also won the accolade in 1998, 2000 and 2009.

Westwood praised the European Tour for putting on a full schedule this year in difficult times during the coronavirus pandemic. An elder statesman of the tour, the former top-ranked player played his part by hosting the British Masters in July, a tournament that marked the full resumption of the golf tour's 2020 season following a three-month stoppage.

"His performances and his professionalism are matched by his longevity and his commitment to European golf," the tour's CEO, Keith Pelley, said about Westwood. — AP