

THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI WEDNESDAY 9 DECEMBER 2020



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Mehbooba Mufti claims she was detained before her visit to Budgam



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Swara Bhaskar gets praise from Taiwan President for her acting skills in movies



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WINDOWS



A Kashmiri man walks holding an umbrella during the rain on the outskirts of Srinagar on Tuesday. — PTI

Niti chief says 'too much democracy' in way of reforms

New Delhi: Niti Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant on Tuesday said it is difficult to carry out tough reforms in India as there is "too much of democracy", and emphasised that more reforms are needed make the country competitive. Addressing a virtual event organised by Swarajya magazine, Mr Kant said for the first time, the Centre has carried out hard reforms across sectors, including mining, coal, labour, agriculture. ■ **More on Page 3**

Jio 5G rollout in 2021 second half: Ambani

New Delhi: Reliance Industries chairman Mukesh Ambani has urged the government to accelerate the rollout of fifth-generation (5G) telecom services and scrap outdated 2G technology, run mainly by rivals Bharti Airtel Ltd and Vodafone Idea Ltd. ■ **More on Page 7**

Eluru disease: Lead & nickel found in blood

New Delhi: A preliminary report of All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Delhi, has found traces of heavy metals lead and nickel in at least 10 blood samples collected from patients from different places in Eluru town in West Godavari District in Andhra Pradesh. ■ **More on Page 4**

COUNTERPOINT



Hike prices as much as you want... people are busy with farmers!

WEATHER

Max: 27°C
Min: 13°C
RH: 57%
Rain: 10%
Forecast: Foggy

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Dakshinayana
Tithi: Kartika Bahula Navami
Till 3.13 pm
Star: Uttara till 12.28 pm
Variyam: 8.17pm to 9.47 pm
Durmuhurtam: 11.46 am to 12.30 pm
Rahukalam: 12 noon to 1.30 pm

SUNSET TODAY 5.24 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 7.03 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 1.58 PM
MOONSET TODAY 1.38 AM

Govt hardens line, rejects repeal ■ Farm unions to meet today

Shah's bid to break deadlock fails, today's talks ruled out

SANJAY KAW
NEW DELHI, DEC. 8

Union home minister Amit Shah's Tuesday evening meeting with the representatives of the farmers' unions remained inconclusive as the government categorically stated the new farm laws will not be repealed. The proposed meeting of the farmers' unions with the government on Wednesday at Vigyan Bhavan has also been deferred.

The meeting with 13 farmers' unions was convened by Mr Shah to break the deadlock over the three farm laws on a day the unions had called for a nationwide strike supported by most Opposition political parties. The farmers' leaders remained adamant on their stand and made it clear that they will call off their agitation only after their demands were fully met.

This was the first time that Mr Shah met the farmers' leaders to discuss their concerns and demands. The meeting lasted for over two and a half hours.



Security personnel stand guard at the Singhu border during the ongoing farmers' protest against the Centre's farm reform laws in New Delhi on Tuesday. — PTI

At the meeting, Mr Shah proposed written assurances on amendments on minimum support price and APMC. The new proposals will be given in writing to the farm unions on Wednesday.

"The sixth round of talks between the farmers' leaders and the Centre scheduled for Wednesday has been cancelled," All India Kisan Sabha general secretary Hannan Mollah said after the meeting. Mr Mollah said the government will instead send a proposal for the consideration of the farmers' unions.

The meeting between Mr Shah and the leaders of the protesting farmers' groups on Tuesday got delayed owing to a confusion over the venue of the meeting. The meeting was due to begin at 7 pm but it actually started after 8 pm as some of the union leaders were not ready to hold the meeting at the minister's residence. Finally, the meeting was held at the Indian Council of Agricultural Research campus in Pusa. Agriculture minister ■ **Turn to Page 4**

AAP says Kejriwal under house arrest, Delhi police denies claim

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA
NEW DELHI, DEC. 8

High-voltage political drama was witnessed outside chief minister Arvind Kejriwal's residence on Tuesday where AAP leaders alleged that they were not being allowed to meet the party supremo as he had been placed under "house arrest" by the Delhi Police since he met with the protesting farmers at the Delhi-Haryana border.

"I had planned that today I would go to the border

not as CM but as a common man to express my solidarity with the farmers. I think they came to know about my plan and they did not let me go," Mr Kejriwal later said in an address to party workers at his residence.

"I am glad Bharat Bandh was successful. I prayed for protesting farmers while sitting inside," he added.



Arvind Kejriwal

The Delhi Police, however, denied the charge. Sources said that police has tightened security around Mr Kejriwal's residence where BJP councillors led by three mayors have been protesting since Monday for the release of funds due to the civic bodies. Deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia also said that he was not allowed to enter Mr Kejriwal's residence. The AAP leader later addressed a press conference outside the CM's residence. ■ **Turn to Page 4**

US regulators post positive review of Pfizer vaccine data

Washington, Dec. 8: Documents released by US regulators on Tuesday confirmed that Pfizer's vaccine was strongly protective against Covid-19 and appeared safe — offering the world's first detailed look at the evidence behind the shots.

The positive review from the Food and Drug Administration sets the stage for a decision allowing the vaccine's initial use within days. FDA regulators posted their analysis online even as across the Atlantic, Britain began vaccinating its oldest citizens with the shots, which were co-developed with BioNTech.

But the US judges experimental vaccines in a unique way: On Thursday,

India's Covid count: 26.5K

India's daily coronavirus case count fell to 26,567 in the last 24 hours, the lowest in almost five months. Around 385 people lost their lives in the last 24 hours, making total death count 1,40,958.

the FDA will convene what's essentially a science court that will debate — in public and livestreamed — just how strong the data backing the shots really is. That public vetting is considered key to bolstering confidence in the shots ahead of what's expected to be the largest vaccination effort in US history. — AP

90-year-old UK's 1st vaccine receiver



Margaret Keenan, 90, is applauded by staff as she returns to her ward after becoming the first patient in the UK to receive the Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine at University Hospital, Coventry, England, on Tuesday. — AP

Biden picks retd gen 1st black chief in Pentagon

Washington, Dec. 8: President-elect Joe Biden will nominate retired four-star Army general Lloyd J. Austin to be secretary of defense, according to four people familiar with the decision. If confirmed by the Senate, Mr Austin would be the first Black leader of the Pentagon.

Mr Biden selected Austin over the long-time front-runner candidate, Michele Flournoy, a former senior Pentagon official and Biden supporter who would have been the first woman to serve as defense secretary. Mr Biden also had considered Jeh Johnson, a former Pentagon general counsel and former secretary of homeland defence.

The impending nomination of Austin was confirmed by four people with knowledge of the pick who spoke to the Associated Press on the condition of anonymity because the selection hadn't been formally announced. Mr Biden offered and Mr Austin accepted the post on Sunday, according to a person familiar with the process. — AP ■ **More on Page 6**



Indian players celebrate with the winning Dettol T20 cricket series trophy at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Tuesday. India won the three-match series 2-1. Australia beat India in Tuesday's T20 match by 12 runs. — PTI

Mt. Everest is 86 cm taller, say Nepal, China after remeasure

Kathmandu/Beijing, Dec. 8: The world's highest peak is now taller by 86 centimetres, Nepal and China jointly announced on Tuesday after they remeasured Mt. Everest at 8,848.86 metres, over six decades after India conducted the previous measurement in 1954.

The revised height of Mt. Everest puts an end to the decades-long dispute between the two neighbours on the height of the world's tallest mountain that straddles their shared border.

The exact height of Mount Everest had been contested ever since a group of British surveyors in India

declared the height of Peak XV, as it was initially called, to be 8,778 metres in 1847. Mt. Everest stands on the border between China and Nepal and mountaineers climb it from both sides. Mt. Everest known as Sagarmatha in Nepal while in China it is called as Mt. Qomolangma, the Tibetan name for the world's highest peak.

The Nepal government decided to measure the exact height of the mountain as some geologists suggested that there might have been some changes due to various reasons, including the devastating earthquake of 2015. The 7.8

magnitude earthquake killed nearly 9,000 people in Nepal, and caused an avalanche which buried parts of the base camp at the mountain. Mt. Everest's revised height was officially announced by Nepalese and Chinese foreign ministers at a special virtual event.

Nepal's foreign minister Pradeep Gyawali and his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi attended the virtual event, and read out the letters written by their respective heads-of-state President Bidya Devi Bhandari and Chinese President Xi Jinping. — PTI

Farmers continue protests at Delhi's borders



Farmers protest at the Tikri border against the Centre's new farm laws in New Delhi on Tuesday. — PTI

Emergency services, banks function normally

Large parts of Bharat shut, bandh peaceful

SANJAY KAW
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, DEC. 8

Life was disrupted in several parts of the country on Tuesday as shops and commercial establishments stayed closed, transport was affected and protesters squatted on key roads and rail tracks in response to a nationwide bandh called by farmers' unions in protest against the Centre's three farm laws. The farmers, mainly from Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, blocked key roads during their four-hour "chakka jam" protest from 11 am. Protesters also blocked railway tracks at several places in West Bengal, Bihar and Odisha.

Emergency services and banks, however, functioned as usual during the pan-India shutdown, backed by about 15 Opposition parties and several trade unions. The major impact of the protests, which were peaceful, was felt not only in Punjab, Haryana and

▶ **FARMERS, MAINLY** from Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, blocked key roads during their four-hour "chakka jam" protest from 11 am. Protesters also blocked railway tracks at several places in West Bengal, Bihar and Odisha.

Delhi, but also in Odisha, Maharashtra, Bihar and Jharkhand. In Rajasthan, where "mandis" were closed but shops remained opened, there were reports of clashes between workers of the state's ruling Congress and the BJP.

In the national capital, where most main markets were open but app-based cabs were off the roads, tension spiralled when the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) alleged that the Delhi Police had put chief minister Arvind Kejriwal under house arrest. City police denied the claim but the party stuck to its guns and said the move was a response to Mr Kejriwal meeting protesting farmers at the Singhu

border, the main access point for those coming to the city from Punjab. "No one has been permitted to leave or enter his residence... When our MLAs went to meet the chief minister they were beaten and thrown on the streets," said party leader Saurabh Bhardwaj.

All India Kisan Sabha general secretary Hannan Mollah described the shutdown as a show of strength by the farmers. "We are standing by our demand that we want a complete repeal of the three laws and will not accept any cosmetic changes. If our demands are not met, we are ready to take our agitation to the next level," Mr Mollah said.

Life was hit in Bihar too with train tracks, highways and inner roads teeming with protesters as Opposition parties extended their support. RJD supporters and workers of Pappu Yadav's Jan Adhikar Party fanned out to various parts of Patna, ■ **Turn to Page 4**

Army Chief on 'historic' visit to UAE, Saudi Arabia

PAWAN BALI
NEW DELHI, DEC. 8

In a strategically significant move, Chief of Army Staff Gen. M.M. Naravane left Tuesday on a six-day visit to the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. The Army said the visit was "historic" as it is the first time an Indian Army Chief will visit the two Middle Eastern nations.

This is part of the Narendra Modi government's strategy to boost ties in the region. It is also significant as the UAE and Saudi Arabia have close relations with Pakistan. Of late, however, the Saudi relationship with Pakistan has come under a strain.

During the visit, Gen. Naravane will meet his counterparts and the senior military leadership of the two countries. The Army Chief will visit the UAE on December 9 and 10, when he will call on senior military officials and discuss avenues for enhancing India-UAE defence ties.

He will then travel to Saudi Arabia for the second leg of his tour, from December 13 to 14. He will take forward defence cooperation between India and Saudi Arabia through multiple meetings with senior security officials. ■ **More on Page 4**

SHORT TAKES

MAYORS, LEADERS OF MCD STAY PUT OUTSIDE CM HOUSE

New Delhi: The city mayors and leaders of the BJP-ruled municipal corporations continued to picket outside chief minister Arvind Kejriwal's residence for the second consecutive day on Tuesday, saying they will not budge until funds "due to the civic bodies" are not released by the Delhi government. The mayors of North, South and East Delhi Municipal Corporations, Jai Prakash, Anamika Mithilesh and Nirmal Jain, accompanied by Delhi BJP vice-president Harsh Malhotra, and many women councillors, had started the sit-in on Monday morning outside Kejriwal's Flagstaff Road residence. Awaiting meeting the chief minister, they continued the dharna till late night and even spent the whole night there, sitting on mattresses outside the CM residence. "We will not move from his bungalow until the due funds of MCD are released or the CM gives us an assurance of that," said North Delhi Mayor Prakash. East Delhi Mayor Jain said, all MCD leaders spent the night outside the CM Residence in cold, "but we will continue to do dharna, until the funds are released, irrespective of the cold weather". The mayors along with their deputies, chairpersons of standing committees leaders of Houses, and others again demonstrated on Tuesday, and raised slogans demanding release of crores of funds which they allege is "due" to the three civic bodies.

Man held for killing girlfriend's father

New Delhi: A 25-year-old man was arrested for allegedly killed his girlfriend's father in Sonia Vihar area after he refused his marriage proposal for his daughter, police said. The accused Suraj Kumar, a resident of Sonia Vihar, was working as a house keeper at Palam Metro Station, they said. Kumar was arrested from near Shah Auditorium in north Delhi area when he was about to flee, police said. On Saturday, the body of 50-year-old Bijender Singh was found lying with multiple injuries on his head at his house in Sonia Vihar area, a senior police officer said. It was also found that there was no forceful entry into the house, he said. Deputy commissioner of Police (Northeast) Ved Prakash Surya said during investigation, it had come to notice that the victim and his wife had adopted a girl who was close to a local boy identified as Suraj, while the parents of the girl were strongly against their relationship. When the girl, who is now 24-year-old, remained adamant on continuing the relationship with Suraj, the couple left the her with her biological parents in Moradabad district of Uttar Pradesh. It had come to knowledge that Suraj's parents had approached the woman's parents in Moradabad with a marriage proposal but Singh strongly opposed their proposal, which agitated Suraj. "During interrogation, Suraj disclosed that after Singh refused his marriage proposal for his daughter, he got angry and made a plan to kill him. He started following Singh and his wife from November 28 onwards," he said.

18 held for illegal sex trade in spa

Noida: Eighteen people, including seven women, have been arrested for alleged involvement in illegal sex trade in Uttar Pradesh's Greater Noida, police said on Tuesday. The racket was busted after the local police raided a spa centre located at the Jagat Farm market on Monday evening, according to officials. Deputy commissioner of police, Greater Noida, Rajesh Kumar Singh said the raid was conducted by officials from the local Beta 2 police station. "Seven women and 11 men involved in the illegal flesh trade have been arrested from the spa centre. An FIR has been registered against them and further proceedings are underway," Mr Singh said. Police have seized 18 mobile phones, two digital video recorders of CCTV, eight jewellery items of yellow-colour metal, some viagra tablets, among others, from the spot, officials said. The FIR has been lodged under provisions of The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956, they added.

Bharat Bandh: Mixed response in Delhi

Businesses, transport services remain largely unaffected ■ AAP alleges Kejriwal under house arrest

New Delhi, Dec. 8: A nationwide strike called by farmer unions against the Centre's agri laws received a mixed response in Delhi on Tuesday with most businesses and transport services operating, even as more protesters converged at the national capital's borders to join the farmers' stir while authorities maintained tight security.

Chants of "Jai Kisan", "Humara bhaichara zindabad, Kisan ekta zindabad", "Tanashahi nahi chalegi" rent the air as farmer leaders gave rousing speeches at the protest sites, vowing to continue their agitation. The AAP, which has supported the Bharat Bandh along with many other opposition parties, alleged that the Delhi Police has put chief minister Arvind Kejriwal under house arrest after he met protesting farmers at the Singhu border on Monday, a claim denied by the city police. Amid high drama, scores of AAP workers converged outside Kejriwal's residence while police stopped them and asked them to follow Covid norms.

The BJP slammed Mr Kejriwal, accusing him of indulging in "cheap and petty politics of deceit".

Police said that there were no major fresh protests in the city except in some Delhi border points, but traffic diversions were made on some routes as a precautionary measure.

Protesting farmers had threatened to block key roads and occupy toll plazas 11 AM and 3 PM on Tuesday as part of their call for a "Bharat Bandh" to press for repeal of the new farm laws.

Most of the markets, including Chandni Chowk and Sadar Bazar, in the city remained open amid group

patrolling by police personnel to maintain law and order. However, there were not many customers.

Praveen Khandelwal, general secretary of the Confederation of All India Traders, claimed transport services and markets functioned normally in the national capital and other parts of the country, and that the "Bharat Bandh" had no impact on such activities. "Trading activities were normal in Delhi markets that were open despite the Bharat Bandh. It was business as usual in all the wholesale and retail markets. Transport of goods is also taking place normally," Khandelwal and CAIT Delhi president Vipin Ahuja said in a statement.

The CAIT and All India Transport Welfare Association (AITWA) have not been part of the "Bharat Bandh" strike, Mr Khandelwal said.

Also, public transport services in the national capital remained largely unaffected during a 'Bharat Bandh' even though some auto and taxi unions kept their vehicles off the roads in support of the shutdown.

Kamaljeet Gill, the President of Sarvodaya Driver Association of Delhi which represents drivers working with app-based cab aggregators, claimed most of its members were on strike.

"There are around four lakh app-based cabs in Delhi-NCR. Most of our members are on strike," he said. Many users of app-based cab services though said they did not face much difficulty in booking rides.

"The waiting time for Ola and Uber was like any other day. I did not have to wait long or face any issues today," said Pradip Dubey, a commuter.

Autorickshaws were also easily available on the roads, said some other commuters. — PTI



Farmers block Delhi-Agra national highway during a protest in support of the nationwide strike, called by agitating farmers to press for repeal of the Centre's agri-laws, in Faridabad on Tuesday.

'Would have gone to support farmers if I was not stopped'

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 8

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Tuesday addressed Aam Aadmi Party members from his residence here and said he would have gone to support the protesting farmers in their Bharat Bandh movement if he was not stopped.

After hours of drama outside Arvind Kejriwal's residence over him allegedly being put under house arrest by Delhi Police, the chief minister came outside and addressed the party members.

"If I was not stopped, I would have gone and supported the protesting farmers in their Bharat



Arvind Kejriwal

▶ **AFTER HOURS** of drama outside Arvind Kejriwal's residence over him allegedly being put under house arrest by Delhi Police, chief minister came outside and addressed the party members.

Bandh movement. I am glad that Bharat Bandh was a success. I prayed for the protesting farmers while sitting inside," Arvind Kejriwal said.

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) earlier in the day alleged that the Delhi Police had put the chief minister under house arrest after he met protesting farmers at the Singhu border, a claim denied by the city police.

Joining the sit-in, deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia also said that he was not allowed to enter inside Arvind Kejriwal's residence.

Later, Mr Sisodia and some Aam Aadmi Party members were allowed inside to meet Arvind Kejriwal shortly after which the party supremo addressed the party workers from his residence.

Delhi records 3,188 cases, positivity rate at 4.23%

AGE CORRESPONDENT
WITH AGENCY INPUTS
NEW DELHI, DEC. 8

Delhi recorded 3,188 fresh Covid cases on Tuesday with a positivity rate of 4.23 per cent, authorities said.

The positivity rate on Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Monday stood at 4.96 per cent, 4.78 per cent, 4.2 per cent, 3.68 per cent and 3.15 per cent respectively.

The fresh cases reported on Tuesday came out of 75,409 tests, including 31,098 RT-PCR tests, conducted the previous day, according to the latest bulletin issued by the Delhi health department.

Fifty-seven fatalities were recorded, pushing the toll in the national capital to 9,763, the bulletin said. Active cases on Tuesday dropped to 22,310 from 22,486 the previous day. According to the bulletin, the total number of cases has climbed to 5,97,112.

Meanwhile, senior Congress leader Anand Sharma on Tuesday cautioned the government against any shortcuts

while processing the Covid vaccine applications and said any compromise on safety standards and rules will not be accepted. Pfizer, Bharat Biotech and the Serum Institute of India have applied to the Drug Controller General

of India (DCGI) for emergency use authorisation of their Covid vaccine candidates in India and the government will soon take a call on them.

Mr Sharma tweeted, "How can DCGI start processing vaccine applications in violation of rules and protocols? Cautioning the government that human lives and health is involved. No shortcuts and compromising safety standards and rules can be accepted."

Mr Sharma, the deputy leader of Congress in Rajya Sabha and a former

Union minister, said the news on early arrival of Covid vaccine in India raises hopes and will be uplifting for national confidence, but applications of US pharma giant Pfizer and Bharat Biotech for emergency use authorisation raise fundamental questions and concerns.

"Pfizer has not conducted any trials in India and the company has not got a licence from its country of origin. Bharat Biotech has not completed Phase 3 trials and even not released any interim data on efficacy of vaccine," he claimed.

On Monday, it was 438 in Ghaziabad, 422 in both Noida and Greater Noida, 388 in Faridabad and 357 in Gurgaon.

Presence of pollutant PM 2.5 and PM 10 also remained high in the five immediate neighbours of Delhi, according to the air quality index (AQI) maintained by the CPCB.

According to the index, an AQI between zero and 50 is considered "good", 51 and 100 "satisfactory", 101 and 200 "moderate", 201 and 300 "poor", 301 and 400 "very poor", and 401 and 500 "severe".

The average 24-hour AQI at 4 pm on Tuesday was 424 in Ghaziabad, 407 in Noida and 405 in Greater Noida, 382 in Faridabad and 347 in Gurgaon, according to CPCB's Sameer app.

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'CM's house arrest drama to avoid meeting mayors'

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 8

The Delhi BJP on Tuesday hit out at Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, accusing him of doing "drama" over his alleged house arrest to avoid meeting mayors and members of the BJP-ruled municipal corporations staging an indefinite dharna outside his residence. The mayors of North, South and East Delhi municipal corporations—Jai Prakash, Anamika Mithilesh and Nirmal Jain — accompanied by Delhi BJP general-secretary Harsh Malhotra and many women councillors have been protesting outside Kejriwal's Flagstaff Road residence since Monday. They are demanding payment of "unpaid" dues of ₹13,000 crore from the Delhi government.

Delhi BJP president Aadesh Gupta and party MPs Parvesh Verma and Meenakshi Lekhi joined the protesting mayors Tuesday morning.

Gupta also tweeted a video purportedly showing the chief minister's car exiting the latter's residence.

"AAP leaders are spreading white lies that CM Arvind Kejriwal is under house arrest since yesterday morning, how is he leaving his residence easily if it is true?" he said.

"CM Delhi is not in house arrest but is resting at home as he partied at a wedding last night. We are used 2nautanki it's time others get 2know," Lekhi tweeted.

"Brilliant performance! Oscar level acting by

@ArvindKejriwal and team," BJP MP Parvesh Verma said on Twitter.

After hours of drama outside Kejriwal's residence over him allegedly being put under house arrest by Delhi Police, the chief minister came outside Tuesday evening and addressed AAP members. He said he would have gone to support the protesting farmers in their Bharat Bandh movement if he was not stopped.

The ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) earlier in the day alleged that the Delhi Police has put Kejriwal under house arrest after he met protesting farmers at the Singhu border, a claim denied by the city police.

The Delhi BJP president, in a press conference, alleged that the "failure" of Bharat Bandh in Delhi has exposed the CM. "The Chief Minister is not under house arrest. He is resting at home to avoid meeting the mayors and municipal leaders demanding unpaid dues of ₹13,000 crore from his government," Mr Gupta said.

Delhi BJP MPs Manoj Tiwari and Gautam Gambhir also trained guns at Kejriwal and the AAP over the issue. "Farmers are the excuse to achieve power in Punjab. Only Arvind Kejriwal can do such a thing by shutting himself in and screaming house arrest," Gambhir said in a tweet in Hindi.

North Delhi mayor Jai Prakash said Kejriwal should meet the municipal corporation leaders and redress their grievances.

On Monday, it was 438 in Ghaziabad, 422 in both Noida and Greater Noida, 388 in Faridabad and 357 in Gurgaon.

'Severe' air in Ghaziabad, Noida 5th day on trot

Noida, Dec. 8: Ghaziabad and Noida's air quality remained "severe" for the fifth day in a row while it stayed "very poor" in Faridabad and Gurgaon, according to a government agency data on Tuesday.

Presence of pollutant PM 2.5 and PM 10 also remained high in the five immediate neighbours of Delhi, according to the air quality index (AQI) maintained by the CPCB. According to the index, an AQI between zero and 50 is considered "good", 51 and 100 "satisfactory", 101 and 200 "moderate", 201 and 300 "poor", 301 and 400 "very poor", and 401 and 500 "severe".

The average 24-hour AQI at 4 pm on Tuesday was 424 in Ghaziabad, 407 in Noida and 405 in Greater Noida, 382 in Faridabad and 347 in Gurgaon, according to CPCB's Sameer app.

On Monday, it was 438 in Ghaziabad, 422 in both Noida and Greater Noida, 388 in Faridabad and 357 in Gurgaon.

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No new taxes for next financial year, says North Corporation

SHASHI BHUSHAN
NEW DELHI, DEC. 8

In order to provide relief to citizens during the coronavirus pandemic, the North Delhi Municipal Corporation, on Tuesday, decided not to impose any new taxes for the next financial year. Additional commissioner Swati Sharma presented the budget proposal after the municipal commissioner tested positive for Covid-19.

As per the budget document, under the non-plan head, the North Corporation has received ₹212.53 crore as

basic tax assignment share for this financial year so far out of the total allocation of ₹850.12 crore. An amount of ₹106.26 crore has been deducted as instalment to loan repayment by the Delhi government. Besides, due to the stoppage of grants under the Plan Head by the Delhi government, the losses accrue to ₹4,178 crore. The liabilities have increased to the tune of ₹7,523.97 crore from ₹6,176.32 crore last year.

"Due to the corona pandemic situation, the overall recovery in tax collection has been reduced. So, a special alternate

arrangement for special grant or interest-free long term loan from state or Union government will be thought of. Our own remunerative projects to make the corporation self-reliant have also been slowed down due to corona and lockdown situations. Yet, no new tax has been proposed," it added.

To control air pollution in its jurisdictions, Ms Sharma said that the North Corporation is bringing a proposal to set up e-charging and battery swap stations for e-vehicles on the roads within three kilometres from anywhere.

Moderate' fog in city, min. temp dips below 10°C

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 8

Delhi's minimum temperature dropped to 9.5°C Celsius and a blanket of fog covered the national capital affecting visibility on Tuesday morning. On Monday, very dense fog had lowered visibility in some areas to zero metres.

The Safdarjung and Palam weather stations recorded a visibility of 300 metres due to moderate fog at 8.30 am, an official of the India meteorological department (IMD) said.

The visibility should be around 800 metres at the airport for flights to take off, said Kuldeep Srivastava, the head of IMD's regional forecasting centre.

▶ **DELHI'S AIR** quality was recorded in the upper end of the very poor category on Tuesday. The city's air quality index (AQI) was 393 at 9.00 am on Tuesday. The 24-hour average was 400 on Monday, 389 on Sunday, and 404 on Saturday.

According to the IMD, very dense fog is when visibility is between 0 and 50 metres, 51 and 200 is dense, 201 and 500 moderate, and 501 and 1,000 shallow.

The mercury is likely to dip further with the wind direction changing to westerly-northwesterly. These icy cold winds blow from snow-laden western Himalayas towards the plains.

Delhi's air quality was recorded in the upper end of the very poor category on Tuesday. The city's air quality index (AQI) was 393 at 9.00 am on Tuesday. The 24-hour average was 400 on Monday, 389 on Sunday, and 404 on Saturday.

Air pollution in the neighbouring cities of Ghaziabad (AQI 436), Greater Noida (415), and Noida (414) remained in the severe zone for the third consecutive day.

An AQI between zero and 50 is considered "good", 51 and 100 "satisfactory," 101 and 200 "moderate," 201 and 300 "poor," 301 and 400 "very poor," and 401 and 500 "severe." The IMD said the maximum wind speed will be around 12 kmph on Tuesday.

Calm winds and low temperatures trap pollutants close to the ground while favourable wind speed helps in their dispersion.

SHORT TAKES

BJD TREADS CAUTIOUSLY ON FARMER PROTEST

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, DEC. 8

Odisha's ruling Biju Janata Dal, an arch rival of BJP, on Tuesday did not participate in the nationwide 'Bharat Bandh' called by the farmers against three farm laws by the Centre. The party, however, extended "moral support" to the agitation. No clear explanation or clarification was given by the leaders of the regional party with regard to their stand on the farmers' agitation. In the Parliament, the BJD had taken a 'diluted stand' on the farm laws — it supported passing of the bills in Lok Sabha while it opposed them in Rajya Sabha. As almost all the non-BJP ruled states and many the political parties opposed the farm laws and extended support to the farmers' agitation and 'Bharat Bandh' call, it was expected that the BJD would follow suit. In fact on Monday, senior BJD leader Debi Prasad Mishra had hinted about the party's opposition to the farm laws and said a final call on extending support to the 'Bharat Bandh' would be taken by the party president and chief minister Naveen Patnaik. "The BJD is extending moral support to the farmers' agitation. Our party president Naveen Patnaik will take a call on supporting 'Bharat Bandh'," Mr Mishra has said on Monday. Sources said the BJD deliberately tried to tread cautiously on the issue of farmers' agitation and 'Bharat Bandh' not to earn the displeasure of the BJP which is baying for its blood on the multi-crore chit scam and mining irregularities.

DIVISIVE FORCES MISLEADING FARMERS: SHIVRAJ

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, DEC. 8

Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Tuesday said divisive forces were trying to trigger unrest among farmers in the country by misguiding them on the 3 farm laws passed in the parliament recently. In a series of twitter posts, Mr Chouhan said a motivated campaign against the 3 farm laws was launched by some parties as part of their political agenda and cautioned people not to walk into their trap. He said the farm laws would bring reforms in the agriculture sector and ensure prosperity for the farmers. The farm laws would attract investment in the agriculture sector leading to establishment of cold storages and food processing units, yielding benefits to the farmers. He said the prevailing system of procurement of food grains on their minimum support prices (MSPs) and 'mandis' (agriculture markets) would continue and farmers could also avail other options to sell their produce following the farm laws. Mr Chouhan said Congress was maintaining double standards on the issue since it was during the UPA regime, reforms in the Agriculture Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) Act were recommended to attract private investment in the development of infrastructure in the agriculture sector.



A farmer holds a placard during a protest in support of the nationwide strike called by the farmer unions to press for repeal of the Centre's agri laws in Amritsar on Tuesday. — PTI



Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) activists block NH-15 in support of the nationwide strike called by farmers in Bathinda on Tuesday. — PTI

Plough, tractor trend on Twitter as farmers protest in solidarity

New Delhi, Dec. 8: Social media was abuzz on Tuesday with messages of solidarity with the agitating farmers on 'Bharat Bandh' day as netizens made ploughs, tractors, crops and 'Kisan' trend on Twitter in support of the protesters' demands. A nationwide agitation was held on the call of 'December 8 Kisan Mahaandolan' as protesting farmers vociferously reiterated their demand of repealing the new farm laws, which they have termed as "kala kanoon". As the agitation picked up in the morning, the #AajBharatBandhHai was trending till late after-

noon. Other hashtags widely used by the netizens were #TractorToTwitter, #IStandWithFarmers, #Kisan, #FarmersProtest and #NoFarmersNoFood. Many users also shared videos of deserted markets in cities in Gujarat, Maharashtra and other states to show the impact of the stir. "I stand with Farmers and strongly support .. Kisaan hai toh Desh hai. #AajBharatBandhHai," tweeted user @gschahal, and shared a photo from the main protest site at Delhi-Haryana border. Images of ploughs locking a door drawn in the shape of India's map and

tractors triumphing over odds were widely shared to convey the idea of bandh and farmers' struggle. Punjabi singer Diljit Dosanjh, who recently had an ugly spat with actress Kangana Ranaut over the farmers' protest issue, shared posters of 'Bharat Bandh' and the trending #AajBharatBandhHai. Many other Twitter users posted posters, pictures and videos to convey their solidarity with the farmers. "Finally Thumbs upThumbs up Worldwide trending on number 1 #AajBharatBandhHai," wrote @JowanjotKaur while sharing an image of a Punjabi 'kisan' holding a flag atop the hood of a tractor.

Bharat Kisan Union tweeted bilingually: "Keep supporting! Strengthen Farmer's Voice! Maximum Retweet! #8December #BharatBandh #FarmersProtestDelhi2020 #FarmersDelhiProtest #FarmersDilliChalo #AajBharatBandhHai, #RepealBlackLaws #FarmersProtest2020." Another user @JAafia tweeted: "I stand with Our Kissan Brothers I support #bharatbandh Raised fist Farm laws need to be revoked and Justice should be done to our

Farmer Brothers Raised fist Agree = Retweet Down pointing backhand index #i stand with farmers #FarmerProtest #NoFarmersNoFood #AajBharatBandhHai. The user posted an image of a lock and chain over the map of India to represent the nationwide stir. "Farmer is the only man in our economy who buys everything at retail, sells everything at wholesale. No Farmer No Food Ear of rice Ear of rice Ear of rice Ear of rice I stand with Our Farmer Brother," said @MukeskkumarsRES. — PTI

BJP slams Opp. for support to Bandh, says MSP to continue

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 8

Calling the Opposition parties support to the "Bharat Bandh" called by some farmers unions as "hypocritical," the BJP on Tuesday said it has been the way of the Opposition to create confusion and mislead the people. Reiterating that Minimum Support Price (MSP) will continue and so will be the APMCs, senior BJP leader and information and broadcasting minister Prakash Javadekar said some of the Opposition parties, who have come out in support of the bandh had themselves favoured closing down of APMCs, had implemented contract farming in their ruled states while pointing out that Left ruled Kerala does not even have APMCs. The BJP

claimed that the opposition parties are misleading farmers by propagating lies on MSP, APMC, contract farming and other issues and alleged that "those who used to hijack democracy are now trying to hijack the country's development growth." "Farmers had demanded remunerative price additional to the cost and we are giving them 50 percent above the cost. Congress has never offered anything during their tenure. It is Prime Minister Narendra Modi who is giving this," said Mr Javadekar. He also tweeted "If hypocrisy had a name..Did you know that Left ruled Kerala does not even have APMCs...But Left parties are on the streets today accusing Modi government of weakening APMCs." Minority affairs minister

Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi said there is a syndicate of criminal conspirators that is always trying to paint in a bad way the good work done by the Prime Minister and has never supported steps taken by the government towards development, economic progress and security of the country. Union minister for textiles and women and child development, Smriti Irani also accused the Opposition parties of "imposing" the "Bharat Bandh" for "political gain" and said these parties were trying to disrupt peace, and law and order in the country in the name of the farmers' protest. She reiterated the BJP's commitment towards the MSP and claimed that the opposition parties have been spreading rumours about the MSP and APMC.

Delhi encounter: Protest in Srinagar as 3 J&K men held

AGE CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR, DEC. 8

The families of three Kashmiri men who were arrested by the Special Cell of Delhi Police after a reported encounter in Shakarpur area a day ago, staged a protest in Srinagar on Tuesday, alleging that the trio was being implicated falsely.

Pleading innocence of their kin, the three families including women and children urged the authorities both in Jammu and Kashmir and in Delhi to intervene in the matter and ensure their early release. "I'm sure my husband has been arrested only because he is Kashmiri," said the wife of one of the suspect Muhammad Ayub Pathan. She added, "I vouch for his innocence. He has never done anything wrong or illegal in his life."

Father of another arrested person Riyaz Ahmed Rather said, "I urge the government to release him. What sins have we done? He only went to buy things from Delhi. He is not a militant or terrorist." The family members of the third Kashmiri Shabir Ahmed Gojri also pleaded his innocence.

Mufti barred from visiting nomads in Budgam areas

AGE CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR, DEC. 8



Mehbooba Mufti residence 'Fairview' on the foothills of Zabarvan and then asks "Open the door? I've to go outside...unlock the door: How can you detain me illegally? Show me the papers? Under which law have you detained me?"

Former chief minister and People's Democratic Party (PDP) president Mehbooba Mufti was on Tuesday barred from visiting the families, mainly nomad Gujjars, evicted from their dwellings in the government's ongoing anti-encroachment drive in Jammu and Kashmir's central district of Budgam.

Ms. Mufti said that she has been illegally detained once again and is not being allowed to visit Budgam "where hundreds of families have been evicted from their homes."

She uploaded a video on Twitter in which she stands by the locked entrance of her residence here and takes a jab at the J&K administration. She can be heard saying: "They tell people that they haven't detained me. Later even lieutenant governor (Manoj Sinha) says that I've not been detained. 'Ye kya tamasha ho raha hai?' (What show is going

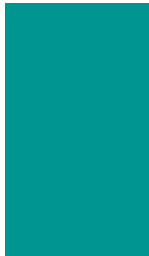
on here?)" She then batters the locked gate at the main entrance to her official residence 'Fairview' on the foothills of Zabarvan and then asks "Open the door? I've to go outside...unlock the door: How can you detain me illegally? Show me the papers? Under which law have you detained me?" Ms. Mufti, who is the vice president of 'People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration', a conglomerate of J&K's mainstream regional opposition parties and their allies from the national Left parties, wrote on the micro-blogging site Twitter: "Illegal detention has become GOIs favourite go to method for muzzling any form of opposition. I've been detained once again because I wanted to visit Budgam where hundreds of families were evicted from their homes."

Acting CJ of combined HC of J&K, Ladakh appointed

CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR, DEC. 8

Justice Rajesh Bindal has been appointed as acting chief justice of the combined high court of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh after the superannuation of J&K's first women Chief Justice Gita Mittal on Tuesday. President, Ramnath Kovind, in his warrant of appointment said that he, in exercise of the power

conferred by Article 223 of the Constitution of India, is pleased to appoint Justice Bindal, senior-most Judge of Common High Court for the Union Territories of J&K and Ladakh, "to perform the duties of the office of Chief Justice of that High Court with effect from December 9, 2020 consequent upon the retirement of Kumari Justice Gita Mittal, Chief Justice".



OFFICE OF THE PRINCIPAL
GOVERNMENT MEDICAL COLLEGE, ANANTNANG, J&K
(CAMP OFFICE: MMAB DISTRICT HOSPITAL ANANTNAG)
Phone NO: 01932-227624 email gmcacnntnag2018@gmail.com

e-NIT NO 13 GMCA of 2020 **Dated 02.12.2020**

On behalf of Lieutenant Governor, Union Territory of J&K, e-tenders (through www.jktenders.gov.in), under two bid system, are invited from original Manufacturers/authorized dealers for supply, installation and commissioning of 1.5 Ton 3 Star Hot & Cold split inverter AC-white (copper condenser) at different location of Govt. Medical College and Associated Hospitals, Anantnag:-

Sr. No	Particulars	Dated and Time	
1.	Date & Time of floating of Bid	03.12.20202	3:30 PM
2.	Date & time of online bid submission. (Any query to clear can be done through e-mail ID on gmcacnntnag2018@gmail.com from 03.12.2020 to 07.12.2020	Start Date & Time 04.12.2020 10.30 Am	End Date & Time 19.12.2020 4:30 PM
3.	Date & time of online Technical bid of opening	22.12.2020	2:00 PM
4.	Earnest Money Deposit	Rs. 10,000/- (Rs. Ten thousand)	
5.	Cost of tender document	Rs. 300/- (Rs three hundred only)	

The bid document with all information relating to the bidding process including Schedule of Requirement and terms and Conditions are available on the website:www.gmcacnntnag.net and www.jktenders.gov.in

Principal,
Government Medical College
Anantnag.

DIPK-9876/20 Dated 07.12.2020

Government of Jammu and Kashmir



Directorate of Tourism, Kashmir

Phone 0194-2502279 directortourismkmr@gmail.com

Fax: 0194-2502281

Fresh e-Tender No. DTK/Rec/ 01 of 2020

Dated 07.12.2020

e- TENDER NOTICE

Sealed Tenders on behalf of Lieutenant Governor, UT of J&K are invited from Registered dealers/Suppliers/Firms for Annual Rate Contract and Supply of Imported 4 Men Tent, 2 Men Tent, Sleeping Bag, Carry Mat, Ruck Sack, Jacket, High Ankle Trekking shoes, Solar light, Torch, Head Light, Binocular etc. Please read the equipment quoted should be from reputed manufacturing companies/brands like Alps, Ferrino, Husky, Eureka, CAMP, / Millet, La Sportiva, Lafuma, Valandre, Zamberlan, Solomon, Petzl, Black Diamond, Princeton and any other brand with CE or International Certification. The offers should be quoted strictly in light of Specifications and Terms & Conditions as mentioned in documents. Each firm has to submit an Authorization Certificate from the Original Manufacturer of the product/Equipment.

The e-tender must be accompanied by non refundable Demand Draft amounting to Rs. 1500/- (Rupees one Thousand five hundred only/-) and earnest money/ security deposit of CDR/FDR amounting Rs. 1,00,000/- (Rupees one lac only/-) pledged to Accounts Officer, Directorate of Tourism, Kashmir.

The Bidders will submit tender in two stage format viz. i) Technical Proposal & ii) Financial Proposal. In the first Stage/Format the bidders have to submit following scanned documents online, on the official website www.jkten-tenders.gov.in with each document authenticated by a digital signature.

The First stage/ format will be the technical Bid; consisting of the following self attested documents:

- Copy of Registration Certificate of Firm /Agency/Original manufacturer (original copy by Post)
- Copy of Authorized Dealer Certificate from OEM.
- CE/International Certificate for the imported equipment.
- Copy of PAN card / Last year's ITR Return.
- Copy of GST certificate (last 06 months GST return)
- Experience in relevant field (minimum 03 years).
- Previous Work Orders from Government /Public Sector in the relevant field (Minimum turnover of Business Rs 50 lacs /year for last 5 years.)
- Completion Certificates of Job order from the concerned departments etc.
- CDR/FDR (Original by post)
- Demand Draft (Original by post)

Only those bidder who qualify the Technical bids will be evaluated on Financial bid.

The Second stage/format shall contain financial proposal such as Rates, and Labour Charges etc. which should be inclusive of all Taxes, duties, freight etc. Both the Stages/Formats should be submitted online to the Office of the undersigned by or before 19th December 2020 up to 4.00 PM.

Special Conditions:-

i. In case the bidders don't qualify the minimum technical qualification, as prescribed, their financial proposals would not be considered for further evaluation. The decision in this regard will be final.

ii. The undersigned reserves the right to accept or reject any bid, without assigning any reason thereof.

iii. The Bidding documents consisting of qualifying information, eligibility criteria, specifications, set of terms and conditions of contract and other details can be seen/downloaded from www.jkten-tenders.gov.in as per schedule of dates given below:-

1. Date of Issue of e-Tender Notice	07/12/2020 (Monday)
2. Period of downloading of bid documents	07/12/2020 10.00 A.M to 19/12/2020 4.00 P.M
3. Bid submission Start Date	07/12/2020 from 10.00 A.M.
4. Bid Submission End Date	19/12/2020 4.00 P.M
5. Date & time of opening of Bids(Online)	21/12/2020 (Monday) at 1.00 P.M

in the office of Director Tourism, Kashmir

Sd/-
Accounts Officer,
DoT- Kashmir

DIPK10076/20 Dtd 07.12.20

'Too much democracy' in way of reforms: Niti chief

New Delhi, Dec. 8: Niti Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant on Tuesday said it is difficult to carry out tough reforms in India as there is 'too much of democracy', and emphasised that more reforms are needed make the country competitive.



"This government has demonstrated political will to carry out hard reforms," he added. The Niti Aayog CEO stressed that the next wave of reforms must come from states. "If 10-12 states will grow at higher rates, then there is no reason why India won't grow at higher rates. We have asked union territories to privatise discoms. Discoms must become far more competitive and provide cheap power," he said. Replying to a question on protests by farmers, mainly from Punjab and Haryana, against the Centre's new farm laws, Kant said the agriculture sector needs reforms. "It is very important to understand that MSPs (minimum support price) will be there,

mandis will remain...farmers must have a choice to sell their products as they benefit out of this," he noted.

On sourcing of raw material for manufacturing electric batteries in India, Kant pointed out that lithium (which is used for manufacturing batteries) is available in large quantities across the world, including Australia.

"We don't anticipate any shortage of lithium," he said. On Modi government's 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' initiative, he said it is not about looking inwards, but unleashing the potential of Indian companies.

The government has identified 10 champion sectors for production-linked incentives (PLI) scheme and these sectors will play a major role in making India a manufacturing hub, and give the country economies of scale, Kant said.

trains on the CR. Although the ruling parties had supported the Bandh but appealed to protesters not to disrupt public transport services.

In a tweet in Marathi, NCP leader and MP Supriya Sule said that it is the moral responsibility of the government to resolve a problem through dialogue if there is anger in any section of the society. The Congress also staged a statewide agitation in support of the Bharat Bandh.

NORTHERN RAILWAY		
TENDER NOTICE		
Invitation of Tender through E-Tendering (E-Procurement Systems)		
N.I.T. No.	15 (A, B, C)/20-21	
Name of work with its location	(a) Extension of TN Bajpai hall & provision of two rooms in AIRF office at State entry road new delhi (b) Outsourcing of maintenance activities to provide habitable conditions at Transit Camp in the section of SSE-W-T.CAMP under ADEN-E-I (c) Repair to boundary wall in the rly. colony sadar bazar more saral gas factory & improvement of park at in more saral rly colony in the section of SSE/W/T. Hazari under ADEN-E-I.	
Approx. Cost of work	(a) Rs. 2228440.48	(b) Rs. 10451243.61
	(c) Rs. 4540229.36	
Earnest Money	(It should be in the form of net banking or payment gateway Only. Note :- FDR will not be accepted as EMD for tender invited on IREPS as per Railway Boards letter no. 2015/CE-I/CT/5/1 dated 31.08.2016)	
	(a) Rs. 44600.00	(b) Rs. 202300.00
	(c) Rs. 90800.00	
Cost of tender on cash/by post	(It should be in the form of net banking or payment gateway Only. Note :- FDR will not be accepted as EMD for tender invited on IREPS as per Railway Boards letter no. 2015/CE-I/CT/5/1 dated 31.08.2016)	
	(a) Nil	(b) 5900 (c) Nil
Completion period of Work	(a) 6 Months (b) 305 Days (c) 8 Months	
Date and time for Submission of tender and opening of tender	Up to 15.00 hrs. on 05.01.2021 Opening of tender at 15.00 hrs. on	
Website particulars notice board location complete details of tender can be seen and address of the office from where the tender form can be purchased etc.	Above tender available on IREPS site i.e. www.ireps.gov.in	
128-W/269/OET/20-21/WE/NIT/15 (A,B,C) Dated : 07.12.2020 2742/2020		
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE		



SHORT TAKES

BJP MEN KILLED PARTY WORKER: BENGAL POLICE

RAJIB CHOWDHURI KOLKATA, DEC. 8

The West Bengal police has put the blame of BJP worker Ulen Roy's death on "shot-gun fire" by "armed persons", who it alleged, were brought by the saffron party to its rally to Uttar Kanya, the North Bengal state secretary in Siliguri, on Monday with a "malafide intention to create violence". In a veiled reference to the incident, West Bengal and Trinamul Congress supremo chief minister Mamata Banerjee told a meeting in Burdwan West, "The BJP holds it's rallies but kills own workers to peddle lies... They just killed someone firing pellets so easily!" Calling the incident "unprecedented" and "unheard" the police has entrusted the criminal investigation department (CID) for a probe though the BJP, which observed a 12-hour North Bengal bandh on Tuesday in protest of its worker's death, rejected it's allegations. The police, which earlier rejected the BJP's claims of lathicharge as the cause of Roy's death, stated, "As per the post mortem report 'death was due to the effects of shot-gun injuries'. The police does not use shotguns. It's obvious that during yesterday's protest in Siliguri, armed persons were brought and they fired from firearms. The deceased received pellet injuries from a shotgun fired from close range by a person standing near the deceased in the protest program." It added, "This is unprecedented. Bringing armed persons in protest programs and inciting them to fire is unheard off. There was a malafide intention to create violence by the use of firearms. CID West Bengal has been asked to investigate. Truth will come out and strong action will be taken against all those who planned and executed the heinous crime."

COAST GUARD RESCUES BANGLA FISHERMEN

RAJIB CHOWDHURI KOLKATA, DEC. 8

The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) has rescued 19 Bangladeshi fishermen from a boat which suffered a machine breakdown in the Bay of Bengal away from the West Bengal coast. On Monday night an ICG aircraft, on an operational task in the sea, noticed the Bangladeshi fishing boat: Rana with 19 crew members aboard, drifting in the Indian exclusive economic zone after its machine broke down. The boat had left Coxbazar (Bangladesh) on November 15 for fishing and remained adrift for long. "The boat was contacted on VHF radio to which no response was received. The aircraft passed the information to Indian Coast Guard Ship (ICGS) Varad that was deployed in Bay of Bengal. The ship immediately approached towards the boat factoring wind and sea conditions and located the boat in early hours of Tuesday," the ICG stated. The 19 fishermen, found exhausted with no ration onboard, were provided with first aid, food and water. The Bangladesh Coast Guard has been requested under the existing MoU with the ICG to make necessary arrangements to take over of the stranded fishing boat along with the crew at the pre-designated location in vicinity of International Maritime Boundary Line. The stranded boat is being towed by the ICGS to hand it over to the Bangladesh authorities.

Tech has enabled benefits to reach deserving & help poor: PM

Mobile technology to be used for vaccination drive, says PM

Ministry: 3 candidates under active consideration of DCGI

New Delhi, Dec. 8: Three Covid-19 vaccine candidates, developed by Bharat Biotech, Serum Institute of India and Hyderabad-based pharmaceutical firm Bharat Biotech have applied to the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI)

seeking emergency use authorisation for their potential COVID-19 vaccines. At a press briefing, Niti Aayog member (health) V.K. Paul said the Covid-19 situation in India has stabilised with active cases showing a "clear-cut declining trend" even though the pandemic situation in many other countries is becoming quite serious. The concern and anxiety that arose following an increase in daily cases of infection in Delhi has also settled now, he said. Asked what steps would be followed by the DCGI in the absence of a water-

tight emergency use authorisation law for granting licence to vaccine makers, Union health secretary Rajesh Bhushan said not all countries' regulatory framework or rules and acts mention emergency use authorisation. "So, the fact that this phrase is not used in the national regulatory framework of any country does not mean that specific country does not have an enabling provision to accord an approval which is early and which is distinct from a regular market approval," he said. —PTI

Covaxin which is being indigenously developed in collaboration with the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR). The applications mean that a mass vaccine effort could be shortly underway in a nation that has the world's second-largest coronavirus caseload. At the IMC, Mr Modi said, "We need to work together to ensure a timely roll-out of 5G to leapfrog into the future and empower millions of Indians." He also pitched for making India a global hub for telecom equipment, design, development and manufacturing. Speaking on mobile technology, he said it was because of this that the government was able to provide benefits worth billions of dollars to millions of Indians. "It is because of mobile technology that we are seeing billions of cashless transactions which boost formalisation and transparency. It is because of it that we will enable smooth contactless interface on toll booths," he said. —PTI

60 envoys will be taken to Hyd for Covid hubs' tour

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI NEW DELHI, DEC. 8

The Union government will organise a visit for more than 60 Foreign heads of missions (HoMs) in India to Hyderabad on Wednesday to "to give a flavour of India's robust and resilient progress in Covid vaccine development and in the trial process", sources said on Tuesday. The foreign envoys will be "taken to leading biotech companies in Hyderabad, Bharat Biotech and Biological E", sources added. Sources said, "In continuation of Covid-19 briefing by ministry of external affairs on November 6, a visit is being organized for foreign heads of missions in India to Hyderabad on December 9. More than 60 HoMs are being taken to leading biotech companies in Hyderabad, Bharat Biotech and Biological E. This is the first such visit and it will be fol-

lowed by visits to facilities in other cities." Sources added, "We have been contributing significantly to global efforts against COVID 19 pandemic. There is a lot of interest in India's vaccine development efforts. India is the world's largest vaccine manufacturer. As PM said India's vaccine production and delivery capacity will be used to help all humanity in fighting this crisis." It may be recalled that India had planned to "take a delegation of resident ambassadors for a tour" of Indian "vaccine and diagnostic facilities". A few weeks ago, the government had organised a briefing by senior bureaucrats in the Union government across several ministries for about 180 senior foreign diplomats and representatives of international organisations in the Capital on the measures taken by India in the past several months to tackle the Covid pandemic and also the issue of vaccine development.

Apex court nod to 8 lane Chennai-Salem highway

PARMOD KUMAR NEW DELHI, DEC. 8

The Supreme Court on Tuesday gave its nod for 277-km-long eight lane Chennai-Salem greenfield express highway holding that there was no legal infirmity in the Central government declaring it as part of Bharatmala highway project. Holding that the Central government can under the National Highways Act, 1956 notify any road not forming a part of existing highway or even a proposed green field road as a national highway, Justice A.M. Khanwilkar heading a

bench also comprising Justices B.R. Gavi and Krishna Murari said, "This power is not restricted or circumscribed by any other inhibition, such as to declare only an existing road or highway within the state as a national highway." Justice Khanwilkar said that the requirement of a national highway within the country as a whole and state-wise, in particular, is to alleviate evolving socio-economic dynamics, and "There is nothing in the Constitution of India or for that matter, the National Highway Act 1956 to limit that power of the Centre."



Senior BJP leader and NEDA convener Himanta Biswa Sarma attends a rally ahead of the second phase of Bodoland Territorial Region polls in Kokrajhar district in Assam on Tuesday.

India, Qatar to set up group over investments

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI NEW DELHI, DEC. 8

India and the oil-rich Gulf nation of Qatar on Tuesday decided to "create a special task-force to further facilitate investments by Qatar Investment Authority into India", and also "resolved to explore Qatari investments in the entire energy value-chain in India". The decisions were announced after a phone conversation

between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Amir of the State of Qatar Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani. India's outreach is significant, given the politics in the Gulf region and Qatar's stormy relations in the past three years with Saudi Arabia which is widely considered the leader of the Arab world. Arabia and Qatar to mend their own bilateral ties. In a statement, the MEA said, "Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi spoke on telephone with His Highness Sheikh Tamim

Bin Hamad Al-Thani, Amir of the State of Qatar: Prime Minister conveyed his felicitations to H.H. The Amir for the forthcoming National Day of Qatar. While thanking Prime Minister for the greetings, H.H. The Amir appreciated the enthusiasm with which the Indian community in Qatar participates in the National Day celebrations. He also conveyed warm greetings to Prime Minister for the recent Diwali festival."

The MEA added, "The two leaders discussed the robust cooperation between both countries in the fields of investment flows and energy security, and reviewed recent positive developments in this regard. They decided to create a special Task-Force to further facilitate investments by Qatar Investment Authority into India, and also resolved to explore Qatari investments in the entire energy value-chain in India."

Pesticide residues led to mystery illness

AGE CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, DEC. 8

Residues of pesticides and preservatives that farmers use to keep vegetables fresh and fish feed containing heavy metals like lead and nickel were reported to have caused mystery illness, affecting nearly 536 people in Eluru in West Godavari. State health authorities said farmers use pesticides, preservatives and heavy metals extensively for vegetables and fish and these chemicals might have entered the body of the consumers, affecting

ELURU

their health. In its preliminary report, New Delhi-based All India Institute of Medical Sciences confirmed the high presence of heavy metals like lead and nickel in the blood samples of 10 affected patients, substantiating the suspicion of the state health authorities that these metals could be one of the prime reasons for causing mystery illness. The state health authorities have sent 40 samples of blood and urine of the affected persons to AIIMS

for investigation and their reports are expected to be out by Wednesday afternoon. Eluru government hospital medical superintendent Dr A.V.R. Mohan said, "Though the root cause of the mystery illness is yet to be found out, based on a preliminary assessment, we understand that consumption of vegetables, fruits and fish — having deposits of residues of pesticides and heavy metals — without cleaning them properly might be one of the reasons for triggering such an illness."

The mystery illness affected at least 536 persons since Saturday. Out of them, only 64 are taking treatment as in-patients while the rest of them were discharged after recovery. Twenty patients were referred to government hospitals in Vijayawada and Guntur also. The authorities maintain that the presence of pesticide residues and heavy metals like lead in the body will lead to convulsions among people as was the case in Eluru. No patient complained of fever and other symptoms and their recovery was also fast.

Bharat bandh is peaceful

Continued from Page 1 forcing shopkeepers to down their shutters and deflating tyres of vehicles plying on the roads. In Jehanabad, the movement of Patna-Palamu Express was obstructed for a few minutes until the bandh supporters, squatting on the tracks, were chased away by the police. Train services were also affected in Odisha as activists of farmers' organisations, trade unions and political parties held sit-ins on tracks in Bhubaneswar, Cuttack, Bhadrak and Balasore. Elsewhere in the state,

ruled by the Biju Janata Dal, normal life was hit with markets and offices shut and Congress and Left supporters blocking major roads. Major cities in Congress-ruled Chhattisgarh, including its capital Raipur, wore a deserted look with most business establishments closed and public transport keeping away. "At least 36 farmers, labourers and social organisations led by the Chhattisgarh Kisan Majdoor Mahasangh (CKMM) have been staging protests at various locations in the state in

support of the shutdown," said CKMM's Sanket Thakur. Neighbouring Madhya Pradesh saw sporadic demonstrations, particularly in Seoni-Malwa in Hoshangabad district where protesters under the banner of the Krantikari Kisan. In West Bengal, where the ruling Trinamul Congress joined the Congress and the Left in supporting the shutdown but stayed away from enforcing it, the response was mixed. Railway tracks were blocked in several places and there were sit-ins on major roads.

Bid to break deadlock fails, today's talks ruled out

Continued from Page 1 Narendra Singh Tomar, consumer affairs minister Piyush Goyal and senior officials of the ministry were also present. One farm union leader, Ruldu Singh Mansa, did not take part in the meeting due to the confusion over the venue. In a social media post, Joginder Singh Ugrahan, who was not invited to the meeting with Mr Shah, said there was no need for the talks before official consultations and hoped that the leaders attending Tuesday's meet would keep in mind the views of the larger group. The meeting, however, appeared to have created a discord among the organisations spearheading the protests at

Delhi's borders for the past 12 days, with the head of the BKU (Ugrahan), which is one of the largest outfits in the group, questioning the rationale of the talks a day before the scheduled official consultations. Hours ahead of a meeting with Mr Shah, the farmers reiterated their stand of not compromising on their demand that the three contentious farm laws be repealed. "There is no midway, we will demand just 'yes' or 'no' from home minister Amit Shah at today's meeting," farmers' leader Rudru Singh Mansa said. The farmer leaders included eight from Punjab and five from various nationwide organisations. The participating leaders

included Hannan Mollah of the All India Kisan Sabha, Rakesh Tikait of the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU), Gurnam Singh and Shiv Kumar Kakka. In another development, Haryana chief minister Manohar Lal Khattar, who met Mr Tomar at his 3, Krishna Menon Marg residence in Delhi, said the agriculture minister had promised that the minimum support price for farmers' crops will be protected. Mr Khattar tweeted this after meeting Mr Tomar and asserted that all BJP governments in the states as well as the Centre accorded the highest priority to farmers' interests. "On the issue of farmers, I had a meeting with Narendra Singh

Tomar Ji. He has assured that the MSP will be protected," Mr Khattar tweeted. Among those present at Mr Shah's meeting were BKU spokesperson Rakesh Tikait, BKU Haryana chief Gurnam Singh Chaduni, All India Kisan Sabha general secretary Hannan Mollah, Rashtriya Kisan Mazdur Mahasangh president Shiv Kumar Kakka, BKU president Balbir Singh Rajewal, All India Kisan Mahasabha president Ruldu Singh Mansa, Manjit Singh Rai, Buta Singh Burjigill, BKU (Lakhnowal) general secretary Harinder Singh Lakhowal, Darshan Pal, Kulwant Singh Sandhu, Bodh Singh Mansa and Jagjit Singh Dhalewal.

Kejri under house arrest, cops deny

Continued from Page 1 Addressing a press conference earlier, AAP spokesperson Saurabh Bhardwaj claimed the city police has put Kejriwal under house arrest. "On the direction of the ministry of home affairs (MHA), the Delhi Police has put chief minister Arvind Kejriwal under house arrest ever since he visited farmers at Singhu border. No one has been permitted to leave or enter his residence and he has not been allowed to meet anyone. When our MLAs went to meet the chief minister, they were beaten and thrown on the streets. The party volunteers were also not allowed to meet." Refuting the charge, Satish

Golcha, special commissioner of police (Law and Order) North Zone, said, "It is claimed in certain sections on social media that there have been restrictions on the movement of the chief minister of Delhi... these claims are totally baseless. There are absolutely no restrictions. The chief minister is doing his normal engagements and there is normal movement. Further, he is going out of his residence for his engagements." Anto Alphonse, deputy commissioner of police (North), tweeted a photograph of the entrance of Mr Kejriwal's residence and denied the allegations. "This claim of CM Delhi

being put on house arrest is incorrect. He exercises his right to free movement within the law of the land. A picture of the house entrance says it all," the DCP tweeted. Addressing a press conference outside Mr Kejriwal's residence, Mr Sisodia claimed that he and several party MLAs were not allowed to meet the CM. "Still the police is falsely saying that there is no house arrest. They are doing this because Kejriwal denied permission to convert Delhi's stadiums into temporary prisons for the protesting farmers. They are afraid of Kejriwal and fear that he will come out to support the bandh," he said.

THE ASIAN AGE

9 DECEMBER 2020

Court rap over Central Vista: Rethink in order

The Supreme Court’s rap on the knuckles of the Narendra Modi government for its unseemly hurry to forge ahead with its plan to disfigure the most iconic vista of New Delhi, built between 1921 and 1927 by architects Edwin Lutyens and Herbert Baker, and leave the exchequer poorer by at least ₹20,000 crores — though this is likely to escalate — is well-received. Worryingly, the Modi government had taken advantage of the lockdowns it had ordered to push ahead with what is being dubbed as the PM’s vanity project despite the matter being sub judice. The bench of Justices A.M. Khanwilkar, Dinesh Maheswari and Sanjeev Khanna has rightly put a lid on it, as of now.

The 64,500 square metre Central Vista redevelopment plan was hatched on the frivolous basis of putative cost-benefits of integrated offices, as the government sought to play up the walking distance between various departments in terms of traffic jams and blame on architecture delays due to politics, red

There are well-founded suspicions that the project is indeed a gravy train for the regime’s favourite babus and builders

Besides the very real threats to heritage and the environment, as hundreds of trees must now be translocated leading to the loss of biodiversity, not to mention the city’s most popular space for public recreation, almost every other aspect of the redevelopment plan — its clearances, public consultations and aesthetics — is problematic. For one, no heritage assessment analysis was done. The environment impact assessment report as well as the Central Vista committee report was rushed. The DDA changed the land use after a perfunctory hearing on 1,300 public objections. The tender to build the new Parliament building, that went to a Gujarat-based architecture firm, was hastily awarded. There are well-founded suspicions that the project is indeed a gravy train for the ruling party’s favourites. All this forms the substance of the bunch of 10 petitions the Supreme Court is currently hearing.

It is also learnt that the plan entails the demolition of four bhavans built in the 1960s — the iconic National Museum, Vigyan Bhavan, the fairly recent IGNCA, and the very new and expensive external affairs ministry buildings. That flies in the face of the basic tenets of sustainability.

But what shows the Centre’s move in the most terrible light is that it’s being done as lakhs of Indians lack food security and the nation’s medical infrastructure needs strengthening on an urgent basis.

Government sources claim that a belief that the current Parliament House was “unlucky” and anticipation of delimitation — the new building can house 1,224 instead of 790 members — are among the real reasons for the exercise. The Supreme Court has, meanwhile, in its order Monday, given the green light to hold the foundation stone laying ceremony for the project, albeit conditionally, on Thursday, December 10. This will be accompanied by a religiously coloured bhoomi puja, which should have had no place in an institution that serves a secular republic. Doubts may well be created in the minds of our citizens about the future outcome of the lawsuit.

Anju’s inspiring secret

It may take just a microsecond to post a composed tweet but in that instant our estimation of the long jump athlete Anju Bobby George went up a billion fold. While her revelation in a Twitter bombshell that she has had only one kidney since birth is remarkable enough, what lends her narration an incredible dimension is her reticence to say this during her career. In choosing to let out the secret at a difficult time for humanity during the coronavirus pandemic, she has timed well the telling of her inspirational tale of success against seemingly insurmountable odds.

It is at the drop of a hat that professional athletes are known to complain about the state of their body and mind during competition, the conditions in which they compete and the problems they face in their sporting career and life. Anju may have come face to face with her true condition only in 2001 when she consulted doctors because of excessive fatigue. Remarkably, her best years in athletics came soon after with medals in Asian, Commonwealth and World competitions. Her battle against her body was made worse by her allergy to painkillers but she never trotted out an excuse in public.

Women in sport are an inspiration because they face additional difficulties in their physiology and hormonal balance. Their spirit shines through as they compete, with mothers seen going on to win medals and even tennis grand slams. Besides stereotypical sporting challenges, women also have had to battle racial discrimination like the Williams sisters and male domination and chauvinism like Billie Jean King. While a batsman might let on that he is colour blind or an athlete talk freely about his heart condition, women stars are known for their patient and silent determination to achieve. Given such a background, Anju’s achievements gain a lustre, as does her husband, coach and sportsman Robert George’s contribution to her career.

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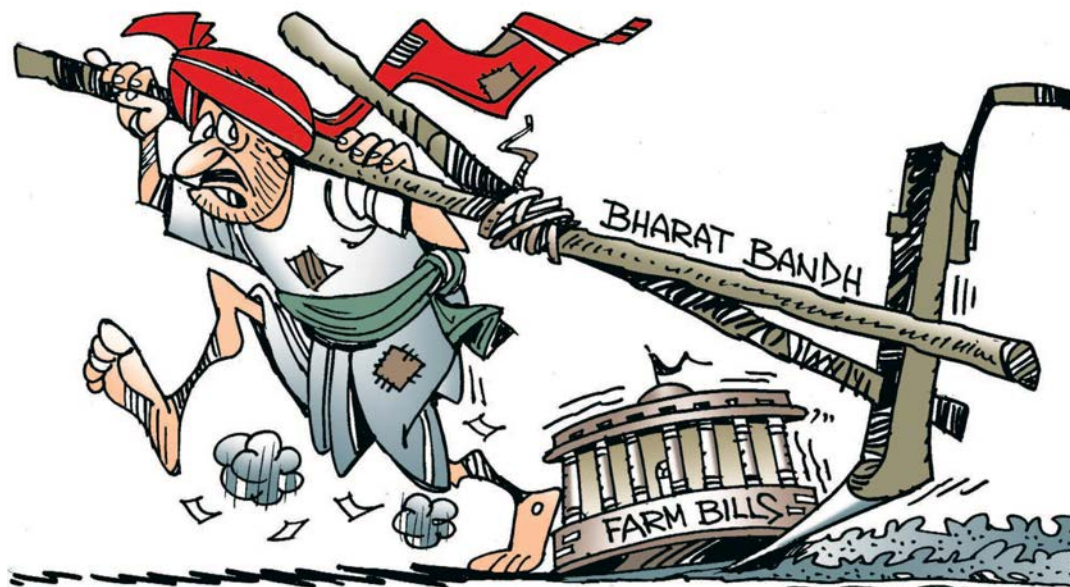
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Subhani



At the Singhu border: An agitation like none other



Anand K. Sahay

Far & Near

The farmers’ movement rocking the Delhi region, with its ripple effects spreading, appears unique due to its patterns of participation and mobilisation, which lend it spectacular social energy articulated in wholly peaceful fashion. Whether it has the potential for wider political impact will depend on its staying power.

The Narendra Modi government’s efforts to discredit it as a “Khalistani” plot — as Sikh farmers are its most visible element — or the devious result of the Congress’ machinations have cut no ice, but the government continues to play a perception game through the media.

Mr Modi’s reputation is for not going back. Thus, mind games are being played to tire out the protesters. But if these tactics don’t succeed quickly, an unlikely prospect since Prime Minister Modi is stuck in a rigid pro-big industry position which farmers read as being anti-farmer, the government could be headed for a very chilly winter.

Large-scale protest movements and mobilisations, by their very nature, have about them a degree of latent militancy. This doesn’t always mean violence, although it can degenerate into that, causing irreversible injury to the cause itself, as in the Assam, Punjab and Kashmir agitations in the 1983-93 decade.

The protests that rocked the country during the JP agitation in the 1970s, culminating in the Emergency, did not involve people’s violence but the active willingness to give battle to the State appeared ever present and the air was seldom free of tension, although the movement had the participation of Gandhians.

The Anna Hazare movement, which led to the undoing of the

Manmohan Singh government, appeared to have been brought together for that very purpose by its BJP-RSS core. It wore the clothing of an anti-corruption campaign as Dr Singh was perceived as a man of unshakeable integrity. It attracted idealists, had extensive urban middle class and media backing, and proved a greatly successful affair, even giving birth to a political party which bends to sectarian Hindu sentiments when in trouble rather than to any known principle.

In sharp contrast, while the entirely peaceful anti-CAA movement of last year, mostly involving Muslim women — usually seen as homebound — in urban settings across the country, did gain international attention, it failed to receive wide national endorsement, although it campaigned with rare courage on a very important national issue — the communal changes made by the Modi government in citizenship laws.

The present government, with its religion-based orientation, and near monopolistic influence on the media and social media, demonised this movement and harassed and punished many of those involved, with the judicial system remaining quiescent and lackadaisical.

Based on a broad appreciation of these historical events, in which this writer was a keen professional observer, it’s not hard to see that the truly massive mobilisation of farmers at Delhi’s Singhu border with Haryana at the national capital’s northern end, from where the road leads to Punjab, has characteristics that separate it from anything in recent decades.

Perhaps its most noteworthy feature is its participation and mobilisation quotient. The movement eschews political links and is about the farmers’ demands alone.

It challenges laws that were first brought through the ordinance route and then passed with unseemly haste in Parliament without discussion and rushed through the Upper House bypassing established voting procedures. But it’s not just Punjab’s farmers who are at the Singhu border, every section of Punjab society and many from Haryana are out there laying siege to the nation’s capital.

While every state in India is primarily agrity. It attracted idealists, had extensive urban middle class and media backing, and proved a greatly successful affair, even giving birth to a political party which bends to sectarian Hindu sentiments when in trouble rather than to any known principle.

Farm holdings are small, and this part of the country was among India’s poorest in 1947 for want of irrigation. But irrigation and power availability through the Bhakra-Nangal, and vastly improved yields through green revolution technologies, made Punjab and Haryana relatively prosperous. On this edifice has rested education, sports, physical and health infrastructure, industry and the arts. This is why writers, poets, artists and sportspersons are returning their national awards in solidarity with the farmers, who are also likely to be relatives. But it’s useful to note that good yields turn to a reasonable income only due to the assured minimum price or minimum support price (MSP), a subsidy in economic terms which distorts the market. Is it necessary for the government to fight that subsidy if it has made entire regions economically viable and socially

stable? A day’s visit to the Singhu border is a fascinating experience. There are miles of tractor trolleys. During the day protesters mill about and listen to speeches or run the countless “langars”, or community kitchens, where free food is respectfully served to all — including the hordes of Delhi’s poor who show up — according to the precepts of “sewa”, or service, in Sikhism. At night they sleep in their tractors or under them. There are no shops of any kind. Camaraderie flows. There is much talk about “Modi conspiring with big industry to finish the farmer”.

It is said that the riders in Chenghiz Khan’s amazingly mobile 13th century army slept on horseback, covering distance even when asleep. The diesel-run steel tractor is the Punjabi farmer’s steed racing to take on the Modi government. Social solidarity is his weapon. Women and the elderly are also zealous participants. Delhi’s Muslims too run free food stalls. The protesters say they are stocked for a few months and can replenish. Backing them are Punjab and Haryana traders, teachers, journalists, social workers, industrial workers — well, nearly everyone except the BJP and RSS outfits.

The farmers are on the Haryana side in Sonapat district. On the Delhi side, facing them, are thousands of Delhi police, CRPF and Rapid Action Force personnel, all under home minister Amit Shah. There is unspoken political tension. The tens of thousands of protesters radiate energy. The BJP government in Haryana is a likely first casualty if its MLAs come under public pressure. This is one movement that can’t be reviled as “anti-national”, or “anti-Hindu”. Its protagonists can’t be asked to go to Pakistan or Rome.

Also, new labels have to be found. Is it a farmers’ “sit-in” when the protest stretches over many invisible miles, or is it the whole society marching on the command headquarters?

Is it a farmers’ ‘sit-in’ when the protest stretches over many invisible miles, or is it the whole society marching on the command headquarters?

LETTERS

BREATHE EASY

The number of active COVID-19 cases in India dropping below four lakhs for the first time in four and a half months must make citizens breathe easier. The declining trend in fresh cases suggests that the worst may be over. Daily fatalities also fell below 400 on Monday, after over five months, even as there are no signs of a second peak yet. But one must not drop guard and continue to take all precautions to keep the virus at bay.

N.J. Ravi Chander
Bengaluru

LAVISH WEDDINGS

THE TREND of lavish marriage parties in West Bengal and elsewhere with hundreds of people attending, often to keep up appearances, at a time when a pandemic is raging in the world’s second most populated country and one with nonexistent health infrastructure in many places needs to be condemned. What is the need to conduct such ceremonies at all, and why can’t they be done online, or even postponed? This seems to be a uniquely Indian problem, too, as none of the other nations of the world has faced it in their often-bitter struggles against the Covid-19 pandemic. The government must crack its whip through its law and order machinery on this account. Citizens must act responsibly.

Priyanka Mathur
Kolkata

KIND GESTURE

THE INDIAN ARMY’S successful repatriation of two girls from Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, who had inadvertently crossed over to the Indian side from across the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir’s Poonch district, is wonderful. Laiba Zabair, 17, and Sana Zabair, 13, were picked up by Indian soldiers soon after they had inadvertently come over to this side. But they treated them very kindly, provided them with food and shelter and facilitated their early return to their homes. We are truly proud of our big-hearted soldiers who guard our borders and take care of us when in distress. Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan.

Mohd. Nur
Kolkata

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

Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu



Babus angered by Haryana IAS cadre post appointments

As noted in an earlier column, there is a degree of discontent among Haryana babus over what many consider is a consistent attempt by the Manohar Khattar government in the state to allow the “usurping” of IAS cadre posts by other services. The Haryana government has appointed several IPS, IFS and IRS officers to the cadre posts of the IAS.

Now Haryana IAS officer and well-known whistleblower Ashok Khemka has entered the fray with his take on the issue. Not known to mince words, a habit that has often landed him in trouble, Mr Khemka has reportedly written to chief secretary Vijai Vardhan and demanded that such cases should be referred to the Centre for consideration.

Those in the know say that in his letter the IAS officer pointed out

that the IAS cadre rules stipulated that a non-cadre officer may be appointed temporarily (maximum three months) to a cadre post if no suitable cadre officer is available. Continuing an officer for a longer period requires prior approval of the Centre. He urged Mr Vardhan to refer the cases of IPS, IRS and IFS officers appointed on the cadre posts of IAS officers to the central government.

And Mr Khemka is not a solitary voice, it turns out that he has now been joined by the Haryana Civil Service Association whose president Dr Vandana Disodia, too, has highlighted the issue. It is not going to die down.

EMANELMENT BLUES

The trend of reduced representation at the joint secretary level has got the “heaven born” worried. But none are more worried than

the 2003 batch of IAS officers, whose wait for empanelment is getting inordinately prolonged even by the standards of the Modi sarkar.

Sources say that since August 2019 only one fresh round of 37 officers of the 2002 batch and 25 officers from previous batches have been empaneled as joint secretaries. But the 2003 batch officers continue to await their turn. Meanwhile, four fresh batches of IAS (from the early 1990s) have been empaneled as additional secretaries and two batches (1987 and 1988) have been empanelled as secretaries.

Further, only 17 per cent of the empaneled officers are from the IAS, with the lion’s share going to non-IAS officers. This trend is likely to stay in the back of the minds of senior IAS officers even as the 2003 batch continues to hope that

their empanelment happens sooner than later.

CLEARING THE AIR ON COVID VACCINE

In October, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had said the government was preparing to reach every single citizen with the Covid vaccine. In the run-up to the Bihar Assembly elections, the BJP even promised free vaccine to the state’s voters in lieu of their support.

The election done and dusted; the government has now changed its stance. Union health secretary Rajesh Bhushan has “clarified” that the government never spoke about vaccinating the entire country! He said that it is important that the discussion be based “only on factual information”. Mr Bhushan said that the average daily positivity rate in India is 3.72

per cent and India has the lowest number of cases per million count among all major countries, with 211 cases per million.

According to him, the government’s aim now is to vaccinate a critical mass of people and break the transmission of the virus, this not having to vaccinate the entire population, which by itself would be a challenging exercise. This ties in with the view of the World Health Organisation (WHO) experts who say that 65 to 70 per cent vaccine coverage rate is sufficient to reach herd immunity.

But the question is whether the voters of Bihar will get the vaccine first as promised in the BJP’s poll manifesto or was it just another jumla?

Share a babu experience! Follow dilipthecherian@Twitter.com. Let’s multiply the effect.

SHORT TAKES

AVALANCHE WARNINGS AFTER SNOWFALL IN OZ

Berlin, Dec. 8: Authorities in Austria issued avalanche warnings on Tuesday for the east of the country as 4,000 homes there were without electricity and one man was injured while on a back-country skiing tour.

After several days of heavy snowfall in East Tyrol and other parts in the Austrian Alps, several roads were still closed in Tyrol and some valleys were cut off from the rest of the country. Electricity provider Tinetz said several electrical lines were snapped either by snow or by fallen trees, public broadcaster ORF reported. A 23-year-old German man was injured Monday in the Hahnenkamm skiing region in Tyrol when he went skiing on a closed slope.

PAKISTAN ARRESTS TWO ISIS MEMBERS

Lahore, Dec. 8: Pakistan's security agencies on Tuesday arrested two members of the Islamic State (ISIS) terror group on the charges of terror financing in Punjab province.

According to the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) of Punjab police, it received a credible source information that two terrorists were collecting funds for the ISIS in Model Town of Bahawalnagar, some 400 kms from Lahore.

"An intelligence-based operation was conducted by CTD at Model Town Bahawalnagar. It arrested the two terrorists of ISIS. Funds collected for terrorism financing and literature have been recovered," a CTD spokesperson said in a statement here on Tuesday.

The terrorists are identified as Mohibur Rehman and Usman Ghani alias Abdul Rehman. A case has been registered in CTD Police Station Multan.

THAI DISSIDENT'S KIN MEETS JUDGE IN CAMBODIA

Phnom Penh, Dec. 8: The sister of an exiled Thai dissident who was reportedly abducted in Cambodia earlier this year appeared before a judge in Cambodia's capital on Tuesday to offer evidence that she hopes will lead to an official investigation into her brother's disappearance.

A group of armed men snatched Wanchalearm Satsaksit, 38, off the street in front of his apartment in Phnom Penh, the capital, in early June before taking him away in a black car, according to human rights groups and fellow activists, citing witness accounts and security video at the building.

Sitanan Satsaksit, the dissident's older sister, was joined by her lawyers at the office of the investigating judge at the Phnom Penh Municipal Court and said she hoped the meeting would prompt a formal investigation into her brother's whereabouts. Cambodia has denied that any abduction took place and said no investigation was planned.

UN URGES RUSSIA TO WITHDRAW FROM CRIMEA

United Nations, Dec. 8: The U.N. General Assembly has approved a resolution urging Russia to immediately withdraw all its military forces from Crimea "and end its temporary occupation of the territory of Ukraine without delay."

The vote in the 193-member world body was 63-17 with 62 abstentions, close to the vote on a similar resolution adopted last year. The measure, which is not legally binding but a reflection of world opinion, was supported on Monday by Western nations and their supporters and opposed by Russia and its supporters including China, Cuba, Venezuela, Iran and Syria.

Russia sent troops into Crimea and annexed the peninsula in 2014. It has supported separatist rebels in eastern Ukraine in a six-year war that has killed 14,000 people. An uneasy cease-fire has been in effect since late July. The resolution condemned the occupation of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol by Russia and reaffirmed "the non-recognition of its annexation."

It affirmed that "the seizure of Crimea by force is illegal and a violation of international law," and said it must be "immediately returned."

Don calls US '3rd world country'

Washington, Dec. 8: President Donald Trump has likened the US to a "third world country" as he blasted the "rigged" election, reiterating his unsubstantiated claims about widespread voter fraud in the presidential polls. The election was a "disgrace to our country", Trump told reporters at the Oval Office of the White House on Monday during a ceremony to present the Presidential Medal of Freedom to wrestler and coach Dan Gable. "It's like a third-world country — these ballots pouring in from everywhere, using machinery that nobody knows ownership, nobody knows anything about. They have glitches, as they call them. Glitches. The glitches weren't glitches. They got caught sending out thousands of votes — all against me."

— DONALD TRUMP
US President

Biden's transition to power but has not yet conceded defeat, alleging massive voter fraud and electoral malpractice. However, state election officials and the media have denied such large-scale fraud.

Election officials in key battleground states have declared Biden the winner, giving him an unofficial 306-232 edge in the Electoral College that determines the outcome of US presidential contests. The Trump campaign has filed multiple lawsuits in several states.

— PTI

Austin selected as defence secretary

Washington, Dec. 8: US President-elect Joe Biden has selected retired Army general Lloyd Austin to run the Pentagon as Secretary of Defence, according to media reports. If confirmed by the Senate, the 67-year-old career military officer would be the first African-American to lead the Department of Defence. The office of the President-elect did not confirm the news, but said Biden will announce additional members of his Cabinet before Christmas, including his nominee for Secretary of Defence and members of his economic and domestic cabinet before the end of this week.

"Retired Gen. Lloyd Austin, once viewed as a long-shot candidate to be President-elect Joe Biden's defence secretary, has been chosen to lead the Pentagon," *Politico* reported on Monday.



Lloyd Austin

Biden's decision to pick Austin comes amidst increasing pressure from the African Americans to name one of them to the top four positions — Secretary of State, Treasury Secretary, Defence Secretary and Attorney General, according to political observers.

Austin was the Commander of the US Central Command from 2013 to 2016.

— PTI

Religion: Both Pak, China worry US

Washington, Dec. 8: The US has designated Pakistan and China among eight other countries that are of particular concern for violation of religious freedom, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has said. Pakistan and China along with Myanmar, Eritrea, Iran, Nigeria, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan were placed in the list for engaging in or tolerating "systematic, ongoing, egregious violations of religious freedom", Pompeo said in a statement on Monday.

The State Department placed the Comoros, Cuba, Nicaragua and Russia on a Special Watch List (SWL) for governments that have engaged in or tolerated "severe violations of religious freedom".

"Religious freedom is an unalienable right, and the bedrock upon which free societies are built and flourish. Today, the United States — a nation founded by those fleeing religious persecution, as

the recent Commission on Unalienable Rights report noted — once again took action to defend those who simply want to exercise this essential freedom," Pompeo said.

The US also designated al-Shabaab, al-Qaida, Boko Haram, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, the Houthis, ISIS, ISIS-Greater Sahara, ISIS-West Africa, Jamaat Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin and the Taliban as 'Entities of Particular Concern'. Pompeo said the US did not renew the prior 'Entity of Particular Concern' designations for al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula and ISIS-Khorasan due to the total loss of territory formerly controlled by these terrorist organisations.

"While these two groups no longer meet the statutory criteria for designation, we will not rest until we have fully eliminated the threat of religious freedom abuses by any violent extremist and terrorist groups," he said.

— PTI

Japan on a flight from Australia, attended by a group of JAXA officials.

At the end of its yearlong journey from asteroid Ryugu, more than 300 million kilometers (190 million miles) from Earth, Hayabusa2 released the capsule Saturday from 2,20,000 kilometers (1,36,700 miles) in space, successfully sending it to land on a targeted area in a sparsely populated desert in Woomera.

Tokyo, Dec. 8: A small capsule containing asteroid soil samples that was dropped from space by Japan's Hayabusa2 spacecraft and landed in the Australian Outback arrived on Tuesday in Tokyo for research into the origin of the solar system and life on Earth.

The Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency said its capsule, tightly sealed and carefully stored in a container box, arrived in

Boris to head to Brussels to break post-Brexit deadlock

Prospect of tariffs on goods unless the UK and EU ratify deal by month-end

London, Dec. 8: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson will fly to Brussels this week for crunch talks to try and break the deadlock with the European Union (EU) over a post-Brexit trade agreement ahead of the December 31 deadline. The clock is ticking for the end of the Brexit transition period and unless the UK and EU are able to thrash out and ratify a deal by the end of this month, Britain will have left the 27-member economic bloc on January 1, 2021, with the prospect of tariffs on goods as both sides trade on World Trade Organisation (WTO) terms.

"I'm always hopeful, but I've got to be honest, the situation at the moment is very tricky," Johnson told the BBC. But he added that he remained optimistic and hopes for "the power of sweet reason". "We will see where we get to in the course of the next two days, but I think the UK government's position is that we are willing to engage at any level, political or otherwise, we are willing to try anything. But there are just limits beyond which no sensible, independent government or country could go and people have got to understand that," he said.

Johnson and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen issued a joint statement on Monday night after their respective Chief Negotiators, Michel Barnier and Lord David Frost, failed to



Pedestrians cross Westminster Bridge as fog envelopes the Elizabeth Tower, commonly known by the name of the bell, "Big Ben", and the Palace of Westminster, home to the Houses of Parliament, in London on Tuesday as talks on a trade deal between the EU and the UK enter a critical stage.

— AFP

overcome the final hurdles in three key areas of divergence. "We agreed that the conditions for finalising an agreement are not there due to the remaining significant differences on three critical issues: level playing field, governance and fisheries," the joint statement noted.

"We asked our Chief Negotiators and their teams to prepare an overview of the remaining differences

to be discussed in a physical meeting in Brussels in the coming days," it said. The two leaders spent over an hour talking on the phone on Monday night but failed to resolve any of the key remaining differences. While no date has been set for their face-to-face meeting, it is expected either before or after a scheduled EU summit on Thursday. Barnier and Frost, meanwhile, will

meet on Tuesday to draw up a list of the outstanding differences.

The UK and EU have been trading for years without paying tariffs or conducting customs or border checks, which is set to change at the end of the Brexit transition period unless they agree a new pact. The major stumbling blocks remain a set of shared rules and standards, or level playing

field, to ensure businesses in one country do not have an unfair advantage over their competitors.

Brussels wants the UK to follow EU rules closely in areas such as workers' rights and environmental regulations, but Britain says the basis of the Brexit vote in the June 2016 referendum was to break free from following common rules and reassert national sovereignty.

— PTI

Georgia again certifies Presidential election results showing Biden won Support Democrats: Hindu-Americans

Atlanta, Dec. 8: Georgia's top elections official on Monday recertified the state's election results after a recount requested by President Donald Trump confirmed once again that Democrat Joe Biden won the state, and the governor then recertified the state's 16 presidential electors.

"We have now counted legally cast ballots three times, and the results remain unchanged," Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger said during a news conference at the state Capitol before the results were recertified. Georgia law allows a losing candidate to request a recount if the margin between the candidates is within 0.5 per cent. Trump requested the recount after the results certified by Raffensperger showed that Biden led by a margin of

12,670 votes, or 0.25 per cent of the roughly 5 million ballots cast.

During the recount, which was done using scanners that read and tally the votes, there were discrepancies in vote totals in some counties. Since the results of a recount become the official results, those counties had to recertify their results. Once that was done the secretary of state recertified the statewide results.

Kemp then recertified the state's slate of 16 presidential electors — all prominent Democrats — as required by state law, spokesman Cody Hall said. The recertification of results comes before the federal "safe harbor" deadline on Tuesday — electors named by that date in accordance with state law cannot be disregarded by Congress.

— AP

Washington, Dec. 8: President-elect Joe Biden's Hindu-American and South Asian supporters are ramping up efforts to convince Georgia's rapidly-growing Hindu population to support Democratic candidates in the January 5 Senate runoffs.

Hindu-Americans' population in Georgia has grown significantly in recent years, with approximately 100,000 living in the state, including naturalised citizens originally from India, Bhutan, Nepal, Guyana, and Trinidad and Tobago.

While most of them live in the Atlanta metropolitan area, sizable numbers

are also living in Savannah, Macon, and in the southwestern part of the state. "Hindus in Georgia should ensure that their Senators will fight for inclusion and pluralism, and not those who seek to return the state to its darker days of racism and xenophobia," said Hindu Americans for Biden co-chair Sohini Sircar.

The two Democratic candidates are Jon Ossoff and Rev. Raphael Warnock. Hindu-Americans can seize the moment and help to bring about a more pluralistic vision for the country and a resounding defeat of Trumpism.

— PTI

Indian-origin Raj Chouhan elected Speaker of Canada's British Columbia

Toronto, Dec. 8: Raj Chouhan, an Indian-origin legislator in Canada, has been elected as the Speaker of the British Columbia Legislative Assembly, becoming first from the community to occupy the post, according to a media report.

Chouhan, who has represented Burnaby-Edmonds constituency five times in the British Columbia legislature, has served as Deputy Speaker in the previous government and would be replacing retiring

Darryl Plecas as Speaker, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) News reported on Monday.

Punjab-born Chouhan immigrated to Canada in 1973 and started working on a farm. He was greatly impacted by the plight of other immigrant workers and the wide disparity between the rich and poor in a prosperous country.

This contributed to his ongoing advocacy for community and social justice for workers, the report said, citing Chouhan's biography. "I am truly grateful to have been entrusted with this role by all members of the legislative assembly," Chouhan was quoted as saying in the report.

"As a proud member of the Indo-Canadian community, I am tremendously proud of this historic occasion and honoured to continue my public service in this new role," he added. Chouhan's selection was the first order of business Monday as British Columbia politicians returned to the legislature for a brief session after the October election that gave the New Democratic Party (NDP) a majority government.

Former NDP cabinet minister Moe Sihota called Chouhan's selection "a historic day for British Columbia." "We are in awe of Raj's accomplishment and what it says about ethnic communities in general, and the degree with which we are beginning to take our place in society," Sihota said on CBC Radio.

— PTI

They are particularly interested in studying organic materials in the samples to learn about

how they were distributed in the solar system and if or how they are related to life on Earth.

The samples will be treated in a clean room at the Sagami-hara facility to avoid any external impact, and the work is expected to start soon. After initial studies and curation in Japan, some of the samples will be shared with NASA and other international scientists for further study.

— AP

BORDER: CHINA SAYS WORKING WITH INDIA

Beijing, Dec. 8: China and India are working for further de-escalation of the border standoff in eastern Ladakh and both sides will have consultations to determine specific arrangements for the next round of talks, a senior Chinese official said on Tuesday.

The Chinese and Indian armies held the 8th round of Corps Commander-level meeting on November 6 to resolve the border standoff that erupted in early May.

Asked when the next round of talks will be held, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying told a media briefing here that "China and India have been in communication through diplomatic and military channels on the border issue and we are working for further de-escalation of the border situation."

"Based on the implementation of current consensus, we will have consultations to determine specific arrangements for further talks," she said.

— PTI

TAIWAN ARMS SALE, HK CURBS: CHINA FLAYS US

Beijing, Dec. 8: China on Tuesday lashed out at the US over new sanctions against Chinese officials and the sale of more military equipment to Taiwan.

The US actions are part of what critics see as an effort by the Trump administration to put in place high-pressure tactics toward Beijing that could make it more difficult for President-elect Joe Biden to steady relations.

The Cabinet's office for Hong Kong affairs expressed "strong outrage and condemnation" over the sanctions levied against 14 members of the standing committee of China's legislature, which passed a sweeping Hong Kong National Security Law earlier this year. Foreign ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying, meanwhile, demanded the US cancel its latest arms sale to Taiwan.

— AP



quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	45,608.51	0.40
Nifty 50	13,392.95	0.28
S&P 500*	3,695.19	0.09
Dollar (₹)	73.52	0.53
Pound Sterling (₹)	98.17	-0.13
Euro (₹)	89.20	0.17
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	49,430▲816	1.65
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	48.87	0.08
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.939	-0.001
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.903	-0.025

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Post-sale, BPCL's LPG business to be in new SBU

Privatisation-bound BPCL's new owner will after three years of takeover get a right to decide on retaining the business of selling subsidised LPG, which in the intervening period will be transferred into a new unit to continue the flow of government subsidy, a top official said. Government subsidy will continue to be given to BPCL customers if the new owner chooses to retain the business after three years, the official said.

Bengal has 6,000 acres in land bank for industry



The West Bengal government has put 6,000 acres of land meant for the industry in the WBIDC land bank for greenfield investment or expansion of existing operations, officials said. The 6,000 acres of developed and underdeveloped industrial land is readily available in the land bank of West Bengal Industrial Development Corp. Paschim Medinipur and Paschim Bardhaman have the highest developed land parcels.

Godrej Properties acquires 18 acres in Bengaluru

Godrej Properties said it has bought an 18-acre land parcel in Bengaluru to develop a housing project. Property consultant Anarock facilitated the deal. In a regulatory filing, Godrej said "it has entered into an outright transaction to purchase a well-located land parcel in Whitefield, Bangalore." Sources said the per acre cost in the Whitefield area would be around Rs 13-15 crore, pegging the deal value at about Rs 250 crore.

Indoco Remedies wins ₹140-crore German tenders

Indoco Remedies said it has won tenders worth Rs 140 crore in Germany for supply of allopurinol tablets, used to treat gout and kidney stones. In a regulatory filing, the firm said the revenue expected from this business is Rs 70 crore per annum. "The supplies to Germany will begin from January 2021 and continue till end of 2022," it said. Aditi Kare Panandikar, MD, said: "This is Indoco's first own label product in Europe."

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■ Firm to use locally developed network and hardware Jio's 5G rollout in second half of '21

New Delhi, Dec. 8: Reliance Industries chairman Mukesh Ambani has urged the government to accelerate the rollout of fifth-generation (5G) telecom services and scrap outdated 2G technology, run mainly by rivals Bharti Airtel Ltd and Vodafone Idea Ltd. "As many as 300 million mobile subscribers in India are still trapped in the 2G era," Ambani said in a speech on Tuesday at the India Mobile Congress. "I assure you that Jio will pioneer the 5G revolution in India in the second half of 2021."

Ambani's push for these policy measures will give an unparalleled edge to Reliance Jio Infocomm Ltd, Ambani's telecom unit which disrupted the sector in 2016 with an intense tariff war and is now the country's top wireless operator.

Being a new network built for data-heavy services, Jio doesn't have 2G wireless phone users, unlike Bharti and Vodafone Idea. Ambani has often said that Jio is ready for 5G while its competitors-indebted and loss-making- will find it harder to keep up with such investments.

Ambani also wants deeper penetration and easier availability of smartphones. "Urgent policy steps are needed to ensure that these underprivileged people have an affordable smartphone," he said on Tuesday.

Reliance Industries had asked local suppliers to



INDIA-SPECIFIC 5G STANDARD AN EXISTENTIAL THREAT: AIRTEL CEO

New Delhi, Dec. 8: The idea to develop India-specific 5G standard is an existential threat and will lock the country out of the global ecosystem, Bharti Airtel CEO Gopal Vittal said on Tuesday.

He also said the development of a separate 5G standard will impact innovation. "There are sometimes talks that India must have its own 5G standard. This is an existential threat which

ramp up production capacity in India to as many as 200 million smartphones over the next two years, Bloomberg reported in September. The group was then in talks with domestic assemblers to make a version of its Jio phone that would run on Google's Android and cost about Rs 4,000.

Ambani also pitched for developing hardware manufacturing in India, saying the nation cannot rely on imports in a critical area.

oped network, hardware and technology components. "Jio's 5G service will be a testimony to your inspiring vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat."

Jio and other service providers such as Bharti Airtel and Vodafone Idea offer 4G services. The country however also has a 2G network that supports only voice calling and text messaging.

"I can say with utmost confidence that 5G will enable India to not only participate in the Fourth Industrial Revolution but also to lead it," he said.

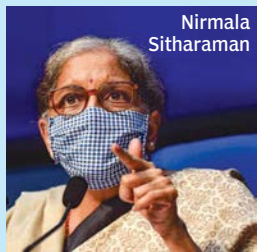
As the digitalisation of the Indian economy and Indian society picks up speed, the demand for digital hardware will grow enormously.

Stating that many leading global companies are coming to India to set up manufacturing facilities, he said the country has developed world-class strengths in chip design.

"I clearly foresee India becoming a major hub for the state-of-the-art semiconductor industry," he said. Jio Platforms, with its family of over 20 start-up partners, has built world-class capabilities in artificial intelligence, cloud computing, big data, machine learning, the internet of things and blockchain.

"We are creating compelling home-grown solutions in education, healthcare, agriculture, infrastructure, financial services and new commerce," he said.

—Agencies



FM: WON'T HOLD BACK SPENDING OVER FISCAL DEFICIT WORRIES

VRISHTI BENIWAL DEC. 8

The country will not worry about missing its budget deficit target as it seeks to step up spending to support the economy, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman said.

The government will ensure that state-owned enterprises continue with capital expenditure, she said in an interview to Bloomberg TV.

"For the present, I'm not going to allow the fiscal deficit number to worry me because there is a need, and a clear need, for me to spend the money," Sitharaman said.

India last month expanded stimulus measures to 15 per cent of the economy to rescue companies and save jobs in an economy clobbered by a sudden lockdown in March to stem the coronavirus pandemic. That could widen the budget gap to 8 per cent of gross domestic product in the year to March, more the double the budgeted 3.5 per cent.

—Bloomberg

Hiring up from lockdown lows

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, DEC. 8

Online job postings have seen significant recovery from their lows during the lockdown and are now getting closer to pre-Covid levels. Employers also anticipate their hiring to return to pre-Covid levels in the next few months.

After posting a growth in the March quarter, job postings had fallen considerably during the lockdown period of April-July, finds a study by Monster.com. Among the different sectors, BPO/ ITES saw a decline of 48 per cent, banking/financial services and insurance, 48 per cent, production and manufacturing, 46 per cent, travel and tourism, 76 per cent and garments/textiles/leather as well as gems & jewellery were down by 49 per cent compared to the March quarter.

However, telecom, advertising, market research, public relations, media & entertainment, printing/packaging and agro-based industries were impacted relatively less.

By August-November, job postings across industries such as import/ export, logistics, courier/ freight/ transportation, retail, BPO/ ITES, garments/textiles/ leather, gems & jewellery improved by 8-15 per cent from the lockdown period.

Some of the sectors have got closer to the pre-Covid levels. Telecom is down by only 8 per cent, advertising, market research & public relations by 11 per cent, media & entertainment 5 per cent and logistics, courier/freight/ transportation by 9 per cent from the March quarter levels. Agro-based industries are almost back to pre-Covid-19 levels.

"We are definitely seeing improvements in the job market, with promising recovery in industries such as logistics, transportation, BPOs, ITES, among others...The recovery in the post-lockdown period has been promising, almost at par with pre-Covid-19 levels. We could hope to end this year with job levels at par with what we started the year with, if not better," said Sekhar Garisa, CEO, Monster.com.

Meanwhile, the ManpowerGroup Employment Outlook Survey found that hiring plans of employers have gradually improved. The survey of 1,518 employers across India found that nearly 65 per cent may return to pre-Covid hiring within the next nine months compared to 44 per cent in the last quarter. Only 10 per cent are now unsure about returning back to normalcy and this was 42 per cent last quarter.



Car sales up 4% in Nov. on festival demand

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, DEC. 8

Passenger vehicle (PV) retail sales in November reported a year-on-year rise of 4.17 per cent to 2,91,001 units, as the Diwali-Dhanteras period led to a spike in vehicle registrations in Asia's third biggest economy, the Federation of Automobile Dealers Associations, or FADA, said on Tuesday.

Fada, which collected vehicle registration data from 1,265 out of the 1,472 regional transport offices (RTOs), said PV sales stood at 2,79,365 units in November 2019.

However, two-wheeler sales dropped 21.4 per cent to 14,13,378 units last

Vehicle registration in India		Nov. 2019: 22,64,947	Nov. 2020: 18,27,990	-19.29
Vehicles	(%)			
Two-wheelers	-21.40	17,98,201	14,13,378	
Three-wheelers	-64.98	69,056	24,185	
Commercial vehicles	-31.22	72,863	50,113	
Private vehicles	4.17	2,79,365	2,91,001	
Tractors	8.47	45,462	49,313	

► Figures do not include data for AP, MP, Telangana and Lakshadweep as they are not in centralised Vahan 4. ► Data gathered from 1,265 out of 1,472 RTOs Source: Federation of Automobile Dealers Association/KBK Infogratics

month compared to 17,98,201 units in Nov. 2019. "While registrations during Navratri were tepid,

people came out in good numbers to purchase their dream vehicles during the Dhanteras-Diwali period,"

Fada president Vinkesh Gulati said.

New launches, especially compact SUVs, continued to show good demand in the PV segment, he pointed out.

The two-wheeler segment continued to witness a shift from 100cc to 125cc and above category due to good harvesting coupled with Dhanteras-Diwali and marriage season, Gulati said.

Commenting on small goods commercial vehicles, he said the segment continued to see good demand with increased level of transportation and last-mile connectivity needs.

With schools and colleges continuing to remain

closed, demand for buses remained weak.

Similarly, the medium and heavy commercial vehicle (M&HCV) segment continued to play spoilsport with excessive capacity, high prices of BS-VI models, finance issues and high fuel price, Gulati noted.

"Fada once again urges the government to increase infrastructure spending, including timely payment to vendors and introduce attractive incentive based scrappage policy to revive the M&HCV segment," he said.

On sales outlook, Gulati said with the festive season coming to a close, demand revival now solely depends on year-end schemes.

Redemptions from equity, hybrid MF schemes soar

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, DEC. 8

Equity mutual funds saw huge redemption in November, with Rs 12,917.36 crore outflow from equity-oriented schemes and Rs 5,249.18 crore from hybrid schemes, monthly data released by industry body Association of Mutual Funds in India (Amfi)

showed.

However, a huge rally in the equity market as well as inflows of around Rs 45,000 crore in debt mutual fund schemes helped net industry assets under management (AUM) to hit the Rs 30-lakh crore mark for the first time.

Kaustubh Belapurkar, director, manager research, Morningstar India said,

"Equity-oriented mutual funds witnessed net outflows for the fifth month in a row, and the pace of net outflow shot up significantly from the previous month." He said November saw a net outflow of Rs 13,140 crore against Rs 2,725 crore in October.

"While gross purchases (new investments) remained steady, the pace of

redemptions picked up as markets made new highs, suggesting investors looked to book some profits given the higher market valuations," he said.

Investors are booking profit in equity mutual funds and investing in the debt mutual fund schemes, according to N. S. Venkatesh, chief executive, Amfi.

Kotak offers fitness, WFH allowances

Mumbai, Dec. 8: Private sector lender Kotak Mahindra Bank on Tuesday said it will be giving a fitness allowance to its employees for their health and wellness.

The employees will have to share their health and fitness goals with the bank to get the monthly fitness allowance, it said.

The bank has also classified employees' roles as full-time or partially remote working ones, and will be giving a 'remote working allowance' as per their role's classification.

Many employees have been working from home either full time or partially since the onset of the pandemic in March.

While working from home in what are sedentary jobs, the employees have to depend on dedicated equipment for connectivity and also take care of their health.

The bank said the two allowances have been introduced to give a boost to employees' health and wellness in the new normal and will be applicable from December 1 onward.

"In a work-from-home environment, it's been seen that work-life balance is getting impacted," said group chief HR officer Sukhjit Pasricha. —PTI

UNDERHAND DEALS Vitol admitted that it was paying bribes via a network of shell companies How MBAs in corruption corner major tenders

ANDY HOFFMAN & JACK FARCHY DEC. 8

For years, the world's largest oil trading firm has maintained that it has "zero tolerance" for corruption. Now Vitol Inc has admitted that it was paying bribes through a network of shell companies and sham contracts.

As recently as July 2020, while publicly repeating those assurances, Vitol was bribing government officials in Ecuador and Mexico.

In Brazil, a Vitol executive delivered cash to traders at Petroleo Brasileiro SA and in exchange for the "gold number"—the price at which Vitol should bid to win tenders from the Brazilian state oil firm.

The revelations, from a deferred prosecution agreement between Vitol Group's US unit and the Department of Justice, are part of Brazil's so-called Carwash bribery scandal, that's described by the Petrobras chief as "an MBA in corruption."

They are a setback for all commodity traders, undermining efforts to cast off a reputation for malfeasance that's dogged the industry since the days of Marc Rich, the pioneer who spent two decades as a fugitive from American justice.

Agreeing to pay just over \$160 million to regulators in the US and Brazil, Vitol admitted to having bribed government officials for more than a decade, between 2005 and 2020,



DOJ documents show.

On one occasion, in early 2013, an executive at Vitol in Brazil emailed his colleague in Houston the exact price that one of the trading house's competitors was bidding for a cargo of high-sulfur diesel. "This is the gold number," he said. "Okay great...we'll take it," replied the trader.

The mechanisms Vitol

used for paying bribes were hardly revolutionary. Vitol SA, the Swiss unit that handles a large portion of the company's trading, sent money to intermediary companies via bank accounts in the US, Curacao, the Cayman Islands, the Bahamas, Portugal and Brazil.

On some occasions, the money was then converted into Brazilian currency by

a "doleiro," a professional money launderer, before being delivered in cash to a Petrobras trader, according to the DOJ documents.

Vitol and the individuals involved in the scheme created fake invoices showing the payments were for consulting services and "market intelligence."

The traders communicated using codenames, including "Batman," "Tiger," "Phil Collins," "Dolphin," "Popeye," and "Beb."

"Shell/offshore companies, fake consulting contracts, fake invoices, sham email accounts - nothing is new under the sun," said George Voloshin, director for corporate intelligence and investigations at Aperio Intelligence. "The tricks of the trade have

changed little from the previous century."

Authorities in the US and Brazil are also investigating Vitol's rivals, Glencore Plc and Trafigura Group Ltd, on similar allegations.

Brazilian prosecutors last week filed a civil lawsuit against Trafigura and several of its top executives, alleging it also paid bribes to Petrobras executives.

Non-governmental organisations and watchdogs say the investigations and Vitol's settlement give credence to their calls for greater regulatory oversight of commodities traders in Switzerland, where Glencore is headquartered and Vitol and Trafigura have major operations. —Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

IOC bans Belarus prez from Games

Lausanne: The IOC suspended the authoritarian president of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, from all Olympic activities including the Tokyo Games next year. Lukashenko, who has led the Belarus Olympic Committee for 23 years, claimed a sixth presidential term after a state election in August widely viewed as rigged in his favour. Belarus has since been in turmoil amid protests and a crack-down by security forces, and the International Olympic Committee has investigated complaints from athletes that they faced intimidation. IOC president Thomas Bach said after a board meeting on Monday that the Belarus Olympic body's current leadership has not appropriately protected Belarus athletes from political discrimination within sports organizations in the country. — AP

Saints extend unbeaten run

Brighton: Southampton extended their unbeaten run against Brighton to eight games and moved into fifth place in the English Premier League with a 2-1 win.

As 2,000 Brighton fans were welcomed back in their home stadium for the first time following a nine-month absence because of Covid-19 pandemic restrictions, Southampton rallied after going a goal behind. Brighton took the lead from the spot in the 25th minute, when Pascal Gross sent goalkeeper Alex McCarthy the wrong way after James Ward-Prowse handled the ball in the area.

Ralph Hasenhuttl's lineup equalised just before halftime after Ward-Prowse made up for his earlier error to pick out Jan Vestergaard, who headed home the corner. — AP

Team Hero up for Dakar rally

Delhi: Close on the heels of an exciting win at the BAJA Portalegre, Hero MotoSports Team Rally, the motorsport team of the world's largest two-wheeler manufacturer Hero MotoCorp, on Tuesday unveiled their plans for the Dakar Rally 2021.

Participating with a full strength three rider team, Hero MotoSports will take on the Dakar 2021 with the 2020 FIM Cross-Country BAJAs World Cup winner — Sebastian Buhler, 2019 Pan Africa Rally winner — Joaquim Rodrigues and ace Indian rider — C.S. Santosh. This will be the second official appearance for Sebastian in Hero colors at the Dakar, while it will be the fifth appearance for both JRod and Santosh.

The riders will take on the Dakar challenge on a new Hero 450 Rally bike, which now features a new 450cc engine.

Para-athletics coach tests +ve

New Delhi: Para-athletics coach Gajender has tested positive for Covid-19 and is under home quarantine, the Sports Authority of India said on Tuesday. Gajender is the coach and husband of para-athlete Simran, who is training at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium here. "Gajender who is the coach as well as husband of Para-athlete Simran training at New Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium tested positive for the coronavirus," SAI said in a release. — PTI

Live on TV

CRICKET

Lanka Premier League: Kandy vs Jaffna from 3 pm on Sony Six; Galle vs Dambulla from 7.30 pm on Sony Ten 2

FOOTBALL

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

Champions League: Midtjylland vs Liverpool from 11.25 pm on Sony Ten 2; Ajax vs Atalanta from 11.25 pm on Sony Ten 1; Real Madrid vs Monchengladbach from 1.30 am (Thursday) on Sony Ten 1; Salzburg vs Atletico Madrid from 1.30 am (Thursday) on Sony Six; Manchester City vs Marseille from 1.30 am (Thursday) on Sony Ten 2; Inter Milan vs Shakhtar Donetsk from 1.30 am (Thursday) on Sony Ten 3

WWE

NXT: Bouts from 6.30 am (Thursday) on Sony Ten 1, HD

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Members of the Indian team pose with the winner's trophy at the end of the third T20 international against Australia at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Tuesday. Indian won the series 2-1.

— AP

Oz trump Kohli & Co

Virat's chancy 85 in vain as Australia win final T20

Sydney, Dec. 8: Australian bowlers held their nerves to come up trumps against the genius of Virat Kohli, stalling an Indian clean-sweep with a 12-run victory in the third and final T20 International here on Tuesday.

While India won the shortest format 2-1, it was overall an even result for the two teams which won three white-ball games each. Tuesday's loss ended the visitors' 10-match winning streak in the format.

Kohli got as many as four reprieves and cashed in well enough to smash his way to 85 off 61 balls but India could only reach as far as 174/7 in their pursuit of 187 in 20 overs.

It was a slash drive off Andrew Tye in the penul-

SCORECARD	
Australia: Matthew Wade lbw b Thakur 80, Aaron Finch c Hardik Pandya b Washington Sundar 0, Steven Smith b Washington Sundar 24, Glenn Maxwell b T. Natarajan 54, Moises Henriques (not out) 5, D'Arcy Short run out (sub Manish Pandey/Rahul) 7, Daniel Sams (not out) 4. Extras (lb-1, w-10, nb-1) 12. Total: (for 5 wks, in 20 Overs) 186.	India: K.L. Rahul c Steven Smith b Maxwell 0, Shikhar Dhawan c Daniel Sams b Swepson 28, Virat Kohli c Daniel Sams b Andrew Tye 85, Sanju Samson c Steven Smith b Swepson 10, Shreyas Iyer lbw b Swepson 0, Hardik Pandya c Finch b Zampa 20, Washington Sundar c Andrew Tye b Abbott 7, Shardul Thakur (not out) 17, Deepak Chahar (not out) 0. Extras (b-1, w-6) 7. Total (for 7 wks, in 20 overs) 174.
FOW: 14-1, 79-2, 169-3, 175-4, 182-5. Bowler: Deepak Chahar 4-0-34-0, Washington Sundar 4-0-34-2, T. Natarajan 4-0-33-1, Yuzvendra Chahal 4-0-41-0, Shardul Thakur 4-0-43-1.	FOW: 0-1, 74-2, 97-3, 100-4, 144-5, 151-6, 164-7. Bowler: Glenn Maxwell 3-0-20-1, S. Abbott 4-0-49-1, Daniel Sams 2-0-29-0, Andrew Tye 4-0-31-1, M. Swepson 4-0-23-3, Adam Zampa 3-0-21-1.

time over which was plucked inches off the ground by Daniel Sams, who compensated for a forgettable day with the ball.

An over before that Hardik Pandya's swagger was checked by Adam Zampa (1/21 in 3 overs). Zampa's leg-break turned

enough to force the 'Baroda Bomber' to hit one against the turn and be caught at short third-man. Once Pandya was gone, there was too much pressure on Kohli and this was one rare occasion when he failed to take the team home.

While he hit four fours

and three sixes, Kohli did lead a charmed life as Steve Smith missed a dolly at deep mid-wicket fence when he gave Maxwell the charge.

Then Sean Abbott failed to get his hands on a tough return catch while another slipped through Tye's palms. During the fag end,

Matthew Wade missed an easy stumping.

The Indian captain scored his third half-century of the tour and an effortless six off Abbott after the completion of the milestone gave much-needed relief to the Indian dug-out. This was after Mitchell Swepson's (3/23) innocuous leg-breaks reduced them to 100 for 4.

Swepson would be the first to admit that he was lucky to dismiss Shikhar Dhawan (28 off 21 balls) with a half-tracker and ever unreliable Sanju Samson (10) with a low full-toss.

The only wicket-taking delivery he bowled was the one that got Shreyas Iyer out for a first-ball duck. — PTI

Kohli hints at missing third warm-up match

Sydney, Dec. 8: India captain Virat Kohli on Tuesday hinted that he might skip the three-day pink-ball warm-up game ahead of the eagerly-awaited Test series against Australia after an intense limited-overs leg of the tour ended with his team winning the T20 series 2-1 here on Tuesday.

The tour game against Australia A is due to begin in three days' time and will be India's final tune-up before the opening day-night Test in Adelaide from December 17.

Kohli will lead the team in the opener of the four-match series, after which he will go back to India for the birth of his first child.

"I will wake up tomorrow and see if I can play the tour match. Playing it on and off is not my thing and I like to play the full game. I will talk to our physio and then

I will wake up tomorrow and see if I can play the tour match. Playing it on and off is not my thing and I like to play the full game. I will talk to our physio and then decide on my participation.

— VIRAT KOHLI
India captain

decide on my participation," Kohli said after the third and final T20 International here, which India lost by 12 runs.

Overall, Kohli was pleased with the way his side fought and found ways to win matches from tough situations.

PANDYA SAYS HE'S HEADING BACK HOME

Swashbuckling India all-rounder Hardik Pandya on Tuesday said he is "heading back home", two days after raising hopes of extending his

stay in Australia for the upcoming Test series following his incredible outing in the limited-overs leg.

Coming off a back surgery and yet to start bowling on a regular basis, Pandya's showing in the just-concluded limited overs leg of the tour gave rise to hopes that he might be considered for Test selection.

And those beliefs were strengthened when the all-rounder, after his match-winning effort on Sunday, said he wouldn't mind staying back if the team management wants.

However, two days later, he confirmed that he is going back to India.

"I think I should head back home and spend some quality time with my family. I haven't seen my child for four months, so I'd like to spend some time with family right now," Pandya said. — PTI

SAHA HITS HALF TON AS VISITORS EKE OUT DRAW

Sydney, Dec. 8: In the form of a sedate half-century, Wriddhiman Saha got himself some invaluable batting practice ahead of the first Test against Australia, but his other famed Indian colleagues failed to bat long as their warm-up game against Australia A concluded in a draw here on Tuesday.

Medium pacer Mark Steketee, who returned impressive figures of 5/37, came in the way of what could have been a few sessions of good batting practice on the third and final day for the touring Indians.

Making up for his first-innings nought, Saha top-scored for the visitors with 54 after facing 100 deliveries at the Drummoyne Oval on the third and final day of the tune-up.

Bracing for the first Test, the seasoned Saha found the fence seven times during his stay in the middle.

Beginning with a deficit of 59 runs, the Indians declared their second innings at 189 for nine and in reply, the Australians,



Wriddhiman Saha

needing 130 in 15 overs to register an outright victory, reached 52 for one when the stumps were drawn for one last time in the game.

India vice-captain Ajinkya Rahane, who is going to lead the team in the absence of Virat Kohli after the first Test, followed up his neat first-innings century with a knock of 28. — PTI

Brief scores: Australia 'A' 306/9 decl. & 52/1 drew with India XI 247/9 decl. & 189/9 decl. (Saha 54*, Steketee 5-37).

Pakistan team released from managed isolation in NZ

Wellington, Dec. 8: The Pakistan cricket squad has been allowed to leave managed isolation to begin their preparation for Twenty20 and Test series against New Zealand.

All members of the squad tested negative on the 12th day of their 14-day stay in isolation and will be allowed to travel to the South Island resort of Queenstown, where they can now train as a group.

The team's exemption to train in smaller groups after the third day in isolation was revoked by New Zealand health authorities when players breached protocols by mingling in corridors and sharing food. Six members of the 53-

All members of the Pakistan squad tested negative on the 12th day of their 14-day stay in isolation and will be allowed to travel to Queenstown.

strong squad tested positive for Covid-19 on arrival and two more subsequently returned positive tests and were moved to the quarantine wing of their hotel.

New Zealand's Ministry of Health reported 52 members of the Pakistan squad will be released from the quarantine facilities in Christchurch on Tuesday. "One case will remain in

the Christchurch quarantine facility until fully recovered," the ministry said in a statement.

That person is reported to have shown symptoms of Covid after arriving in New Zealand from Dubai but has since tested negative.

After extensive testing and completion of their time in managed isolation in Christchurch, the ... medical officer of health is satisfied these people pose a very low risk to the community," the ministry added.

Head coach Misbah-ul-Haq earlier was quoted as saying his Pakistan players had suffered mentally and physically during their time in isolation. — AP

Dance breaks into Olympics

Geneva, Dec. 8: Breakdancing became an official Olympic sport.

The International Olympic Committee's pursuit of urban events to lure a younger audience saw street dance battles officially added to the medal events program at the 2024 Paris Games.

Also confirmed for Paris by the IOC executive board were skateboarding, sport climbing, and surfing.

Those three sports will make their Olympic debuts at the Tokyo Games which were postponed because of the coronavirus pandemic by one year to open on July 23, 2021.

Alongside the additions, the IOC made subtractions: The slate of 329 medal events in Paris is 10 fewer than in Tokyo, including four lost from weightlifting, and the athlete quota in 2024 of 10,500 is around 600 less than next year.

Two sports with troubled governing bodies boxing and weightlifting saw the biggest cuts to the number of athletes they can have in Paris.

Weightlifting should have 120 athletes in Paris, which is less than half of its total at the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Games. The sport could be dropped entirely due to its historic doping problems and IOC concerns over the pace and depth of reform at the International Weightlifting Federation.

The IOC stressed its future priorities for Paris, and beyond to the 2028 Los Angeles Games, by claiming it will hit a long-term target of equal participa-

The IOC's pursuit of urban events to lure a younger audience saw breakdancing officially added to the medal events program at the 2024 Paris Games.

The street dance battles will be called breaking at the Olympics, as it was in the 1970s by hip-hop pioneers in the United States.

tion by men and women athletes, and more urbanised events.

With Paris organisers needing time to prepare their project, the IOC kept to its pre-pandemic schedule to confirm the 2024 sports lineup this month even before some are tested in Tokyo.

Breakdancing will be called breaking at the Olympics, as it was in the 1970s by hip-hop pioneers in the United States.

It was proposed by Paris organisers almost two years ago after positive trials at the 2018 Youth Olympics in Buenos Aires. Breaking passed further stages of approval in 2019 from separate decisions by the IOC board and full membership.

In Paris, breaking has been given a prestige downtown venue, joining sport climbing and 3-on-3 basketball at Place de la Concorde. — AP

MACHADO'S BRACE RESCUES NORTHEAST

Goa, Dec. 8: Bengaluru FC and NorthEast United split the points after playing out a thrilling 2-2 draw at the Fatorda Stadium, here on Tuesday.

Gerard Nus' men took an early lead through a fortuitous strike from Luis Machado (4') but Bengaluru hit back through Juanan (13') and substitute Udanta Singh (70'). Just as the Blues looked set for a win, Machado (78') struck again to ensure his team got a share of the points.

NEUFC got off to the best possible start when they scored in just the fourth minute. Rochharzela cut into the box and unleashed a shot at goal. His strike struck his teammate Machado and Bengaluru goalkeeper Gurpreet Singh Sandhu could only look on in despair as the ball looped in.

But rather than be pegged down by the early goal, Bengaluru responded with a flurry of attacks and eventually found their equaliser, NEUFC's lead lasting just over ten minutes. A Rahul Bheke throw caused all sorts of chaos in the NEUFC box and it fell to Juanan, whose first-time shot found the net.

Bengaluru had a number of chances to take the lead in the first half and their coach Carles Cuadrat would have been rather displeased that they did not do so.

FIFA WORLD CUP 2020

Italy have tough qualifying path

Zurich, Dec. 8: After missing out on the 2018 World Cup, Italy have been handed a challenging path to the 2022 tournament in Qatar.

The four-time world champions were drawn in a qualifying group on Monday with Switzerland, who have made it to the last three World Cups and were the highest-ranked team outside of the top seeds.

Italy's failure in the 2018 playoffs cost FIFA around \$100 million in lost television revenue.

"Only the first-placed teams qualify automatically. I think it will be a fight between us and Switzerland," Italy coach Roberto Mancini said.

Italy will contest the Nations League finals next year, meaning they have only four opponents in Group C: Northern Ireland, Bulgaria and Lithuania.

World Cup-holders France, Belgium and Spain are also vying for UEFA's newest title next year.

France are in Group D with Ukraine, Finland, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kazakhstan.

"I'm not going to jump for joy, one always needs to be humble and show respect to all these teams," France coach Didier Deschamps said.

"Obviously, as a seeded team France will be favourites, but we still need to make sure we do

Italy's failure in the 2018 playoffs had cost FIFA around \$100 million in lost television revenue.

deliver," Deschamps added.

Germany face five opponents in Group J, but only North Macedonia qualified for the European Championship next year, unlike Romania, Iceland, Armenia and Liechtenstein.

"We are going into the race as the big favourites," said Joachim Loew, who is remaining Germany coach despite recent poor results.

The Netherlands, another powerhouse to miss out on the 2018 World Cup, are in Group G with Turkey, Norway, Montenegro, Latvia and Gibraltar.

Group B produced yet more matches between Spain and Sweden, who met in Euro 2020 qualifying and are in the same group at the delayed tournament.

"We are tired of playing against each other," Spain coach Luis Enrique said.

"I don't think them or us are happy about it."

It's also a politically charged group since Kosovo will play Spain, Georgia and Greece, who all don't recognize the former province which declared independence from Serbia in 2008. — AP