

SHORT TAKE

COVID POSITIVITY
BELOW 2% FOR
3RD DAY IN ROWAGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 17

For the third consecutive day, the Covid-19 positivity rate remained below two per cent. Delhi recorded 1,363 new Covid-19 cases on Thursday with over 90,000 tests conducted, the highest till date, even as the positivity rate slipped to 1.51 per cent. With 35 new fatalities, the death count climbed to 10,182. According to the health department data, 1,363 fresh cases, lowest since August 31, came out of the record 90,354 tests conducted the previous day, including 49,102 RT-PCR tests and 41,252 rapid antigen tests. On August 31, the city had recorded 1,358 cases. The positivity rate from December 3 to December 7 had successively dipped to 4.96 per cent, 4.78 per cent, 4.2 per cent, 3.68 per cent, and 3.15 per cent respectively. On December 8, however, it had risen again to 4.23 per cent but fell to 3.42 per cent on December 9 and 2.46 per cent on December 10. It had risen to 3.33 per cent again on December 11 and fell again to 2.64 per cent on December 12. It rose marginally again to 2.74 on December 13 but fell to 2.15 per cent on December 14. On December 15 and 16, the positivity rates were 1.9 per cent and 1.96 per cent respectively. The active cases tally, on Thursday, dropped to 12,198 from 13,261 the previous day. The bulletin said that the total number of cases has climbed to 6,13,357.

BIZMAN TRACED,
JOINED STIR TO
ESCAPE LENDERS

Ghaziabad, Dec. 17: A debt-ridden businessman, who changed his appearance and joined the ongoing farmers' protests at one of the Delhi border points to escape moneylenders, was traced by police on Thursday. Praveen, a resident of Murad Nagar town, had left his house on December 1 but did not return, police said. He was found at the Ghazipur-Ghaziabad (Uttar Pradesh gate) border. On a previous occasion too, he had gone missing but had returned some days later, therefore, his family did not lodge a police complaint till December 12, police said. Praveen was tracked with the help of his mobile phone which was put under surveillance and his car was found parked near the protest site, superintendent of police (rural) Irai Raja told PTI. "He had grown a beard and looked like a Sikh man. However, we recognised him as was getting inside his car," a police officer said. Upon interrogation, he told the police that he was under debt and the lenders were mounting pressure on him to return their loans. To escape their harassment, he began camping at the protest site and was getting free food there, they said. — PTI

Adhikari and
another MLA
leave Trinamul

■ **Continued from Page 1**
announced his exit from the TMC after quitting the chairman's post as the outgoing mayor in the board of administrators of Ansansol Municipal Corporation in protest against vandalism in his office. "The leaders in Kolkata did not want me to be in the party. That is why they ordered the vandalism. "I have quit all posts of the party and left it too. In Bengal now Mr Adhikari is the most popular leader," he said. Mr Mondal also pledged his support to Mr Adhikari in his next political stint. His followers already circulated posters about him with Mr Adhikari. BJP sources said Mr Mondal's defection is almost certain. The prospect of switchover by Mr Tiwari and Mr Mondal, however, arose at a meeting on Wednesday evening in presence of Mr Adhikari, who headed to Mr Mondal's residence at West Bengal Assembly after tendering his resignation as Nandigram MLA. Retired Army officer Col. Diptangshu Chaudhuri, who joined the TMC from the BJP, was also present there.

Kejriwal tears copies of Centre's farm laws

Delhi Assembly passes resolution against 3 new farm laws

SUNIL THAPLIYAL
NEW DELHI, DEC. 17

The Delhi Legislative Assembly passed a resolution against the three new farm laws in a special session held on Thursday. During the tabling of the resolution, chief minister Arvind Kejriwal said that he cannot betray the farmers and the soldiers of the country, and tore up copies of the Centre's three new farm laws. The CM urged the Centre "not to become worse than Britishers". He also asked the Centre "what was the hurry to get the farm laws passed during pandemic".

Tearing the three farm acts in the Assembly, CM Kejriwal said: "I support the resolution tabled in the Assembly today. I am in pain while I tear these three farm laws, as I did not intend to do this. But today, when a farmer of the country is sleeping on the road in 2°C temperature, I cannot betray the jawans and kisans of my country. I am a citizen of this country first, a chief minister later. This Assembly rejects the three laws and appeals to the Central government to



Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal tears copies of new farm laws as he speaks at Delhi Legislative Assembly. — PTI

meet the demands of farmers."

He said he was doing so because he cannot betray the farmers and soldiers of the country. Highlighting the plight of farmers protesting at Delhi's various borders,

he said 20 farmers have so far lost their lives and appealed to the Centre to repeal the laws immediately.

Addressing the Delhi Assembly, the CM said: "I honour the martyrdom of Baba Ram Singh Ji. Even

in such selfish times, there are people who are so troubled by the state of affairs, that they can do this supreme sacrifice for the people, for the society, and their country. The letter that they wrote depicted their plight and anguish, he wrote that he was not able to bear the pain of the farmers. He came to the Singhu border daily and brought jackets and quilts for the farmers. When he could not bear the plight of the farmers anymore, he decided to sacrifice his life. More than 20 farmers have lost their lives until now. It has been 20 days since this movement has started, which means one farmer is losing his life every day. I want to ask the Central government, how many lives will you take before you listen to the plight of the farmers?"

"Every farmer has become Bhagat Singh... government is saying they are reaching out to farmers and trying to explain benefits of the farm bills... The UP chief minister told farmers they will benefit as their land won't be taken away. Is that a benefit?" Mr Kejriwal asked.

HC rejects plea seeking
aid, security to farmers

New Delhi, Dec. 17: The Delhi high court on Thursday declined to entertain a plea seeking aid, security and treatment of the farmers protesting on the borders of the national capital, saying a similar issue was before the Supreme Court.

A bench of Chief Justice D.N. Patel and Justice Prateek Jalan also said that the high court's jurisdiction does not extend to areas outside the national capital territory and added that the same plea could have been filed in any of the high courts of Rajasthan, Punjab or Uttar Pradesh.

The bench also observed that the plea was filed without doing any research or preparation and dismissed it.

The court's order came after Delhi government additional standing counsel Sanjoy Ghose and advocate Rishabh Jetley told the bench that a similar was being heard by the apex court.

The petition by a lawyer, Ashish, had sought direc-

■ **THE COURT** observed that the plea was filed without doing any research or preparation and dismissed it

tions to the Centre and Delhi government to take steps to prevent the spread of Covid-19 among the farmers protesting at the borders of the national capital.

The plea, filed through advocate Rohit Jha, had also sought directions to the authorities to ensure the protests do not turn violent and to remove the road blockages caused by the agitation.

The farmers are protesting at several roads near Delhi borders against the three new farm laws — Farmers Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020, Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020 and Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act 2020. — PTI

HC: Dharnas
in residential
areas could set
wrong example

New Delhi, Dec. 17: The Delhi high court on Thursday expressed concern over the continuing protest outside Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's residence here, saying permitting such demonstrations in a residential area could set a wrong precedent.

Justice Sanjeev Sachdeva said today the protest may be peaceful, but if a precedent is set, then anyone would come and squat there as they do in areas, like Ramlila ground or Jantar Mantar here, which are designated spots for holding protests.

"There is no problem if you come, protest and then go away. But this is going on for 11 days continuously. Once you set a precedent, anyone will come and squat there. If this is permitted for all time to come, then you know what is the state of certain areas, like Ramlila ground and Jantar Mantar, where squatting and protests are permitted. We cannot have that kind of a situation in a residential colony," the court said.

The concerns were expressed by the court while hearing a plea by the Civil Lines Residents Association, represented by advocate Rohit Bhagat, against the 11-day long protest outside the CM's residence there on grounds that it was blocking a road and causing inconvenience to residents there.

The association has contended that protest has been permitted in a residential area and roads leading there have been barricaded in violation of the high court's 2017 direction to restrict dharnas in residential areas and to keep the roads clear.

The mayors of the three corporations have been protesting outside Kejriwal's residence seeking release of funds and clearance of alleged pending dues payable to the MCDs.

The court, during the hearing, observed that tents have come up in the area and there were news reports which stated that the mayors were going to run their offices from there. — PTI

MCD dues: Mayors start
indefinite hungerstrikeAGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 17

On the 11th day of their sit-in protest, all the three mayors along with other BJP councillors on Thursday started an indefinite hungerstrike against the AAP government for not releasing pending dues to the tune of ₹13,000 crore to the three civic bodies. The Delhi high court, however, expressed concern over the continuing protest outside chief minister Arvind Kejriwal's residence, saying permitting such demonstrations in a residential area could set a wrong precedent.

North Delhi mayor Jai Prakash, South Delhi mayor Anamika Mithilesh and East Delhi mayor Nirmal Jain started the indefinite hungerstrike outside the CM's residence.

"For the last 11 days we have been sitting on a dharna outside the residence of the chief minis-



BJP workers led by Delhi BJP president Adesh Gupta (unseen) try to cross the police barricades set up outside the Delhi Legislative Assembly on Thursday. — PTI

ter demanding release of outstanding dues of all three corporations but Mr Kejriwal neither tried to meet us nor is he ready to listen to us. The three mayors have decided to sit on indefinite hunger strike from today itself till the Delhi government releases the outstanding funds of the municipal corporations," said Mr Prakash.

The city BJP, meanwhile, held a protest near the Delhi Assembly under the leadership of its president Adesh Gupta, MP Ramesh Bidhuri and Praveesh Verma, along with other senior leaders demanding the release of ₹13,000 crore to the civic bodies. The police detained the BJP workers and released them later.

Man stabbed over extra salad

Man shot at after quarrel
over serving of omelette

New Delhi, Dec. 17: A 27-year-old man was shot at by a person following a quarrel between them over serving of omelette at a food joint in central Delhi's Chandni Mahal area, police said on Thursday.

Nafees, a resident of Rakab Ganj area sustained a gunshot injury in his right thigh and is out of danger. The incident took place on late Wednesday night, police said.

Deputy commissioner of police (central) Sanjay

Bhatia, the victim and the accused along with his associates were at a shop selling omelettes at Chitli Qabar chowk when an argument broke out between the two sides over who would be served first.

Later, when the victim was going to his house, the group approached him and one of them fired in the air and then shot at the victim twice, he said.

Nafees was taken to a nearby hospital where he is being treated, he added. — PTI

heated argument took place between the two over sharing an onion salad.

While having food, accused Ali asked Pawan for some extra onions for

salad but when Pawan refused saying there were hardly any left. A heated argument took place between them and in a fit of rage, the accused stabbed Pawan multiple times in his stomach with a kitchen knife, the police officer said.

While escaping from the spot, he hid the knife near the wall of a farm on the main road, he said.

"The injured was shifted to AIIMS trauma centre by CATS ambulance. The hospital informed that the patient was stabbed multiple times in the stomach due to which his intestine and other inner body organs were exposed completely," said DCP (South) Atul Kumar Thakur.

He was in a very serious condition but is stated to be out of danger, he said.

India, Bangla ink 7 pacts

■ **Continued from Page 1**
issuing a stamp in honour of Mahatma Gandhi on the occasion of Gandhiji's 150th birth anniversary celebrations earlier in September 2020".

In all, seven agreements were signed at the virtual summit between the two countries on hydrocarbons, culture, agriculture and high-impact community development projects. A decision was also taken "to expeditiously conclude the ongoing joint study on the prospects of entering into a bilateral Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)".

The joint statement said Mr Modi also "assured that (Covid) vaccines would be made available

to Bangladesh as and when produced in India".

Sheikh Hasina "highlighted the need for early signing of an interim agreement for the sharing of Teesta waters, as agreed upon by both the governments in 2011", and Mr Modi "reiterated India's sincere commitment and continued efforts of the Government of India in that regard", the joint statement said.

The two PMs also "stressed on full implementation of the ongoing Coordinated Border Management Plan" and "agreed that loss of civilian lives at the border is a matter of concern and directed the border forces concerned to enhance coordinate measures to

work towards bringing such border incidents to zero".

They also "agreed to facilitate completion of border fencing at all pending sectors at the international border between both the countries at the earliest beginning from the Tripura (India)-Bangladesh sector". Both sides also "agreed to hold an early meeting of the Joint Boundary Conference to prepare a new set of strip maps along the stretch of Ichhamati, Kalindi, Raimongol and the Hariabhanga Rivers from Main Pillar 1 to Land Boundary terminus, with a view to finalising the delineation of the boundaries as fixed".

SC for 'pause' in implementing laws

■ **Continued from Page 1**
movement. "Farmers have the right to protest. We won't interfere with it, but we will look into the manner of protest ... and slightly alter it so that it doesn't affect the citizens' right of movement," the judges said.

The farmers' unions remained adamant on their demand that the laws must be withdrawn first. Agreeing with the court that the issue must be resolved soon, Bharatiya Kisan Union spokesman Rakesh Tikait said the future course of action will be decided after discussions with panchayat leaders.

They noted that the protesters had not blocked roads, it was the police

that had put up the barricades.

The ongoing protests have already cost the lives of 22 farmers, including several women. Eight victims died due to accidents while returning home, 12 due to heart attacks, three due to cold and a Sikh priest killed himself in protest against the farm laws.

Union minister Hardeep Puri said the government was willing to sit with the protesting farmers. He said: "It pains me many people sitting in protest probably are not aware of what they are protesting against... The government is still sending a message to all farmers that please come and talk."

In the Supreme Court, as

the solicitor-general insisted it was not possible to put the new farm laws on hold, an irked CJI said: "Don't pre-empt it. A-G says he will discuss. We are not staying the law. But you can just say that no action will be taken in the meanwhile."

The Centre, meanwhile, expressed its hesitation about the CJI's option of setting up a committee of neutral and independent people with expertise in agriculture to hear both the farmers and the government to suggest a way forward.

Mr Mehta said the talks between the government and the agitating farmers should take place in the presence of neutral and eminent people to ensure

reasonability in the positions of both sides.

At one stage the CJI suggested the name of P. Sainath, a Magsaysay Award-winning journalist focusing on social inequalities, as a member of the proposed committee.

The petitioners said in court that roads were blocked by protesters and border points closed, affecting vehicular traffic. This, they said, was causing hardship to people, including Covid-19 patients, preventing them from accessing emergency medical services.

The Centre argued that the blockade at the Delhi borders will have to be lifted as "it affects the right to movement and the damage is enormous".

SHORT TAKES

JD-U throws hat in ring for Bengal poll

Patna: Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar's JD(U) on Thursday asserted that it was looking forward to contesting a substantial number of seats in the West Bengal assembly elections, in which its ally BJP has high stakes. JD(U) national general secretary Ghulam Rasool Baliyavi said the party's unit in West Bengal wants to contest at least 75 seats and the number could go up, subject to the approval of the leadership. Elections to the 294-strong West Bengal Assembly are likely to be held in a few months and the BJP, which put up a stunning performance in the state in last year's Lok Sabha polls, is looking to unseat the ruling Trinamul Congress, headed by chief minister Mamata Banerjee. "We have contested assembly elections in West Bengal in the past. We would like to do so this time also. Our party has carried out massive membership drives in districts such as Malda, Murshidabad, Purulia and Bankura," Baliyavi said. — *PTI*

16-year-old girl raped by 'friends'

Pune: A 16-year-old girl was allegedly raped and another minor girl molested by their two male "friends" in Pimpri-Chinchwad in Pune district. According to the police, both the accused, who are in their early 20s, with the help of their three friends, kidnapped the girls and confined them after committing the crime. All the five accused have been arrested and booked under relevant sections of the IPC and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, they said. As per a complaint filed by one of the girls, their two male friends took both of them to a secluded place on Tuesday evening. "While the complainant was raped by one of the two accused, the other, aged 14, was molested by the second accused. The duo then kidnapped both the girls with the help of three more friends and confined them till early next morning," said a police officer. — *PTI*

53-year-old on run since 1993 arrested

Latur, Maharashtra: The city police has arrested a 52-year-old man who had been on the run after allegedly setting his wife ablaze nearly three decades ago. The accused was identified as Suresh Limbaji Kshirsagar (52), a resident of Vivekanandapuram here. Kshirsagar allegedly set his wife ablaze on December 16, 1991. A case under IPC section 498 (A) (husband or relative of husband of a woman subjecting her to cruelty) was registered against him, but he got bail in 1993 after which he absconded, said a police official. Acting on a tip-off, a police team arrested him from Mohamadwadi area in Pune on Wednesday. Probe revealed that he had settled down in Pune and worked in a laundry. — *PTI*

MAHA OPPOSES PLEA AGAINST RANAUT TWITTER

SHAHAB ANSARI
MUMBAI, DEC. 17

The Maharashtra government on Thursday urged the Bombay high court not to entertain a petition filed by advocate Kashif Khan seeking directives to Twitter to permanently suspend the Twitter handle of actress Kangana Ranaut. The state contended that the reliefs sought in the plea are vague and cannot be granted in writ jurisdiction. The HC has however, adjourned the matter till Monday. Public prosecutor Jayesh Yagnik, on behalf of the state told the division bench of Justice S S Shinde and Justice Makrand Karnik, "The matter doesn't have any head or tail. It is a baseless petition as it is silent on how the tweets are affecting the petitioner or the public at large." According to him, the reliefs sought by advocate Kashif Khan are vague and cannot be granted in writ jurisdiction. He also argued that prayers sought are vague and vast, which cannot be granted under the writ jurisdiction of this court. Mr Kashif told the bench that Ms Ranaut has been "misusing" the death of actor Sushant Singh Rajput.

Will not interfere with farmers' protest: SC

As long as the protests are peaceful, there should be no impediment, says top court

New Delhi, Dec. 17: Farmers agitation should be allowed to continue without impediment and this court will not interfere with it as the right to protest is a fundamental right, the Supreme Court Thursday said on the ongoing stir of agriculturists on Delhi borders. "We are of the view at this stage that the farmers' protest should be allowed to continue without impediment and without any breach of peace either by the protesters or the police," the bench headed by Chief Justice of India SA Bobde said.

The apex court, which put a sole caveat that there should not be any breach of peace either by farmers or police, also mooted an idea of putting on hold the implementation of the laws to enable negotiations with the agitating farmers which was opposed by the Centre saying agriculturists would then not come forward for the talks.

The top court was told by attorney-general K.K. Venugopal that he would get back after taking instructions on the suggestions.

The bench, which said it was worried with the way things are going on, was told by both the Centre and one of the farmers union that the negotiations are not happening at the moment.

The bench said in its bid to resolve the impasse over the three contentious agri laws, it wanted to set up of an "impartial and independent" panel of agriculture experts and farmer unions. However, it held it back as farmers unions, impleaded as parties by it on Wednesday, could not appear to give their views.

In order to bring about an effective solution to the present stalemate between the protesters and the Government of India, we consider it appropriate in the interests of justice to constitute a Committee consisting of independent and impartial persons including experts in the field of agriculture for the purpose. — *PTI*



Farmers share a hookah at a khap panchayat during a protest against the new farm laws at Delhi-UP border near Ghazipur, New Delhi, on Thursday. — *PTI*

'I come from farming family': Tomar writes an open letter

Minister has made effort to engage in dialogue, says PM

SANJAY KAW
NEW DELHI, DEC. 17

Union agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar has written an open letter to farmers in a bid to clear confusion over the three farm laws as the farmers' protest entered 22nd day on Thursday. He said that the MSP and APMC mandis will continue and the government is ready to give a written assurance in this regard.

In his "emotional" letter, Mr Tomar highlighted that he too belongs to a family of farmers and it is his duty to clear the confusion being created by the opposition over the agrarian laws. Moments after Mr Tomar released his open letter, Prime Minister Narendra Modi urged farmers and common citizens to read the agriculture minister's note. "Agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomarji has written a let-



Narendra Singh Tomar

ter to farmer brothers and sisters and expressed his feelings, he has made an effort to engage in a humble dialogue. I request all 'annadaatas' (farmers), do read it. I also request all the people of the country to ensure that this letter reaches more and more people," Mr Modi tweeted in Hindi.

Earlier in the day, Mr Tomar met Union home minister Amit Shah and railway minister Piyush Goyal at the BJP headquarters to discuss the farmers' issues.

In the letter, Mr Tomar said: "As the agriculture

minister of the country, it is his duty to clear the air over the three farm laws. As agriculture minister, it is my responsibility to break the conspiracy that is being spread in the name of the farm laws between the government and the farmer sitting on protest near Delhi's borders."

The minister said: "I belong to a farmer's family and since childhood, I have experienced the tough life of farmers. And I also know what it takes to grow or sell crops. It is very satisfactory that after implementation of the law, MSP procurement has set a new record this time."

Targeting the Congress, Mr Tomar said, "Congress sat on recommendations made in the Swaminathan Committee report for eight years. And these days, they are working again to create tension...They have even questioned our Army and their supreme sacrifice in Leh-Ladakh."

PM may flag off Delhi Metro's driverless train

New Delhi, Dec. 17: Prime Minister Narendra Modi may flag off the country's first driverless metro train later this month in the national capital, official sources said on Thursday.

The train will be flagged off on the Magenta Line (Janakpuri West-Botanical Garden) of the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC), they said.

"A proposal has been sent to the Prime Minister's Office to flag off the driverless train around December 25," a source said.

"Our driverless metro train, which will be the first in the country, is ready to be flagged off. We have made all preparations on our part," the source said.

Delhi Metro had begun its commercial operation on December 25, 2002, a day after the then prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee had inaugurated DMRC's first stretch, spanning 8.2 km from Shahdara to Tis Hazari with just six stations.

The DMRC now has 10 lines with 242 stations and on regular days, the average daily ridership of the Delhi Metro is over 26

lakh. The Delhi Metro driverless trains are to operate on the Magenta Line and the Pink Line, made as part of the Phase-III of the DMRC.

The Delhi Metro in September 2017 had started full signalling trials of its new 'driverless trains' along a 20-km-long stretch on the Pink Line, which was yet to be commissioned back then.

The trials were to test the automation of the new metro trains, equipped with Unattended Train Operations (UTO) and CBTC (Communication Based Train Control) signalling systems, which will significantly increase their frequency.

The driverless trains, having six coaches, are equipped with several advanced features. These new trains of the Delhi Metro have undergone significant technological as well as eco-friendly upgrades and many additional features have been added to increase passenger comfort. They are designed for a maximum speed of 95 kmph and operational speed of 85 kmph, the Delhi Metro had earlier said. — *PTI*

If US can hold poll, why can't India have Parl session? Sena

BHAGWAN PARAB
MUMBAI, DEC. 17

The Shiv Sena has slammed the Narendra Modi government's decision to cancel the Winter Session of Parliament owing to the coronavirus pandemic. "If America can hold Presidential elections during Covid times, why can't we hold even a four-day winter session of the parliament?" Maharashtra's ruling party asked.

"The presidential election of the big democratic country in the world did

not stop due to Covid-19. The polls were held and change of guard took place in a democratic manner. Donald Trump was replaced by Joe Biden. This is the strength of super power's democracy, but we have locked the supreme temple of the democracy," said the Sena in an editorial in the party mouthpiece *Saamana*.

The Centre has announced that the Winter Session will not be held this year due to the Covid-19 and the Budget Session will be convened in January 2021.



Narendra Modi

PM to address to MP farmers on new farm laws' 'benefits'

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 17

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will virtually address farmers in Madhya Pradesh on Friday even as some farmer unions have been protesting at Delhi borders against the three recently passed farm sector-related legislations. Chief Minister Shivrāj Singh Chouhan will also distribute relief amount for crops loss to around 35 lakh farmers during the event which will be attended by around 20,000 farmers across the state.

Meanwhile, Union agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar, home minister Amit Shah, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman and railways minister Piyush Goyal held a meeting with some BJP general secretaries at the party headquarters on farmers issue.

During the meeting, sources said, Shah reviewed the party's outreach programme through press conferences and "chaupals" across all districts of the country to allay fears on the new farm laws. The party has been holding chaupals at all districts across the country highlighting the three legislations and how they are aimed at benefiting farmers, mainly small and marginal farmers and countering the propaganda by some farmer unions and opposition parties against the legislations and how MSP and APMC will continue to exist. The meeting at the BJP headquarters was held on the day the Supreme Court heard a plea related to the farmers' protests.

'Election cash' scandal rocks MP

BJP demands probe by state police into Kamal Nath's role in case

RABINDRA NATH
CHOUDHURY
BHOHAL, DEC. 17

Hours after the Election Commission directed Madhya Pradesh government to book 3 Indian Police Service (IPS) officers and a state police officer for their alleged role in the use of black money in 2019 Lok Sabha polls in MP, ruling BJP on Thursday demanded a probe into it to "establish involvement" of former chief minister Kamal Nath in the "scandal".

State BJP president Vishnu Dutt Sharma said the state government should initiate a probe into the alleged "poll cash" scam to nail down Mr Nath, who was the chief minister when the reported scandal broke out, in the case in the wake of the exposure of



Kamal Nath

▶ 3 IPS and a state police officers were booked for their alleged role in the use of black money in 2019 Lok Sabha polls

▶ THE EC ordered the MP chief electoral officer to lodge a criminal case against the 4 bureaucrats for their alleged role in the transfer of funds to a political party

the electoral malpractices during 2019 LS polls.

"The economic offence bureau (EOW) of MP police should be handed over the probe into the matter. The investigation will unearth how money from the state was being sent to Congress leaders at Delhi during the Kamal Nath government," he told reporters here.

Chief minister Shivrāj Singh Chouhan, however, said the state government was yet to receive the order from EC. He said

action would be taken against the guilty. The EC late on Wednesday evening ordered the MP chief electoral officer to lodge a criminal case against the 4 bureaucrats for their alleged role in the transfer of funds to a political party during the 2019 general elections in the state.

The bureaucrats included the IPS officers Sushovan Banerjee, Sanjay and V. Madhu Kumar and state police officer Arun Mishra.

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TRP scam: Ex-COO of rating agency Barc held in Mumbai

BHAGWAN PARAB
MUMBAI, DEC. 17

The Mumbai police on Thursday arrested the former Chief Operating Officer (COO) of the Broadcast Audience Research Council (Barc) in connection with the alleged TRP (Television Rating Points) rigging scam. He was produced before a local court, which remanded him to police custody till December 19. This is the 14th arrest in this case.

A team of Mumbai crime branch arrested Romil Rmgarhia, former COO of the Barc on Thursday afternoon.

Post arrest the crime branch officers produced

▶ ACCORDING TO the Mumbai police, during the investigation, Romil Ramgarhia's alleged involvement in the case came to light, following which he was placed under arrest on Thursday

him before a metropolitan magistrate and sought his remand on the ground that they needed to interrogate him in connection with the case. They also said that his custody was required in order to retrieve electronic evidence from him.

According to the police, during the investigation, Ramgarhia's alleged involvement in

the case came to light, following which he was placed under arrest on Thursday.

The police began a probe in the alleged TRP scam after ratings agency Broadcast Audience Research Council (Barc) filed a complaint through Hansa Research Agency about rigging of TRP by some channels. TRP, measured by recording viewership data at sample households, is crucial for attracting advertisers.

The Barc engaged Hansa to install and maintain barometers which record TV viewership data at sample households.

BSF kills 2 Pakistani intruders

New Delhi/Amritsar, dec. 17: Two Pakistani "armed intruders" were on Thursday shot dead by the BSF along the International Border in Punjab as the force thwarted three bids of drugs smuggling at this front. In the first interception, two men in their 30s were killed near the Rajatal border post in Amritsar around 2.20 am after the troops on guard

detected suspicious movement ahead of the border fence in Indian territory, a BSF spokesperson said.

An AK-56 rifle, semi-automatic rifle, pistol, 90 bullets, five magazines and two PVC pipes, usually used to push drug packets across the border, of about ten feet each, have been seized after a search was conducted of the incident site, the DIG said. — *PTI*

NORTHERN RAILWAY
1st CORRIGENDUM NOTICE
Sub-: 1st Corrigendum for the work in the section of Sr. DEN-IV/DLI to be opened on 08.01.2021.
This has the reference to the open tender notice No. 128-W/260/Tender Notice/NIT 39.40.841/W/20-21 dated 14.12.2020. Due to change in the tender schedule, name of work and special condition etc. with the tender schedule for the work at item no 3 viz. "Hiring of artisans & Helper for day to day maintenance of colonies and service building under Sr. DEN-IV" has been revised. The revised tender document can be seen at railway website www.ireps.gov.in. Tender for the above work will be opened on its prescribed date i.e. 08.01.2021 at 15.00 hours. Other terms and conditions will remain same. No : 128-W/260/Tender Notice/NIT 41/W-IV/20-21
Dated: 17.12.2020 28/10/2020
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noida Administrative Building, Sector-6, Noida G.B. Nagar, (UP)
Website : www.noidaauthorityonline.com

E-TENDER NOTICE
E-Tenders are invited from firms/contractors registered with UPLC Lucknow for the following jobs against which bids can be uploaded and same shall be opened / downloaded as per schedule mentioned. The details and conditions of all tenders are available on Noida Authority's official website: www.noidaauthorityonline.com & <http://etender.up.nic.in>
Please ensure to see these websites for any changes/ amendments & corrigendum etc.

A) (1) 38/DGM(JAL)/AO/SM(JAL)-I/20-21 Village Development (P/L Water and Sewer Line in Shanker Singh wali Gali in Village Sorgha), Noida. Rs. 27.50 Lacs
(2) 39/DGM(JAL)/AO/SM(JAL)-I/20-21 M/o Water Supply (Two years Annual Repairing of Bowl Assly. and Tube Shaft Set of Network -112, 113, 115, 118 and Village-Sorgha), Noida. Rs. 29.79 Lacs
The above tenders can be uploaded by date **31.12.2020 upto 5.00 PM**. Pre-qualification shall be opened/downloaded on date **01.01.2021 at 11.00 AM**.

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SHORT TAKES

ADHIKARI LOYALIST
TIWARI QUILTS TMC,
TO JOIN BJP

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC
KOLKATA, DEC. 17

Former West Bengal minister Shubhendu Adhikari and his loyalist Jitendra Tiwari, also Pandabeshwar MLA, severed their long ties with the Trinamul Congress in a span of few hours on Thursday, over their revolt against Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

After dealing the double blow to their party, the duo, along with with two-time Burdwan East TMC MP Sunil Mondal, is now set to join the BJP in the presence of Union home minister Amit Shah at a rally in Midnapore on December 19 upon his arrival on a two-day state tour this weekend.

Adhikari, who resigned as an MLA of Nandigram on Wednesday, wrote to Banerjee politely in a letter, “I am writing to tender my resignation as a member of All India Trinamul Congress as well as from all other positions held by me in the party and its associate organs with immediate effect. I am thankful for all the challenges and opportunities that has been afforded to me and I will always value my time spent as a member of the party.”

NCB ISSUES NOTICE
TO KARAN JOHAR
OVER VIRAL VIDEO

Mumbai, Dec. 17: The Narcotics Control Bureau has issued a notice to Bollywood filmmaker Karan Johar over a viral video allegedly showing drugs being consumed at a party at his house last year, NCB sources said on Thursday.

The notice has been sent to Johar to check the video’s veracity, an NCB official said.

The central agency is conducting an anti-drugs probe that began in connection with the death of actor Sushant Singh Rajput in June this year. The video, which also shows several top stars, is being investigated as part of NCB’s probe, the official said.

The NCB had received a complaint regarding the video of a party, which was attended by top Bollywood stars last year, the official said.

The complaint was about movie stars apparently seen in a ‘drugged’ state in the video.

MISSING BIZMAN
JOIN FARMERS’ STIR
TO ESCAPE LENDERS

Ghaziabad, Dec. 17: A debt-ridden businessman, who changed his appearance and joined the ongoing farmers’ protests at one of the Delhi border points to escape moneylenders, was traced by police on Thursday.

Praveen, a resident of Murad Nagar town, had left his house on December 1 but did not return, police said. He was found at the Ghazipur-Ghaziabad (Uttar Pradesh gate) border.

On a previous occasion too, he had gone missing but had returned some days later, therefore, his family did not lodge a police complaint till December 12, police said.

Praveen was tracked with the help of his mobile phone which was put under surveillance and his car was found parked near the protest site, superintendent of police (rural) Iraj Raja said.

“He had grown a beard and looked like a Sikh man. However, we recognised him as was getting inside his car,” a police officer said. —PTI

SC UPHOLDS HC
ORDER ON
KAHEEL KHAN

New Delhi, Dec. 17: The Supreme Court on Thursday refused to interfere with the Allahabad High Court verdict which had quashed the detention of Dr Kafeel Khan under the National Security Act (NSA) and ordered his immediate release, saying it is “a good judgement”.

“We will not interfere in the judgement. However, the observation will not impact any other proceedings,” said the bench comprising Chief Justice S.A. Bobde and justices A.S. Bopanna and V. Ramasubramanian. The bench was hearing the Uttar Pradesh government’s plea challenging the high court’s September 1 verdict. Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the state, told the bench that observation made by the high court exonerates Khan in the criminal proceedings. “Criminal cases will be decided on their own merits,” the bench observed.

Chilling out



Workers warm themselves around a bonfire amid the snow-laden area at Sonamarg in Ganderbal district of Central Kashmir on Thursday. The minimum temperature across Kashmir plummeted several degrees below the freezing point on Thursday owing to a clear sky as the valley reeled under cold conditions, with Srinagar experiencing the coldest night of the season -6.4.

— PTI

No breach of info: India on
China ‘espionage’ report

SRIDHAR
KUMARASWAMI
NEW DELHI, DEC. 17

India on Thursday indicated that there had been no breach of any classified information, after media reports surfaced that Chinese communist party members had been hired as staff by foreign diplomatic missions in China, including one reportedly in the Indian consulate in Shanghai, a few years ago.

According to these media reports, “at least seven branches of the Communist Party of China (CPC) have an India connection”.

China, meanwhile, went on the offensive and sought to deny any espionage angle but interestingly did not explicitly deny that CPC members had indeed been recruited in foreign missions in China.

Stating that “such allegations hyping up the “CPC infiltration” is groundless out of ideological prejudice”, a furious Chinese embassy in New Delhi said, “The members of the Communist Party of China (CPC) are not ‘monsters or scoundrels’. They are all ordinary human beings who serve the people with their hearts and souls. Is there

▶ ACCORDING TO media reports, ‘at least seven branches of the CPC have an India connection’

▶ CHINA, MEANWHILE, went on the offensive and sought to deny any espionage angle but interestingly did not explicitly deny that CPC members had indeed been recruited in foreign missions in China.

really anything to be afraid of?” It added, “It is absolutely ridiculous and wantonly smearing to maliciously label CPC members as ‘espionage’.” New Delhi, meanwhile, maintained that in certain countries, hiring of local staff there by Indian missions requires the approval of the concerned local authorities there but that all Indian missions ensure “due security precautions”. Asked to comment on the purported “data” regarding the information cited by the media reports, the MEA said it was “not in a position to independently verify the data”.

But defending the CPC members, the Chinese embassy said, “Hyping up the ‘China Threat Theory’ and ‘demonising’ the CPC members by certain anti-China forces is in essence

intending to provoke ideological confrontation, mislead the public with ulterior motives, and attempt to revive ‘McCarthyism’ in the 21st century. Such actions on the basis of ideology are very dangerous. Anyone with reason, conscience and a sense of justice will not accept it.”

It added, “The CPC is the vanguard of the Chinese working class, the Chinese people, and the Chinese nation. Thanks to the CPC leadership, the Chinese people have achieved independence, freedom, liberation and great achievements in national development. The CPC is such a political party striving for the well-being of the Chinese people, the peace of the world and the progress of humanity.”

The Chinese embassy added, “When interacting with each other, states should follow basic norms governing international relations and respect each other’s system and national conditions. China respects the system and national conditions of other countries, and hopes the relevant media can also respect China’s system and national conditions, uphold an objective and just position in China related reports and stop irresponsible hype.”

DAC APPROVES
11 OFFSHORE
PATROL VESSELS

PAWAN BALI
NEW DELHI, DEC. 17

The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) headed by defence minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday in a meeting granted Acceptance of Necessity (AoNs) for proposals worth ₹28,000 crore including airborne early warning and control (AEW&C) systems for the Indian Air Force.

These airborne early warning and control systems will be designed and developed by DRDO. These are reported to be deployed on six Airbus aircraft to be acquired from Air India. AEW&C which are airborne help in detection and tracking of attacking enemy aircraft, missiles and drones much before ground based radars. They also provide crucial inputs during dogfights with the enemy fighter jets and give information on troops deployment by enemies on ground.

DAC also approved proposals for 11 next generation offshore patrol vessels for the Indian Navy and modular bridges for the Indian Army.

In a major push to Make-in-India, six proposals out of seven for which AoNs were granted will be sourced from the Indian industry.

MHA transfers 3
WB IPS officers

Mamata Banerjee govt refuses to accept the
Centre’s order; likely to challenge it legally

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC
KOLKATA, DEC. 17

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has accused the Narendra Modi government of “colourable exercise of power” after the Union home ministry ordered the central deputation of three IPS officers of her government on Thursday. The Trinamul Congress supreme also refused to accept the Centre’s order which her government, according to sources, may challenge legally.

Banerjee, who is now in North Bengal, Tweeted, “GoI’s order of central deputation for the three serving IPS officers of West Bengal despite the state’s objection is a colourable exercise of power and blatant misuse of emergency provision of IPS Cadre Rule 1954. This act is nothing but a deliberate attempt to encroach upon state’s jurisdiction & demoralise the serving officers in WB.”

● BANERJEE SAYS Centre’s order despite the state’s objection is a colourable exercise of power and blatant misuse of emergency provision of IPS Cadre Rule 1954.

She added, “This move, particularly before the elections is against the basic tenets of the federal structure. It’s unconstitutional & completely unacceptable! We wouldn’t allow this brazen attempt by the Centre to control the state machinery by proxy! West Bengal is not going to cow-down in front of expansionist & undemocratic forces.”

The IPS officers are Rajeev Mishra, inspector general (South Bengal), Praveen Kumar Tripathi, deputy inspector general (Presidency Range) and Bholanath Pandey, superintendent of police (Diamond Harbour Police District) in South 24 Parganas.

In August last year a video of Mishra, touching

the feet of the CM at Digha in East Midnapore went viral.

The Centre has assigned Mishra, a 1996 batch officer, to the Indo-Tibetan Border Police. Tripathi, of the 2004 batch, has been sent to Sashastra Seema Bal while Pandey, from the 2011 batch, has been deputed to the Bureau of Police Research and Development. All the three organisations are under the ministry of home affairs headed by Amit Shah. The officers came under the MHA’s scanner for security lapses after Trinamul workers attacked the convoy of BJP president J.P. Nadda last week at Diamond Harbour.

The MHA, the nodal controlling authority of the IPS cadre, requisitioned them for central deputation while asking the state government for their release. Furious, the Chief Minister then held them back which only prompted the MHA to act this time strongly.

CORONAVIRUS
CASELOAD
CROSSES 99.56L

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 17

With 24,010 fresh cases in a day, the country’s Covid-19 caseload crossed 99.56 lakh, while the number of people who have recovered from the infection surged to 94.89 lakh. According to the Union health ministry, the total Coronavirus cases mounted to 99,56,557 and the death toll rose to 1,44,451 with 355 new fatalities in a day.

As per the health ministry data, active recoveries outnumbering new cases on a daily basis have ensured a high recovery rate among patients. The total recovered cases are nearing 95 lakh (94,89,740). The recovery rate has improved to 95.31 per cent on Thursday. The gap between recovered cases and active cases is also increasing consistently, and presently stands at 91,67,374. The Covid-19 case fatality rate stands at 1.45 per cent.

Modi, like RSS, is not dogmatic on economy. But, he
is close to a Gandhian socialist, claims author Sitapati

SRIRAM KARRI
HYDERABAD

The economics of the Sangh parivar and of Prime Minister Narendra Modi are not based on dogmas or ideology; the RSS is actually like a rainbow coalition of all kinds of economic views. Modi takes his decisions based more on politics than economics, per se, argues Vinay Sitapati in this concluding part of this interview.

Q Everybody today tries to guess the deep rooted economic policy impulse, inclination and instinct of Narendra Modi. Some argue he is pro-free markets or pro-corporates. The farmer bill agitation currently hinges on it. You explore the evolution of RSS, the Jan Sangh and now BJP for hundred years. Is RSS, and consequently Modi, socialist or pro-free market?

As I trace in my book, the RSS is a loose umbrella coalition when it comes to economics. They do not have a fixed ideological view on it. Throughout its history Hindu nationalism has articulated so many different views of economics. In Deen Dayal Upadhyaya’s work, Integral Humanism, which is very core to RSS thinking, a vast welfare scheme and uplift of the downtrodden

is strongly articulated. You have free market supporters like Balraj Madhok and Dr. Subramanian Swamy as much as centrists like Vajpayee. It also included someone like Nanaji Deshmukh, whose personal honesty was peerless and who would raise funds from businessmen, including say Nussli Wadia, grandson of Jinnah.

Even though Prime Minister Vajpayee was one of the greatest economic reformer we ever had, he only continued the economic direction that P.V. Narasimha Rao started.

In essence, the Hindu nationalist ideology was around organising and uniting the Hindu society but had little view on the modern state, or issues that we refer to as ‘governance’. The Sangh looks at economics as a flexible tactical political issue, in which the quest for votes is more significant. So Modi’s assertion that least governed is best governed is his slogan rather than an RSS ideology.

Modi has a certain view of economics, certainly, but it is that state must play a role and it is crucial. A visceral Gandhian socialist view. In contrast to Modi’s economic policies, you can see ideological fervour in Modi’s changing of Article 370 or the Citizenship Bill. These are in the ideological realm, with a long genealogy.

Incidentally, they have no strong ideological view on foreign affairs either. Yes, there are vague assertions like Vasudeva Kutumbikam or a goal of becoming a Vishwa Guru, but they are not substantial. And arguments of Akhand Bharat mean nothing in modern geopolitics.

Q Why does it look today that Modi’s BJP with the backing of the RSS is so hard to defeat in elections?

They win for many reasons, but a big one is teamwork and unity. This RSS teamwork is a response to the history lesson that Indians are terrible team players. They fight among themselves and split into factions. RSS uses this simple but deep insight to create organisational unity. Only one other man did it before them — Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. The RSS has created in a sense a very un-Indian ideal of unifying Hindus, to habituate them into team work as an ideal. BJP leaders too have lots of internal bickering and differences, but they rarely divorce and split the party.

Vajpayee was able to use this trait to get rid of two of his earliest rivals — Madhok and Subramanian Swamy — who were very individualistic and unafraid to air

their differences in public. Even Veer Savarkar was an opinionated individual, whereas Hedgegar and Golwalkar were committed to the sangh above all. This is what I call Hindu fevicol, and it is a hard bond to break.

Congress in that sense is typically Indian organisation. They fight it out in the open and sabotage their own larger cause for a pettier goal. Congress is not a uniquely nepotistic party but a typically Indian-minded family party. Every Indian wants to hand over their power to their son or daughter. In that sense there is a Nehru-Gandhi in all of us.

In contrast, when Indians see Narendra Modi, a man without a family to benefit, they are in respectful awe but it is so unlike them. That sense of sacrifice is what puts Modi above others in the minds of common Indians.

Q Talking of Gandhi, we can see a strand of commonality between him and Vajpayee and Modi... idea of Brahmacharya, extending the logic of sacrifice of family and material concerns, at least in perception. Does this favour a Yogi Adityanath to inherit the mantle from Modi?

It is a very powerful appealing idea, the old Hindu tradition of adopting Brahmacharya. Our psyche puts those who accept the monastic life in

position of reverence. This is the appeal of Yogi Adityanath also. It obscures many legitimate criticisms of his politics. It definitely gives him an upper-hand if he enters the race to become prime minister one day.

Q Many say that despite being from the RSS, Vajpayee was a moderate acceptable to all whereas Modi is a Loh Purush (iron man). Did the incarceration in Emergency play a role in giving the BJP leaders like Advani and Vajpayee a different experiential perspective in the issue of personal liberties?

Yes, while Modi was underground in Gujarat during Emergency, Vajpayee and Advani (and a plethora of others), developed a strong view about personal liberties because they were the worst victims of state atrocities during Emergency. Had Modi been arrested then, who knows what kind of a different viewpoint he would have had?

But it was also about the coalitions. The participation of Vajpayee-Advani in the Janata Party government and their later leadership of NDA shows they were willing to engage with a range of people — from a socialist like George Fernandes to aristocrat like Jaswant Singh. Modi has been electorally freed from the need for a

coalition.

Q Coming to Vajpayee and Advani, your jugalbandi book, how did their relationship evolve?

Advani began as a fan to the star Vajpayee. Their personal backgrounds were very different — Vajpayee was a communicator, poet, orator, very Hindi heartland, lower middle class, whereas Advani was from Karachi, highly cosmopolitan, very English, but introverted and serious.

Vajpayee, like Syama Prasad Mukherjee before him, had charisma and magic. He could mean different things to different people. Advani was also under-confident but he had other strengths. He was loyal, disciplined, always willing to make a self-sacrifice. He was for most part underrated. They were great friends too. They are the kind who would go watch Bollywood movies, cry over some scenes and eat pani puri on the roadside.

Q Did Advani stick to Vajpayee through thick and thin because he was too scared by Partition and even the idea of a separation was very heavy on him?

(Hmm.) I wish we had spoken before writing the book. Could be. But to answer another question of yours, Advani, the rich scion was comfortable

with jail life and never complained of difficulties whereas Vajpayee despite being from a poor background found it hard — because of Partition. Advani lost everything, his home, his comfort and material wealth, his beloved Sindh... all in one go. Partition was an event for Vajpayee but a lifelong trauma for Advani.

Q In the end, What’s your appraisal of Vajpayee and Advani? How do they differ from the Modi-Shah duo?

At heart, Vajpayee and Advani were both romantics, even children at heart. No one would say that about Modi and Shah. Their jugalbandi is very different. They won’t be seen eating pani puri in public or crying while watching Bollywood movies.

The other difference is their understanding of India. Unlike Vajpayee or Advani, Modi and Shah have never served for a single day before taking power in 2014. They have no background of compromising with smaller regional parties in Parliament. They were also not shaped by Partition or Emergency. They have been shaped by caste and religious politics in the Hindutva crucible of Gujarat. But the two jugalbandis share more than we imagine. All four of them are team players. That’s why the BJP wins.



THE ASIAN AGE

18 DECEMBER 2020

Covid not a good reason to scrap Winter Session

While the Opposition parties have cried foul, and complained of not being consulted by the government on the decision to not hold the Winter Session of Parliament this year, the Constitution is clear that they cannot demand discussion or consultation as a matter of right. That right belongs to the government alone, and the President summons Parliament to meet when advised to do so by the government. The Narendra Modi government is absolutely in the clear on this score.

There is only one constraint under which the government labours, constitutionally speaking. It must ask the President to summon Parliament at least once every six months. While recently announcing that there would no Winter Session in 2020, the government has hinted that the Budget Session would be commenced in January. There is nothing out of the ordinary about that.

The minister for parliamentary affairs, Pralhad Joshi, has claimed that he has consulted leaders of the leading Opposition parties on the scuttling of the Winter Session, and there was general agreement that the session be given the go-by in view of the Covid pandemic. Apparently, MPs were chary of travelling to Delhi. Jairam Ramesh of the Congress claims no consultation was held with his party. None of this matters, however, since the decision rests with the government alone.

Nevertheless, giving Covid as the reason for skipping the traditionally three-week long Winter Session is hardly a persuasive argument. The government and the BJP had seemed eager to hold the Bihar election when it was due recently,

rather than respect the sentiment of the Opposition parties to defer it by a few months. The election to the Hyderabad Municipal Corporation was also held recently. Covid-related considerations did not come in the way. The pandemic is raging in America but the US stuck to the schedule for its recently concluded election for President. The US Congress and the British Parliament have met as scheduled. The British Parliament did not skip meetings even during the Second World War. In November 1962, our Parliament was in session when the Chinese invaded in NEFA.

It is the widest impression today that the government has run away from the Winter Session because questions will be raised about the three-week old farmers' protest on Delhi's borders. Moreover, the Modi government has set a precedent in this regard. Future governments may also act similarly — skip a session whenever expedient. And this is hardly good for our democracy where important questions crop up all the time, often unexpectedly. A bloody-minded government may hold a session of Parliament only when it wishes to pass laws, not otherwise. This is the best way to avoid noisiness in Parliament and be an "orderly" country.

Even if the pandemic was seemed a matter of serious concern, the Winter Session could have been held online. This was done in Britain recently. MPs who could not be physically present attended on-line. India is technologically capable and this could have been organised if the government had the mind to make it happen.

While the Winter Session stands scuttled, the government can still attest to its bonafides by holding a brief session of two or three days to go over proposals for "reform" of the farm sector with which all may be invited to engage. Whatever the outcome, it is not unlikely that the farmers' protest may be defused through such a denouement.

Post-pandemic bonding

The choice of Boris Johnson to be the chief guest at India's Republic Day celebrations is interesting, not the least because he will be the first British Prime Minister to be bestowed the honour since John Major in 1993. Much water has flowed down the Ganga and the Thames since the time India was just emerging as a fledgling player in the free markets after pathbreaking economic reforms. It might appear the UK needs its old friends as trading partners much more now as it seeks to exit the EU as soon as possible, deal no deal. The time to strike a trade deal with the UK in the form of a FTA is ripe enough.

The world has changed post-pandemic and the shared experiences of grief and economic woes should form a sombre backdrop to what should be more sober festivities in the coming R-Day. Johnson is not the dominant figure he was projected to be when he had just staged a notable coup in the Tory Party and emerged as the champion in British eyes who would steer the island on an independent course. Just as the shadow of Covid-19 on Christmas celebrations as the UK struggles to tamp down a second coronavirus surge, the Indian Prime Minister is challenged by striking farmers who expect a "fair deal" at home.

It would be presumptuous to believe mighty geopolitics is guiding the choice of guest at this time back to Britannia and the land of colonial masters. But, in a new world order shaped by the blows of the pandemic, of which BoJo has experience since he was personally pushed to the very brink, it would be realistic to examine ways of promoting ties, particularly as India might have much to contribute in IT and ITeS. Britain as well as India's ardour for Chinese goods and 5G technology has also dampened considerably and so even this crisis-ridden time smells of opportunity to get ties right.

THE ASIAN AGE

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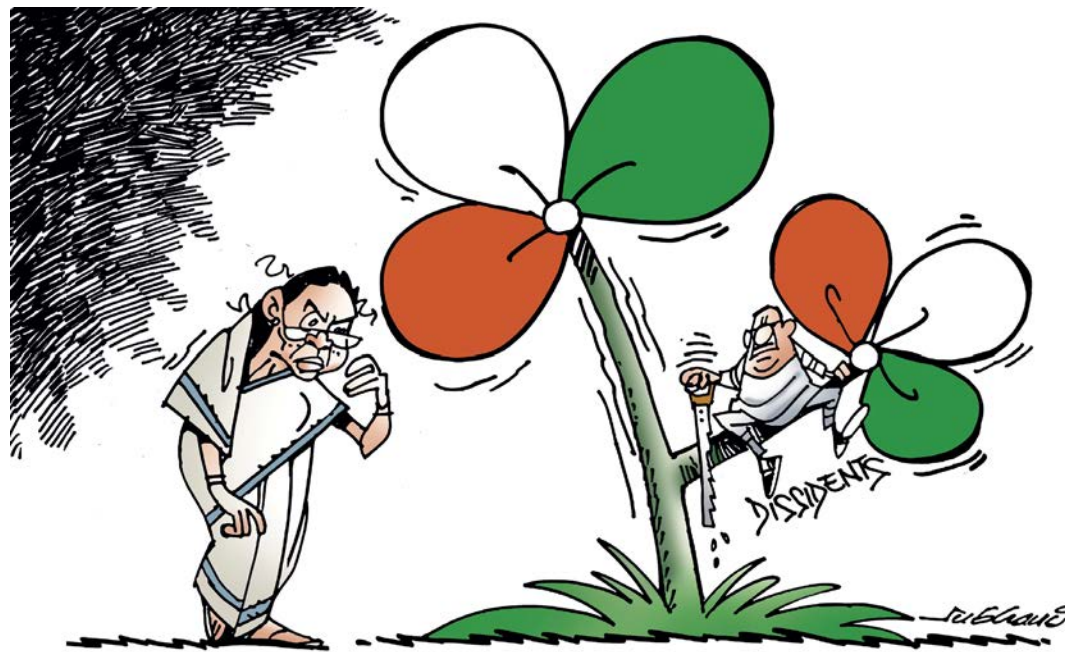
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Subhani



How rise in inequality distorts Indian society



Mohan Guruswamy

In 2013 the French economist Thomas Piketty released *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, a magnum opus on income inequality. It was an event book very much like Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time*. Hawking's book sold as many as 10 million copies, by comparison Piketty's tome had 2.4 million buyers so far. Such event books are more often than not read by only a fraction of the buyers. Speaking for myself, I still have somewhere a slightly read copy of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, still considered by the cognoscenti as the foremost work of modern literature. It is said that an analysis of the Kindle readers of the Piketty book revealed that a typical reader got through 26 of its 700 pages. But have no fear, those first 26 pages have all you need to know. They encapsulate the rationale and results of Piketty's monumental work.

I once asked a well-known economist who had reviewed Piketty's *Capital* about what the main proposition of the book was. He encapsulated it quite brilliantly. He just said that Piketty had set out to prove that R was greater than G, where R is the return on capital and G is the growth of the economy. There is much empirical evidence to back this up. In the eight years between 2006 and 2014, the US benchmark index S&P 500 gained 45 per cent, an average simple growth rate of 5.6 per cent, four times higher than the average GDP growth rate of around 1.5 per cent. The consequence of this, of course, is the explosion in income inequality, which is the hallmark of the post-World War II era, and particularly after the

advent of globalisation. Oxfam has informed us that in the past two decades 73 per cent of the growth has been cornered by just one per cent of the population. Oxfam has a known tendency to exaggerate a bit to prove its point, but this proposition, that few people benefited the most during this period of huge economic expansion, is undisputable.

Paul Krugman wrote: "What excited them was Piketty's novel hypothesis about the growing importance of disparities in wealth, especially inherited wealth, as opposed to earnings. We are, Piketty suggested, returning to the kind of dynastic, 'patrimonial' capitalism that prevailed in the late 19th century." We only need to look around us to see that most of the wealthy today are inheritors, and without doubt many of them are building on those inheritances to further accentuate the income inequality. What is really troubling about this growing concentration of wealth is the concentration of political power in the hands of very few who are able to influence politics and policies.

According to Marx an individual's position within a class hierarchy is determined by their role in the production process and argues that political and ideological consciousness is determined by class position. He saw a class as those who share common economic interests and are conscious of those interests. Classes, according to Marx, were inherently antagonistic and in a state of constant struggle.

In his new book *Capital and Ideology*, Thomas Piketty argues, with far greater validity, that inequality is driven by human institutions, which in turn reflect the

The nature of the institutions determines outcomes, not the means of production or processes

dominant ideology. Piketty defines his thesis very succinctly thus: "Inequality is neither economic nor technological: it is ideological and political. In other words, the market and competition, capital and debt, skilled and unskilled workers, natives and aliens, tax havens and competitiveness — none of these things exist as such. All are social and historical constructs, which depend entirely on the legal, fiscal, educational, and political systems that people choose to adopt and the conceptual definitions they choose to work with. These choices are shaped by society's conception of social justice and economic fairness and by the relative political and ideological power of contending groups and discourses."

Does this mean Marx was wrong? The times in which Marx and Piketty lived are very different. Marx saw the distortions and inequity in society and wondered why? He came up with explanations. His prescriptions were limited by the knowledge and evidence available to him then. The world has moved on and moved very far since then. When Karl Marx began writing his first three volumes of *Das Kapital* (1867-1883), it was the early days of electricity. Marx couldn't contemplate the massive leaps of productivity made possible in the 1900s, when the world witnessed a monumental expansion of knowledge and, with it, capital. Piketty's study relates to how both capital and knowledge came to be inequitably allocated because of the institutional arrangements within societies.

To understand how institutional arrangements determine outcomes, just think of

India's educational system. We now have two or possibly three parallel educational streams. The two urban upper classes largely benefit from a higher standard and quality of education imparted in English in schools with high quality teaching and facilities. This is the stream that produces India's managerial classes (both government and industrial). The working class stream flows out of our government schools, with its emphasis on vernacular education and indifferent standards. There is a third stream of rural education from which escape even into the next higher class becomes even more difficult, if not impossible. The flow into the upper reaches of Indian society from these three streams is vastly unequal. What Piketty is saying is just this. The nature of the institutions determines outcomes, not the means of production or processes.

Capital and Ideology is rich in references to India and draws inferences about the institution of castes (*varnas*) and the rising role of brahmins, after the advent of Muslim rule, leading to the diminution of the role of Kshatriyas. The role of the brahmins expanded to an even more dominant status under the British. Piketty lauds the determined "affirmative action" policies after Independence that vastly increased the upward mobility of the lower castes, like most of us do. He also notes that the benefits could not be fully realised due to the low standards of education and its unevenness in towns and the hinterland and between regions. So, what's new? Most Indians with even an elementary understanding of post-independence India know this. The question is — what is to be done now?

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

LETTERS

MEET THEM HALFWAY

The Supreme Court (SC) proposing the setting up of a committee of farmer leaders and government representatives is laudable. The farmers' protests against agricultural laws are three weeks old, and both sides have failed to mend fences. Protesting farmer unions urged the Centre to stop "defaming" the ongoing agitation against the three contentious farm sector laws and holding "parallel talks" with other outfits even as it welcomed the SC's observations as a "moral victory". Both sides need to display a spirit of giving and taking to resolve the ongoing impasse.

N.J. Ravi Chander
Bengaluru

TRAGEDY DURING STIR

SHOCKED TO READ that a Sikh preacher from Haryana's Karnal died by suicide near the Singhu border in Delhi. He was protesting against the three new farm laws. Sant Baba Ram Singh was a former office bearer in many Sikh organisations, including Haryana SGPC, and had his own following. In the handwritten suicide note found near his body, he said he was "hurt to see the plight of the farmers". The Modi government should take this incident with due seriousness.

Bhagwan Thadani
Mumbai

EAT MORE ONIONS

THE ONION, which is a staple kitchen item among others for an average Indian, is an essential ingredient for many cuisines and recipes. From spicy curries to tangy relishes, it is impossible to imagine cooking anything without it. But it also has high medicinal value. If folk remedies are to be believed, onions could treat cold, cough, asthma and bronchitis. The government relaxing curbs on onion imports is thus a welcome move.

Jubel D'Cruz
Mumbai

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

Mahir Ali



On 250th birth anniversary, Beethoven still holds his own

If music be the food of love, play on; Give me excess of it..." The opening lines of Shakespeare's Twelfth Night might have entered the thoughts of the uniquely privileged Viennese audience that witnessed Ludwig van Beethoven premiering his Fifth and Sixth Symphonies in the Austrian capital on Dec 22, 1808.

For good measure, the artistic showcase also featured the first performances of his Piano Concerto No 4 and Choral Fantasy. A 20th-century equivalent would have entailed The Beatles, say, unveiling 'Sgt Pepper' and 'Abbey Road' simultaneously in a live performance. Incidentally, the latter album's Because is based on reversing the chords of the Moonlight Sonata. It wasn't the only time turned up in the pop pantheon.

By 1808, Beethoven was already viewed as the most fascinating composer of his age. He was born in Bonn, probably precisely 250 years ago today. He first visited Vienna as a teenage prodigy, and may have been tutored by Mozart. He was obliged to return to Bonn

to attend to his dying mother, but went back to Vienna at Haydn's invitation five years later and remained there for the rest of his life.

I cannot claim to be an aficionado of Western classical music — the temporal investment it requires has always been a hard slog. Yet there are compositions that insinuate themselves into the subconscious, from Mozart's Eine Kleine Nachtmusik to Strauss's Blue Danube, Tchaikovsky's Swan Lake, Ravel's Bolero and Chopin's etudes.

I would make a particular exception, though, for Beethoven. It dates back, perhaps, to a presentation on the weekly Disney show featured on PTV in the early 1970s, where a dramatised biography of Beethoven showed the opening chords of the Fifth Symphony being inspired by a debtor banging on the door of the composer's rented accommodation. Those dramatic notes are more often described as the knocking of Fate.

The show was possibly more accurate in its depiction of a deaf Beethoven being swung around by

a soloist after inaugurating his Ninth Symphony to witness the rapturous response. The Ninth came almost a decade after the Eighth, which had been unveiled before an audience of international leaders at the Congress of Vienna in 1814.

That particular segment, now the official anthem of the European Union, has stood the test of time in more ways than one. Beethoven's death centenary in 1927 was widely commemorated across Europe, from Britain to the Soviet Union. As a German, though, he was also appropriated by the Nazi regime, which continued to honour him despite determining that he was 'mixed race'. Based on Beethoven's looks, the suspicion of African ancestry has persisted, albeit without any firm foundation.

His politics have also served as the basis of much conjecture. Beethoven famously rescinded the dedication of his Third Symphony, Eroica, to Napoleon after the latter emerged as a potential tyrant. And there is a tale, possibly apocryphal, about how he, while out for a walk

in a park with Goethe, encountered a royal party and strolled right through it, even as Goethe stepped aside to bow and scrape.

For all his antipathy towards authority, Beethoven relied for much of his life on the sponsorship of European nobles, and many of his compositions were dedicated to princes, counts and barons. But he regularly fell out with patrons, and occasionally detested royals. Yet his Symphony No 8 was unveiled before the crowned heads of Europe at the Congress of Vienna in 1814.

He never compromised his art, though, confessing at the turn of the century that his devotion to music had prevented him from suicide. His personal life was a shambles, littered with unrequited love or romances doomed by the social rules of the era. Yet, despite a handful of detractors, few who heard his compositions could fail to be moved by them.

And the legend only grew after his demise in 1827, just three years after he had inaugurated his magnificent Symphony No 9, whose glorious final movement, a setting for Schiller's Ode to Joy, has been

appropriated for political purposes throughout the past two centuries, and serves today as the European Union's official hymn.

Not surprisingly, the German Nazi regime picked Beethoven as an avatar (despite concluding that he was mixed race). However, a century earlier Friedrich Engels had waxed eloquent about the Fifth Symphony, and some decades later Vladimir Lenin declared he could listen to the Appassionata sonata every day. "What astonishing, superhuman music," he is quoted by Maxim Gorky as saying. "It always makes me proud ... to think that people can work such miracles."

But perhaps the pianist and conductor Daniel Barenboim summed up Beethoven best a few years ago by pointing out that "he freed music from hitherto prevailing conventions of harmony and structure", and that much of his work could be paraphrased "by saying that suffering is inevitable, but the courage to fight it renders life worth living".

By arrangement with Dawn

SHORT TAKES

'21 BERLIN FILM FEST MAY GO VIRTUAL

Los Angeles, Dec. 17: The Berlin International Film Festival might be held virtually for its upcoming 2021 edition.

Sources told *Variety* that the festival organisers are expected to delay the festival due to resurgence in Coronavirus cases in Germany. They will be announcing their plans later this week. As of now, the 71st edition of the film gala is scheduled to run as a physical event from February 11-21, but the organisers are now rethinking their strategy.

The festival is now looking to stage a competition section in a virtual format in early March, with the European Film Market running as a digital event at the same time. The organisers are also thinking of holding a mini-festival with a series of onsite world premieres for early June.

US JOINT CHIEFS CHAIRMAN MEETS TALIBAN

Kabul, Dec. 17: The top US general held unannounced talks with Taliban peace negotiators in the Persian Gulf to urge a reduction in violence across Afghanistan, even as senior American officials in Kabul warned that stepped-up Taliban attacks endanger the militant group's nascent peace negotiations with the Afghan government. Army Gen. Mark A. Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, met for about two hours with Taliban negotiators in Doha, Qatar, on Tuesday and flew Wednesday to Kabul to discuss the peace process with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani.

Milley's meetings came amid a new drawdown of US troops, although under current US policy a complete pullout hinges on the Taliban reducing attacks nationwide. "The most important part of the discussions that I had with both the Taliban and the government of Afghanistan was the need for an immediate reduction in violence," Milley said.

CYCLONE YASA: FIJI IMPOSES EMERGENCY

Suva, Dec. 17: Fiji imposed a nationwide curfew Thursday after urging people near the coast to move to higher ground as the island nation prepared for a major cyclone to hit.

Cyclone Yasa was expected to hit the two main islands of Viti Levu and Vanua Levu later Thursday or early Friday. Authorities imposed an overnight curfew and declared a state of natural disaster. The National Disaster Management Office warned the cyclone could bring waves as high as 16 metres (52 feet) in some places and sustained winds of up to 250 kilometres per hour (155 mph), with gusts hitting 350 kph (217 mph).

In the capital Suva, many residents were experiencing power cuts.

Michael Cheer, who owns the Samabula Cake Shop, was moving cakes into his car so he could take them home and put them into a cooler, rather than driving them across the island to deliver them to another town.

CHINA PROBE BRINGS HOME MOON SAMPLES

Beijing, Dec. 17: China's Change-5 probe successfully touched down on Earth in the early hours of Thursday, bringing home the first samples of the moon in over 40 years. The spacecraft landed in Siziwang Banner in north China's Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region at 1:59 AM (local time), according to the China National Space Administration (CNSA). Zhang Kejian, head of the CNSA, declared the Change-5 mission a success.

It marks a successful conclusion of China's current three-step lunar exploration programme of orbiting and landing, and bringing back samples which began in 2004, state-run *Xinhua* news agency reported.

President Xi Jinping congratulated scientists on the complete success of the Change-5 mission. As China's most complicated space project, President Xi in his message to the CNSA said, the Change-5 mission "is another major achievement in overcoming difficulties by giving full play to the advantages of the new system of pooling national resources and strength, marking a great step forward in China's space industry".

Record cases, deaths in Calif.

Most of state's 40 mn residents under stay-at-home orders

Los Angeles, Dec. 17: California has reported more than 53,000 new Coronavirus cases and 293 deaths, setting new records as hospitals struggled to keep up with the surge.

State health officials said Wednesday a change in data processing added 15,337 previous cases to the count, but the new virus cases remained a daily record. The state has been grappling with soaring cases and hospitalisations. Most of California's 40 million residents are under stay-at-home orders because of dwindling intensive care unit capacity.

Hospitals are filling up so fast that officials are rolling out mobile field facilities and scrambling to hire more doctors and nurses. — AP

2 health staff develop allergic reactions to Pfizer's Covid vaccine

New York, Dec. 17: Two healthcare workers, who received Pfizer's Coronavirus vaccine, developed "concerning reactions", even as the US rolled out the vaccine to frontline healthcare workers and high-risk individuals amid increasing Covid-19 infections across the country. A report in *The New York Times* said the two health care workers at Bartlett Regional Hospital in Alaska developed concerning reactions just minutes after receiving Pfizer's Coronavirus vaccine this week.

One staff member was hospitalised for a few days. One of the healthcare workers, a middle-aged woman, had no history of allergies but had an anaphylactic reaction 10 minutes after receiving the vaccine. She experienced a rash over her face and torso, shortness of breath and an elevated heart rate, the *NYT* report said adding that anaphylaxis can be life-threatening, with impaired breathing and drops in blood pressure. The second worker received his shot on Wednesday and developed eye puffiness, lightheadedness and a scratchy throat 10 minutes after the injection, the hospital said. — PTI

RO KHANNA IS DEM VICE CHAIR OF INDIA CAUCUS

Washington, Dec. 17: Indian-American Congressman Ro Khanna, who represents the Silicon Valley in the US House of Representatives, has been named as the Democratic Vice Chair of the Congressional India Caucus. The seat has been created for the first time since its formation in 1994.

Khanna, 44, who was recently elected for a third consecutive term from the congressional district representing Silicon Valley, is being considered as a potential contender to fill the US Senate seat from California that will fall vacant in January after Kamala Harris is sworn in as the country's vice president. "I believe Ro Khanna would be an outstanding Democratic Vice Chair," Congressman Brad Sherman, Democratic Co-Chair of the Caucus, said in an email. — PTI

UN | PRIZE

Vidyt Mohan helps farmers earn extra by converting waste farm residues into value-added chemicals

Indian among 'Young Champions of the Earth' winners

United Nations, Dec. 17: A 29-year-old Indian entrepreneur is among the seven winners of the prestigious "Young Champions of the Earth" 2020 prize given by the UN environment agency to global change-makers using innovative ideas and ambitious action to help solve some of the world's most pressing environmental challenges.

Vidyt Mohan, an engineer, is the co-founder of "Takachar", a social enterprise enabling farmers to prevent open burning of their waste farm residues and earn extra income by converting them into value-added chemicals like activated carbon on-site, UN Environment Programme (UNEP) said in a statement on Tuesday.



A police car drives at the empty pedestrian zone at early morning in Dortmund, western Germany, on Thursday, at a partial lockdown to curb the spread of the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic. — AFP

Macron latest to test +ve for Covid

Paris, Dec. 17: French President Emmanuel Macron is the latest world leader to test positive for Covid-19, joining a growing list of others just as inoculation drives against the illness are beginning in a number of countries.

Macron, 42, has repeatedly said he is sticking to strict sanitary protocols during the pandemic, including not shaking hands, wearing a mask and keeping distance from other people. The Elysee Palace announced on Thursday that Macron would be isolating for seven days.

President Donald Trump announced in October that

he and his wife, first lady Melania Trump, tested positive for the Coronavirus. At 74, the US president was the oldest head of state to become infected with the virus to date, and his age put him at higher risk of serious complications from Covid-19.

British PM Boris Johnson was the first major world leader confirmed to have Covid-19, after facing criticism for downplaying the pandemic. Prince Charles, the heir to the British throne, also tested positive in March and showed mild symptoms.

Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro announced his

illness in July and used it to publicly extol hydroxy-chloroquine, the unproven malaria drug that he'd been promoting as a treatment for Covid-19 and was taking himself.

Honduras president Juan Orlando Hernandez announced in June that he had tested positive, along with two other people who worked closely with him. Hernandez said he had started what he called the "MAIZ treatment," an experimental and unproven combination of microdactyn, azithromycin, ivermectin and zinc. He was briefly hospitalised and released.

The president of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko, who dismissed concerns about the virus as "psychosis" and recommended drinking vodka to stay healthy, said in July he had contracted it himself but was asymptomatic.

Others who were infected include Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin, Prince Albert II of Monaco, Guatemalan president Alejandro Giammetti, Bolivian interim president Jeannie Anez, president of the Dominican Republic Luis Abinader. — AP

VACCINATION IN ASIA-PACIFIC BY MID/LATE '21: WHO

Jakarta, Dec. 17: The World Health Organisation said Thursday that countries in the Asia-Pacific region are not guaranteed to have early access to Covid-19 shots and urged them to adopt a long-term approach to the pandemic. "The development of safe and effective vaccines is one thing. Producing them in adequate quantities and reaching everyone who needs them is another," WHO Regional Director Dr. Takeshi Kasai told reporters in the Indonesian capital, Jakarta. — AP

Despite US sanctions, Turkey not to step back on Russian S-400s

Ankara, Dec. 17: Turkey won't step back from its decision to deploy Russian air defence systems despite US sanctions imposed on the country over the purchase, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said on Thursday.

In an interview with Turkey's 24 TV television, Cavusoglu also said Turkey was mulling steps it would take to reciprocate against the US sanctions, but did not say what the steps could entail. The US announced sanctions earlier this week over Turkey's procurement of Russia's advanced S-400 system, under a US law known as CAATSA, aimed at pushing back on Russian influence. The sanctions target Turkey's Presidency of Defence Industries, the head of the presidency and three other senior officials. The penalties block any assets the four officials

GREECE TO PAY \$2.8 BN FOR FRENCH RAFALE JETS AMID TURKEY TENSION

Athens, Dec. 17: Greece's government said on Thursday that it will pay 2.32 billion euros (\$2.8 billion) for the purchase of French-made Rafale fighter jets and an upgrade of compatible missiles, under a major military overhaul amid tensions with neighbouring Turkey.

Delivery of the 18 jets will begin in mid-2021 and be completed over two years, government spokesman Stelios Petsas said.

als may have in US jurisdictions and bar their entry into the US. They also include a ban on most export licences, loans and credits to the agency.

It is the first time that CAATSA has been used to

penalise a US ally. "If we were to step back we would have done so before now," Cavusoglu said in response to a question on whether Turkey would cancel the S-400 deal with Russia. Cavusoglu added:

"Now we are assessing the impact of these sanctions in great detail...and will take steps accordingly."

The minister also described the sanctions as "wrong both legally and politically," arguing that Turkey's purchase of the Russian system in 2017 predated the CAATSA law. Cavusoglu said that an improvement of relations between Turkey and the United States would be conditional on President-elect Joe Biden's ability to address Ankara's grievances.

Ties between the two have been plagued by numerous disputes, including the jailing of American citizens and local consular staff, US support for Syrian Kurdish fighters considered to be terrorists by Turkey and the continued US residence of a Muslim cleric accused of masterminding the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey. — AP

Navalny poisoning: No role, says Putin

Moscow, Dec. 17: Russian President Vladimir Putin on Thursday rejected allegations that the Kremlin was behind the poisoning of his top political foe, opposition leader Alexei Navalny, and accused US intelligence agencies of fomenting the claims. Speaking via video call during an annual marathon news conference, the Russian leader countered the accusations by saying that if the Kremlin wanted to poison Navalny it would have pressed the attack home.

"If there was such a desire, it would have been done," Putin said with a chuckle. Navalny fell sick on Aug 20 during a domestic flight in Russia, and was flown while he was in a coma to Germany for treatment two days later. Labs in Germany, France and Sweden, and tests by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical

Weapons, established that he was exposed to a Soviet-era Novichok nerve agent. Russian authorities have vehemently rejected the accusations of involvement in the poisoning.

On Monday, the investigative group Bellingcat and Russian outlet The Insider released a report alleging that operatives from the FSB, Russia's domestic security agency, which is a top KGB successor, followed Navalny during his trips since 2017, had "specialised training in chemical weapons, chemistry and medicine" and "were in the vicinity of the opposition activist in the days and hours of the time-range during which he was poisoned." The investigation, conducted by Bellingcat and The Insider in cooperation with CNN and Der Spiegel, identified the supposed FSB operatives. — AP

CHARLIE HEBDO HIT: 30 YRS' JAIL FOR I.S. WIDOW

Paris, Dec 17: The fugitive widow of an Islamic State gunman and a man described as his logistician on Wednesday were convicted of terrorism charges and sentenced to 30 years in prison in the trial of 14 people linked to the January 2015 attacks in Paris against the satirical Charlie Hebdo newspaper and a kosher supermarket.

The verdict ends the three-month trial linked to the three days of killings across Paris claimed jointly by the Islamic State group and al-Qaida. During the proceedings, France was struck by new attacks, a wave of Coronavirus infections among the defendants, and devastating testimony bearing witness to bloodshed that continues to shake France.

All three attackers died in police raids. The widow, Hayat Boumedienne, fled to Syria and is believed to still be alive. The two men who helped her out of France were tried in absentia, may be dead, though one received a sentence of life in prison. — AP

'88 LOCKERBIE BOMBING: NEW CHARGES BY U.S.

Washington, Dec. 17: The Justice Department plans to unseal new charges in the coming days in connection with the 1988 bombing of a Pan Am jet that exploded over Lockerbie, Scotland, killing 270 people, according to a person familiar with the case.

The bombing of Flight 103, whose victims included dozens of American college students, spurred global probe and produced sanctions against Libya, which surrendered two intelligence officials for prosecution before a Scottish court sitting in the Netherlands. The New York-bound flight exploded over Lockerbie less than an hour after takeoff from London on Dec. 21, 1988. — AP

quick BITES

| INDICATORS | | % |
|------------------------|------------|--------|
| Sensex | 46,890.34 | 0.48 |
| Nifty 50 | 13,740.70 | 0.42 |
| S&P 500* | 3,717.43 | 0.44 |
| Dollar (₹) | 73.58 | 0.01 |
| Pound Sterling (₹) | 99.96 | 0.50 |
| Euro (₹) | 89.98 | -0.15 |
| Gold (10gm)* (₹) | 49,455▲194 | 0.39 |
| Brent crude (\$/bbl)* | 51.38 | 0.30 |
| IN 10-Yr bond yield | 5.952 | 0.008 |
| US 10-Yr T-bill yield* | 0.895 | -0.025 |

Economy seems bottoming out: Credit Suisse

After years of downgrades to the country's medium-term growth outlook, the estimates are likely to be upgraded now, Credit Suisse said in a report. The country's economy is showing signs of bottoming out, it said. The consensus forecasts of GDP growth for FY22 over FY20 stopped falling after October 2020 (currently at -) 1 per cent). Analysts at Credit Suisse expect these estimates to be revised upwards.

Puravankara to get ₹556 crore from IFC, EAF



IFC, a member of the World Bank group, and IFC Emerging Asia Fund (EAF) will invest Rs 556 crore in an affordable housing platform of Puravankara Ltd to develop up to four projects. IFC and IFC EAF have partnered with the Puravankara Group to invest in the development of up to four residential projects under the Puravankara group's affordable housing brand 'Provident'. Two of these four projects are planned in Kochi and Bengaluru.

Redmi 9 Power smartphone sales from next week

Redmi India unveiled Redmi 9 Power which will be sold online from Dec. 22. Redmi said the new smartphone comes with a 6,000 mAh battery that last for two days after a single charge. Redmi business head Sneha Tainwala said the year has been phenomenal for Redmi India, and the company is further pushing boundaries with Redmi 9 Power. Redmi 9 Power's two variants are priced at Rs 10,999 and Rs 11,999.

Blockchain-led solar power trading in UP

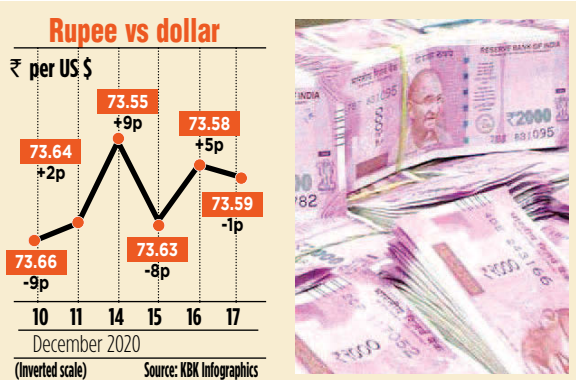
US-based tech services firm Abjayon Inc has partnered with India Smart Grid Forum (ISGF) to support the integration of blockchain platform with UP Power Corporation's (UPPCL) billing system. UP has launched India's first blockchain-enabled peer-to-peer trading of rooftop solar power on a pilot basis in Lucknow. UPPCL, Madhyanchal Vidut Vitran Nigam and UP New & Renewable Energy Dev. Agency will host the project.

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■ Fallout of US placing India on watchlist RBI may go slow on forex interventions

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, DEC. 17

The US adding India to the watchlist for currency manipulation could keep the Reserve Bank of India guarded on aggressive forex intervention and may help the rupee gain, according to experts. The United States Treasury report once again included India in its monitoring list of countries with potentially "questionable foreign exchange policies" and "currency manipulation" after the RBI relentlessly bought dollars to forcibly keep the rupee weak to boost exports. Abheek Barua, chief economist at HDFC Bank told *Financial Chronicle*, "The RBI will have to consider the ramifications of continuing with their action (of massive dollar buying), what possible penalties or the cost of ignoring the US altogether be? It's a difficult call but I believe that the RBI will have to take their foot off the intervention pedal a little going forward given this new development." "This is rupee positive and bond yields should go down theoretically, but sentiment is a critical factor in the very short term and let's see how that is perceived. There will be pressure on the RBI to stop buying dollars at the rate they have been both in the spot and in the forward market...So we will just have to see. I don't think it will have a major



impact but certainly it will have some near-term weakness against other currencies such as sterling, euro, yuan and yen. In the first nine months of 2020, the RBI bought a whopping \$57 billion just in the spot market. Its purchases through forward contracts are around \$12.6 billion. The US Treasury Department's report said that the Indian central bank's interventions added up to 2.4 per cent of the country's GDP, breaching one of the thresholds that the US monitors. India was last included in the currency watchlist in October 2018, but removed from the May 2009 list. A currency manipulator tag is given by the US to countries that deliberately keep their currency low against the dollar to gain export advantage. The treasury report, published twice a year, warns of any unfair currency practices. The US has included India, Taiwan and Thailand to its monitoring list.

Agarwal gets partner to join govt's selloff with \$10 billion

DINESH NAIR DEC. 17



Anil Agarwal

Commodities tycoon Anil Agarwal is planning to invest \$10 billion through a new partnership targeting government privatisations in India. The billionaire is teaming up with London-based Centricus Asset Management Ltd to seek investments in Indian companies offering substantial growth opportunities, according to a statement on Thursday. They will look to turn around companies being sold off as part of the country's Rs 2.1 lakh crore (\$29 billion) divestment programme. Agarwal made a fortune buying state companies and fixing them up, building a metals and mining powerhouse under the umbrella of Vedanta Resources Ltd. He's now seeking to repeat that success, betting he can spot gems among the dozens of companies being put on the block by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government.

The entrepreneurial dynamism in India "can be harnessed to unlock incredible transformation in the public sector," Agarwal said in the statement. "We believe that this strategy can, and will, play a crucial role in the country's ongoing industrialisation." A former metals trader, Agarwal built his business through a series of ambitious acquisitions over the past few decades, including a 2001 deal to take control of government-owned Bharat Aluminium Co in one of the first tests of India's efforts to offload state holdings. He now has a net worth of \$2.5 billion, according to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index. Centricus overseas \$28 billion in assets, according to its website. It advised SoftBank Group Corp on the creation of its \$100 billion Vision Fund and also worked on its \$3.3 billion takeover of Fortress Investment Group. —Bloomberg

Locust swarms in Africa, Yemen prompt UN appeal for funds

SAMUEL GEBRE DEC. 17

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization is seeking \$40 million to help fight desert locusts, with new swarms seen in the Horn of Africa and Yemen. The funds will support surveillance and control operations in the most-affected countries including Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen, the FAO said on Wednesday. More than 1,500 people have been trained in surveillance and control of the pests. The operation currently has about 20 aircraft and 110 ground-vehicle squads. The arrival of the new swarms means the biggest plague of the insects in seven decades will continue into the new year,

threatening the food security of millions of people in parts of Africa and the Middle East. The World Bank in May approved \$500 million to help combat the pests. A single swarm contains as many as 80 million locusts that can destroy crops sufficient to feed 2,500 people for a year. "Locust swarms are already forming and threatening to re-invade northern Kenya," the FAO said in the statement. "Breeding is also underway on both sides of the Red Sea, posing a new threat to Eritrea, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan and Yemen." The FAO is leading efforts to fight the locust invasion and has helped clear more than 1.3 million hectares of the pests in 10 countries this year. —Bloomberg

Mrs Bectors Food IPO subscribed 198 times

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, DEC. 17

After the grand listing success of initial public offerings by Burger King India and Gland Pharma in the recent past, Rs 540-crore public issue of biscuits and bread maker Mrs Bectors Food Specialities has also received overwhelming response, getting subscribed over 198 times on the last day of the public offer. In fact, the public issue got oversubscribed on the very first day after opening for subscription on Tuesday. As per details made available by stock exchanges and sources working closely with the merchant bankers, total subscription as per the last update was 198.02 times shares on offer. The qualified institutional buyers portion has been subscribed 176.85 times, non-institutional investors or high net worth investor portion was subscribed 621 times and the retail individual investors portion was subscribed more than 29 times. Earlier on Monday, the company raised Rs 162 crore from the anchor investors. The price band for Mrs Bector Food Specialities public offer has been fixed at Rs 286-288 per share of Rs 10 face value.

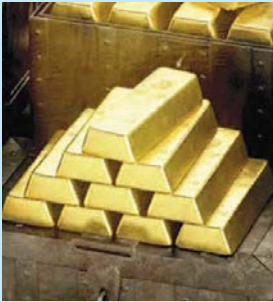
Soaring LNG prices worsen gas crunch in Asian nations

JESSICA JAGANATHAN SINGAPORE, DEC. 17

Surging spot prices for liquefied natural gas (LNG) are exacerbating a gas supply crunch in key fast-growing emerging markets in Asia just as a cold spell in other parts of the region boosts demand for the fuel. Companies from Pakistan to China have cancelled a flurry of LNG tenders this week, several trade sources said, as lofty prices risk pushing up the input costs of industries, which could make energy more expensive for consumers. Benchmark Asia spot LNG prices have soared seven-fold since May to six-year highs, driven by production losses in Australia, Malaysia, Norway and Qatar combined with accelerating use in China, India and elsewhere. "Buyers with no alternatives are now paying top-dollar for prompt cargoes in January," said Chong Zhi Xin, a director at consultancy IHS Markit. The state buyer for Pakistan—one of the

In rare move, Japan sells gold to fill budget hole

TETSUSHI KAJIMOTO TOKYO, DEC. 17



Japan has sold 80 tonnes of gold used for minting coins to another arm of the government to fund part of its huge stimulus package to combat the coronavirus crisis, government officials told Reuters. Saddled with public debt twice the size of its economy and tax revenues hit by the pandemic-induced recession, the finance ministry is under pressure to find non-tax revenues to cover the rising cost of spending to deal with the health crisis. The ministry usually taps reserves set aside as special accounts, and profits the Bank of Japan (BOJ) and other agencies return to state coffers after they close their annual books. This time, the ministry resorted to a rare

arrangement involving the central bank. Under the move, the ministry's division in charge of international affairs sold a portion of dollar reserves to the BOJ. With the yen it received, the division bought gold from another division of the ministry in charge of debt management. From the gold sale, the division in charge of debt management gained proceeds worth 500 billion yen (\$4.84 billion) that would be used to finance a

new fund aimed at boosting research and development at universities, two officials told Reuters on condition of anonymity. The BOJ announced on Wednesday it would buy dollars from the ministry as a precaution against any market disruptions caused by the pandemic. But some analysts say the arrangement may have been initiated by the finance ministry, which wanted to avoid issuing too much debt or using taxpayers' money for the fund. "From the standpoint of fiscal consolidation, this deal may be described as effective use of state property," said Yoshimasa Maruyama, chief market economist at SMBC Nikko Securities. "It sounds reasonable for the BOJ to top up dollar funds. But it was probably the government, not the BOJ, that pulled the trigger," —Reuters

Smartphone market up 42% in Oct.

New Delhi, Dec. 17: India's smartphone market grew 42 per cent, with shipments of 21 million units in October—the second highest for a month—driven by multiple online sale events, research firm IDC said on Thursday. IDC said it expects the smartphone market to see a single-digit decline in final consumer sell out in 2020 on a full-year basis. According to IDC, the growth in October was driven by multiple online

sale festivals and continuing pent up demand from the third quarter of 2020.. "This is the highest ever October shipments and second highest for a month, following 23 million units in September 2020, an all-time high for a single month," it added. Online platforms accounted for 51 per cent share of the shipment, and the channel grew 53 per cent year-over-year (YoY). Offline channels, especially in smaller

towns and cities, also saw a healthy 33 per cent YoY, IDC said. The low-mid range segment (\$100-200) grew by 60 per cent YoY and its share increased to 58 per cent of the total market in the said month, it added. The premium segment (\$500-700) witnessed multi-fold growth with high shipments of the iPhone XR, 11 and OnePlus 8 driven by affordability schemes/offers. —PTI

Antony Waste's ₹300-crore IPO from Monday

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, DEC. 17

Antony Waste Handling Cell's Rs 300-crore IPO opens on December 21 in the price range of Rs 313 to Rs 315 per equity share of Rs 5 face value. Antony Waste Handling is the second largest player in the Rs 5,000-crore municipal solid waste management industry, with a 19-year track record. The company has undertaken more than 25 projects, of which 18 were ongoing as at November 15, including projects for the municipal corporations of Greater Mumbai, Navi Mumbai, Thane, Pimpri Chinchwad, Nagpur, North Delhi and Mangaluru, besides Noida and Greater Noida Industrial Development Authority. The company had a fleet of 1,147 vehicles and close to 7,400 full time employees to handle municipal solid waste management. The public issue comprises a fresh issue of Rs 85 crore and an offer for sale worth Rs 215 crore by financial investors. —Reuters

VIRUS | FATIGUE

Ticket sales in Japan have reached pre-Covid levels in last 3 months

Imax doubles down on China as theatres buzz again

SHIRLEY ZHAO DEC. 17

Imax Corp sees the potential to add at least 400 theatres in China by 2023, as the cinema chain operator looks to expand its footprint in a country that's emerged as the largest movie market this year. The Ontario, Canada-based firm known for massive screens in its movie halls, has signed a deal with its Chinese partner Guangzhou Jinyi Media Corp for five new locations and upgrades at seven existing ones, it said in an email. Imax, which has about 700 theatres in China, sees the possibility of expanding its network by 50 per cent over the next three years, it added.

The theatre chain is stepping up its commitment in China as the Asian country rebounds strongly from the coronavirus pandemic-induced slowdown while the outbreaks continue to ravage the US and Europe. While both US and China contributed about a third of Imax's global box office in 2019, the latter has surpassed the US as the world's top film market this year, underscoring its importance for movie hall operators. "One big vote of confidence in the Chinese market is that a number of our Chinese leading exhibitors are adding more theatres to their Imax footprint," Imax chief executive officer Rich Gelfond



said in an interview. The company has also "been on a trajectory to release more local language Chinese films," he said. China's box-office gross revenues touched 16.4 billion yuan (\$2.5 billion) this year, compared with about \$2 billion ticket sales in the US, according to data from ticketing platform Maoyan Entertainment

and market tracker Box Office Mojo. "Imax's exposure to China's quick box office rebound gives it a leg-up against regular theatres that have a greater presence in North America and Europe, where the recovery has been tepid," Bloomberg Intelligence analysts Geetha Rangathan and Amine Bensaid wrote in a Nov. 17 note. Box office revenues in China are now at 75 per cent of the levels seen last year, owing to local-language blockbusters such as "The Eight Hundred," also the world's top-grossing movie this year -- Gelfond said. The pandemic has also accelerated the company's commitment to releasing more Chinese-

language films, he said. While China has become an increasingly important movie market, it has also become a tricky one as it witnesses a heightened sense of nationalism. As people get fatigued with social distancing and vaccine initiatives become more widespread, Imax expects movie watchers to return in hordes. And not just in China. Ticket sales in Japan in the past three months have reached the same level in the year before while South Korea too has seen a strong comeback, according to Gelfond. "When people feel safe going to the movies, they are coming back in very large numbers," he said. —Bloomberg

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told him the best team lost and he disagreed, but that's his opinion. "If I behave the same way he does on the touchline, I do not stay there. That's animated? For some reason I am different." — *AFF*