

IN BRIEF

WASNIK WARY
OVER CHANGE IN
MP LEADERSHIP

RABINDRA NATH
CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, DEC. 16

All India Congress Committee (AICC) general secretary in-charge of Madhya Pradesh affairs Mukul Wasnik on Wednesday remained non-committal on change of guard in state Congress amid growing demand in the party here to replace Kamal Nath as PCC chief.

Wasnik who arrived here in the morning on a 3-day-visit to the state to review preparations of the party for the upcoming civic body polls, told reporters that the party needed senior leaders for their experience and the young ones for revitalisation of the organisation.

He was replying to a question as to if change in leadership in MP Congress was imminent.

When insisted by reporters to clear the air on the matter, he quipped “Do you expect me to answer all your questions today itself”.

Nath’s recent statement that he needed ‘some rest’ and wanted to stay at home has given birth to speculation that he may pave the way for a new PCC chief.

J&K SOUTHERN
DISTRICTS SEE LOW
VOTER TURNOUT

AGE CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR, DEC. 16

The seventh phase of Jammu and Kashmir’s first ever District Development Council (DDC) elections recorded an overall 57.22 per cent voting on Wednesday. State election commissioner K.K. Sharma said that the polling was by and large peaceful in the 31 constituencies where voting took place. He said Jammu division recorded an average voter turnout of 71.93 per cent with frontier district of Poonch highest 80.12 per cent followed by Reasi district with 76.75 per cent and Udhampur 75.63 per cent voting.

The lowest 58.82 per cent turnout in Jammu division was reported from hilly Doda district. The Kashmir Valley reported 39.52 per cent average voter turnout with Bandipora district recording the highest polling at 70.47 per cent followed by Baramulla with 59.53 per cent and Kupwara district recorded 59.23 per cent polling, he added.

Once again, the southern districts of the Valley — Anantnag, Kulgam, Pulwama and Shopian— considered to be the hotbed of militancy saw majority of voters staying away from the polling.

As per the official statistics, Anantnag recorded 22.46 per cent, Kulgam 17.98 per cent, Pulwama 11.06 per cent and Shopian just 6.55 per cent.



Ex-servicemen join farmers' protest against the new farm laws at Singhu Border in New Delhi on Wednesday.

— PTI

Cabinet clears ₹3,500 crore aid for sugarcane farmers

Move will benefit 5 crore farmers, 5 lakh workers in sugar mills

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 16

The government on Wednesday cleared financial assistance of ₹3,500 crore to sugar mills for the export of 60 lakh tonnes of sweetener during the ongoing marketing year 2020-21 as part of its efforts to help them clear outstanding dues to sugarcane farmers.

Briefing media after the meeting, information and broadcasting minister Prakash Javadekar said the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has approved a subsidy of ₹3,500 crore on exports of 60 lakh tonnes of sweetener and the subsidy amount will directly be given to

● THIS SUBSIDY aims at covering expenses on marketing costs including handling, upgrading and other processing costs and costs of international and internal transport.

farmers.

The dues will be directly credited to their accounts on behalf of sugar mills against the cane price dues, and the subsequent balance, if any, will be credited to mills’ accounts.

Farmers sell their sugarcane to the sugar mills, however, they don’t get their dues from the sugar mill owners as they have surplus sugar stock. To address this concern, the government has facilitated the evacuation of surplus sugar stock. This will enable payment of dues of

the sugarcane farmers.

The CCEA has approved the subsidy at the rate of ₹6 per kg for the current year, much lower than about ₹10.50 per kg in the 2019-20 marketing year keeping in view favourable international prices

According to official sources, the government will incur about ₹3,500 crore for this purpose, and this assistance would be directly credited into farmers’ accounts on behalf of sugar mills against cane price dues and subsequent balance, if any, would be

credited to mill’s account.

The decision will benefit five crore farmers and 5,00,000 workers employed in sugar mills and related ancillary activities. Sugar mills will be able to earn ₹18,000 crore revenue from the export, said Javadekar, who is also Union environment minister.

This subsidy aims at covering expenses on marketing costs including handling, upgrading and other processing costs and costs of international and internal transport and freight charges on the export of up to 60 LMT of sugar limited to Maximum Admissible Export Quota (MAEQ) allocated to sugar mills for the sugar season 2020-21.

Sikh priest ends life in support of stir

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA
NEW DELHI, DEC. 16

A 65-year-old farmer turned saint has committed suicide in protest against new legislation passed by the Centre that many claim will leave agricultural workers seriously out of pocket. Baba Ram Singh, from the village of Singhra in Haryana state, shot himself at the Singhu border — one of the main rallying points — on the outskirts of New Delhi on Wednesday

evening. The deceased reached at the Delhi-Sonapat border at Kundli, last evening. The area is 2 km from the Singhu border, the epicentre of farmers’ protest, which is now on its 21st day. In a note, he said he was sacrificing his life “to express anger and pain against the government’s injustice”.

He left a suicide note explaining that he couldn’t bare to witness the plight of India’s farmers any longer. “I feel the pain of farmers

fighting to ensure their rights... I share their pain because the government is not doing justice to them. To inflict injustice is a sin, but it is also a sin to tolerate injustice. To support farmers, some have returned their awards to the government. I have decided to sacrifice myself,” read the note he left.

“He was rushed to Park Hospital in Panipat and was declared dead on arrival by the doctors,” said Shyam Lal Poonia, the

deputy police commissioner of Sonapat. His body is now being shifted to Karnal, where he lived, the officer added.

“Sant Baba Ram Singh from Karnal died by suicide over the farmers’ condition... My condolences in this moment of grief... Many farmers have sacrificed their lives. The Modi government has crossed all the limits of cruelty. Stop being adamant, take back the laws,” Congress’ Rahul Gandhi tweeted in Hindi.

CPM-led LDF registers big win in local body polls

AGE CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
DEC. 16

The CPM-led ruling Left Democratic Front in Kerala on Wednesday registered a significant victory in local body polls considered as the semifinals ahead of crucial Assembly elections next year.

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan termed the success of ruling front as “peoples victory.”

“It’s a befitting reply from the people of Kerala to the forces who tried to destroy our achievements, central agencies which worked with ulterior motive, communal forces which wanted to weaken the unity of the people and the forces which unleashed lies against the government,” he said.

The Chief Minister said the people irrespective of caste, creed, religion, region extended wholehearted support to LDF.

“The mandate reflects the secular mindset of

RESULTS 2020	TOTAL SEATS	LDF	UDF	BJP	OTH
G. Panchayats	941	514,	377,	22,	28
B. Panchayats	152	108	44	0	
D. Panchayats	14	10,	4,	0	
Municipalities	86	35	45	2	4
Corporations	6	5	1	0	

(G) Grama; (B) Block; (D) District

the people of the state,” he said.

For the LDF, the victory is vital as it comes in the backdrop of serious allegations related to gold smuggling, corruption in mega projects faced by the government and Chief Minister’s office.

Almost all central agencies including CBI, ED, Customs, NIA are camping in the state in connection with the investigations into various cases forcing even Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan to accuse the BJP-led government at the Centre of misusing these agencies to derail the pro-people projects and topple democratically elected state government.

Despite facing such

an adverse political situation, the LDF managed to keep its rural base almost intact winning 514 grama panchayats.

The UDF which was expected to do better this time, ended up with 377 grama panchayats.

However, the UDF maintained its upper hand in municipalities winning 45 of the 86. The LDF won 35 while BJP added one more to its 2015 tally.

Meanwhile, Opposition leader Ramesh Chennithala claimed that the UDF had improved its performance compared to 2015. “LDF cannot claim a big victory as its tally in grama panchayats and municipalities has gone down,” he said.

Icy winds sweep Delhi, cold wave till Friday: IMD

New Delhi, Dec. 16: The national capital recorded a minimum temperature of 5.8 degrees Celsius on Wednesday as cold winds continued to sweep across the city.

The India Meteorological Department has predicted both “cold day” and “cold wave” in parts of Delhi on Thursday and Friday.

The minimum temperature was three notches below normal. The maximum temperature settled at 18.6 degrees Celsius, four notches below normal, it said.

The visibility dropped to 100 metres in the Palam area in the morning due to “dense fog”, it said.

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 IMD had declared a cold wave in Delhi on Tuesday as icy winds blowing from snow-covered western Himalayas brought the minimum temperature down to 4.1 degrees Celsius, the lowest in the city this season so far.

The maximum temperature had also dipped to 18.5 degrees Celsius, more than four notches below normal. According to the IMD, the minimum temperatures is likely to remain around five degrees Celsius till Friday.

— PTI

VHP to launch campaign over Ram temple funds

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 16

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad will embark on a massive door-to-door campaign from Makarsankranti (January 15), seeking donation for the construction of Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, reaching out to 110 million families across the country — “from Kashmir to Kanyakumari and Attock to Cuttack” — and “people of all faiths and sects.”

PM Narendra Modi, President Ram Nath Kovind, vice-president M. Venkaiah Naidu, leaders of various political parties, heads of religious and social organisations, will also be reached out to, with the VHP clarifying that “not because some of these are holding constitutional positions but in their individual capacity, if they are willing”.

Farmers impasse

■ Continued from page 1

an-an, while hearing a batch of petitions seeking the removal of farmers protesting near the Delhi borders, issued a notice to the Centre and posted the matter for hearing on Thursday. Solicitor-general Tushar Mehta told the bench that the government would not do anything against the interests of farmers.

Mr Mehta told the court that the government was and is ready for negotiations. “The difficulty is the farmers’ ‘yes or no’ approach. Different ministers have talked to them, but they turned their chairs back and did not talk.”

“It appears now that some other interests have taken over the farmers’ protests,” the government added, without naming the Opposition parties, whom it has repeatedly accused of inciting the farmers. On the government’s assurance that it would not “do anything against the farmers”, Justice Bobde said: “What’s the point of saying so when it is adversely affecting them?”

“Your negotiations will again fail as they won’t agree. Give us names of the organisations that can be before us... This will soon become a national issue and will have to solved through negotiations,” Justice Bobde added.

The Chief Justice asked the petitioners to make the protesting farmers’ associations party to their petitions and they will have to be heard. “Why farmers associations were not made a party to the case? Without hearing them, how can orders be passed?” he asked, and directed the solicitor-general to provide the names of the associations to the petitioners.

A series of petitions were filed before the Supreme Court, both for and against the protests. One petition wanted the protesters to be removed to a designated place in view of the coronavirus outbreak. Another sought the court’s direction to the Centre to consider the farmers’ demands. It also wants the National Human Rights Commission to investigate if there was any police assault on the farmers. A third petition wants the court to allow the farmers enter Delhi and protest at Jantar Mantar. One of the petitioners argued that proper care like shelter, sanitation and food be provided to the farmers at the borders and wanted an amicable solution to the issue.

Adhikari quits

■ Continued from page 1

“Dictated by a sense of duty and public welfare, I quit the ministry. I now gather that this change of political stance at my end is spurring those in authority to be in political vendetta mode against me. Unleashing police repression by implication in criminal cases on political considerations is certainly an alarming indicator of governance away from the rule of law. Such sinister moves are antithetical to the Constitution.”

He added: “Surely political bonhomie with the ruling party or dispensation cannot be the essential requisite for enjoying liberty and human rights, as is the situation presently. In this premise, and in view of floating inputs to me, I am constrained to seek your intervention so that rule of law is not impaired by such actions. I am sure there will be at your end initiation of appropriate steps so that those concerned in the police and administration desist from implication in political motivated manner.”

Tomorrow: Modi’s Economics

Sangh suffers from Islamophobia but sincerely wants to eradicate caste animosity: Vinay Sitapati

SRIRAM KARRI
HYDERABAD

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was critical of every kind of religious bigotry, says Vinay Sitapati, author of *Jugalbandi*, in the second part of this interview. He defends the RSS and Sangh, saying they are actually keen to eradicate caste differences. Excerpts.



Vinay Sitapati

Q In your background regarding the birth of Hindutva, you emphasise a historical irony, maybe even an anomaly, that Ambedkar supported Partition siding with Jinnah against Gandhi and Congress but for exactly an opposite view, possibly keeping his quote on Islam being a close corporation, its brotherhood not being universal, or that Islam being incompatible with self-government.

How do you then perceive the argument that a Muslim-Dalit coalition, or as Asaduddin Owaisi would say — Jai Bheem, Jai Meem — is the most likely formidable answer to Modi’s Hindutva? How would India’s first law minister, Dr Ambedkar, have responded to acts like CAA or the NRC?

Ambedkar was critical

think of themselves as one. If they did, it would be easy for any Hindu party to win elections. But his math was right — get the Hindus to feel united and win power. In the process, the Muslims are alienated, even demonised. But lower caste Hindus are co-opted, and made partners.

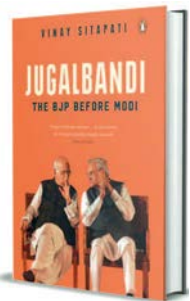
The underlying logic — trying to form coalitions for the sake of a numerical majority — is not unique to the BJP. Every party does it. The Communist party says we will unite the have-nots, workers and farmers and win, while demonising capitalists, traders and businessmen.

All OBC and Dalit parties have this formulation of a majority too. They demonise the upper caste, in a bid to consolidate the SCs, STs and OBCs; to which then you add Muslims.

There are many ways to get to a majority in elections and each ideology is a reflection of a particular calculation to reach it.

Owaisi is trying to fashion his own majority. The BJP is playing the same game, with a different set of blocks. In that sense, every political party pursuing power in a democ-

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW PART - 2



Title: Jugalbandi: The BJP Before Modi
Author: Vinay Sitapati
Category: Non-fiction narrative, Indian politics
Publisher: Penguin Viking
Pages: Hardback / 424
Price: ₹799

racy is therefore majoritarian in that sense. They are all playing a game of stitching together a sustainable majority and advocating and justifying policies to benefit constituents of their groupings.

Q But how viable is Owaisi’s argument of Muslims and Dalits — in argument both victims of upper caste Hindus — to create a sub-altern’s government?

The BJP, at this point of

time, under Narendra Modi has already succeeded in stitching together a sustainable majority, which is across the caste hierarchy of Hindu society. My critique of Owaisi is that he is not a liberal counter-argument against the RSS, merely the other side of the coin.

He says he opposes a ban on beef but not because he believes every individual must have the right to eat what she or he wants. Owaisi says there should be no ban on beef because lots of people eat beef, especially Muslims and Dalits.

The BJP beats him and the likes of him at this game because there is no significant liberal constituency in India, who want to keep the state away from their private choices.

Q A strong critique of RSS is it is a thinly-veiled Brahmanical hegemony?

I don’t agree. If that was the case, why are OBCs, Dalits and Tribals voting for the BJP more than for any other party? Do they not know their own interests? The RSS idea of India has, for over a century, has been articulated by upper-

castes who nonetheless have rejected a Hinduism that is only for upper-castes. In fact, no one wants the abolition of caste differences between Brahmin and Dalits more than the RSS and the BJP. Of course this was initially entirely for electoral reasons — to create a Hindu ‘vote-bank’. But if you wear a mask for a 100 years, that mask becomes your face. And today, with a Dalit President and OBC Prime Minister ruling the country, it is obvious the mask has become the face.

The correct criticism of Hindu nationalism is that they are anti-Muslim.

There is no way to dilute this charge. But don’t group Muslims and lower-castes Hindu together.

That is, in a way, creating another kind of vote-bank politics in India. And that vote-bank has failed.

Q Let us understand your argument correctly. You are saying RSS is anti-Muslim but not anti-Dalit. It means it wants unity between all castes and polarisation only on communal lines? So the allegation they are anti-Dalit and anti-Muslim is half wrong?



IN BRIEF

PATNAIK WRITES TO PM, WANTS HOUSES FOR FANI VICTIMS

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, DEC. 16

Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on Wednesday shot off a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi requesting him to consider his demand for sanctioning of special houses to people affected by cyclone Fani in the state under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G).

In his letter, the Chief Minister said the state has identified, geo-tagged and Aadhaar seeded 7.87 lakh houses in 14 Fani affected districts. The beneficiaries may be brought into the permanent wait list of PMAY (G) and considered for sanction of PMAY (G) special houses.

He said the move will not only provide relief to the affected families, but also ensure safe housing to rural families to withstand natural calamities in the cyclone prone areas.

He further insisted the PM to open a window of Aawaas+ mobile app to geo-tag houses that had been left out from the permanent wait list of PMAY-G in 16 non-Fani affected districts, to accomplish the objective of 'safe housing for all'.

"The state has identified 6.07 lakh eligible households who had been left-out from the permanent wait list of PMAY (G) in 16 non-Fani affected districts," the Chief Minister mentioned in the letter.

Cyclone Fani which hit the Odisha coast on May 3, 2019 had claimed 64 human lives. Besides, it had claimed lives of 37.28 lakh poultry birds, 2,210 large animals like cows and buffaloes and 2488 small animals like sheep and goats.

According to damage, loss and need assessment (DLNA) report prepared by the government, the state needed ₹29,315 crore for restoration work. The infrastructure sectors were the hardest hit and constituted about 42 per cent of the total needs. And the social sectors, which included housing, constituted 36 per cent of the total needs. The report estimated the total damage and loss in the cyclone to be ₹24,176 crore.

CABINET OKAYS NEXT ROUND OF SPECTRUM AUCTION

New Delhi, Dec. 16: The Union cabinet on Wednesday approved the next round of spectrum auction to be held in March in which frequencies of 2,251 megahertz would be sold, communications minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said.

The government will not put on sale spectrum frequencies that have been identified for 5G services. The government will put on auction 2,251 MHz of spectrum in the frequency bands of 700 MHz, 800Mhz, 900 Mhz, 2100 Mhz, 2300 Mhz and 2500 Mhz, Prasad said.

"The notice inviting application shall be issued in this month and by auction will be conducted by March," Prasad said.

The Digital Communications Commission, the apex decision making body of the Department of Telecom, in May had approved the spectrum auction plan worth ₹5.22 lakh crore which included radiowaves for 5G services as well.

According to Reliance Jio, spectrum worth ₹3.92 lakh crore is lying unused with the DoT for auction.

The telecom ministry gets an average revenue share of around 5 per cent as spectrum usage charge from telecom operators which is calculated based on their spectrum holding of companies and 8 per cent as licence fee from the revenue earned by the companies from sale of communication services.

MATCHING | CRIMINALS

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 16

The Union home ministry has initiated an ambitious project to automate the collection, storage and matching of fingerprints for expeditious identification of suspects. This will be part of the Criminal Tracking Network & Systems (CTNS) a database of criminal record being used by different states and courts.

Ministry sources said that this database, the National Automated Fingerprint Identification System

Line of duty



An Indian army soldier patrols near line of control in Poonch district on Wednesday.

— PTI

‘Covaxin well tolerated with no serious adverse events’

Vaccine induced robust binding, neutralised antibody responses

New Delhi, Dec. 16: The interim findings of phase 1 clinical trial of Covid-19 vaccine

Covaxin, indigenously developed by Bharat Biotech in collaboration with the ICMR, showed that it was well tolerated in all dose groups with no serious or adverse events.

The vaccine induced robust binding and neutralising antibody responses which were comparable to those observed in the convalescent serum collected from patients who had recovered from Covid-19, according to the findings which have appeared on medRxiv, a preprint server.

A preprint is a version of a scientific manuscript posted on a public server prior to formal peer review.

One serious adverse event was reported, which was found to be

India caseload rises to 99.32L

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 16

With 26,382 new cases in a day, India's Covid-19 caseload rose to over 99.32 lakh, while the number of people who have recovered from the infection surged to over 94.56 lakh. According to the Union health ministry, the total Coronavirus infection tally climbed to 99,32,547, while the death toll rose to 1,44,096

unrelated to vaccination, the findings showed. It was a double-blind randomised controlled phase 1 clinical trial to evaluate the safety and immunogenicity of Covaxin (BBV152).

The document mentions that BBV152 is stored between 2 degrees

with 387 new fatalities.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 94,56,449, pushing the national recovery rate to 95.21 per cent, while the Covid-19 case fatality rate stands at 1.45 per cent.

The Covid-19 active caseload remained below four lakh for the 10th consecutive day. "The ongoing trend of contraction of India's total

active cases continues.

The active caseload of the country stands at 3,32,002. The share of active cases in the total positive cases has further shrunk to 3.34 per cent. In the last 24 hours, only 26,382 persons were found to be infected in India. In the same period, India also registered 33,813 new recoveries ensuring a net decline of 7,818 cases in the active caseload.

vaccine BBV152", after the first vaccination, local and systemic adverse events were predominantly mild or moderate in severity and resolved rapidly, without any prescribed medication. A similar trend was observed after the second shot was administered.

Rahul walks out of defence committee meet in protest

PAWAN BALI and ASHHAR KHAN
NEW DELHI, DEC. 16

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and two other members of his party on Wednesday walked out of a meeting of the parliamentary committee on defence, alleging that the panel's time was being wasted in discussing armed forces' uniform instead of the crucial issue of national security.

When Mr Gandhi raised the objection and sought to raise the issues of Chinese aggression and better equipping the soldiers at the border in Ladakh, he was disallowed to speak by the panel chairman Jual Oram (BJP).

After this the Congress leader decided to walk out. Congress members Rajeev Satav and Revanth Reddy also left the meeting along with Mr Gandhi.



Rahul Gandhi

Congress sources said that during the meeting Indian Armed forces' dress style was being discussed in the presence of the Chief of Defence Staff Gen. Bipin Rawat, wherein two BJP MPs said that let American military dress style be adopted for Indian Army, Navy and Air Force. However, the former Congress chief said the Army, Navy and the Air Force should decide what the colour of their uniform should be, and not the politicians.

"The politicians should have no business to tell the Army, Navy or

Air Force which uniform to wear and it is neither their jurisdiction nor domain and should not belittle them or insult them.

"The political leadership should instead provide hot tents, boots and equip the soldiers who are braving out at the border and are fighting the Chinese in Ladakh," Mr Gandhi was quoted as saying at the meeting.

He pointed out that each armed forces, their units and uniform have a glorious past and history. He said that political leadership should instead be discussing the issues of national security and how to strengthen the forces who are fighting the Chinese in Ladakh, said Congress sources.

The military stand-off between India and China has entered in its eighth month with no agreement on disengagement in sight.

JEE MAINS 2021 FIRST ROUND FROM FEB. 23

New Delhi, Dec. 16: The JEE-Mains exam for admission to engineering colleges will be held four times a year starting 2021 to offer flexibility to students and a chance to improve their scores, Union education minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank announced on Wednesday.

The first edition of the exam will be held from February 23 to 26, followed by rounds in March, April and May.

"We have examined the suggestions received from students and various quarters and it has been decided that JEE-Mains will be held in four sessions in February, March, April and May," Mr Nishank said.

"The first session will be held from February 23-26 and the results will be declared within five days from the last date of exams," he said. — PTI

‘Trust between India, China evaporated post LAC clash’

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, DEC. 16

The Galwan clash has vaporised the mutual trust between the Indian Army and People's Liberation Army (PLA), which would consume time to rebuild for stability despite no intrusions or face-off in the Eastern Command in wake of the Ladakh stand-off.

This was underlined by Eastern Command General Officer Commanding-in-Chief Lt. Gen. Anil Chauhan on Wednesday after the wreath-laying ceremony on the occasion of Vijay Diwas at Fort William, eastern command headquarters.

In national capital, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other Army official paid tributes at the National War Memorial on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the 1971 India-Pakistan war that led to the creation of Bangladesh.

Lt. Gen. Chauhanalso said there have been no intru-



Lt. Gen. Anil Chauhan

sions or major face-offs in the area of responsibility of the Eastern Command since the Ladakh stand-off.

"Post the Galwan incident, the bonhomie and the mutual trust on the Line of Actual Control between us and the PLA evaporated and it will take time for things to stabilise and rebuild it."

"The PLA and Indian Army had undertaken some precautionary deployments during the Ladakh crisis which is now witnessing a gradual deduction in the eastern sector. However, the Indian Army is fully prepared to beat any challenge during the winter. The PLA

had carried out a rapid infrastructure development activities, including development of defence opposite Sikkim and Kuming in Arunachal Pradesh. We are taking reciprocal actions and prepared to meet emerging challenges," Lt. Gen. Chauhan added.

On the question of the PLA's abduction of five Indian youth in Arunachal recently, the Eastern Army Commander said, "The deployment of LAC, especially in Arunachal, is a bit different from the eyeball to eyeball kind of contact that we have with Pakistan on the LoC. So there are some places where there is no deployment and those areas are only frequented. So there is no such deployment along the LAC. McMahon Line whenever it was made was based on a very inaccurate kind of survey and hence the correct alignment of the LAC is disputed in this particular area. So inadvertent crossing by any civilian is highly possible in this area."

BJP TARGETS MAHA GOVT OVER METRO CAR SHED FIASCO

BHAGWAN PARAB | DC
MUMBAI, DEC. 16

Following the high court stay on Metro car shed work at Kanjurmarg, the BJP has targeted the MVA government and environment minister Aaditya Thackeray in particular, saying the government's decision to move the car shed to salt pan land was doomed from the beginning and it was taken only to satisfy "ego". However, Aaditya has insisted that Kanjurmarg was the best available place for Metro car shed.

Calling the HC decision 'a slap on the face of the MVA government,' BJP leader and former chief minister Devendra Fadnavis urged the government to give up its 'ego' and resume the construction in Aarey colony, which was the original site for the car shed.

Probe into riots at iPhone plant

Bengaluru, Dec. 16:

Investigations into the recent violence at the Wistron's iPhone manufacturing plant are on and a report was likely in a couple of days, Karnataka labour minister Shivaram Hebbar said even as he expressed hope about the factory restarting soon, with the Centre also involved in addressing issues.

Asserting that the government was there to protect the interest of the labourers, the minister, however, said such incidents may have an adverse impact on investment and job creation prospects in the state.

Wistron Corp, a Taiwanese contract manufacturer for Apple, has informed the Taiwan Stock Exchange that the

December 12 violence at the iPhone manufacturing facility at Narsapura in Kolar district, did not cause any material damage to major manufacturing equipment and warehouses.

It put preliminary damage estimates in the range of New Taiwan Dollar 100 to 200 million, which is about ₹52 crore.

Earlier reports had put the estimate at about ₹437 crore. "There is no employees union as yet... There was immaturity on part of the labourers, also the company should have paid attention towards contractors. We will get to know in a couple of days, the exact information on how much amount was paid (towards workers) and when," Hebbar said.

— PTI

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NORTHERN RAILWAY HEADQUARTER DIVISION

PENSION ADALAT

ON 29.12.2020

Through Video Conferencing

Pension Adalat will be held on **29.12.2020 from 11 AM to 1 PM** through video conferencing.

Pensioners retired from HQ's Office of Northern Railway may send their grievances to **Dy.CPO/HQ, Northern Railway, Baroda House** by mail on the below mentioned Email ID.

Settlementhqbh338@gmail.com

Last date of receiving the application is 21.12.2020

PLEASE SEND YOUR APPLICATION BY MAIL ONLY.

The pensioners can also join the Pension Adalat on **29.12.2020 from 11 AM to 1 PM** through the Link given below:

<http://meetingsapac33.webex.com/meet/pr1708354445>

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E-Tender Notice No. P/IEP/20-21/07

Phone No. 0172-2756469

Tender applications are invited for purchase of various items against tender No. 1-14 from the Manufacturers or their sole authorized distributors/agents. The bidders can place their bids as per terms & conditions contained on <https://eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app>.

Sr. No	Equipment/Item Name	Quantity	EMD	Bid submission/ Bid Opening date	Dept. Name	
Non Pre Bid cases						
1	Sudo Scan	01No.	40,000/-	14-01-2021	15-01-2021	Endocrinology
2	Pharmaceutical Kits	As Per technical specification	88,000/-	-do-	-do-	Nuclear Medicine
3	Laser for Maxillofacial Surgery for Head and Neck Surgery	01No.	50,000/-	-do-	-do-	OHSC
4	High Definition Video Bronchoscopy System with image recording	01No.	60,000/-	-do-	-do-	Pediatrics
5	Fibre Optic Nasal Endoscope	01No.	50,000/-	-do-	-do-	Plastic Surgery
6	Dental Software	01No.	30,000/-	16-01-2021	18-01-2021	OHSC
7	Adult advanced cardiac life support (ACLS) Management trainer	01No.	20,000/-	-do-	-do-	Pulmonary Medicine
8	Scaling Unit with Endo Tips	10Nos.	20,000/-	-do-	-do-	OHSC
9	Vision and Stereocoaty testing instruments	As Per technical specification	20,000/-	-do-	-do-	AEC
10	Real Time PCR Consumables	As Per technical specification	23,600/-	-do-	-do-	Biomedical HUB
Pre Bid cases						
11	Fully Automated Individual (ID)NAT Testing System-01 Nos. along with rates of reagents for 75000 tests per years with expected 10% escalation each year and Rates will be frozen for next 10 years	01No.	5,50,000/-	18-01-2021	19-01-2021	BTD
12	Infant Lung Function Testing System	01No.	1,40,000/-	-do-	-do-	Pediatrics
13	Inhaled Nitric Oxide System	01No.	80,000/-	-do-	-do-	Pediatrics
14	Whole Body Cooling System	02 No.	80,000/-	do	do	Pediatrics

Tender List can also be downloaded from website www.pgimer.edu.in and can be applied on website www.eprocure.gov.in. Cost of Tender fee is Rs.200/- (non refundable) which can deposited in the shape of Demand Draft in favour of Director, PGIMER, Chandigarh. Earnest Money Demand Draft must be in the form of FDR. TDR valid for a period of one year from any scheduled bank in the name of the Director, PGIMER, Chandigarh. EMD in any other form will not be accepted. Tender fee and EMD should be submitted at the Procurement Branch (Import) manually by 2:30 PM on or before the date of opening of bid mentioned against respective item. The tenders shall be opened on the next date at 03:00 PM in the presence of the authorized intending tenderers. Tenders not submitted on the prescribed form, not accompanied with Tender fee and valid Earnest Money shall be summarily rejected straightaway.

The undersigned reserves the right to accept or reject any or all the tenders received without assigning any reason thereof. **"PRE-BID CONFERENCE" WITH INTENDING BIDDERS FOR ITEM Sr. No. 11 to 14 shall be held on 23-12-2020 from 03:00 P.M. ONWARDS IN THE P/IEP, OFFICE, PGIMER, CHANDIGARH** The intending bidder are free to join Pre bid Conference through video conference. For more details contact: 0172-2756469 at Procurement Branch (Import).

NOTE 1. The terms and conditions of the original Notice Inviting Tender (NTI) available on PGIMER Website will remain same. However on switching over to e-Tendering on e-Procurement, the bids will be received in electronic form on e-Procurement website and no bid will be received in Physical form.

NOTE 2. If any of the tender opening dates happens to be a holiday in PGIMER, Chandigarh, then the same shall be opened on next full working day.

Additional Terms and Conditions.

1. All the bidders are required to furnish a Certificate as per newly introduced rule 144(Xi) of GFR-2017.

2. As per rule 150 of GFR-2017 all bidders are required to provide their GeM registration Id. Without this Id Supply Order will not be issued even after being L-1.

PROFESSOR IN-CHARGE (EP)

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	46,666.46	0.87
Nifty 50	13,682.70	0.85
\$S&P 500*	3,703.40	0.24
Dollar (₹)	73.58	0.09
Pound Sterling (₹)	99.31	-1.25
Euro (₹)	89.49	0.03
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	49,059.215	0.43
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	50.70	-0.06
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.944	0.003
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.928	0.007

* As of 8:30 PM IST

SBI: GDP to dip only by -7.4%, full recovery in 7 qtrs

India's GDP growth is expected to be at (-) 7.4 per cent in FY21 on better than projected recovery, said a SBI research report, upgrading its earlier forecast of (-) 10.9 per cent. The report also said it would take seven quarters from the fourth quarter of FY21 for GDP to reach the pre-pandemic level in nominal terms. It said the revised estimates are based on SBI 'Now-casting Model' with 41 high frequency indicators.

LPG price raised again by ₹50; ATF costlier by 6.3%



Cooking gas LPG price was increased by Rs 50 per cylinder, the second hike in rate this month following firming of international prices. Also, aviation turbine fuel (ATF) price was raised by a steep 6.3 per cent. Non-subsidised LPG price was increased to Rs 694 per 14.2-kg cylinder from Rs 644 earlier, according to a price notification of state fuel marketing companies. On Dec. 1, price was hiked by a similar Rs 50 per cylinder.

Reforms window for states open till February 15

The finance ministry has extended the deadline till February 15 for states to implement reforms—one-nation one ration card, ease of doing business, urban local body/ utility and power sector reforms—to become eligible for additional borrowing this fiscal. To meet the extra fund requirements of states on account of Covid-19, the Centre in May had decided to raise the states' borrowing limit by 2 per cent of GSDP.

Kia Motors sells 1 L 'connected cars' in India

South Korea's Kia Motors said it has crossed 1 lakh cumulative sales milestone of its 'connected cars' in India within 16 months of starting operations in the country. One out of two Kia cars sold in India is a connected car—equipped with Kia's UVO connect system, an advanced and dynamic solution that seamlessly integrates smartphone or smartwatch with the car and its infotainment system into a single unit, the firm said.

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■ Gov's advice for raising credit-GDP ratio Lend by cash flow, not collateral: Das

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, DEC. 16

Banks should rely less on collateral security for lending and instead focus more on cashflow-based lending to help improve the credit-to-GDP ratio in the country, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) governor Shaktikanta Das said on Wednesday. The credit bureaus and the proposed public credit registry (PCR) are expected to improve the flow of credit as well as credit culture, the apex bank chief added. India is ranked amongst the most financially underpenetrated economies, which suffered from a bad loan problem with industrial credit while also having an underpenetration in last mile credit. As per RBI data, the scheduled commercial banks' credit as a per cent of GDP came down to 50.99 per cent in FY20 from 51.51 per cent in FY19.

On the other hand, the credit-to-GDP ratio in advanced economies and China is in the range of 150 to 200 per cent.

"To improve the credit to GDP ratio, access to credit and cost of credit need to be addressed by lesser reliance on collateral security and greater cash-flow based lending. Credit bureaus and the proposed Public Credit Registry (PCR) framework are expected to improve the flow of credit as well as credit culture," Das said in his keynote address titled the National Strategy on Financial Education 2020-



Shaktikanta Das

25 at the webinar on 'Investing in investor education in India: Priorities for action' organised by the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER).

The views had earlier been put forth by former deputy governor Viral Acharya, who, in July this year, said that an estimated 50 per cent of Indians were employed informally and remained invisible to the banking system despite earning as much as their peers in the formal system. "When they want a loan, the bank denies them credit unless they provide a hard asset collateral, which is not easy to come by if you are the last mile and below the poverty line," Acharya had said.

He said the average Indian could not provide collateral and hence resorted to informal finance which remained infamous for 'extraordinary high rates, onerous terms and inhuman collection policies'. Acharya had cited the example of micro entrepreneurs and said that "if the formal financing system can observe the cash flow patterns of

micro entrepreneurs through other transactions that they are doing, they can start doing cash flow lending and can start serving the unique needs of the customers based on the specific maturity profile and their cash flows."

India, with a large section of population in the working age group, is already the third largest economy in the world in terms of purchasing power parity and is aiming to become a \$5 trillion economy.

"We need to harness the demographic dividend by meeting the aspirations of a large young population. This necessitates creating an enabling environment and infrastructure in the form of education, training and opportunity. Among all the prerequisites for achieving demographic dividend and accelerated growth, quality of human resources, greater formalisation of economy, a higher credit to GDP ratio and greater financial inclusion are the differentiating factors that would elevate our economy to the desired level," Das added.

400 foundries stop work over high raw material price

Coimbatore, Dec. 16: About 400 small and tiny foundries in the district remained silent on Wednesday as part of their indefinite strike to draw the attention of the Centre to the spiralling price of raw materials in the last two months.

The foundries, affiliated to the Coimbatore Tiny and Small Foundry Owners Association (Cosmafam), stopped production indefinitely, resulting in a loss of Rs 30 crore daily, its president Shiva Shanmugakumar said.

The increasing prices would not only affect the foundries but also related industries such as wet grinder, pump & motors, textiles and automobiles, who are the large-scale customers of foundry products, he said.

The price increase ranged from 30 to 55 per cent compared to the pre-lockdown period, he said.

Hoarding by the traders, thus creating artificial scarcity of the materials, also contributed to the price hike, he said, adding the entire industrial sector is seeking the intervention of the Centre to bring down the prices for its survival.

The Coimbatore and Tirupur Medium Industries Association, with nearly 50,000 units, has also given a call to down shutters for a day on Wednesday to express solidarity with striking foundries. Nineteen SME associations had already staged a demonstration here on Tuesday. —PTI

Sebi relaxes norms for CIRP firms, MF sponsors

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, DEC. 16

The Sebi board on Wednesday made changes to the shareholding norms for corporate insolvency resolution process (CIRP) companies, relaxed mutual fund sponsor eligibility criteria and also decided to relax minimum promoter contribution in follow-on public offer.

The regulator said firms that remain listed due to implementation of resolution plan under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code will be required to have at least 5 per cent public shareholding at the time of their admission to deal on a stock exchange.

There is no such minimum requirement now.

Further, such companies will be provided 12 months to achieve public shareholding of 10 per cent from the date shares are admitted for dealings on the stock exchange and 36 months to achieve public



shareholding of 25 per cent. For this, the current timelines are 18 and 36 months, respectively.

The Sebi also decided to relax the profitability criteria for becoming a mutual fund sponsor, aiming to facilitate innovation and expansion in the sector.

The regulator has also decided to segregate and ring-fence assets and liabilities of mutual fund schemes. This is in addition to the existing requirement of segregating bank accounts and securities accounts.

On sponsor eligibility, the Sebi said sponsors that

are not fulfilling the profitability criteria when applying will also be considered eligible to sponsor a fund. "This is subject to having a net-worth of not less than Rs 100 crore for the purpose of contribution towards the net-worth of the Asset Management Company (AMC)."

The net-worth of the AMC has to be maintained till it makes profit for five consecutive years.

The new rules will open the gates for new players to come in as mutual fund-sponsors with high net-worth but no profitability. At present, a sponsor has to show profits in three out of the immediately preceding five years.

The board approved the proposal to do away with the applicability of minimum promoters' contribution and the subsequent lock-in requirements for the issuers making a Further Public Offer of specified securities subject to conditions.

Covid steals 81 mn jobs in Asia-Pac

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, DEC. 16

Covid-19 wiped out some 81 million jobs in the Asia-Pacific while 364-429 million casual workers were affected by the Indian lockdown measures, says the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in a study.

The report estimates that in Asia and the Pacific, the Covid-19 crisis has led to a gap of 81 million jobs compared with the pre-crisis numbers. The regional jobs gap in 2020 is largely

driven by South Asia, where the employment estimate is nearly 50 million jobs below the pre-crisis baseline, corresponding to a 7.4 per cent drop in employment.

"India implemented one of the strictest lockdowns among the large middle-income countries...An estimated 364-429 million workers have been adversely affected by the lockdown measures," the report said.

While India's total Covid-19 fiscal response package as a percentage of GDP

was higher than the median among the Asia-Pacific countries, government support to income or revenue, as part of the Covid-19 policy expenditure, was on the lower side and lesser than countries like Pakistan, China and Australia.

Overall, in Asia-Pacific, labour income is estimated to have declined by 9.9 per cent in the first three quarters of 2020. An additional 22-25.4 million persons could be added to working poor or those living on less than \$1.90 a day.

Market rally continues after consolidation

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, DEC. 16

Sensex and Nifty-50 closed at new all time highs gaining close to one per cent on firm global cues and improving domestic macro-economic data.

The Sensex gained 403.29 points, or 0.87 per cent, to close at a new all-time high of 46,666.46 while the Nifty-50 gained 114.85 points, or 0.85 per cent, to close at 13,682.70.

The market rally was broad based with BSE Mid-cap index gaining 0.87 per cent and Small-cap gaining 0.88 per cent.

"Nifty broke the last four sessions of consolidation with a gap-up and it rallied to almost test the 13,700 mark. The broader markets continued its up move, however the banking space looked tired and it underperformed," said Ruchit Jain, technical & derivatives analyst, Angel Broking.

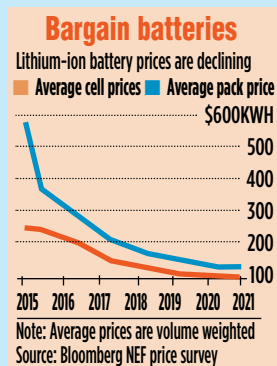
The sectoral gainers included the BSE Realty Index (5.03 per cent) and Consumer Durables (2.39 per cent).

Electric cars to get cheaper as battery costs plunge

DAVID R. BAKER
DEC. 16

Electric vehicles may cost about the same as their fuel-guzzling brethren in just three or four years—and only get cheaper from there, shows a new report from Bloomberg-NEF.

Electric cars and buses have long been saddled with bigger up-front costs than those burning petrol or diesel, due to the cost of batteries. But researchers say that price premium will disappear once battery packs reach \$100 per kilowatt-hour—a tipping point BNEF expects to occur in 2023, according to its Battery Price Survey. Battery costs have



plunged nearly 90 per cent in the last decade, from \$1,100 per kilowatt-hour in 2010 to \$137 this year. Packs built for cars—as opposed to home solar arrays or pieces of the

power grid—cost even less. They now average \$126 per kilowatt-hour.

The survey also found examples of batteries for electric buses in China selling below \$100 per kilowatt-hour, said lead author James Frith. China's average pack price for electric buses is only slightly higher, at \$105.

"Within just a few years we will see the average price in the industry pass this point," said Frith. "What's more, our analysis shows even if prices for raw materials were to return to the highs seen in 2018, it would only delay average prices reaching \$100/kWh by two years." —Bloomberg

WHATSAPP TO HELP BUY 'SACHET-SIZED' HEALTH POLICIES

New Delhi, Dec. 16: WhatsApp on Wednesday said it expects to facilitate the purchase of 'affordable sachet-sized' health insurance through its platform by the end of the year as part of its efforts to provide users in India with

greater access to financial solutions.

The Facebook-owned company noted that its 'Payments' feature is now available to users across the country (having 20 million users) with support from banking partners

State Bank of India, HDFC, ICICI and Axis Bank.

"WhatsApp is deeply committed to India with over 400 million active users, this is our largest market," said WhatsApp India head Abhijit Bose at an event. —PTI

Beware of these pests coming to eat your crops

AGNIESZKA DE SOUSA & MICHAEL HIRTZER
DEC. 16

Climate change is opening up new habitats to old pests, transforming them from a nuisance into a growing menace and placing unprecedented threats on the global food supply. Here are bugs to keep an eye on.

■ **Fall Armyworm**—Spodoptera frugiperda

Found in: Africa, Australia, East and South Asia, and North and South America

Eats: Corn, rice, sorghum, sugar cane, wheat

Native to tropical areas of the Western Hemisphere, this invasive species has spread rapidly, causing "major damage to economically important cultivated grasses," according to CAB International, the non-profit Centre for Agriculture and Biosciences International. The pest infested about 15 per cent of Zambia's corn crop this year. It also contributed to a 4 per cent decline in China's corn harvest—a difference of about 11 million tonnes—sending prices skyrocketing and

forcing the country to open its strategic stockpile, according to the US Department of Agriculture.

■ **Coffee Berry Borer**—Hypothenemus hampei

Found in: Tropical climates—i.e., almost all coffee-producing countries

Eats: Coffee

These tiny beetles make their home inside the fruit of coffee plants, eating them from the inside out. The bug used to stick around lower, warmer elevations, but rising temperatures have coaxed them higher uphill. That's affecting the more expensive arabica coffee varieties, which prefer to grow on the slopes. Controlling the beetle population requires careful, labour-intensive monitoring. And farmers, who are already seeking higher ground because of climate change—coffee plants are particularly sensitive to temperatures—are running out of room.

■ **Desert Locust**—Schistocerca gregaria

Found in: Africa, Asia, and the Middle East; plus a few cases in Europe

Eats: Pretty much anything

This pest has a Biblical appetite. In the



past year it's ravaged crops in regions as far-flung as East Africa and northern India. Both outbreaks were made possible by warmer seas, which generate more hurricanes and typhoons, which in turn create the perfect breeding ground for locusts. Ample rains moisten the soil, helping eggs thrive and encouraging vegetation growth in typically arid regions. As the climate gets more volatile, locust swarms are expected to become both more frequent and more severe.

■ **Soybean Gall**—Midge Ressel-iella maxima

Found in: US Great Plains, creeping into

the Midwest

Eats: Soybeans

This tiny up-and-comer has been appearing in soybean fields in some US states. Its larvae attack the stems of soy plants that are in flower. There's no known effective defence. "Nothing was significant enough to suppress the larvae," says Erin Hodgson, associate professor of entomology at Iowa State University. "Plants can experience straight-up death."

■ **Spotted wing drosophila**—Drosophila suzukii (Matsumura)

Found in: Asia primarily, but increasingly in the Americas and Europe

Eats: Summer fruits, such as berries, cherries, and grapes

The flying pest's small larvae feast on soft, expensive fruit varieties, rendering them non-saleable and costing farmers millions of dollars. Although it showed up in North America only a decade ago, it's already wreaked havoc on US berry farmers. Rising temperatures will expand the drosophila's potential habitat, allowing it to push farther north each year.

—Bloomberg

THE ASIAN AGE

17 DECEMBER 2020

Facts don't back PM's theory on farmers' stir

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speech in Kutch on Tuesday, in which he spoke of "a great conspiracy to mislead farmers, in and around Delhi", can be said to mark a new stage in the agitation of farmers of North India, in the vanguard of which are Punjab farmers. This stage bespeaks the hardening of the government's stand against the farmers knocking on the doors of the nation's capital for the past 20 days.

After six rounds of dialogue between the government and the farmers' representatives, including a session with Union home minister Amit Shah, the food growers maintain their opposition to the three controversial agri-laws, passed in controversial circumstances last September. The government is just as adamant and will not agree to their repeal, the farmers' key demand. The farmers have rejected the government's implied offer of amending specific sections of the three laws if farmers can pinpoint them.

In Parliament, and in various statements made by the government's representatives outside the legislature, not excluding the remarks of the PM at various forums, the government is yet to cogently explain to the need for the laws that have created a storm, other than to say that these represent much-needed "reform" that will benefit farmers and the farm sector, and will not leave them worse off. The agriculturists are not persuaded, however. The government's bland assurances have done nothing to reassure farmers that the real reason for these "reforms" was to not to benefit big industry, rather than the owners of farmland.

Ironically, even as Mr Modi attacked the Opposition parties — and when he does that he specifically means the Congress since he says "they" were unable to bring reforms when in power — the real attack on the government has come from Akali Dal president Sukhbir Badal on the same day that the PM was accusing the Opposition of misleading farmers and playing politics in the guise of backing farmers. The Akalis depend principally on the votes of agriculturists.

Such was the force of the Dal's opposition to the three farm laws that its announcement of leaving the Narendra Modi government came on the floor of the Lok Sabha, in the course of the discussion on the controversial farm laws. Subsequently, the Punjab party left the ruling alliance. Therefore, the notion of innocent farmers being "misled" by the Opposition — assiduously propagated by the government and the BJP — does not square with the facts. In the first instance, this opposition to the agri-laws came from the Akali Dal when it was a member of the ruling NDA until three months ago. This was clearly a case of opposition from within.

In a newspaper interview, Union agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar said the BJP under Mr Modi came back with an increased majority in 2019 because of the "transformative" policies of demonetisation and GST. The extremely negative economic effects of these policies did not concern him and he equated more seats in Parliament with approval of these policies by the people. In the same way, he noted, the farm laws, that have triggered a tsunami of protest, will also be backed by the electorate.

The farmers seem to be up against the strength of ideology rather than economic logic.

Naked power grab

The fracas in the Karnataka Legislative Council may be par for the course in many a legislature, but it did nothing for the reputation of a House of Elders. The physical pushing and shoving of the deputy chairman, who was the presiding officer at the time and the kind of street language members used against each other made this a new low so far as meetings at the majestic Vidhana Soudha building in Bengaluru goes. The issue does run deeper and the incident only further illustrates the naked power grabbing politics gripping places reserved for people's representatives.

It appears the ruling party BJP was in a tearing hurry to pass the contentious Karnataka Prevention of Slaughter and Preservation of Cattle Bill 2020 and the Congress, afraid of losing the chairmanship and control of the council, was hell bent on stopping the proceedings and the Bill. But the Congress chairman had no right to duck legislative business in adjourning the House on December 10 even as the BJP and JD(S) had no right to forcibly occupy the chair through deputy chairman Dharmegowda to try and pass the Bill.

The Congress' fear of losing the last vestige of power in Karnataka it had enjoyed in its alliance of convenience with the JD(S) till 2019 may have led it to such subterfuge in blocking legislation the BJP is keen to enact. The cattle protection laws are in keeping with BJP's pursuit of Hindutva, to enable which it has been seen enticing the JD(S) into its sphere of influence by dangling the carrot of an alliance that may stretch into the next Assembly elections.

The JD(S) is a past master in the art of gravitating towards political power as evidenced in its supreme H.D. Devegowda once becoming Prime Minister of India in a large coalition with a minuscule number of MPs. Its effort to remain relevant in Karnataka politics today is understandable. However, the least expectation is presiding officers of legislatures will meticulously follow the rule book so as not to deny a majority from having its say, such majority always being on the floor of the House.

THE ASIAN AGE

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Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu



Gymkhana divided on suspension of ex-cop

Due to various complex rules around admission, the Delhi Gymkhana Club has maintained its exclusive "aura" for 107 years. Its governing body is comprised of various retired government and defence officials as well as other private citizens. Its elections are a hotly contested affair, often leading to accusations of use of "illegal" and "unlawful" means between the contestants.

These days the club is roiled by a letter written by 50 members collectively to the club president expressing their outrage at the "arbitrary decision" of the governing body. One of the issues that has riled members is the proposed suspension of a member, Dr Parvez Hayat, a retired IPS officer, for a day and further debarring him from contesting the club elections. Sources say that the member's suspension was the result of allega-

tions levelled against him by vice-admiral B.S. Randhawa. The letter alleged that the club authorities did not observe the rules and due process before taking the decision to suspend the retired IPS officer.

Such controversies are not new. Earlier this year, the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) had ruled that the club was acting in a manner "prejudicial to public interest" and, therefore, must be probed. It said that a five-member central government appointed panel should investigate the affairs of the club, including land usage and its admission policy for members.

UPRIGHT BABU RILES UTTARAKHAND MINISTER

These days your average babu can rarely say "no" to a minister. Blind obedience is what is expected from them, leaving little room for independent decision-making.

But like always, there are exceptions to the rule. An instance from Uttarakhand has recently come to light. There is even a touch of the bizarre about it!

The state's minister of women and child welfare, Rekha Arya, reportedly wrote to the DIG of Dehradun, Arun Mohan Joshi, inquiring about her additional secretary V. Shanmugam, who, she said, was "missing". And since the officer was "incommunicado", she feared he might have been kidnapped!

As it turns out, according to sources, trouble had been brewing between the minister and the IAS officer for some time. Matters came to a head sometime in September when Mr Shanmugam awarded a contract in a tender possibly against the wishes of the minister. Subsequently, he went into a two-day "self-isolation" and did not take any calls from his

office or the minister.

The irate mantri forced chief minister Trivendra Rawat to order an inquiry into the award of the contract, but additional chief secretary Manisha Panwar has reported that the probe did not find any misconduct by Mr Shanmugam. Further, Mr Panwar has stated that the officer had followed due process while awarding the contract and while going on leave. This is where matters rest, for now. It remains to be seen whether the minister will pursue the issue further or let it fly. It would also be interesting to see if the babu manages to hold on to his post or gets transferred elsewhere.

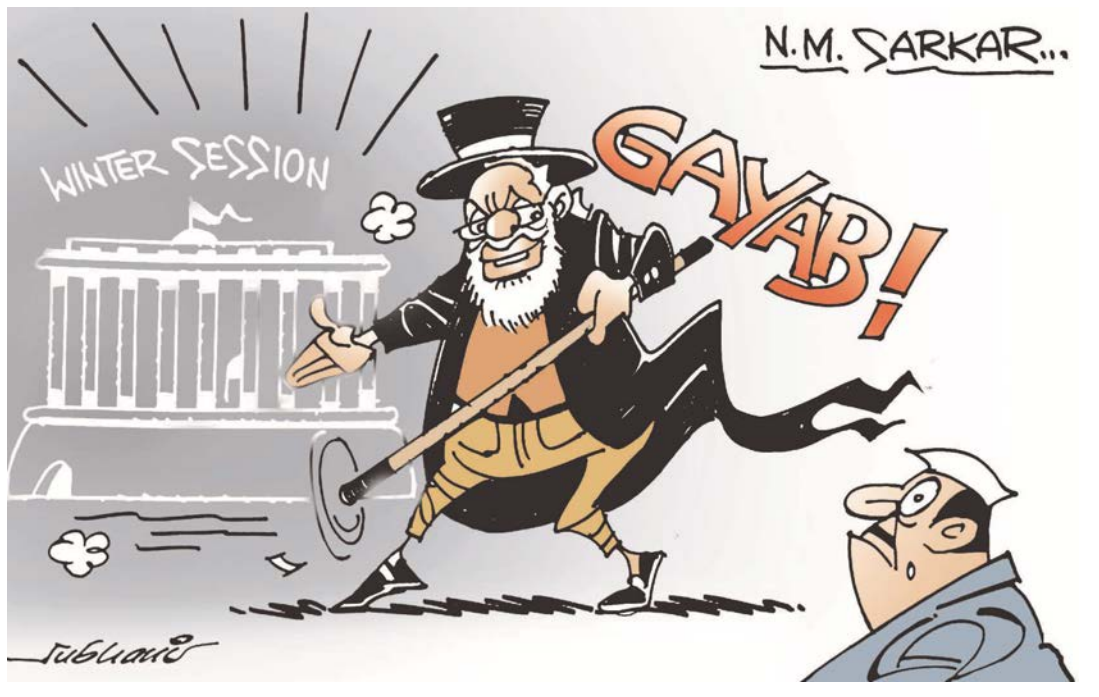
Contrast this with a powerful babu in Delhi who did not vanish after his "gaffe". Immense sweeping powers and other capabilities were exercised in Delhi and his statement vanished instead. What

One issue that has riled up members is the proposed suspension of a member, Dr Parvez Hayat, retired IPS officer, for a day and further debarring of him from the club elections. The member's suspension was the result of allegations levelled against him by vice-admiral B.S. Randhawa.

was reported in the media (of course, the story was promptly withdrawn, though the video exists!) on questioning the credentials of democracy itself led to much speculation whether this was just a gaffe or something more!

Share a babu experience! Follow [@dilipthecherian](https://twitter.com/dilipthecherian) on Twitter. Let's multiply the effect.

Subhani



Child nutrition crisis may derail India's aspirations



Patralekha Chatterjee

Dev 360

It can be tempting to blame every crisis on the Covid-19 pandemic. But quite often, facts get in the way. Many things were bad enough even prior to the onset of the pandemic, that gutted so many lives and livelihoods.

The latest data from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) is a case in point. It shows that several states across the country are doing worse since the last NFHS was conducted in 2015-16. They have reversed course and are showing worsening levels of child malnutrition despite improvements in sanitation and better access to fuel and drinking water.

Arguably, the first set of findings from the NFHS-5, conducted in 2019-20, four years after the last one (2015-16), relates to only 22 states and Union territories and does not include major states like Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh. Data for these states will be released sometime in the middle of next year.

It is also true that not everything in NFHS-5 reeks of gloom.

Immunisation coverage has expanded in many states, the number of households using clean fuel has improved. Ditto with sanitation facilities. The total fertility rate (TFR) across most Indian states is also declining.

All this is good news. But we can't afford to take the eye off the ball and gloss over the heart-breaking reality of growing numbers of stunted and undernourished children in India.

In Maharashtra, the percentage of children in the 6-59 months group who are anaemic has shot up from 53.8 per cent (2015-2016) to 68.9 per cent in 2019-2020. Rural children are more severely affected. In the same period, the percentage of children under five who are stunted (low height for age) has gone up from

34.4 to 35.2.

What leapt out at me was the data from Mumbai. Children in the 6-50 months group who are anaemic has risen from 65.7 per cent in 2015-2016 to 72.8 per cent in 2019-2020.

Or take Gujarat, a relatively affluent state. The percentage of children under five who are stunted has risen from 38.5 (2015-2016) to 39.0 (2019-2020). In the same period, children under five who are severely wasted has gone up from 9.5 per cent to 10.6 per cent and those between 6-59 months who are anaemic has shot up from 62.6 per cent in 2015-2016 to 79.7 per cent in 2019-2020.

Nutrition experts point out that out of 22 states and Union territories for which we have data, there is a surge in severe acute malnutrition cases in 16 states/UTs, compared to NFHS-4 conducted in 2015-2016.

Even Kerala, that usually leads in social policies, has problems: anaemia is growing among children.

The underfed hugely outnumber the overfed but alongside the crisis of child under-nutrition, we are also seeing a rise in child obesity, perhaps due to more junk food consumption.

All this is exacerbated by widespread under-nutrition and anaemia among women, including those who are pregnant.

What is going wrong and what has changed between 2015-2016 and 2019-2020?

"We don't have granular data for all states and Union territories as yet but the first lot of data from NFHS-5 points to worsening malnutrition and anaemia in several states. From the data that's available, it's hard to pinpoint why malnutrition worsened even before the pandemic set in, but it's important to note that the period when it worsened coincides with the time India suf-

fered economic shocks. We had demonetisation in 2016, which gutted much of the informal sector which dominates the Indian economy. We don't know to what extent those who took a severe hit during demonetisation have recovered. The GST rollout also affected small businesses and rural wages have stagnated," says Dipa Sinha, assistant professor of economics at New Delhi's Ambedkar University and a key figure in India's Right to Food Campaign.

"The other unknown for which we don't have much data is the impact of the weakening of the social protection framework with inadequate budgetary support and no expansion in response to the economic slowdown which could have affected affordability of diets. PDS (public distribution system) provides only rice and wheat in most states. Some states also give pulses and oil, but many poorer states don't," she adds.

Some experts point out that the work of the Narendra Modi government's flagship National Nutrition Mission and Anaemia Mukh Bharat (AMB) campaign, with an ambitious target of reducing anaemia by three percentage points per annum till 2022, are not really captured in the NFHS-5 data because they really got going only recently.

Even if that is so, it is vital to review what is actually happening on the ground. There are enough indications that all is not well with many programmes. Take the mid-day meals, for example — the Central government's flagship school-based feeding programme aimed at improving the nutritional status of students and promoting the universal

isation of elementary education.

According to the Accountability Initiative of the Centre of Policy Research, only 14 states in India could utilise 100 per cent of the funds allocated to them for mid-day meals for the year 2018-2019, and states like Telangana, Assam and Goa used only two-third of the money allocated to them under this head. Gujarat and Haryana used only 40 per cent of the funds allocated to them for mid-day meals. All this goes to show that there is a lot that is dysfunctional on the ground.

India's child nutrition crisis should give policy-makers sleepless nights.

Stunting is a marker of chronic or recurrent undernutrition, usually associated with poor socioeconomic conditions, poor maternal health and nutrition, frequent illness, and/or inappropriate infant and young child feeding and care in early life.

Children who suffer from stunting may not only not grow to their full height, there is also a risk that they would not develop their full cognitive potential.

Experts say mothers who suffer from under-nutrition are more likely to have children who suffer from stunting or wasting, perpetuating the cycle of poverty and undernutrition. Anaemia is also hugely debilitating. It can affect children's cognitive performance and physical growth. In women, anaemia can adversely impact the capacity to work and can lead to poor pregnancy outcomes.

Children are India's future, on whom the country's dreams rest, but they are paying the price of adult bungling and apathy. We can't afford that. Nor can we afford diversions like the needless hullabaloo over serving boiled eggs, a source of protein, to poor children in government programmes.

The writer focuses on development issues in India and emerging economies. She can be reached at patralekha.chatterjee@gmail.com

LETTERS

ONE-OFF SHOWDOWN

Thank you, Mr S. Kamat, for the letter, "Nadda wrong" (December 15). Violence in any form is undesirable. But if the attack on a convoy becomes the "ultimate proof of lawlessness" in West Bengal; then I wonder what certificate needs to be given to Uttar Pradesh where Bulandshahr inspector Subodh Kumar Singh got murdered by alleged lovers of "gomata". There, dalits are killed for growing a moustache or riding a mare to their wedding. What of the harassment of a family of dalit men in Una, Gujarat? Does it show the presence of impeccable law and order in that state?

Kajal Chatterjee
Kolkata

TOO EARLY TO TELL

THE PRESIDENTIAL YEARS, the explosive third and final part of former President Mukherjee's memoir, has risen his household in two, with his son, Abhijit, asking for publishers to pulp it, because it allegedly contains unsavoury facts and observations about former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Congress interim president Sonia Gandhi and daughter Sharmistha determined to carry out her father's wishes by publishing it. Too bad the fight is being fought in public, but will it work in favour of Sharmistha? It is too early to tell.

Bhagwan Thadani
Mumbai

LEFT WELL-PLACED

THE RESULT OF KERALA civic elections, which are being seen as a semi-final to next year's Assembly polls in the state, show a clear advantage for the ruling CPM-led LDF in most of the rural and urban local bodies leaving the BJP and Congress behind. LDF was headed for a "resounding" victory.

Sankar Paul
Chakdaha, West Bengal

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

SHORT TAKES

ANIME STUDIO ARSON: JAPAN DETAINS MAN

Tokyo, Dec. 16: Japanese prosecutors on Wednesday charged a man with murder over the 2019 arson attack on Kyoto Animation that killed 36 people, the country's deadliest violent crime in decades.

Shinji Aoba, 42, was detained in the aftermath of the July attack, but has been under constant medical supervision since then after sustaining severe burns in the incident.

The charges include murder, attempted murder, arson, trespass and breach of the arms-control law, the Kyoto prosecutor's office said, without giving further details.

More than 30 people were also injured in the attack, in which Aoba is accused of breaking into the studio's building, spreading gasoline around the ground floor and setting it alight.

TRYING TO FLEE: CHINA INDICTS 10 HK RESIDENTS

Hong Kong, Dec. 16: Chinese prosecutors on Wednesday announced the indictment of 10 people from Hong Kong over an attempt to flee the city amid a crackdown on opposition political activity.

The Yantian district prosecutor's office in the city of Shenzhen just across the border from Hong Kong said on its microblog that 10 of the suspects were charged with illegally crossing the border while two were also charged with organising the attempted journey.

Two others are minors and a decision on how to handle their cases will be made at a later time, the office said. Relatives of the 12 say they have been prevented from hiring their own lawyers and that the accusations against them are politically motivated. The 12 were arrested at sea in August while they were apparently attempting to flee to Taiwan after a tough national security law took effect in Hong Kong.

FIJIANS TOLD TO SEEK SHELTER FROM CYCLONE

Suva, Dec. 16: Fijians living in the path of an approaching super cyclone were told to hunker down at home or head to emergency shelters immediately on Wednesday, as authorities warned of the storm's potential to uproot buildings and cause mass destruction.

The Fiji Meteorological Service said Cyclone Yasa had intensified into a top-of-the-scale category five storm, with gusts of up to 280 kilometres per hour (174 miles per hour).

It is on track to hit Fiji late Thursday and the National Disaster Management Office said around two-thirds of the island nation's population of 900,000 were in its path.

National Disaster Management Office director Vasiti Soko said anyone who doubted their home's structural integrity should prioritise survival over protecting their property and flee right away.

"If you need to move to an evacuation centre, we are pleading that you move before it gets dark."

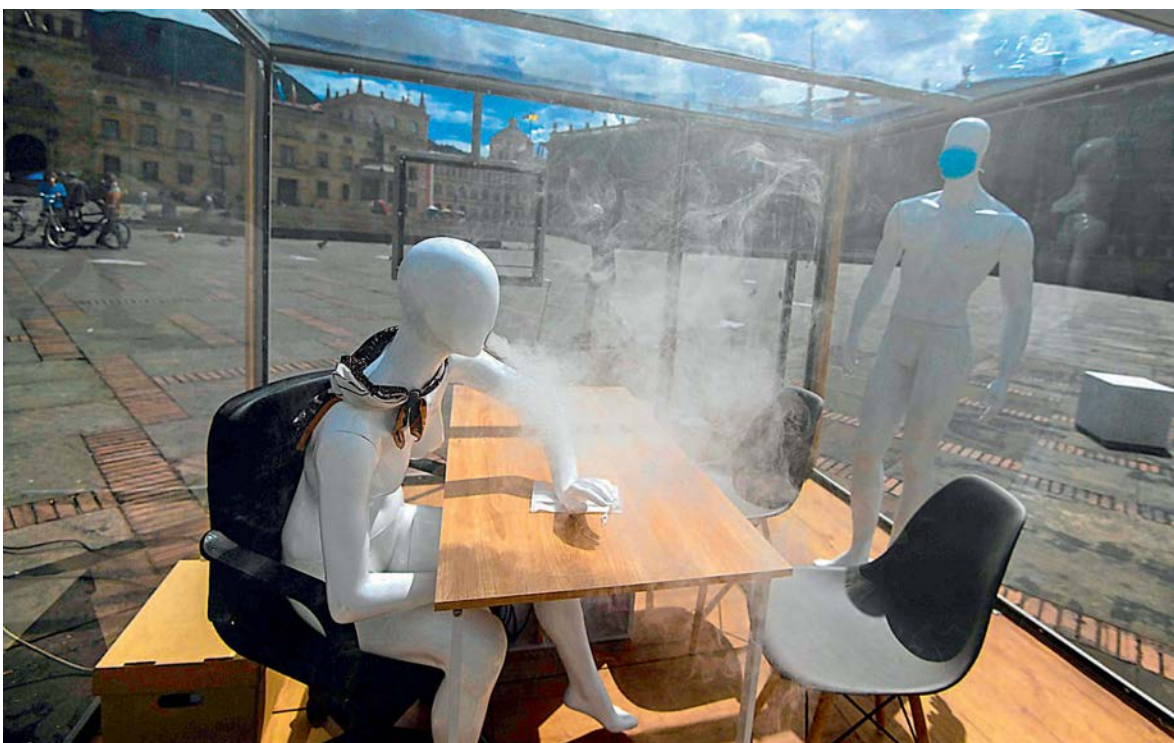
PIG GENETICALLY MODIFIED FOR FOOD GETS NOD

New York, Dec. 16: US regulators have approved a genetically modified pig for food and medical products, making it the second such animal to get the green light for human consumption.

But the company behind it says there are no imminent plans to sell it for meat. The pig is genetically engineered to eliminate the presence of alpha-gal, a type of sugar found in many mammals. The sugar makes its way into many products — including medications, cosmetics and food — and can cause allergic reactions in some people.

The main goal of the company behind the pig, United Therapeutics Corp., is to develop medical products, such as blood thinners, that won't set off such reactions, said its spokesman Dewey Steadman. Eventually, the Silver Spring, Maryland-based firm hopes to develop a way for the pig's organs to be transplanted into people.

The pig, called GalSafe, also has commercial potential as food, but Steadman said the company doesn't know when it might be able to secure an agreement with a meat producer to process and sell it.



Smoke comes out of a mannequin's mouth to show how bacteria can spread in the air during a campaign to raise awareness for the prevention of the Coronavirus, in Bogota on Tuesday. — AFP

Many European nations impose pre-Christmas virus restrictions

Berlin, Dec. 16: Several European countries on Wednesday imposed tighter Coronavirus restrictions ahead of Christmas, as the United States reported another record number of new infections.

Hopes for an end to the pandemic were boosted by positive assessments of the Moderna Covid-19 vaccine, but a study warned that at least a fifth of the world's population in poorer nations may not have access to vaccines until 2022.

With the virus resurgent in Europe, Germany closed non-essential shops and schools, swathes of England came under tighter curbs, and Denmark extended its restrictions.

"It's very good that we're closing the shops, it's for our health. We can't wait for things to fall apart," said shopper Jurgen in Berlin, where people were rushing to finish their Christmas purchases before the shutdown.

Germany had coped relatively well with the first wave in the spring, but it has struggled to contain a resurgence in recent months and its health minister said it wanted the European Union to approve the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine "before Christmas".

Calls have been growing for the EU health regulator to speed up its vaccines decision process, with the bloc lagging behind a growing number of nations that have authorised the drug.

Britain has already started using it, but high infection numbers forced London on Wednesday to join large parts of central and northern England under tough, economically painful restrictions.

Pubs, bars, restaurants and other hospitality sites will close, apart from take-aways, as will theatres and other entertainment venues. "The hospitality business needs this week, and it's devastating. It is devastatingly awful," said Lesley Lewis, owner of The French House, a London pub.

"But if this is what it takes to save lives, that's what we have to do," The Netherlands, France and Turkey have also announced restrictions to be in force over the holiday season.

— AFP

Charity: Bezos's ex-wife gives \$4bn

San Francisco, Dec. 16: MacKenzie Scott, the ex-wife of Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, said Tuesday she has given \$4.2 billion to groups helping the vulnerable as the pandemic hits lives like "a wrecking ball." Scott, who formerly went by the name MacKenzie Bezos, last year signed a "giving pledge" to donate the bulk of her wealth to charity.

In a round of donations early this year, Scott gave nearly \$1.7 billion to groups devoted to race, gender and economic equality, as well as other social causes.

"This pandemic has been a wrecking ball in the lives of Americans already struggling," Scott said in a post detailing

her second round of giving this year.

"Economic losses and health outcomes alike have been worse for women, for people of colour, and for people living in poverty," Meanwhile, she noted, the wealth of billionaires has substantially increased.

Such billionaires include her ex-husband, although Scott did not mention his name. Bezos's wealth has reportedly grown almost 80 percent during the pandemic.

Scott said she enlisted a team of advisors that helped identify 384 organizations across the US that support people suffering from the economic toll of the pandemic.

— AFP

Frankfurt Am Main, Dec. 16: Germany registered a record number of deaths from Covid-19 on Wednesday, the first day of a new partial lockdown to try and cope with a surge in infections.

A total of 952 people died in the previous 24 hours, according to the Robert Koch Institute disease control centre.

It said 27,728 new Coronavirus cases were registered, a figure close

to the daily record of nearly 30,000 infections reported on Friday.

The previous daily record for fatalities was imposed, with non-essential shops and schools closed in a bid to halt an "exponential growth" in infections.

The restrictions will apply until January 10, with companies also urged to allow employees to work from home or to offer extended company holiday.

tensive Care and Emergency Medicine (DIVI) said.

The latest figures come as a new partial lockdown was imposed, with non-essential shops and schools closed in a bid to halt an "exponential growth" in infections.

The restrictions will apply until January 10, with companies also urged to allow employees to work from home or to offer extended company holiday.

— AFP

WTO mulls how to ease food aid

Geneva, Dec. 16: World Trade Organisation negotiators were debating Wednesday a proposal to lift all trade barriers inhibiting the delivery of international food aid as the Coronavirus pandemic pushes humanitarian needs to new heights.

Dozens of WTO members, including the United States, the European Union and China, support the proposal put forward by Singapore and the World Food Programme, which won the 2020 Nobel Peace Prize for its humanitarian work.

"This is a very important proposal," EU ambassador to the WTO Joao Aguiar Machado told reporters.

If adopted, the proposal would "ban export restrictions on these foodstuffs which hinder the World Food Programme's ability to procure (food products for) the populations most in need across the world."

But while the draft text enjoys strong support, it could struggle to secure unanimous backing which is required for all decisions at the global trade body.

According to a Geneva-based trade official, who asked not to be named, India has hinted it would be reluctant to back a blanket exemption on trade barriers affecting WFP, pointing to the need to protect "national food security".

The short text up for discussion says WTO mem-

US AUTHORISES FIRST AT-HOME COVID-19 TEST

Washington, Dec. 16: The United States on Tuesday authorised its first rapid at-home test for Covid-19, which is available over-the-counter and produces a result in around 20 minutes.

The test, made by California-based Ellume, will sell for around \$30 and the company plans to roll out three million units in January 2021, and millions more in subsequent months. Stephen Hahn, commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration, said the emergency use authorization represented a "major milestone."

— AFP

bers "shall not impose export prohibitions or restrictions on foodstuffs purchased for non-commercial humanitarian purposes by the World Food Programme."

It highlights that the work of the WFP has been "made more urgent in light of the Covid-19 pandemic and other crises." The largest humanitarian organisation fighting famine, the UN agency founded in 1961 feeds tens of millions of people each year — 97 million in 2019 — across all continents.

— AFP

VIRUS HUNT: WHO TO SIFT CHINESE SAMPLES, DATA

Falkensee, Dec. 16: A German scientist who is part of a small team of experts assembled by the World Health Organisation to investigate the origins of the Coronavirus says they plan to sift through samples and medical data from China to help determine where the bug first jumped from animals to humans and which species it came from.

The search for the source of the new Coronavirus has sparked claims of cover-ups and fuelled political tensions, particularly between the US administration of President Donald Trump and Beijing.

Most researchers think that the virus, also known as SARS-CoV-2, originated in animals in China, probably bats, and the WHO has put together a 10-person team to examine the science. Mission member Fabian Leendertz, a biologist at Germany's Robert Koch Institute who specialises in emerging diseases, said that the goal is to gather data to be better prepared for possible future outbreaks.

"It's really not about finding a guilty country," Leendertz said. "It's about trying to understand what happened and then see if based on those data, we can try to reduce the risk in the future."

— AP

Senate run-offs: Biden campaigns

Nominates Buttigieg as transportation secy

Atlanta, Dec. 16: President-elect Joe Biden threw his weight into the Democratic battle for control of the US Senate on Tuesday, as his White House win was finally acknowledged by top Republicans and holdout foreign leaders.

Biden flew into Georgia — a southern state he won in an upset against President Donald Trump — to host a rally for two Democratic candidates in run-off races that will determine the Senate's balance of power.

"Honk for your next United States senators Jon Ossoff and Rev. Raphael Warnock," Biden told the crowd at the drive-in event in Atlanta — urging voters to turn out in force on January 5.

"Send me these two men, and we will control the Senate!" One day after the Electoral College affirmed Biden's victory, attention shifted to the looming Senate battle — and to the shape of the incoming administration, as Biden also announced he had nominated Pete Buttigieg, a former Indiana mayor and presidential rival, as secretary of transportation. He would be the first openly gay person confirmed by the Senate to a presidential cabinet post — in sync with Biden's pledge to usher in the most diverse cabinet ever when he takes office on January 20.

Rouhani: 'Happy' Trump leaving

Tehran, Dec. 16: President Hassan Rouhani said Wednesday that Iran was "very happy" over the looming departure from office of US counterpart Donald Trump, who led a campaign of "maximum pressure" against the Islamic republic.

President-elect Joe Biden, who defeated Trump at the ballot box in November, has signalled a willingness to return to diplomacy with Iran after four tense years under the outgoing president.

"Some say you are over-excited by the advent of Mr. Biden. No, we are not, but we are very happy to see Trump leave," he said in televised comments at a cabinet meeting.

"Thank God, these are his final days," Rouhani added, calling Trump a "tyrant", "the most unruly, lawless president" and a "terrorist and murderer." The electoral college confirmed Biden as the next US president on Monday even as the incumbent continues to refuse to accept defeat.

The formal handover of power will take place on January 20 when Biden is sworn in.

Tensions between Tehran and Washington soared during Trump's presidency as his administration sought to bring Israel and the Gulf Arab states closer together with a hard line against Iran.

— AFP

And while Trump still refuses to concede — continuing to tweet baseless allegations of mass fraud that have been rejected in dozens of lawsuits — top Senate Republican Mitch McConnell finally broke his silence with a message to the president: It's over.

"The Electoral College has spoken. So today I want to congratulate President-elect Joe Biden,"

McConnell said on the Senate floor, adding that Americans can also "take pride" that they will have their first female VP in Kamala Harris. Biden said that he had a "good" phone conversation with McConnell, a longtime Senate colleague. "I told him that while we disagree on a lot of things, there are things we can work together on," he said.

— AFP

Afghan, Taliban in Pak to talk peace

Islamabad, Dec. 16: A high-level Afghan-Taliban delegation arrived here on Wednesday to hold talks with the top Pakistani leadership as part of efforts to push forward the reconciliation process, amid growing incidents of violence in Afghanistan.

The Taliban Political Commission (TPC), headed by Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, is on a December 16-18 visit to Pakistan, according to the Foreign Office (FO).

"During the visit, the delegation will meet with the Foreign Minister and call on the Prime Minister," the FO said. The visit comes after a delegation led by US special representative for Afghanistan reconciliation, Zalmay

Khalilzad, on Monday met Pakistan's Army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa and discussed with him the ongoing Afghan peace process.

AP reported that Baradar and his delegation were summoned to Islamabad from Qatar, where they have been negotiating since September with Afghan government representatives, officials close to the talks said.

According to a report in *The Express Tribune*, the delegation will discuss issues of mutual interest, in particular, problems of refugees, relaxation and facilitation of Afghan's movement to Pakistan, as well as issues faced by Afghan traders.

— PTI

ERDOGAN: U.S. CURBS ATTACK SOVEREIGNTY

Ankara, Dec. 16: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Wednesday called US sanctions against Ankara over its purchase of a Russian missile defence system an "open attack" on the NATO member state's sovereignty. The United States made good on months of threats to punish Turkey for buying the S-400 system under a 2017 law known as CAATSA, which aims to limit Russia's military influence and punish it for its behaviour abroad.

The sanctions were lighter than feared, but Erdogan noted that they had never before been used against a fellow member of NATO.

— AFP

Siddharth Chatterjee is UN's China Resident Coordinator

United Nations, Dec. 16: UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has appointed senior UN official Siddharth Chatterjee of India as the United Nations Resident Coordinator in China, with the host government's approval.

Chatterjee's appointment follows confirmation from the Host Government, where he will take up his post in the middle of January of next year," Spokesman for the Secretary-General Stephane Dujarric said on Tuesday as he made the announcement.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Guterres appointed Chatterjee as the Resident Coordinator in China, with the host government's approval.

Chatterjee's appointment follows confirmation from the Host Government, where he will take up his post in the middle of January of next year," Spokesman for the Secretary-General Stephane Dujarric said on Tuesday as he made the announcement.

ent. "We congratulate our friend Siddharth," Dujarric said.

"We proudly remain with full gender parity and North-South balance among all of our Resident Coordinators, who cover 162 countries and territories," he said. Chatterjee has more than 25 years of experience in international cooperation, sustainable development, humanitarian coordination and peace and security.

— PTI

PRICELESS | TREASURE

The hoarder risks facing a colossal fine and possibly jail time

Over 27,000 artefacts seized in France

Paris, Dec. 16: French authorities have seized a "priceless" haul of over 27,000 archaeological artefacts ranging from Bronze Age bracelets to Roman coins that had been secretly amassed by a single person in the east of the country, customs said Wednesday.

The seizure of the 27,400 objects was the result of a year-long investigation conducted by French customs, Belgian authorities and the French culture ministry.

The hoarder, who has not been named and now faces a criminal probe, had built up the collection for personal and trading purposes, the French customs service said.

He had amassed the col-

● **THE MAN** had first aroused suspicion in 2019 when he told authorities he had found almost 15,000 Roman coins by chance on land he had acquired in Belgium.

lection himself using metal detectors as well as what appears to be a deep archaeological knowledge.

The man had first aroused suspicion in 2019 when he told authorities he had found almost 15,000 Roman coins by chance on land he had acquired in Belgium.

The French customs service then confirmed that this haul had actually been built up through "the looting of various sites in France", it said.



A picture taken on December 14, 2020 shows Customs seals of some of 27,500 archeological items in Metz, eastern France, seized by Customs officers and which were held by a man from France northeastern region Lorraine who tried to sell them in Belgium. — AFP

The case has now been handed to the judiciary, with the man risking a

colossal fine and possibly jail time. This seizure is "a clear

message to those who -- for the profit and the selfish pleasure of a few -- deprive us of our shared heritage and erase entire sections of our history", Economy and Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire said in a statement.

He described the haul as a "priceless treasure". The collection includes thousands of rare Roman coins, many of them rich in silver.

Also among the looted objects are bracelets and torques dating from the Bronze Age and the Iron Age, a rare Roman dodecahedron of which there are only around 100 known examples in the world, as well as objects from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

— AFP

OUR CRITIC'S RATING Outstanding ★★★★★ | Great ★★★★★ | Good ★★★ | Okay ★★ | Poor ★ | Truly Terrible TT

Wonder Woman combats a huckster's rise in 1984

The Prom

CAST: Gal Gadot, Chris Pine, Kristen Wiig, Pedro Pascal, Robin Wright, Connie Nielsen, Lilly Aspell, Amr Waked

DIRECTOR: Ryan Murphy

RATING: ★★★

Streaming on HBO Max

JAKE COYLE

If you're going to make a movie about wish fulfillment, 1980s America is about as good as you can do for a setting outside the Arabian Desert.

Wonder Woman 1984, Patty Jenkins' time-traveling sequel to 2017's record-setting *Wonder Woman*, shuttles Gal Gadot's warrior to the era of Regan economics, parachute pants and *Rio*. All have their cameos in *Wonder Woman 1984*, a superhero parable of greed and fanny packs with pointed references to today.

Two movies in, it's clear that Jenkins and DC Comics have a thankfully different concept for *Wonder Woman* as a film franchise. Like its predecessor, *Wonder Woman 1984* is spirited, purposeful and blessedly lacking in grandiosity. And both films place *Wonder Woman* not under the burdensome heft of world building or even universe saving — or at least Gadot comes across as too resplendently regal to ever seem weighed down. She's more a moral and muscular counterweight to ego-driven male misdirections, steering history through the repeating pitfalls of megalomaniacs intoxicated by power.

Last time, it was German and British military leaders under the sway of Ares, the god of war. This time, it's a struggling entrepreneur/TV personality who, in stealing an ancient gem — the “dream stone” — from the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C. (where Gadot's Diana now works), gains the power to grant wishes. Max Lord (Pedro Pascal) goes from deadbeat dad to despot, turning into a conman of mythical dimensions. He's a diabolical genie without a bottle, or to paraphrase Robin Williams' Aladdin, he's got phenomenal cosmic powers sans the itty, bitty living space.

A snake oil salesman who placates cravings while stealing everything else is, you might say, a touch timely. *Wonder Woman 1984* plays up its Trump critique about as much as it does its '80s style. In one scene, Steve Trevor

Like its predecessor, *Wonder Woman 1984* is spirited, purposeful and blessedly lacking in grandiosity. And both films place *Wonder Woman* not under the burdensome heft of world building or even universe saving — or at least Gadot comes across as too resplendently regal to ever seem weighed down.

(Chris Pine), summoned from the grave by Diana's own wish while holding the gem, giddily tries on all the period-appropriate clothing like Ken's fashion show in *Toy Story 3*. Best in the first *Wonder Woman* were the screwball fish-out-of-water scenes of Diana experiencing London with Trevor; this time the roles are reversed, and the charm a little less.

What does Max's rise have to do with *Wonder Woman*? A huckster is a kind of perfect foil to Diana, conceived from the start as a force for truth. (Her lasso of truth was modeled after the polygraph, an invention of *Wonder Woman* creator William Moulton Marston.) Jenkins opens the film with an Amazonian flashback to an obstacle course race on the island of Themyscira where a young Diana learns the value of truth. “No true hero is born from lies,” says Antiope (Robin Wright).

The dream stone transforms another, too: Barbara Minerva, a meek archeologist played by Kristen Wiig. Awkward in heels and most everything else, she mutters that she'd like to be more like Diana when holding the stone, setting off a metamorphosis that playfully remakes Wiig's typical screen presence, and creates another foe for *Wonder Woman*.

Just as in *Wonder Woman*, I think Jenkins has left some opportunities on the table. The first film, despite being set in 1918 during WWI, omitted any real interaction with the era's then-flourishing women's rights movement — a vital source of inspiration to Marston. Likewise, *Wonder Woman 1984* — more focused on “greed is good” decade and its contemporary resonances — doesn't much pause to interrogate the 1980s' gender imbalances. Like the last movie, *Wonder Woman 1984* becomes consumed by its (admittedly quite good) antagonist. It drags in the third act in a messy White House battle and a prolonged finale.

But I still like these movies more than most superhero films. They feel both campier and more real than Marvel movies — more like the page-turning thrill of a comic book. The ambitions of “*Wonder Woman 1984*” may be just outside its grasp, but it seldom feels predestined or predictable — a precious rare commodity in the genre.

As its characters awaken to their powers, turning from recognisable people to monsters, the film keeps changing shape, enlarging as it goes. Jenkins' pop cinema craft is limber and lucid. Pascal's performance, more sweet than sinister, is scintillatingly over the top.

Premiering in theaters and on HBO Max in North America, *Wonder Woman 1984* will close out a year largely absent of superheroes in a release plan that has upended the film industry. It's a very big film heading primarily to the small screen, at a time when the pandemic has made the escapist, popcorn-eating moviegoing that superhero movies are made for impossible, or nearly so. That makes *Wonder Woman 1984* a nostalgia act in more ways than one.

— AP



Clooney makes *The Midnight Sky* moving

Netflix is on a roll this year, with *Mank*, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, *Da 5 Bloods* and *The Trial of the Chicago 7* all garnering Oscar buzz. Well, hold onto your spacesuits for the latest — *The Midnight Sky*.

George Clooney directs and stars in this feature film adaptation of Lily Brooks-Dalton's novel “Good Morning, Midnight” and what he has done on both sides of the camera is astounding.

He has managed to craft two intimate, connected stories set against the vastness of the cosmos and the white sprawl of the Arctic. He has turned in a tragic but yet hopeful tale grounded in, of all things, Earth's destruction.

“*The Midnight Sky*” opens with a grizzled Clooney eating a microwaved meal in an empty cafeteria. He stares out into nothingness. It is 2049 and three weeks after an unclear disaster has befallen Earth.

Clooney plays a cancer-ridden astrophysicist who is waiting out his days alone in an Arctic lab, trying to warn a returning spaceship about what has happened back home. Then he discovers he's not alone — a girl is also in the outpost and needs looking after. Until now, he's been drinking whiskey, playing chess against himself and undergoing transfusions. “I'm the wrong person,” he tells her.

To contact the astronauts, the scientist and the girl must travel across icy wastes to reach another station with a more powerful signal, in a sort of nod to “*The Road*.” The film alternates between the pair on Earth and the five-person crew in the heavens, the story switching from the white of Arctic snow to the blackness of space.

Clooney's filmmaking is unrushed, poetic and elegant, admiring beauty in its extremes — the ballet of manmade machines spinning slowly in space and the austerity of a blizzard in empty wilderness. Mark L. Smith's script is equally spare, letting every word count.

This is Clooney's seventh outing as a director and there are artistic touches everywhere, like a tiny bright spacecraft against the darkness dissolving into a dark tent on an endlessly snowy plain. One scene in which blood droplets float in zero gravity is horrific and beautiful at the same time. His camera lingers on the space station like a proud dad showing off his son's toy model.

Music by Alexandre Desplat is rich and evocative and the addition of Neil Diamond's “Sweet Caroline” and Chris Stapleton's “Tennessee Whiskey” feel natural and integral. There's even a nod to “On the Beach,” Stanley Kramer's post-apocalyptic sci-fi drama.

With five calm and capable astronauts in the sky and two characters in the Arctic, *The Midnight Sky* touches on themes of regret, parenting, fragility, familial responsibility and the conflict between love and career. It's also a film about an environmental disaster whose final editing had to be done during a global pandemic.

Felicity Jones and David Oyelowo play husband-and-wife astronauts with a cool and sexy playfulness, while Demián Bichir is deeply moving in his scenes as a wistful and grieving mission specialist.

Kyle Chandler plays the ship's pilot with a tangible ache for his family. “I was the one who was supposed to be at risk. And they were supposed to be safe — home and safe,” he says. And 7-year-old newcomer Caoilinn Springall almost steals the movie outright with her silent expressiveness. But it's hard to beat Clooney when he's this good. You can see the life draining from his character, shuffling about with his thick beard and limp. Clooney is not afraid to be ugly — drooling, vomiting, frightened, old. Seeing him drop his gruffness for a delightful food fight with peas is a delight.

The filmmakers battled 50-mile-per-hour winds at the top of an Icelandic glacier at 40 below zero. They also had to write around Jones being visibly pregnant, a pivot that proved perfect in the end, when all the floating parts of this story beautifully snap into place.

It's a film that will satisfy every kind of fan — sci-fi, intimate drama, romantic and fantasy. It is gentle and deliberate, deeply felt and yet lighter and less cerebral than its distant cousin, *Interstellar*.

Clooney has said making *The Midnight Sky* was like shooting *The Revenant* and then shooting *Gravity*. What a coincidence: Both those films also won a bunch of Oscars. — AP

The Midnight Sky

CAST: George Clooney, Felicity Jones, David Oyelowo, Tiffany Boone, Demián Bichir, Kyle Chandler

DIRECTOR: George Clooney

RATING: ★★★★

Streaming on Netflix

Reorienting the crime drama

I'm Your Woman

CAST: Rachel Brosnahan, Arinze Kene, Marsha Stephanie Blake, Bill Heck, Frankie Faison

DIRECTOR: Julia Hart

RATING: ★★★

Streaming on Amazon Prime

When it's at its best, *I'm Your Woman* feels like you've slipped through a trap door, revealing a hidden pathway in an old genre apparatus. Everything looks familiar — this is a '70s-set crime drama with all the usual trappings of shootouts, safe houses and polyester — but you're seeing it from a different perspective. The camera doesn't stick with the usual characters. It has other interests.

I'm Your Woman, which debuts Friday in theaters and Dec. 11 on Amazon Prime Video, is directed by Julia Hart, who also wrote the script with her husband, the producer Jordan Horowitz. Rachel Brosnahan

(The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel) stars as Jean, the kind of woman typically relegated to bit characters in more masculine dramas.

She's sitting in their suburban home when her husband Eddie (Bill Heck) comes home and presents a new baby the way someone might unveil a new toaster. “Who is that?” Jean says. “He's our baby,” he answers, beaming. We get no more information than she does, as the film immediately drops us into the disorientation of Jean's world as the kept woman of a man we soon learn is some kind of gangster. But even Jean doesn't seem to know much about what he does.

Instead of Eddie coming home one night, Jean is roused by a knock at the door. The man, Cal (a very good Arinze Kene), explains men are after Eddie, and soon will be looking for Jean, too. They have to go. Whatever Eddie did or whoever his pursuers are remains, like Jean's own hazy understanding, in the distant background. Instead, the film rigorously stays with her as she and the baby are plunged into a loosely connected underworld meant to shield her from whatever trouble is after her. Eventually, she'll



reach for a gun, herself.

Hart's schematic framework is a

worthy and intriguing one, yet *I'm Your Woman* struggles to turn thesis

into drama. Jean slowly transforms into a more conscious, decision-mak-

ing woman but her character's psychology doesn't fill out. Even with growing independence, Jean remains a perplexingly passive genre fragment in a narrative that never comes into focus — though it continues to compellingly bring in elements usually kept at bay in the crime film, like family and race. It's also possible that Brosnahan, so identifiable already as the unflinching Midge Maisel, is too charismatic and clever to convince us otherwise.

Hart has spoken about how she was pulled to make *I'm Your Woman* by wanting to follow Diane Keaton in *The Godfather* or Tuesday Weld in *Thief*. It's a tantalizing concept, one that *I'm Your Woman* comes close to achieving. Hart, gifted as a filmmaker rich in both texture and ideas, has already skipped around in genre, often reorienting it in the process. Her 2019 sci-fi film, *Past Color* told a human-scaled superhero story about three women in a family with superhuman powers. It will be exciting to see what genre she tackles — and potentially remakes — next. In the meantime, I wouldn't mind knowing where that baby came from. — AP

SHORT TAKES

Moody is SRH director of cricket

New Delhi: Australian Tom Moody has been appointed director of cricket at Indian Premier League side Sunrisers Hyderabad, who are captained by his compatriot David Warner. Moody, 55, was the Hyderabad coach for seven years and led them to their only IPL title in 2016. He was replaced by another Australian, Trevor Bayliss, last year and late on Tuesday the franchise announced that Moody would be returning. The former batsman switched to coaching and TV commentary after retiring in 2001 and helped Hyderabad reach the play-offs five times during his stay as coach. Hyderabad, who also have New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson and Afghanistan spin ace Rashid Khan in their ranks, failed to reach this year's final when they lost to DC in the playoffs in November. —*AFP*

Shutter Foo Kune banned for doping

Geneva: Mauritian badminton player Kate Foo Kune, her country's flag-carrier at the 2016 Rio Olympics, was banned for two years for doping on Wednesday after failing to prove her drink was spiked. Foo Kune tested positive for a banned steroid last year but she escaped a ban when the Badminton World Federation's anti-doping panel accepted her explanation that she was the victim of sabotage. But after a BWF appeal against its own panel's decision, the Swiss-based Court of Arbitration for Sport said there was no evidence of foul play. "The CAS panel found the athlete's assertion of intentional spiking during the 2019 African Badminton World Championships devoid of supporting evidence," said a statement from the court, announcing a two-year ban from December 15. —*AFP*

Floyd, Laila voted to Hall of Fame

Canastota, New York: Floyd Mayweather, who captured 11 world titles in five weight divisions and retired unbeaten, former heavyweight champion Wladimir Klitschko, and Laila Ali have been elected to the International Boxing Hall of Fame and Museum. The Class of 2021 announced Tuesday also includes former Olympic champion Andre Ward, Ann Wolfe, Marian Trimira, and Dr. Margaret Goodman. Elected posthumously were: Davey Moore, Jackie Tonawanda, cut man Freddie Brown, manager-trainer Jackie McCoy, journalist George Kimball, and television executive Jay Larkin. Honorees were selected by members of the Boxing Writers Association and a panel of international boxing historians. Induction day is scheduled for June 13 and also will include last year's class. —*AP*

Prez candidate wants Leo to stay

Barcelona: Barcelona presidential candidate Jordi Farre said on Tuesday he would work to make sure Lionel Messi stays at the Catalan giants should be elected next month, and hinted at a improbable bid for Neymar by the cash-strapped club. Farre was promoter of the motion that led to previous club chief Josep Maria Bartomeu's resignation and with elections set for January 24 has been trying to attract support for his candidacy by offering free tattoos and pizzas with the Barca crest to fans who supported his bid for the top job. The 45-year-old businessman and engineer said his priority is convincing Messi to stay despite the disillusioned Argentina forward's bid to leave in the close season and the fact he can begin negotiating a departure next summer in the new year. —*AFP*

Live on TV

CRICKET

Australia vs India: First Test — Day One from 9.30 am on Sony Ten 1, 3, Sony Six, HD

Big Bash League: Hobart Hurricanes vs Melbourne Renegades from 5.40 am (Friday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

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IT'S SHOWTIME

Tough India face Australian might in Pink Ball affair

Adelaide, Dec. 16: A peerless Virat Kohli and his "fearless" India would look to unleash their might on an Australian team which is ready for revenge but not exactly in 'pink of health' ahead of the first Day/Night Test starting here on Thursday.

Media mogul Kerry Packer, while promoting his path-breaking 'World Series Day/Night Test matches' on Channel 9 back in late 1970s, had an unforgettable caption "Big Boys Play At Night". Even in 2020, there couldn't have been a more appropriate catch-line for a series where Kohli's magnificence meets its match in Steve Smith's manic consistency. Cheteshwar Pujara's doggedness challenged by a much younger Marnus Labuschagne, ready to show the world that he isn't a one-season wonder. All this would be under lights at the Adelaide Oval.

And then there are those mean fast men on both sides aiming to instill the fear of pink ball in twilight zone, creating all sorts of doubts in the batsmen's minds.

A Josh Hazlewood versus Mohammed Shami will be as enticing a subplot as Jasprit Bumrah bowling those yorkers in reply to Pat Cummins' barrage of bouncers.

With a workhorse like Ishant Sharma missing from Indian ranks and the enforcer David Warner absent in the Australian line-up.

However, there will certainly be some distinct home advantage for Australia along with the experience of playing more day/night Tests.

A day/night Test match has its own little grammar where batsmen are expected to attack in the first session while bowlers are at their peak once the sun sets, allowing the pink kookaburra to pick its pace up.

Never has an Indian team been so spoilt for choices with multiple options in place for various positions.

But Indian skipper Virat Kohli made it clear that Shubman Gill and KL Rahul will have to wait for their chances with the management deciding to stick to an out-of-form Prithvi Shaw in the opening slot.



Shubman Gill of India dives to catch a ball during a practice session in Adelaide on Wednesday ahead of the first Test against Australia. —*AFP*

NUMBERS GAME

INDIA TO PLAY 1ST DAY/NIGHT TEST AWAY FROM HOME

- The first day/night Test match of the four-match Border-Gavaskar series between India and Australia will be played at Adelaide Oval from Thursday (December 17). It will be the 99th Test match between the two teams and on 49th Test match on Australian soil.
- Australia have a good record against India in previous Test matches played between the two teams. They have won 42 and lost 28 in 98 previous encounters between the two sides. The remaining 27 matches ended with out a result which include one tied match. They have won 29, lost seven and drew 12 in 42 Test matches played against India at home.
- India have a better record against Australia since 2000. They have won 17, lost 15 and draw 10 in 42 Test matches from January 2000 to January 2019.
- Australia have won seven, lost two and draw three in 12 Test matches played against India at Adelaide Oval. India's victories here came in 2003-04 and 2018-19.
- Adelaide Oval is hunting ground for Indian skipper Virat Kohli, who has scored 431 runs at 71.83 in six innings of three Test matches with three hundreds at this ground.
- India are in third place in the Test Team rankings with 114 rating points, whilst Australia top the rankings with 116.46 rating points. New Zealand follow closely in second with 116.37 rating points. India will feel the pressure as the race to the World Test Championship final heats up.

—*S. PERVEZ KAISER*

Also, Umesh Yadav predictably, after his good show in the practice game, got his place in the side as the third pacer.

On Tuesday, India's top batters were being troubled by Thangarasu Natarajan's incoming

deliveries with pink kookaburra at the Adelaide nets.

If Natarajan, at 130-plus, can trouble them so much, then Mitchell Starc, the world's top wicket-taker in pink ball Tests, can be menacing. —*PTI*

Prithvi to open as Saha keeps

Adelaide, Dec. 16: India have kept faith with opener Prithvi Shaw while opting for Wriddhiman Saha ahead of Rishabh Pant as wicketkeeper for the opening day-night Test against Australia in Adelaide starting Thursday.

Selectors also confirmed Umesh Yadav as the third seamer alongside Mohammed Shami and Jasprit Bumrah in the absence of the injured Ishant Sharma, while Ravi Ashwin won the race to be their frontline spinner ahead of Kuldeep Yadav.

The flamboyant Shaw was under pressure from another young talent — Shubman Gill, also 21 — to open the innings alongside Mayank Agarwal after just one decent knock in four warm-up innings.

But he will take the field

for his fifth cap on Thursday while Gill continues his wait to earn a first.

"Prithvi has performed at the Test level, but he would be playing in Australia for the first time. I think it is very exciting to see his progress as well," the Indian captain Kohli said.

The dogged and experienced Cheteshwar Pujara will come in at number three, followed by Kohli in his only Test of the tour before heading home for the birth of his first child.

Pant, an explosive batsman who became a viral sensation on India's last tour of Australia with his banter behind the stumps, also stroked a quickfire ton against Australia 'A', but he was surprisingly overlooked in favour of Saha. India won their maiden series 2-1 in Australia in 2018-19. —*PTI*

City held; Wolves peg back Chelsea

Manchester, Dec. 16: Manchester City's faltering Premier League title challenge suffered another setback on Tuesday as lowly West Brom held out for a 1-1 draw at the Etihad.

City could have moved to within three points of leaders Tottenham and Liverpool, who face each other on Wednesday, but threw away two points against the side sitting second bottom of the table.

Ilkay Gundogan opened the scoring for Pep Guardiola's men but Ruben Dias's own goal just before half-time proved costly as City's problems in front of goal continued in a goalless second-half despite a siege on the West Brom goal.

A point edges City up to fifth on goal difference, while West Brom move to within two points of safety at the other end of the table.

West Brom had the first big chance of the game when the ball ricocheted off Joao Cancelo into the path of Karlan Grant and he forced Ederson into a fine save low to his left.

City's probing was finally rewarded on the half hour as Raheem Sterling got to the by-line and his cut back was fired home from the edge of the area by Gundogan.

Guardiola's men shot themselves in the foot by conceding for the first time in seven games two minutes before half-time as they failed to clear a free-kick into the box and Semi Ajayi's shot was deflected into his own net by Dias.

It was one-way traffic

THE RESULTS

Manchester City (Gundogan 30)	1
West Bromwich Albion (Dias 43+og)	1
Wolverhampton (Podence 66, Pedro Neto 90+5)	2
Chelsea (Giroud 49)	1

after the break as City set up camp in the West Brom half but lacked the imagination or pace to open the visitors up.

Meanwhile, Frank Lampard believes Chelsea have become complacent after the Blues blew a lead to lose 2-1 at Wolves and suffer back-to-back Premier League defeats for the first time during his reign in charge.

Daniel Podence produced a moment of magic as he twisted and turned inside the Chelsea box to find space for a shot and his effort deflected off Reece James and inside Edouard Mendy's near post.

Neto thought he had won a penalty when driving past James, but after a VAR review referee Stuart Attwell overturned his original decision as there was no contact on the Portuguese winger.

However, Neto was not to be denied on the counter-attack deep into stoppage time as he accelerated past Zouma and drove low into the far corner to move Wolves into the top half of the table and within three points of the top four.

—*AFP*



Olivier Giroud (top left) of Chelsea vies with Romain Saïss (top right) of Wolverhampton Wanderers during their English Premier League match at the Molineux Stadium in Wolverhampton, central England, on Tuesday. The Wolves carved out a 2-1 victory. —*AFP*

Less niggles, more respect, says VK I am representation of new India, says Kohli

Adelaide, Dec. 16: India captain Virat Kohli vowed a "high-voltage" Test series against fierce rivals Australia Wednesday but also predicted a more respectful era between the cricketing powers, saying grudges and tensions were "pointless".

The superstar batsman, who has a reputation as one of the sport's most aggressive players, said this week's opening Test in Adelaide would be highly competitive, but would not get personal.

"It's going to be high-voltage cricket because we have quality players on both sides and they are all hungry and eager to perform... it's definitely going to be as competitive as it has always been," he said. "There's going to be tension, there's going to be

stress, there's going to be emotions flaring every now and then, but I don't foresee anything getting personal anymore. I think all of us are getting smarter and a few more years into our careers so we want to make better choices," he added.

"I think this year has made people realise a lot of things which might not have been necessary in the past, where you hold grudges or you have unnecessary tensions between teams or individuals, which is absolutely pointless," he said.

"It could be a combination of playing a lot of IPL cricket together, Australia changing their approach to an extent and also just the way things have panned out this year," Virat further added. —*PTI*

Adelaide, Dec. 16: India captain Virat Kohli on Wednesday declared himself a "representation of new India", forever ready to take up challenges with optimism, as he responded to Greg Chappell's view that he is "the most Australian non-Australian cricketer of all time".

On the eve of the first Test against Australia, Kohli was asked about his aggressive brand of cricket coupled with a fighting attitude that the former Australia captain, who also served as India coach, found similar to the mindset of his countrymen.

"I would like to say that I have always been myself," the skipper said during a virtual media conference ahead of the



I would like to say that I have always been myself. The way my personality and character is, I am the representation of new India. For me, that's how I look at it.

—**VIRAT KOHLI**
India cricket captain

opening Test against Australia here starting Thursday.

"The way my personality and character is, I am the representation of new India. For me, that's how I look at it," he asserted.

"In my mind, it's not (about) being compared to the Australian mindset as such. It's how we have started to stand up as the Indian cricket team and my personality has been

like this from day one" he added.

The new India, according to one of the country's most followed sporting icons, is the one that's not afraid to take up challenges.

"The new India takes up challenges and is filled with optimism and positivity. We make sure that we are ready for any challenges that come our way," he added. —*PTI*

SACHIN ALL PRAISE FOR 'SMART-BRAIN' RAHANE

Mumbai, Dec. 16: Ajinkya Rahane is blessed with a "smart brain" and should be able lead India well against Australia in the three Tests with his controlled aggression, says iconic Sachin Tendulkar.

Rahane will take over captaincy from Virat Kohli after the first Day/Night Test in Adelaide. Tendulkar, having watched Rahane captain India against Australia at Dharamsala, is hopeful of a good show from him.

"This is going to be slightly different. Having interacted with Ajinkya Rahane, I know he has a very smart brain and he is balanced," Tendulkar told YouTube channel *Sports Today* on the eve of the first Test. What Tendulkar likes is Rahane's intensity and preparedness before any big series. —*PTI*

Smith fit for India: Tim

Adelaide, Dec. 16: Australia skipper Tim Paine hosed down concerns over the fitness of star batsman Steve Smith Wednesday ahead of the opening Test with India, and hinted struggling Joe Burns will keep his spot as opener.

Smith, the world's number one Test batsman, was unable to have a net session at Adelaide Oval on Tuesday after appearing to hurt his back during warm-up

exercises. But Paine said his no-show was precautionary and the former captain was set to take the field on Thursday in their first-ever day-night Test against Virat Kohli's India, who won their last series in Australia 2-1.

"His preparation has been very good," Paine said of Smith.

"He's battled for the last week since we've been in Adelaide. So for him to have a day off might

actually be a blessing in disguise.

"He's had a stiff back before. Yesterday was more precautionary," he added.

"He's in to train today, so we'll see how he goes. But come tomorrow, whether he's fit and sore in the back, or stiff in the back, I think he normally gets up, gets through it and finds a way to score runs like he always does," Australian captain added. —*PTI*