

# THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI SUNDAY 13 DECEMBER 2020



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## WINDOWS



A model walks the ramp at a fashion week event in Lagos, Nigeria, early Saturday. — AP

## Workers of firm that makes iPhone vandalise office

**Bengaluru:** Violence broke out at a Taiwanese tech giant's plant near Bengaluru after some employees, reportedly angry over salaries, vandalised the facility's premises Saturday morning. While the company, Wistron Corporation, is yet to respond, the Karnataka government strongly condemned it. The employees of the Narsapura plant suddenly turned violent over their salaries — a matter that has lingered for months, according to reports. — Agencies  
**Full report on Page 3**

## Actress found dead in Kolkata home

**Kolkata:** Actress Arya Banerjee who starred in several Bollywood films, including *The Dirty Picture*, was found dead at her south Kolkata residence. The police broke open the door of her apartment on Friday and found that the body of the 33-year-old was lying in the bedroom. **Full report on Page 4**

## BPF, UPPL win 4 seats each, BJP 1

**Kokrajhar:** The ruling Bodoland Peoples' Front and the United People's Party Liberal won four seats each while the BJP came out victorious in one so far in the 40-member BTC polls in Assam. The BPF is leading in 14 seats, UPPL in six, and the BJP in eight. — PTI

## COUNTERPOINT



...this time he wants the Indian government to hold talks with Pakistan farmers!

## WEATHER

**Max:** 21.8°C  
**Min:** 14.4°C  
**RH:** 98%  
**Rain:** 1.6mm

**Forecast:** Very dense fog

## ASTROGUIDE

**Sarvari:** Dakshinayana  
**Tithi:** Kartika Bahula Chaturdasi till 12.45 am (Monday)  
**Star:** Anuradha till 1.40 am (Monday)  
**Varjyam:** 7.39 am to 9.46 am  
**Durmuhurtam:** 4.11 pm to 4.55 pm  
**Rahukalam:** 4.30 pm to 6 pm  
**SUNSET TODAY 5.26 PM**  
**SUNRISE TOMORROW 7.05 AM**  
**MOONRISE TOMORROW 5.20 AM**  
**MOONSET TODAY 3.33 PM**

**Farmers say they are open to discussing repeal of 3 contentious laws with govt**

## Farmers ignore PM's appeal, vow to intensify stir, block highway today

**New Delhi, Dec. 12:** Sticking to their demands, farmer leaders Saturday said they are ready to hold talks with the government, but will first discuss repealing the three new farm laws, and announced that representatives of their unions would sit on a hunger strike during a nationwide protest on December 14.

Addressing a press conference at Singhu Border here, farmer leader Kanwalpreet Singh Pannu also said that thousands of farmers will start their 'Delhi Chalo' march with their tractors from Rajasthan's Shahjahanpur through the Jaipur-Delhi Highway at 11 am on Sunday.

The distance between Shahjahanpur and Delhi-Gurgaon border is around 94 kilometres.

Spelling out their strategy to make the agitation even "bigger", the farmer leader announced that their mothers, sisters and daughters will also join them soon, and that arrangements for their stay are being made at the protest sites.

Farmers' move to further intensify their agitation comes on a day Prime Minister Narendra Modi assured them that his government was committed to their welfare and that the three legislations were aimed at giving them alternative markets to boost income.

Without directly referring to the farmers' agitation, which entered the 17th day on Saturday, Mr Modi said at the annual meeting of industry body FICCI here that agriculture reforms as part of government efforts are aimed at removing roadblocks, and the new laws will also bring in technology and investment in the sector.

During the press conference later in the day, farmer leader Mr Pannu said that farmers from other parts of the country are also on their way to join the protesters at camping at various borders of the national capital.

He said the police are putting up barricades to prevent the farmers from heading towards Delhi, but asserted that they will join the protest anyhow and take it to the next level in the coming days.

"If the government wants to hold talks, we are ready, but our main

## LADAKH STANDOFF

## Jaishankar: India is being tested

**New Delhi, Dec. 12:** External affairs minister S. Jaishankar on Saturday said India was being tested in the seven-month-long border standoff with China in eastern Ladakh and expressed confidence that the country will meet the national security challenge.

Calling the "events" along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh "very disturbing", Mr Jaishankar also said what has happened there was not in China's interest as it is facing the prospect of losing goodwill in India that was developed carefully in the recent decades. He said these

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## India, Uzbekistan Iran to discuss joint Chabahar Port use

**SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI**  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 12

In a major boost to its strategic interests, India on Saturday announced that the "first Trilateral Working Group Meeting between India, Iran and Uzbekistan on joint use of Chabahar Port will be held virtually on December 14", adding that "besides Uzbekistan, other Central Asian countries have also shown interest in using the port".

The Iranian port of Chabahar provides sea-land connectivity between India and Central Asia through Iran, bypassing Pakistan.

It may be recalled that at the India-Uzbekistan Virtual Summit on

Friday, India had cited the successful functioning of the Chabahar port in Iran — being developed with Indian assistance — that could be a "fulcrum of connectivity to Central Asia" following which New Delhi had "welcomed the Uzbek proposal to hold trilateral dialogue among India, Iran and Uzbekistan to promote connectivity through the Chabahar port".

In a statement, the MEA said, "The first Trilateral Working Group Meeting between India, Iran and Uzbekistan on joint use of Chabahar Port will be held virtually on December 14, 2020.. India welcomes the interest of Uzbekistan to use the Chabahar port as a transit port. This would open up economic opportunities

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## TEHRAN EXECUTES FRANCE-BASED DISSIDENT SCRIBE CAUGHT LAST YEAR

**Paris, Dec. 12:** Iranian dissident journalist Ruhollah Zam, who was convicted of fomenting violence during anti-government protests in 2017, was executed on Saturday, Iran's state television reported.

Iran said its Supreme Court had upheld the death sentence of Zam, who was captured in 2019 after years of living in exile in France. State TV said Zam, "director of the



Ruhollah Zam

counter-revolutionary network, was hanged this morning". The official IRNA news agency said he was also convicted of espionage for France, cooperating with the "hostile government of America", acting against "the country's

security" and instigating violence during the 2017 protests. At least 25 people were killed during the unrest in December 2017 and January 2018 that was sparked by economic hardship.

Zam, who was granted political asylum in France, ran a channel on the Telegram messaging app called Amadnews. It had more than one million followers.

— Agencies

**Agricultural reforms will increase farmers' income, says PM Modi amid ongoing protests**



Enhanced security arrangements at Gurugram district's Pachgaon village to stop farmers marching towards Delhi during their protest march against the new farm laws on Saturday. — PTI

## 'Efforts are being made for next round of talks'

**New Delhi, Dec. 12:** Union minister Som Prakash, who is among the government representatives negotiating with the farmers protesting against three new farm laws, on Saturday said efforts are being made to call the next round of meeting with the leaders of the agitation soon to end the stalemate.

After holding discussions with agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar on the farmer agitation, Mr Prakash said, "We are trying to call a meeting early.... We are discussing. The date has not been finalised."

"Ultimately, we have to resolve this issue through dialogue. There is no other way out. They (farmers) also know about it, we also know," he added.

Asserting that the government

is ready for discussions anytime, Prakash, the minister of state for commerce and industries and an MP from Punjab, said the Centre is "concerned" about the protesting farmers and urged them to come to the discussion table.

Thousands of farmers, largely from Punjab, are protesting at various borders of Delhi for 16 days now, seeking a repeal of the three farm laws that they claim are "pro-corporates".

The last six rounds of talks between the Centre and 40 farmers' union leaders have remained inconclusive. The government has sent a draft proposal to the farmer leaders for consideration. But the farmer leaders have rejected the government's proposal and intensified their protest. — PTI



Som Prakash

## Srinagar turns white with season's first snowfall



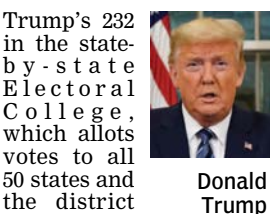
An aerial view of snow covered town after it received fresh snowfall in Srinagar Saturday. Srinagar witnessed season's first snowfall while areas in south Kashmir and upper reaches of Kashmir received good snowfall. Weather department officials said fresh western disturbance is active and could bring more rain and snowfall in Ladakh and Kashmir. — PTI

## US top court rejects bid backed by Trump to overturn elections

**Washington, Dec. 12:** The US Supreme Court on Friday rejected a long-shot lawsuit by Texas and backed by President Donald Trump seeking to throw out voting results in four states, dealing him a likely fatal blow in his quest to undo his election loss to President-elect Joe Biden.

The decision allows the US Electoral College to press ahead with a meeting on Monday, where it is expected to formally cast its votes and make Mr Biden's victory official.

Mr Biden, a Democrat, has amassed 306 votes to



Donald Trump

Trump's 232 in the state-by-state Electoral College, which allots votes to all 50 states and the district of Columbia based on population.

The four states in question — Georgia, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin — contributed a combined 62 votes to Biden's total. To win the White House, 270 votes are needed.

In a brief order, the justices said Texas did not

have legal standing to bring the case, abruptly ending what Trump had touted this week as his best hope for overturning the election.

After midnight, Mr Trump said on Twitter, "The Supreme Court really let us down. No Wisdom, no Courage!"

Complaining that the court had rejected the case "in a flash" despite his winning more votes than any other sitting president, Mr Trump wrote: "A Rigged Election, fight on!"

— Reuters  
**More on Page 6**

## WEST BENGAL CONVOY ATTACK

## MHA recalls 3 cops, Didi will have 'last word'

*Mamata govt will not bow down before Centre's diktat, says TMC*

**New Delhi/Kolkata, Dec. 12:** Upping the ante in its war of attrition with the West Bengal government, the home ministry on Saturday sought Central deputation for three IPS officers over the mob attack on BJP chief J.P. Nadda's convoy, a move the TMC dubbed "intimidatory", and declared the state will have the "last word".

Days after Mr Nadda's cavalcade came under attack by alleged Trinamool Congress supporters when he was on way to address a public meeting at Diamond Harbour near Kolkata, the ministry of home affairs (MHA) summoned the IPS officers to serve under it for alleged dereliction of duty.

The three officers — Bholanath Pandey (SP, Diamond Harbour), Praveen Tripathi (DIG, Presidency Range) and Rajeev Mishra (ADG, South Bengal) — were responsible for the security of the BJP chief during his December 9-10 visit to the politically volatile state that will likely have assembly elections in April-May next year.

The MHA's move came a day after the Mamata Banerjee government defiantly rejected summonses to state chief secretary and police chief to appear before Union home secretary Ajay Bhalla to tender explanation for the attack on Mr Nadda's motorcade that left several BJP leaders

**The Centre is trying to intimidate the state administration and police force... The state will have the last word on the issue... the state will not bow down before the Centre's diktat**

— Kalyan Banerjee, Trinamul MP

and workers injured and their vehicles damaged.

"The Centre is trying to intimidate the state administration and police force by demanding that top ranking police officers be sent on central deputation. These IPS officers were close to the convoy managing Mr Nadda's security."

"The state will have the last word on the issue... the state will not bow down before the Centre's diktat," TMC MP Kalyan Banerjee told journalists.

TMC veteran leader and Lok Sabha member Sougata Roy concurred with Mr Banerjee, and said it was upto the state concerned to release officers of the All India Services for central deputation keeping in mind their availability.

"IAS and IPS officers are governed by Article 312 of the Constitution. But once selected as IAS or IPS they are assigned a state cadre. The Centre

**Turn on Page 2**

## US clears Pfizer Covid vaccine, 1st shot soon

**Washington, Dec. 12:** The US Food and Drug Administration said it authorised the use of Pfizer Inc's Covid-19 vaccine on Friday, with the first inoculations expected within days, marking a turning point in the US where the pandemic has killed more than 292,000 people.

The vaccine, developed with German partner BioNTech, is shown to be 95 per cent effective in preventing the disease in a late-stage trial.

The FDA said the vaccine can be given to people aged 16 and older. Healthcare workers and elderly people in long-term care facilities are expected to be the main recipients of a first round of 2.9 million doses.

The US government said it will begin distributing the vaccine around the country immediately, and that the first inoculations would happen early next week.

Millions of Americans could begin getting vaccinated this month, especially if a second vaccine from Moderna Inc is quickly approved.

The Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine was first approved in Britain earlier this month, and UK residents began receiving the shots on Tuesday. Canada also authorised the vaccine and expects to start inoculations next week.

— Reuters



## SHORT TAKES

## DU student dupes neighbour of ₹2.38L, arrested

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 12

A Delhi University Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) student has been arrested by Delhi Police for allegedly duping a neighbour to the tune of ₹2.38 lakh in National Capital. The 20-year-old girl is a resident of Nehru Vihar area and she is a student of BA from School of Open Learning in DU. According to Anto Alphonse, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), North district, a complaint was received in which the complainant alleged that during lockdown when he checked his mother's savings bank account there was zero balance. "Following this, he contacted the Bank at Mukherjee Nagar and found out that Rs 2,38,000 were deducted from his mother's account between November, 2019 to March, 2020. The complainant also checked messages for deduction in her mother mobile number but was not able to find any such message. The complainant made a complaint in Bank regarding unauthorised transaction, where he came to know that transactions were OTP secured, which were sent to registered mobile number in bank," said the DCP. "A case under section 379/420 of Indian Penal Code (IPC) at Timarpur police station and investigation was taken up. During investigation, it was revealed that the money was transferred from account to PayTM. Notice was also sent to PayTM which provided relevant details following which the beneficiary was identified as Swati (name changed), who is also a neighbour of the victim," said the DCP. "Bank Account Statement of Swati was also collected and it was found that money was transferred from PayTM to her bank account. Subsequently she was apprehended," said the DCP. "During interrogation, the accused confessed to her crime and told police that after helping the victim to activate her new debit card, she also added the card in her PayTM account. She after transferring the money deleted OTP messages from the victim's mobile phone. She spent the money on buying clothes, household items, food and recharge," said the DCP. In another incident, an 18-year-old college student was arrested for allegedly kidnapping a minor girl from Delhi after befriending her on Facebook and later also lured her to marry him, police said on Saturday. The accused Shoyab Khan, who is pursuing B. Pharma from a college in his native place Alwar, Rajasthan was arrested from Badarpur Border area on December 8 and subsequently the kidnapped girl was also rescued safely, they said.

## Farmers ignore PM's appeal, vow to block highway today

■ Continued from Page 1  
demand will remain the scrapping of the three laws. We will move onto our other demands only after that," Mr Pannu said.

Farmer union leaders will also sit on a hunger strike between 8 am and 5 pm at the Singhu Border during the nationwide protest on December 14 against the new agriculture laws, he said.

Mr Pannu alleged the government tried to weaken their agitation, but that the protesting farmers did not let that happen. The farmer leader vowed to keep the protest peaceful.

"The government tried to weaken our agitation by dividing us (various farmer unions). I want to say that the ongoing agitation is fully under control of 32 farmer unions. We will fail every government attempt to divide us," Mr Pannu also said.

The government had on Friday asked the protesting farmers to be vigilant against their platform being misused, saying some "antisocial" as well as "Leftist and Maoist" elements were conspiring to spoil the atmosphere of the agitation which has been going on for over two weeks now.

Photographs of some protesters at the Tikri border seen holding posters demanding the release of activists arrested under various charges had gone viral, prompting agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar to say that these "antisocial elements" are conspiring to spoil the atmosphere of the peasants' movement under the guise of farmers.

## ■ Hunger strike against new agriculture laws, say farmer leaders

## Security beefed up on border as farmers' stir may intensify

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 12

As the protests against the agriculture laws entered its seventeenth day, the protesting farmers stayed put across the borders in the national capital amid rain showers in the early hours of Saturday. The farmers have announced their plan to block the Delhi-Jaipur highway and the Yamuna Expressway in a bid to intensify the ongoing protests at Delhi borders.

Following the call to block toll plazas by farmers, as many as 3,500 police personnel were deployed at the five toll plazas near the national capital. Thousands of farmers, mostly from Punjab and Haryana, have been camping near the Delhi border for three weeks now. They say the new laws will leave them at the mercy of the corporate sector even as the government assured repeatedly that the legislations will bring some much-needed reforms.

There has been no protest yet on Delhi's bor-

ders with Gurgaon and at other points of National Highway-8 that connects the national capital with Jaipur.

The farmers, on Saturday, addressing a press conference at Singhu border also said that if the government wants to hold talks, they are ready but they will first discuss repeal of the three new farm laws.

"The farmers from Rajasthan's Shahjahanpur will start their Delhi Chalo march on Sunday at around 11.00 am. They would be coming in thousands through Jaipur-Delhi highway," said Kanwalpreet Singh Pannu, the farmers' leader.

Mr Pannu said that farmers from other parts of the country are also on their way to join the protesters here and they will take the agitation to the next level in the coming days.

A group of protesting farmers were stopped on Saturday from making a toll plaza free for all vehicles on the Kokhranj Handia Bypass Road in Uttar Pradesh's

Kaushambi district, the police said.

Farmer Union leaders will also sit on a hunger strike between 8.00 am and 5.00 pm on December 14 against the new agriculture laws, he said.

Mr Pannu alleged that the government tried to weaken the agitation but that the protesting farmers did not let it happen. The farmer leader vowed to keep the protest peaceful.

The government on Friday asked the protesting farmers to be vigilant against their platform being misused, saying some "anti-social" as well as "Leftist and Maoist" elements were conspiring to spoil the atmosphere of the agitation which has been going on for over two weeks now.

Photographs of some protesters at the Tikri border seen holding posters demanding release of activists arrested under various charges had gone viral, prompting agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar to say that these "antisocial ele-

ments" were conspiring to spoil the atmosphere of the peasants' movement under the guise of farmers.

Following the call given by farmers, the police had made adequate arrangements and these include multi-layered barricading and deployment of personnel.

Delhi police chief S.N. Shrivastava visited the Bahadurgarh border to interact with officers and personnel and Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) men deployed in view of the farmers' agitation.

Thousands of farmers will take out a tractor rally to block the Delhi-Jaipur highway on Sunday, demonstrators protesting the Centre's new agricultural laws said on Saturday, vowing to intensify their agitation despite a fresh message from Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the new legislations. Protesters will also hold a nationwide demonstration at all district offices on Monday and hold a hunger strike from 8 am to 5 pm, they said.



Covid test conducted at Palika Bazar, Connaught Place, in New Delhi on Saturday. —G. N JHA

## 1,935 cases, 47 Covid-19 deaths in Delhi in last 24 hrs

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 12

Delhi recorded 1,935 fresh Covid-19 cases on Saturday with over 73,000 tests being conducted, even as the positivity rate dropped to 2.64 per cent, authorities said.

The positivity rate from December 3 to December 7 had successively dipped to 4.96 per cent, 4.78 per cent, 4.2 per cent, 3.68 per cent and 3.15 percent respectively.

However, on December 8 it had risen again to 4.23 per cent, falling again to 3.42 per cent on December 9 and 2.46 per cent on December 10. It had risen to 3.33 per cent again on December 11.

Forty-seven fatalities were recorded, pushing the toll in the national capital to 9,981, the bulletin said.

## Man stabbed 22 times in brawl dies, 2 injured

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 12

A man died after he was stabbed 22 times, while his two friends were injured in a brawl with another group of three people, including a juvenile, police said on Friday.

The deceased has been identified as Neeraj and his two injured friends have been identified as Mukesh and Rakesh, both work as contractual security guards in Safdarjung hospital, they said.

According to police, two of the three accused persons — Krishan and Ravi — also used to work at the same hospital, but were replaced by their contractor with Mukesh and Rakesh following which they developed enmity and hatched a conspiracy to attack them, police said.

The incident took place on Wednesday night when Mukesh and

■ THE DECEASED has been identified as Neeraj and his two injured friends have been identified as Mukesh and Rakesh

Rakesh left their workplace after finishing their shift. They were also accompanied by their friend Neeraj. On the way, they were intercepted by Krishan and Ravi, who were accompanied by their juvenile associate.

A heated argument ensued between both the groups and soon the verbal confrontation turned violent.

The accused attacked Mukesh and Rakesh, and when Neeraj tried to stop them, they stabbed him also, police said. Deputy commissioner of police (southwest) Ingit Pratap Singh said a case of murder was registered and two people were arrested, while the juvenile was apprehended.

## Jaishankar: India is being tested

■ Continued from Page 1

events have raised some very "basic concerns" as the "other party" has not abided by agreements on respecting the LAC.

Participating in an interactive session at the annual general meeting of the industry body FICCI, he declined to be drawn into a discussion on any timeline for a resolution of the standoff.

When asked whether it will be a long-haul or a breakthrough is expected soon for a resolution to the military standoff, Mr Jaishankar said: "I would not go into prediction zone at all, whether it is going to be easy or not, and what will be the timelines."

"I do not believe that the events of this year have helped at all. In fact I think the real danger is that the goodwill which was so carefully developed will dissipate," he said.

"But I also would say that, yes, we are being tested. I have every confidence that

we will rise to the occasion; we will meet that national security challenge. But beyond that, at this time, I would really frankly keep my own counsel."

The armies of India and China are locked in a tense border standoff in eastern Ladakh since early May. Both sides have held multiple rounds of military and diplomatic talks. However, no breakthrough has been achieved yet.

"I also believe that what has happened is not actually in the interest of China. Because what it has done is — it has significantly impacted public sentiment (in India). Professionally, I have seen the evolution of how the Indian public feels about China over the last many decades and I am old enough to remember much more difficult days, especially in my childhood and in my teens," he said.

Mr Jaishankar also said a lot of work had gone into

developing the relationship on both sides.

"I think the events of this year have been very disturbing; they have raised some very basic concerns because they have happened because the other party has not abided by agreements that we have had with them about respecting and observing the Line of Actual Control and not bringing the forces to the Line of Actual Control."

Asked about the proposed trade deal with the US, Mr Jaishankar said fairly serious negotiations had taken place between the government and the Trump administration on resolving the outstanding trade issues.

"There was a fairly serious negotiation between our government and the Trump administration on resolving the outstanding trade issues. I think the general thinking on both sides was 'let's deal with differences before we think of something bigger'," he said.

## India, Uzbekistan Iran to discuss joint Chabahar Port use

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for the traders and business community of the region. Besides Uzbekistan, other Central Asian countries have also shown interest in using the port. India seeks to cooperate closely with regional countries on this issue."

The MEA added, "The Meeting would be jointly chaired at Deputy Minister level by Republic of Uzbekistan and Islamic Republic of Iran and Secretary Level from Republic of India."

Uzbekistan had also agreed "in-principle" on Friday to India's request to join the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), an important initiative taken by India, Russia and Iran to promote transportation cooperation and to enhance connectivity with central Asian countries, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Friday.

The INSTC is the "shortest multimodal transportation route linking the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf via Iran to Russia and North Europe".

## AAP demands CBI probe into alleged 'corruption' in MCDs

Vows to protest outside Amit Shah, L-G residences

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 12

The AAP on Saturday demanded a CBI inquiry into an alleged misappropriation of ₹2,500 crore in the BJP-led North Delhi and South Delhi municipal corporations, and vowed to protest outside the residences of Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Delhi's lieutenant governor Anil Bajjal from Sunday until a probe is ordered.

The city's ruling party announced that its MLAs — Raghav Chadha, Sanjeev Jha, Kuldeep, Rituraj Govind — will protest outside the house of the home minister, while Atishi will lead a party agitation outside the L-G house.

Atishi will be joined by party colleagues and the Leaders of Opposition in Delhi's three municipal houses — Vikas Goel (North DMC), Manoj Tyagi (East DMC) and Prem Chauhan (West DMC).

Addressing a press conference, Atishi, also an AAP spokesperson, demanded stringent action in the case, saying

▶ THE CITY'S ruling party announced that its MLAs will protest outside home minister outside Amit Shah's residence, while Atishi will lead the party's agitation outside the L-G house

that the unpaid doctors, medical staff, nurses, teachers and other COVID-19 warriors would have been paid their salaries with these Rs 2,500 crore.

"The way the Delhi Police allowed BJP councillors to sit outside Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's residence, I am sure they will allow us to sit outside the LG's and the Home Minister's residences at 11 AM tomorrow, and also provide us full protection," Atishi said.

Detailing the alleged corruption, she claimed that the North Delhi Municipal Corporation waived off Rs 2,500 crore rupees owed to it by the South Delhi Municipal Corporation for its office at Civic Centre in the NDMC area.

"If you check the

accounts of South MCD for the past many years, they clearly state that Rs. 2,500 crore was the payable rent for the SDMC office at Civic Center (under North DMC). But in this year's budget, the rent payable is shown as 0," she claimed.

"The question that now arises is where these Rs 2,500 crores are? Where has this money been appropriated? Which North MCD BJP leader and South MCD BJP leader received the money to turn these Rs. 2,500 crores into 0," she said.

"These Rs 2,500 crores which were to come to the North MCD have reduced to a loss to the public exchequer. Who is responsible for this loss, this corruption? To investigate the matter, Delhi's Minister of Urban Development Satyendar Jain issued an order to enquire about this loss to the public exchequer," she said.

"Our MLAs and councillors will protest in front of the LG's and the Home Minister's residences until they issue orders for a CBI inquiry into the matter," she added.

## City BJP protests across city, demands due fund of MCDs

Mayors protest against AAP govt by beating thalis

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 12

Delhi BJP leaders and workers staged protests against the Arvind Kejriwal government across the city on Saturday, demanding payment of the due funds of the party ruled municipal corporations. On the sixth day of their protest outside Mr Kejriwal's residence, meanwhile, all the three mayors protested by beating thalis at the dharna site.

Demanding the release of ₹13,000 crore due to the three municipal corporations, Delhi BJP president Adesh Gupta led a protest in Burari. Former Delhi BJP president and Northeast Delhi MP Manoj Tiwari participated in a protest at Khajuri Chowk. New Delhi MP

Meenakshi Lekhi led protests in Kasturba Nagar. Leader of Opposition in Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri led a similar demonstration in the Badarpur Assembly constituency.

Delhi BJP vice president Virender Sachdeva, Rajeev Babbar, Ashok Goel Devraha and MLAs O.P. Sharma, Abhay Verma, Anil Bajpai, Vijender Gupta, and Ajay Mahawar led protests in different parts of the city.

North, South, and East Delhi mayors Jai Prakash, Anamika, and Nirmal Jain respectively, along with senior party councillors, spent nights outside the gate of the chief minister's residence demanding release of due funds to the three civic bodies. On Saturday, they lodged their protest by beating

thalis. According to Mr Prakash, the three mayors of Delhi have been sitting outside the chief minister's residence for six consecutive days with the demand to release the due funds of three corporations of ₹13,000 crore, but not even once the chief minister tried to meet the mayors.

"The mayors and councillors held a protest by beating thalis to make the chief minister listen to their voice and grievance. Till the outstanding funds of the municipal corporations are not released, the three mayors will continue to sit on dharna outside the chief minister's residence. Besides this, the mayors will run their office from the dharna site outside the chief minister's residence," said Mr Prakash.

## North Corp. refutes funds misappropriation charges

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 12

A day after Delhi urban development minister Satyender Jain alleged misappropriation of funds, North Corporation chairman standing committee, Chhail Bihari Goswami refuted the charges of misappropriation of funds for waiving of dues to the tune of ₹2,457 crore towards South Delhi Municipal Corporation (SDMC). Mr Goswami said it shows the knowledge of the Delhi Government about functioning of local bodies.

According to Mr

Goswami, the standing committee is the statutory committee of the corporation which has the authority of dealing with financial issues of the corporation hence the Commissioner presents the budget proposals before this. "This committee has all the authority to make all the changes in the proposals means add or subtract in income and expenditure."

Commissioner tables the budget proposals only, not finalises it. The Commissioner has just tabled the proposals no deliberation has taken place but Aam Aadmi

party in lack of knowledge has started making issue out of it just to satisfy their instinct," said Mr Goswami.

Mr Goswami clarified that last year also Commissioner didn't mention the same in income of the corporation but was incorporated by the standing committee itself. "That stage has not come yet but Delhi Govt made this an issue of misappropriation. Delhi government is not in the safe hands but in the immature and impractical hands. God knows what would be the fate of Delhiites," he said.

## MHA recalls 3 cops, Didi will have 'last word'

■ Continued from Page 1

may ask for names of officers to be sent on deputation. But it's upto the state to release them. The state has the option. That's the procedure," he said.

The home ministry's move for shifting the three IPS officers may further embitter the relations between the Centre and the Mamata Banerjee government.

Sources in the Union home ministry defended the move and said the decision was taken in accordance with the rules governing officers of the All India Services. Admitting that the MHA had taken the decision "unilaterally and bypassing" the West Bengal government, they said in usual circumstances the consent of the state government concerned is obtained.

These three officers are perceived to be close to the ruling dispensation in West Bengal. —PTI

Mr Tewari denied the incident and said that nothing happened between them. Attempts to reach out to Mr and Ms Jha turned futile. Delhi BJP office secretary Hukum Singh said that he was not present in the office at the time of the incident.

▶ THE VICE-PRESIDENT in question, Rajan Tewari, behaved rudely with former city BJP mahila morchha president Poonam Parasara Jha and her husband Anil Jha in the state unit headquarters



## IN BRIEF

**J&K TO GET BACK  
17,000 HA LAND:  
ANURAG THAKUR**

**Srinagar, Dec. 12:** Union minister Anurag Thakur on Saturday expressed confidence that Jammu and Kashmir will get back 17,000 hectares of land that was grabbed through the Roshni Scheme, and action will be taken against those involved in this corruption.

“Roshni Act has been struck down by High Court and (it) termed the act illegal and unconstitutional. It clearly defined why this act had been brought in...just to help a few big names whether in politics, business or bureaucracy,” Thakur, who is the BJP’s election in-charge for Jammu and Kashmir, told reporters here.

Mr Thakur said he was glad that the court had taken an initiative and there has been a fair inquiry into it.

“I am sure that 3.42 lakh kanal (17,000 hectares) of land will be returned to state of Jammu and Kashmir. There will be action against who were involved in the corrupt practice,” he added. The Jammu and Kashmir government has filed a review petition in the high court seeking to distinguish between landless cultivators and wealthy land grabbers who had benefitted from the law which has been struck down. The petition will come up for hearing on December 16.

Commenting on the ongoing District Development Council elections in Jammu and Kashmir, Mr Thakur said the people will decide which party wins or loses. —PTI

**SINO-INDIA TALKS  
ENTER 8TH MONTH  
WITH NO DEAL**

**AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 12**

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

The winter season and snow in upper reaches has for time being reduced the possibility of an armed confrontation between the two sides in the region. However, soldiers deployed in front bases in Ladakh are now fighting the elements with temperatures dipping way below sub-zero temperatures.

The altitudes in Ladakh range from high to super high altitude and the area experiences heavy snow fall, after the month of November. This coupled with the wind chill factor, temperatures dips down to minus 37-40 degrees.

The eighth round of Corps Commanders meeting held on November 6 had given rise to hope that the two sides could reach an agreement on a disengagement plan.

It had seemed that China has agreed to move back from the Finger 4 and take its troops beyond Finger 8 in the Northern bank of Pangong Tso. Even army chief General M.M. Naravane had said that he was hopeful that the Indian and Chinese militaries will be able to reach an agreement on disengagement and de-escalation of tension in eastern Ladakh.

However, since then things have got stuck with no forward progress. There has also been no further meeting of the Corps Commanders since then.

India’s position has been that it was China which had first moved its troops at the LAC and China will have to be first to withdraw from these positions.

India has told China that it will talk about all flash points and not just about the South bank of Pangong Tso where Indian army occupied strategic heights in August in a surprise move.

**All for Rajinikanth**

Stage artistes from across Tamil Nadu dress up as Rajinikanth characters from several of his films on the occasion of the superstar’s 70th birthday on Saturday.

**PM Modi: Eco indicators  
show encouraging signs**

*‘Govt committed to minimum governance to boost investment’*

**India will exceed Paris Agreement targets: PM**

**New Delhi, Dec. 12:** Economic indicators have shown encouraging signs of recovery of the Indian economy post-pandemic, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Saturday as he vowed to keep government controls to a bare minimum and encourage private capital.

In this time of pandemic, he said, the government has accorded highest priority to saving lives of Indians and the way India has handled the crisis through concerted effort has surprised the world.

Compared to February when the pandemic started, things have changed in December, he said, adding, there is a road map to deal with this now.

“Even the economic indicators are encouraging,” he added.

Various measures taken by the government in the

**New Delhi, Dec. 12:** India is not only on track to achieve its Paris Agreement targets, but to exceed them beyond expectations, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said during the Climate Ambition Summit 2020 on Saturday, highlighting that the country has reduced its emission intensity by 21 per cent

over 2005 levels.

In his message delivered virtually at the summit, Mr Modi said India’s solar capacity has grown from 2.63 gigawatts in 2014 to 36 gigawatts in 2020.

The Climate Ambition Summit, held virtually, marked the five years of the adoption of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, which was signed

in December 2015.

The summit was co-hosted by the United Nations, the United Kingdom and France in partnership with Chile and Italy, and brought together global climate leaders — across governments, business and civil society — to ramp up climate ambition and help deliver on the Paris Agreement. —PTI

last six years has instilled confidence among global investors, he said.

As a result, he said, “India has seen record Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and Foreign Portfolio Investment inflows during the pandemic.”

Addressing the FICCI Annual Convention, he said, a decisive govern-

ment always strives to remove obstacles for others and always tries to contribute towards the society and the nation.

Recalling the time when government was in all the sectors, he said, a visionary and decisive government, on the other hand, encourages all the stakeholders to realise their potential.

Mr Modi pointed out that in the last six years, the government has encouraged stakeholders in all sectors and this is reflected in the all-round reforms in sectors ranging from manufacturing to MSME; agriculture to infrastructure; from tech industry to taxation and from real estate to regulatory easing. —PTI

**5-YR IT TARGET  
ACHIEVED IN 3  
YEARS: YOGI**

**Lucknow, Dec. 12:** The Uttar Pradesh government on Saturday said it has achieved a five-year target of attracting ₹20,000 crore investment and providing three lakh jobs in Information Technology sector in three years only.

UP deputy chief minister Dinesh Sharma said many reputed companies from China, Taiwan and Korea are keen to set up their manufacturing units in state’s electronics manufacturing cluster, being developed in 100 acre land in Greater Noida.

“Following the implementation of the UP Electronics Manufacturing Policy-2017, a target of securing ₹20,000 crore investment and generating three lakh jobs in the IT sector in five years by 2022. This target in three years only, said Mr Sharma. —PTI

**Doctor says Lalu Yadav’s  
kidney functioning at 25%**

**Ranchi, Dec. 13:** The physician of jailed RJD chief Lalu Prasad Yadav, Dr Umesh Prasad on Saturday said that the latter’s kidney is functioning at 25 per cent and the situation can deteriorate at any time in future.

Dr Prasad has updated the authorities of Rajendra Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS), where Yadav is admitted, in writing about this situation.

“I have said earlier also that it is true that Yadav’s kidney is functioning at 25 per cent. And this situation is alarming from this logic that his kidney functioning can deteriorate anytime. It is difficult to predict exactly when,” Dr Prasad told ANI.

“The rate at which his disease is getting worse and since he has diabetes for the last 20 years, his end organ is damaging in an escalating manner. So,



Lalu Prasad Yadav

the situation is alarming for the patient’s health. The higher authorities of Rajendra Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS) have been informed in writing about Yadav’s health that emergency situation can arise at any time,” he added.

Dr Prasad also said, in his opinion, there is no need to transfer Yadav to any other medical facility as organ damage due to diabetes is irreversible and no medicine can cure it.

“The court or the gov-

ernment has to decide on whether he needs to be taken somewhere else for treatment. In my opinion, there will not be any major impact on his health if he is taken outside for treatment. This is because the damage in body organs due to diabetes is irreversible. There is no medicine which will make the kidney function at 100 per cent from 25 per cent. Otherwise, there will be no need for dialysis or kidney transplant,” he said.

“We have taken a decision that we will consult the resident nephrologist and decide on the further course of treatment of Lalu Prasad Yadav,” he added.

The RJD leader was admitted to RIMS on August 30, 2018, after he surrendered at Birs Munda Central Jail on Jharkhand court’s orders in the fodder scam. —ANI

**Praful: Pawar  
couldn’t be PM  
due to coterie**

**BHAGWAN PARAB  
MUMBAI, DEC. 12**

Senior NCP leader Praful Patel has alleged that the ‘durbar coterie’ in the Congress ensured that Mr Pawar did not become the PM on two occasions in 1990s. “Mr Pawar was on the verge of becoming the PM in 1991 and 1996, but the darbar politics of Delhi created hurdles for him. It proved to be a big loss for him as well as the party,” he said in a newspaper article.

According to Mr Patel, after Rajiv Gandhi’s death in 1991, Mr Pawar was slated to become a Congress president. However, the durbar coterie opposed him and made an ailing PV Narasimha Rao as the party chief. The same coterie then used Sonia Gandhi’s name to anoint Rao as the PM despite the strong belief in the Congress that the PM can-

didate should be dynamic.

“In 1996, the Congress won 145 seats. H D Deve Gowda, Lalu Prasad Yadav and Mulayam Singh Yadav as well as Left leaders said they will support the Congress if Pawar is made PM, but Rao forced Congress to support Deve Gowda from outside. When Rao stepped down as the Congress president, he pushed the name of Sitaram Kesri as his successor to ensure that Pawar was not selected,” Mr Patel wrote.

Senior Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut said that the NCP chief’s own merit created obstacles in his quest to become the PM. “Inferior leaders in Congress feared him, so they made sure that he didn’t get the top post. Mr Pawar should have become the prime minister long back. Today he is 80. But age is still no barrier for him,” he said.

**3 Covid-19 patients die after  
outage in MP govt hospital**

**RABINDRA NATH  
CHOUDHURY  
BHOPAL, DEC. 12**

Three Covid-19 patients who were on ventilators in a government hospital here died on Friday evening after a power outage in their ward.

Chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Saturday ordered a high level probe into the tragedy even as a sub-engineer of state public works department in-charge of maintenance and a residential medical officer were suspended on charges of dereliction of duty. Besides, show cause notice was served to the dean of the hospital, an official spokesman of the state government said on Saturday.

Mr Chouhan asked Bhopal divisional commissioner Kavindra Kiyawat to probe the incident and submit a report to him within 12 hours.

The deceased included a senior Congress leader, Akbar Khan (64).

Power supply in the 440-bedded Covid-19 ward of the hospital disrupted for

**India’s corona tally  
climbs to 98.26L**

**AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 12**

India’s Covid-19 tally climbed to 98.26 lakh with 30,006 new cases in a day, while 93,24,328 people have recovered so far, pushing the national recovery rate to 94.88 per cent. According to the Union health ministry data, the total coronavirus cases mounted to 98,26,775 and the death toll climbed to 1,42,628 with the virus claiming 442 lives in a span of 24 hours in the

country.

Active cases continue to drop as the total active caseload has dropped below 3.6 lakh (3,59,819) today. “This has been made possible by the trend of recoveries exceeding new cases and the low number of fatalities per day, which have ensured a total net reduction of the active caseload. India’s present active caseload consists of just 3.66 per cent of India’s total positive cases.

around 2 hours from 5.48 in the evening on Friday, causing panic among the patients.

The ward has 150 Intensive Care Unit beds, out of which 57 were occupied when the incident took place.

Eleven patients were on ventilators in the ICU section of the ward.

Sources said the generator, the backup power supply to the ward, also failed after 10 minutes.

Medical education minister Viswas Sarang however said preliminary investigation suggested that the power outage might not be the cause of death of 3 corona patients in the hospital.

**Workers go on rampage at  
iPhone plant in Karnataka**

**Bengaluru, Dec. 12:** Violence broke out on Saturday at the Taiwan-headquartered Wistron Corporation’s plant near here where iPhones and other IT products are manufactured as large number of workers went on a rampage over issues related to payment of salary, police said.

The Karnataka government condemned the violence at the manufacturing facility in Narasapura Industrial Area in Kolar district, about 50 kilometers from here.

Police said 132 people have been detained in connection with the violence that erupted around 6 AM during the morning shift.

“The information we received is that the employees had problems related to their salary payment,”

inspector-general of police Seemant Kumar Singh told reporters after visiting the Wistron facility, adding investigations were on.

The workers in the morning shift hurled stones, smashed glass windows, damaged vehicles, furniture, computers and laptops, another police officer said.

Video footages showed a violent group overturning vehicles, setting them on fire, breaking glass windows in the office leaving a trail of destruction. Condemning the violence, deputy chief minister C.N. Ashwath Narayan said stringent action would be taken against the perpetrators.

The IGP said as many as 132 people suspected to be behind the arson and violence had been detained.

On the extent of damage, Singh said the company would assess it.

He said the employees should have approached the labour commissioner if they had any grievances. Narayan, who holds the IT-BT and higher education portfolio, termed the incident as unfortunate.

“Whether employees are anyone else, whoever is responsible for attack on the factory and damaging its property, they will face stringent action,” the deputy CM said.

A detailed investigation would be carried out to identify the reasons for the unrest among the workers, the situation that enraged those in the morning shift and cover aspects related to payment of salary. —PTI

## TRANSPARENT ELECTIONS

**Expenditure limit for party candidates was last revised in 2014****EC tells parties to fix limit on poll expenses**

**New Delhi, Dec. 12:** The Election Commission has sought views of recognised national and state parties on what should be the limit of expenditure for candidates contesting Lok Sabha and assembly polls.

In a letter sent out on December 7, the commission asked parties to send their “views and suggestions” on as to what should be the ceiling limit of election expenditure for candidates for Lok Sabha and assembly elections in the future. The parties have been asked to send their views to the nodal officer of

the committee that was set up in October to revise the expenditure limit.

While there is a limit on candidates to spend on their election campaign, there is no such cap on political parties.

The committee was tasked to examine the issue of revising the expenditure limit for candidates for Lok Sabha and assembly polls in view of the increase in number of electors and rise in the Cost Inflation Index. Expenditure limit for candidates was last revised in 2014.

For Andhra Pradesh and

Telangana, the limit was enhanced in 2018. “In last six years, the limit was not increased despite an increase in electorate from 834 million to 910 million in 2019 to 921 million now. Further, Cost Inflation Index during this period has increased from 220 to 280 in 2019 to 301 now,” the commission had said in October while announcing constitution of the panel.

The committee will assess the change in number of electors across states and union territories, and its bearing on expenditure.

—PTI

**ELECTION COMMISSION TOYS WITH  
IDEA OF DIGITAL VOTER ID CARD**

**New Delhi, Dec. 12:** The Election Commission (EC) is toying with the idea of providing voters with election photo identity card in a digital format for easy accessibility, a senior official said.

He, however, made it clear that no decision has been taken by the EC yet in this regard. “We keep getting suggestions and ideas from officers on fields, through

working groups of (state) chief electoral officers and public. This is one such idea we are working on,” the functionary said.

Asked whether the digital voter identity card would mean that a voter can carry it on his or her mobile phone using an application, the official said once the EC takes a decision, such details will be settled. —PTI

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SHORT TAKES

Another ED notice to Shiv Sena MLA

**Mumbai:** The ED has summoned Shiv Sena MLA Pratap Sarnaik for a second time next week to interrogate the alleged ₹175 crore money laundering involving a security agency. The agency had grilled him on Thursday. The ED is questioning Sarnaik and his son Vihang in connection with the illegal kickbacks and laundering of the money that was made from the security business. The ED has sent another summons to Sarnaik asking him to appear on Monday for questioning. The officials grilled Sarnaik on Thursday for over six hours on the details of the documents that were seized during the raids and searches carried out by ED teams in Thane and Mumbai. The ED has found some documents pertaining to the credit card and its transactions about which the agency is mulling over to question Sarnaik. The officials may also summon Vihang for questioning.

Maha plans jobs, for kin of martyrs

**Mumbai:** Maharashtra minister of state for ex-servicemen welfare Satej Patil on Saturday said the state government was thinking of providing direct employment to widows and children of soldiers who lay down their lives for the country. The move will be on the lines of employment to kin of policemen killed in Naxal attacks in the state. Mr Patil said district collectors have been asked to allot land to the kin of ex-servicemen and a report on this would be submitted in three months. In Maharashtra, there is 5 per cent quota for ex-servicemen and 2 per cent for kin of martyrs in MHADA housing complexes, while a state government order October 20 earmarked 5 per cent reservation for children of ex-servicemen in degree and post-graduation degree colleges. — PTI

Jagannath Temple may reopen soon

**Puri:** The Shree Jagannath Temple is likely to throw open its gates to devotees before New Year after being closed for nine months due to Covid-19. The Shree Jagannath Temple Administration (SJA) chief administrator Krishan Kumar said the decision on reopening the temple was taken keeping in view the religious sentiments of the devotees and the Covid-19 protocol will be strictly observed when the 12th century shrine reopens. A meeting of temple servants "Chhatisa Nijog" was held and the SJA will send its recommendations to the state government for the final approval to reopen the temple, he said. — PTI

B'WOOD ACTRESS FOUND DEAD IN KOLKATA FLAT

**Kolkata:** Actress Arya Banerjee who starred in several Bollywood films, including *The Dirty Picture*, was found dead at her south Kolkata residence, the police said. The police broke open the door of her third-floor apartment on Friday and found that the body of the 33-year-old woman was lying in the bedroom. Her domestic help reportedly informed neighbours after getting no response despite repeated knocks on the door. A police team soon reached the spot and forced open the door. According to the police, Deb Dutta was found lying on the floor of a bedroom in her second-floor apartment at the three-storey building. There were bloodstains on her nose but no other injuries, the police said. She was taken to SSKM Hospital where doctors declared her dead on arrival. The daughter of late sitarist Nikhil Bandyopadhyay, Arya had also starred in *LSD: Love Sex Aur Dhoka* (2010) among other films. She had also done some modelling assignments in Mumbai. Her domestic help got suspicious as she did not respond to doorbells and phone calls in the morning and informed the neighbours who called the police. Arya lived alone and kept to herself mostly, the domestic help said. The police has recovered two of her mobile phones. — Agencies



Arya Banerjee

# Cong sharpens attack, says repeal agri laws

11 farmers killed during agitation, how many more sacrifices will they have to make, asks Rahul

AGE CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs  
NEW DELHI, DEC. 12

Claiming that 11 farmers have lost their lives while protesting against the new farm laws over the last 17 days, the Congress on Saturday questioned how many agriculturalists would have to lose their lives to get the legislations repealed.

The Congress also hit out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi, saying the farmers want pro-people governance not flowery speeches and urged the Centre to accede to their demands.

In a tweet, Congress' chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala attacked Mr Modi for his remarks at an event on Saturday that the agri reforms will be beneficial for the farmers, saying the "whole country is fed up of your enticing 'lollypops'".

He said the farmers want pro-people governance not flowery speeches, and the people in the country want cheap ration.

The Opposition party also cited a media report to claim that 11 farmers have died in the last 17 days while protesting the new agri laws, with former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi asking how many more sacrifices will the farmers have to make to get the legislations repealed.

"How many more sacrifices will the farmers have to make to get the agri laws repealed?" Mr Gandhi tweeted.

Mr Surjewala said despite the "martyrdom of 11 farmer brothers in the last 17 days, the Modi government is not relenting".

"They (government) are still standing with their 'money providers' not with 'annadaatas' (food providers)," he tweeted.

"The country wants to know — 'Is Rajdharm (constitutional responsibility) bigger or Rajhat' (stubbornness)?" he asked.

Farmers, especially from the three food bowl states of Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, are protesting the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020; Farmers Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020; and The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act 2020.

At least five rounds of discussions have already taken place between the Centre and representatives of farmers.



Farmers play cricket at Singhu border during their Delhi Chalo protest march against the new farm laws in New Delhi on Saturday. — PTI

## Farmers picket toll plazas, threaten bigger protest

**New Delhi/Chandigarh, Dec. 12** Agitating farmers picketed highway toll plazas in Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan on Saturday and claimed thousands more will soon arrive on Delhi's borders to intensify their stir against the Centre's new agri laws, even as Prime Minister Narendra Modi again asserted that these reforms will help increase the income of cultivators.

Hundreds of security personnel were deployed at border points on highways linking Delhi following an announcement by the farmer unions to block the Jaipur-Delhi and the Delhi-Agra Expressways on Saturday.

The roads functioned by and large normally though the protesters did block some stretches briefly and did not allow the collection of toll at many places.

Farmer leaders said major highways linking the national capital will be blocked from Sunday and they will sit on a hunger strike on December 14, when they have called for a nationwide protest.

Some union leaders said that farmers could not block the highways on Saturday because most of them were on their way to Delhi from remote areas of



Farmers ride tractors during their protest march at Kundli border in Sonapat on Saturday. — PTI

Rajasthan and Haryana.

More than 100 farmers gathered at a toll plaza on the Ambala-Hisar highway, around 15 kilometres from Ambala city.

Farmers also did not allow the collection of fees from commuters at Bastara and Peont toll plazas in Karnal on NH-44 and Karnal-Jind highway respectively. Farmers also took over four toll plazas in Hisar district, one on Jind-Nirwana highway among others.

In Uttar Pradesh, dozens of farmers were detained in different parts of Aligarh for trying to occupy toll plazas. Similar incidents of protests trying to picket toll plaza were reported from other districts, including

Kaushambi.

In Rajasthan, RLP MP Hanuman Beniwal joined a demonstration as farmers blocked highways in dozens of places.

Addressing the Kisan Mahapanchayat organised at Kotputli, Mr Beniwal said that the Centre did not discuss it with the stakeholders before bringing the farm laws.

In Punjab, toll charges are not being collected from commuters as farmers have been staging sit-ins at toll plazas since October 1. The NHAI is suffering a loss of ₹3 crore per day on account of farmers' protest at toll plazas in the state. There are 25 toll plazas on national highways in Punjab. — PTI

## Breakthrough with farmers likely in 24-48 hrs: Dushyant

**New Delhi, Dec. 12:** Noting that the Centre "is positive" to find a solution to demands of protesting farmers, Haryana deputy chief minister Dushyant Chautala on Saturday expressed hope that the final round of talks between the government and farmer unions will be held in 24 to 48 hours and will lead to a conclusive result.

In an exclusive interview with ANI, Mr Chautala said that it is his responsibility as representative of farmers to secure their rights.

"The way Centre is holding talks they also want a resolution of the issue. I'm hopeful that in 24 to 48 hours final round of talks will be held between the central government and farmers' leaders and will lead to a conclusive result," Mr Chautala said.

The Jannayak Janta Party leader, who met agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar and defence minister Rajnath Singh on Saturday, said he discussed the matter with union ministers and expressed hope that a way will be found with mutual consent.

"It's my responsibility as a representative of farmers to secure their rights. I discussed the matter with Union Ministers, I'm hopeful that a way will be found with mutual consent and the standoff will be



Dushyant Chautala

## Laws brought in to loot farmers: SP

**Lucknow:** Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav asked the BJP government to stop "atrocities" against farmers and withdraw the agriculture laws brought in for "looting" them. In a release, Mr Yadav said the farmers of the country have understood that the BJP government is "adopting different tactics to snatch their land and harvest". He accused the BJP government of becoming a "puppet in the hands of capitalists". — PTI

resolved. The Centre is positive," he told ANI.

Farmers are protesting on Delhi borders against three recently enacted farm laws. They have rejected the proposal for amendments by the Centre and have said they will intensify their agitation for repeal of the three laws. — ANI

## Farmers backing new laws meet Tomar, threaten protest if repealed

**New Delhi, Dec. 12:** Amid an ongoing protest against three farm laws, a delegation of 29 farmers from Haryana met agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar to extend their support to the new legislations and threatened to stage a protest if those are repealed.

The delegation, led by Bharatiya Kisan Union's (Mann) Haryana state leader Guni Prakash, submitted a "letter of support" to Mr Tomar on the farm laws and demanded the government to continue with these legislations.

"We will also protest if the government repeals the laws. We have given a

memorandum to all districts," Prakash told reporters after the meeting. He also sought to know why the previous government did not implement the recommendations of the Swaminathan Commission till 2014.

"Everyone has a right to protest. They have, so do we. We are in support of the three laws, but this protest is being led by Leftists and those who are violent," he said.

Claiming that the agitation is no longer a peasant movement, the leader said, "It has taken a political colour. Farmers will get real freedom through these three laws." — PTI

## 'Mantris who called farmers Khalistani must apologise'

**Amritsar, Dec. 12:** Attacking BJP-led Union government regarding the ongoing deadlock with farmers over the three agriculture sector laws, SAD chief Sukhbir Singh Badal on Saturday said all the "ministers" who "defamed" the protesting farmers by calling them 'Khalistanis' and 'anti-national' must apologise to them publicly.

Speaking to media in Amritsar, Mr Badal questioned why the Central government is showing "tyranny" and not repealing the laws when the section of the society for whom the laws are made is not happy with them.

"Centre is trying to defame agitation by calling it that of Khalistanis and political parties. It is unfortunate that if one



Sukhbir Singh Badal

disagrees with them they call them anti-nationals. ministers giving such statements must apologise publicly. We condemn Centre's attitude and such statements," said the SAD chief.

"It is unfortunate that Centre is trying to stifle the voices of the farmers, instead of listening to them. Farmers don't want the farm laws. Why is Centre showing tyranny

when the section of the society, for whom laws have been formed, doesn't want it? I request the Prime Minister to listen to farmers," he added.

Mr Badal said the farmers are not happy spending their nights in the streets in this fierce cold but are helpless, and added "it has been the policy of the Central government that anyone who raises voice against them is defamed by being called anti-national."

The farmers' agitation on the borders of Delhi, against the three farm laws passed by the Central government in the last monsoon session of Parliament, entered the 17th day today, with the farmers' unions now threatening to block railway tracks. — ANI



A woman at a rally organised by religious leaders to express their solidarity with the protesting farmers in Kolkata on Saturday. — PRITAM BANDYOPADHYAY

## Protest against 3 Central laws is being funded by commission agents

## Farmers' stir slipping into wrong hands: Shanta

**Dharamshala, Dec. 12:** Himachal Pradesh's former Chief Minister and senior BJP leader Shanta Kumar on Saturday alleged that the farmers' stir against the three Central farm laws is being funded by adhatiyas' and is fast slipping into wrong hands, including those of terror outfits.

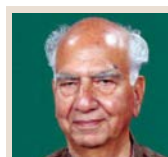
He made the allegation while also cautioning both farmers and government to be careful against such elements taking control of the movement.

It is unfortunate that

even after long talks by ministers and assurances by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the farmers' agitation is becoming more intensified, said Mr Kumar, also a former Union minister for food and public distribution.

The movement has reached a critical juncture as some wrong elements have joined the movement with some suspected NGOs funding it with crores of rupees, alleged Mr Kumar.

The leadership of the movement now is not in



Shanta Kumar

**EXPLAINING THE involvement of commission agents, Mr Kumar said the grain production in Punjab is very high and its procurement by the FCI entails the generation of taxes and commission agents' fees worth over ₹5,000 crore annually**

the hands of the farmers working in fields. The movement is being run mainly by political leaders of Punjab, alleged Mr Kumar.

Explaining the motives and involvement of adhatiya or commission agents for crop sales in the

stir, Mr Kumar said the grain production in Punjab is very high and its procurement by the Food Corporation of India entails the generation of taxes and commission agents' fees worth over ₹5,000 crore annually.

With the new law, farm-

ers will be able to sell their produce anywhere across the country and this would lead to a drastic reduction in the commission agents' income, said Mr Kumar.

This is the reason why Punjab's middlemen are giving crores of rupees, blankets, quilts and food grains to the people sitting on the dharna, said Kumar, adding an international NGO is giving goods worth crores of rupees besides putting up a big pandal at Delhi borders. — PTI

Senior medical officer (Sonapat) Anvita Kaushik, who is also the in-charge of medical facilities at the Singhu border, said despite her team's "best efforts", farmers are not willing to get tested for Covid-19.

"Our district's medical vans and teams have been deployed at Singhu border. They (protesters) are getting medicines from us for cough, fever and other health problems, but are are unwilling to undergo Covid-19 test," Dr Kaushik said.

She said the ongoing protests, only a few of whom wear face masks, not only pose a threat to their lives but also to those of hundreds of workers of various factories located on the Delhi-Sonapat road. — PTI



## THE ASIAN AGE

13 DECEMBER 2020



Ranjona Banerji

Off the beaten track

### Confessions of an old feminist

It was when I hit 40 that it started to bother me. Now this is true: born in the 1960s, my sister and I were sure that we would never live to see the change of the century, the fin de siècle. We would be so old! Almost 40. Life would surely be over. In our youth, we did the usual thing: asked our parents what life was like in the “olden days”.

Well, karma. It's now my turn. And the millennium happened, I turned 40. Getting my reading glasses almost on the date was exciting. I had always wanted to wear glasses and decided that I had “lost” my eyesight at 7 I wanted them so bad but that's another story. Anyway. With my new reading glasses, I was instantly outraged by such newspaper headlines: “Elderly woman of 45 run over”.

The lifestyle pages might have been full of rubbish about 60 being the new 40 and 70 the new 30 or whatever. But as far as the general public was concerned, 45 was elderly. Yes, my joints had started creaking. My hair was greying. And all the rest of the accoutrements of ageing but you know, big deal. I didn't feel “elderly”. And at best, I had moved up a notch from being “Didi” to “Bhabhi” or “Madam” as far as the general public were concerned. Respect at last! What respect? Ephemeral, as you will discover soon.

That 40 bridge was crossed almost two decades ago. I'm looking forward to some senior citizen benefits in a couple of years, if Modi government hasn't done away with them by then of course: 1/4 per cent interest rate increase on FDs and such. But before I even get there, I have to get around the fact that I have in less than 20 years progressed from “elderly” to my death bed.

All day I get advice from the yooofs of India. Do not say this. Do not think like that. When you eat, lift your hand to your mouth. You don't know this, but the Earth rotates on its axis. Why did you say this when you meant that? Did you know that the tomato is not indigenous to India? Or even better, how dare you say the tomato is not indigenous to India you traitorous old coot. Go home Auntie and all the rest of it. Not that I mind being called Auntie. I've been an Auntie since I was in my 20s.

And then, there are the men. Earlier they explained menstruation to me. Now they explain menopause. In between they explain everything else. To be fair, it's not my age so much that forces them to be so generous with their little knowledge. It's my femaleness. The thing is, it doesn't stop.

I'm not unsympathetic to ageists, don't get me wrong. I understand. Between the ages of 12 to 39, I also thought I knew everything and this self-delusional omniscience peaked in my 30s. I do think my Mother conked me on the head a few times and I still didn't get it. Thick and a know-it-all. Imagine how annoying that was.

As is the manner of all things, I learnt. That I am elderly, aged, stupid, ignorant, in dire need of schooling, that my own words need to be explained back to me and especially all my jokes (they may be terrible but they're mine!), maybe I even need cancelling. Because as I have learnt (I can still pick up one or two things) that it's mainly older people who get “cancelled”.

I genuinely thought I would be philosophical about the whole thing. End on the last resort poetry like TS Eliot: “I grow old, I grow old...”

Or WB Yeats and “arise and go now”.

But then I thought, what the what. There's still some life in the old dog. So here are the last two verses of Lewis Carroll's satirical version of Robert Southey's poem. Hah! I beat you to your “did you know”. And don't worry about the last line. I'm not that violent. Yet.

“You are old,” said the youth, “one would hardly suppose  
That your eye was as steady as ever;

Yet you balanced an eel on the end of your nose—  
What made you so awfully clever?”

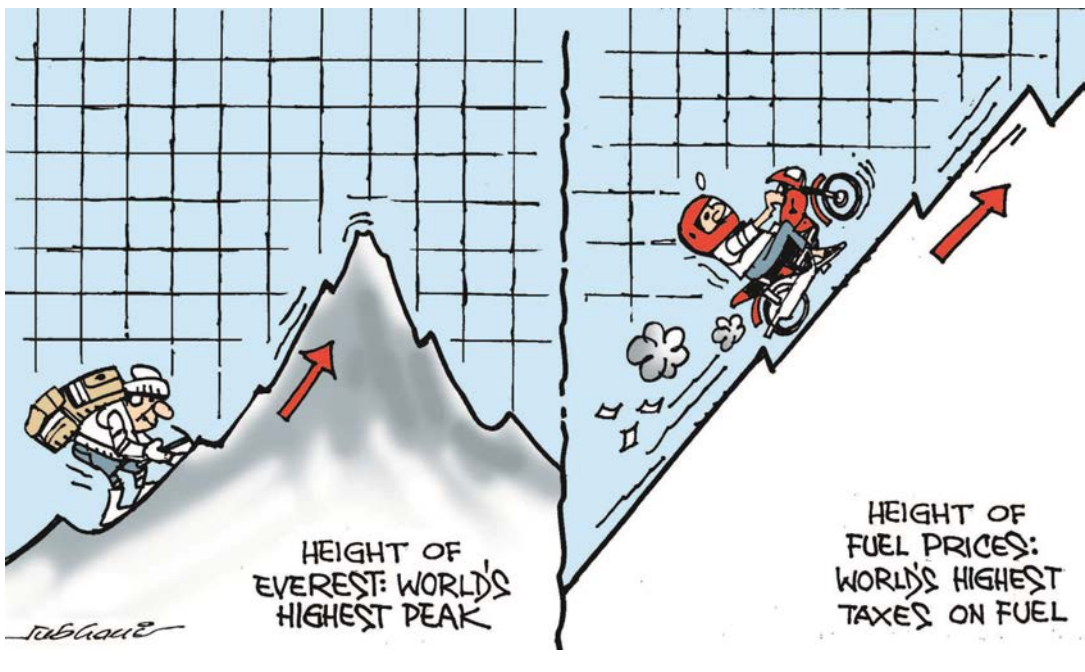
“I have answered three questions, and that is enough,”  
Said his father; “don't give yourself airs!

Do you think I can listen all day to such stuff?  
Be off, or I'll kick you down stairs!”

The writer is a senior journalist who writes on media affairs, politics and social trends. She tweets at @ranjona.

Every Monday the best letter of the week wins ₹500. Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com, Else, send to Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi 110002.

Subhani



## Ground reality darkens PM ‘vista’ of democracy



Pavan K. Varma

Chanakya's View

At the *bhoomipoojan* of the proposed new Parliament building it was heartening to hear Prime Minister Narendra Modi speak about the ancient democratic traditions in India, and modern India's belief in the theory and practice of democracy. It is, indeed, a matter of pride that defying the Cassandra who predicted the early demise of democracy in independent India, our Republic continues to be the world's largest democracy.

However, the PM's espousal of democracy sits in rather strong contrast to the actual practice of the government he heads, where more and more decisions appear to be in the nature of *farmans*. Demonetisation, which caused immense economic dislocation, and from which the country has still not fully recovered, was announced by the PM himself like a bolt from the blue one evening. Similarly, the decision to impose the lockdown at the onset of the Covid pandemic was done at four hours' notice without adequate advance preparation causing unprecedented suffering for millions of migrant labour.

The categorical statements by home minister Amit Shah that the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAA) will be explicitly linked to the patently discriminatory NRC exercise, was unprecedented by consultation and deliberation, thereby leading to nationwide protests. Most recently, the three farmer's bills were rammed through Parliament through a voice vote, without sufficient discussion, and without referring them to

a select committee of Parliament for wide-spread consultations with legitimate stakeholders. Consequently, the farmer's agitation is there for all to see.

In a democracy there is a tangible dialectic between intent and process. In dictatorships the process can be overlooked, and the ruling dispensation can proceed unchallenged in implementing its intent. That is why, undemocratic polities may give the illusion of taking decisions faster, but their foundations are brittle and their decisions, precisely because of the lack of democratic debate, questionable and unsustainable. When the intent, even if laudable, is unaccompanied by democratic processes, the result causes unease, apprehension, and social instability.

At the *bhoomipoojan*, the PM's eloquence on India's democratic credentials, and the importance of civilised discourse, could not hide the fact that the plan for the massive restructuring of New Delhi has suffered from an overwhelming opacity and lack of transparency. Once again, it is evidence of the current government deciding unilaterally what is good for the people, and then proceeding to imple-

**Why was an open design competition not held? This was the methodology followed for rebuilding the World Trading Centre in New York, the Notre Dame revamp in Paris, and the Indira Gandhi Centre for the National Arts in New Delhi.**

**Lutyens, who built New Delhi along with Herbert Baker, was a racist, and what he left us with is not sacrosanct. But, in terms of the process for change, the government has been opaque to the point of being undemocratic.**

ment that decision without fully consulting the people.

The facts speak for themselves. The building of a new Parliament is only one piece of a larger decision to almost rebuild the key heritage areas of New Delhi. As per the plan, the existing Parliament will be junked and made into a museum; the North and South Blocks of the central secretariat will also be junked and made into museums; the iconic Central Vista will be jettisoned, and make way for a new residence for the PM and the Vice President. A new Central Secretariat to house all the babus of the government will be constructed. Several key buildings in these areas will be demolished. In other words, the existing Master Plan for New Delhi will be more or less thrown into the dustbin.

Cities cannot be fossilised and should change with changing times and needs. We can, therefore, give the government the benefit of doubt in terms of its intent. Lutyens, who built New Delhi along with Herbert Baker, was an incorrigible racist, and what he left us with is not sacrosanct. But, in terms of the process for change, the government has been opaque to the point of being undemocratic.

The original brief for a project of this magnitude simply said that “New Delhi must represent ‘the values of a new India’ and be ‘rooted in the Indian culture and social milieu’.” Should not what this should entail be a matter of democratic discussion,

among experts and in Parliament? Then, why was an open design competition not held? This was the methodology followed for the rebuilding of the World Trading Centre in New York, the renovation of the Notre Dame in Paris, and the Indira Gandhi Centre for the National Arts in New Delhi. Again, the selection was based on tenders for which 80 per cent was allocated for quality, and 20 per cent for price. But who decided what constituted the best quality? The government itself. The result was that a Gujarat based company got the contract even when its price bid was reportedly the highest.

Nor were the technical scores for the winning company disclosed. No convincing study was presented to show that the existing Parliament building is falling apart, and cannot be repurposed for future needs. No public jury of eminent architects, environmentalists, landscapers and town planners was appointed to judge the proposals. Why was the meeting of the Central Vista Committee held without the presence of non-government members? Why were environmental clearances sought to be obtained piecemeal, rather than for the project as a whole? Why has the approval of the Heritage Conservation Committee not yet been obtained? The only thing we see is a tearing hurry to complete this architectural megalomania by March 2022, and to start construction even when petitions against it are pending before the Supreme Court.

In a democracy, the democratic bona fides of a government depend on its willingness to follow the democratic process of discussion and debate. In the absence of this, eloquence with regard to our democratic past appears less than convincing.

The writer, an author and a former diplomat, is in politics

## LETTERS

### STONES OF BENGAL

In ancient Greek legends, the Oracle of Delphi is said to have advised the seekers of a fabled treasure to turn every stone, but then there is no record of the treasure having ever been found. Not much different had been the outcome in Kashmir, where the quest with stones ended in the state itself finding an abrupt closure to its very existence to now reach meditative Nirvana. The stones of Bengal, however, are of a more rebellious extraction. In this land of Param-hansa and Tagore, who would get to the treasure first, however, come 2021, is the question now on everyone's minds.

R. Narayanan

Navi Mumbai

### COOL TO COHABIT

IN A LIBERAL and laudable judgment, the Allahabad High Court has ruled that a live-in relationship between two consenting adults is not an offence. It has also granted police protection to a couple that wanted to live together. Parents and other relatives must, therefore, desist from interfering in the private lives of their children even if they, wrongly, feel they are being immoral. Neighbours, or “society”, so to speak, must also stop (mis)judging these people. They must beware and fear judgement, themselves, instead.

Sanjeev Sirohi

Meerut

### GO, ROHIT

STAR INDIA BATSMAN Rohit Sharma passing his fitness assessment and being given the all-clear to leave for Australia must cheer the Indian team and his admirers. The Indian opener who had injured his hamstring during the IPL will depart for Australia on December 14 and will be available for selection for the third Test. The Indian team will be without skipper Virat Kohli for the last three matches. Rohit's omission from the ODIs and T20s and last-minute inclusion in the Test squad had raised eyebrows with even Kohli making his displeasure known over lack of clarity on the issue.

N.J. Ravi Chander

Bengaluru

### BREAKING IT DOWN

THE INTERNATIONAL Olympic Committee's pursuit of urban events to lure a younger audience saw breakdancing being officially added to the medal events programme at the 2024 Paris Games. Three sports events — skateboarding, sport climbing, and surfing — will also make their debut in the Paris Olympics. The likely format for breakdancing in Paris will see 32 breakers (16 B-Boys and 16 B-Girls) compete over two days of 1vs1 competitive duels in hip-hop freestyle called “Battles”. It will be a mixed event.

Sankar Paul

Chakdaha, West Bengal

### BAD YEAR FOR SOCCER

WHETHER IN INDIA or abroad, 2020 was a terrible year for football lovers. If India lost its star winger Pradeep Kumar Banerjee and captain Subimal (Chuni) Goswami, who brought home gold and Olympic glory, Argentina lost all-time great Diego Maradona, and now Italian football legend Paolo Rossi, too, has bidden goodbye to his fans.

Bidyut Chatterjee

Faridabad

Anita Katyal

Political Gup-Shup



### Madhav image irks BJP top brass, he may be repatriated

Once a favourite of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the BJP and the media, Ram Madhav is clearly in the wilderness today. When he was dropped as BJP general secretary some months ago, it was expected that the high-profile leader would be rewarded with a Rajya Sabha seat as a precursor to his induction as a minister in the Narendra Modi government. His cheerleaders, especially those in the media, were convinced that it was only a matter of time before Mr Madhav was rehabilitated. But, so far, there is nothing on the horizon. A Rajya Sabha seat that did fall vacant recently was awarded to Sushil Modi, former deputy chief minister of Bihar. Apparently, the BJP leadership is not happy with the larger-than-life image Mr Madhav has cultivated for himself. It feels he is far too individualistic to be contained by a system. It is now up to the RSS to take a call on Mr Madhav's future as he was loaned to the party by the Sangh. It is speculated that he will go back to the RSS

but there are many in the Sangh who are not happy about his return.

Finding itself on the back foot when the farmers began their agitation against the farm bills, the Modi government was busy defending itself and hard selling the agriculture reforms. The media, too, kept the focus on the protesters and pushed the government to respond to their demands. However, this narrative underwent a dramatic change when Opposition parties extended their support to the December 8 Bharat bandh called by the farmers. The government cleverly shifted the spotlight to what it described as the Opposition's “hypocritical” stand on the farm bills. The government first fielded Union law minister Ravi Shankar Prasad to attack the Congress which, he said, had proposed the introduction of similar reforms in its election manifesto. On the day of the bandh, the BJP unleashed a galaxy of senior ministers and chief ministers to repeat the same accusations. Television news channels promptly

fell into the trap. As a result, most news bulletins were replete with interviews of BJP ministers with an occasional concession being made to an Opposition leader. The bandh and the farmers were last on the priority list.

For three years, the West Bengal police was on the hunt for Bimal Gurung, the founder of the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha, who had been charged under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act for his role in the 104-day shutdown in Darjeeling. Mr Gurung suddenly emerged from hiding in October and declared he was snapping ties with the BJP and pledged support to West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee. As a result, fortune is now smiling on Mr Gurung. From being a hunted man and constantly on the run, he has now been provided security by the same police that was on the lookout for him. Not just that but the grapevine says Mr Gurung has also been given sufficient funds to enable him to campaign for the Trinamul

Congress as Ms Banerjee faces a tough Assembly election next year. In this process, the demand for a separate state of Gorkhaland has been put on the backburner as the Trinamul chief has said a firm no to a division of the state.

The Capital is rife with speculation that it was not Punjab chief minister Amarinder Singh who had sought a meeting with home minister Amit Shah. Instead, it is said, Mr Singh was summoned to Delhi by Mr Shah for a discussion on the farmers' stir. The home minister is not happy with Mr Singh's open support to the protesters and his laxity in dealing with them. Mr Shah wants the chief minister to initiate moves to end the blockade of the highways. Apparently, Mr Singh's attention was also drawn to the pending cases of financial impropriety against his son Raninder Singh. The Punjab chief minister, however, stuck to his guns and has instead put the onus of ending the agitation on the Centre.

The 23 Congress leaders, popularly known as the G-23, who had written to party president Sonia Gandhi in August seeking organisational reforms and a more visible leadership, have not given up. Though they were snubbed at a meeting of the Congress Working Committee called some months ago to discuss their letter, the G-23 has once again approached Sonia Gandhi for a meeting. They are keen that this should not be a virtual meeting as they would like to meet her personally to discuss the issues they raised in their letter. A reply is still awaited. Sonia Gandhi was earlier away to Goa for a winter break but now that she is back, the G-23 is hoping it will get an early response. But it may well prove to be a long wait. Now that Sonia Gandhi's political secretary Ahmed Patel is not there to placate the critics, it is anybody's guess when this meeting would be scheduled.

Anita Katyal is a Delhi-based journalist



## SHORT TAKES

## RUSSIA PROBES MYSTERY DEATH OF 300 SEALS

Moscow, Dec. 12: Russian authorities said on Friday they were investigating the mysterious death of nearly 300 endangered seals that had been discovered washed up on the shores of the Caspian Sea.

Between Sunday and Thursday, 272 dead Caspian seals had been found at a number of locations in the southern region of Dagestan including its regional capital Makhachkala and Derbent, another major city, said the state fisheries agency Rosrybolovstvo.

Some of the seals were pregnant. An agency spokeswoman said that more dead seals could yet be discovered. A team of experts arrived from Moscow to help conduct an investigation.

## REVERSE TRUMP'S IMMIGRATION RULES, BIDEN TOLD

Washington, Dec. 12: Influential American lawmakers, including Indian-American Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal, have urged President-elect Joe Biden to reverse the immigration policies of Donald Trump, as they introduced a resolution, seeking reform of the immigration system that is just, empathetic and fair.

Jayapal and several of her Congressional colleagues on Friday in a resolution urged Congress to create humane, community-based alternatives to detention, and revamp the current deportation system to include, among other things, guaranteed access to legal representation.

Jayapal along with congressmen Jesús "Chuy" García, Veronica Escobar, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Judy Chu and Yvette Clarke unveiled a Roadmap to Freedom Resolution as a progressive vision to transform the immigration system to one that is focused on dignity and rooted in the needs and lives of impacted people.

The Roadmap to Freedom Resolution will be introduced at the beginning of the 117th Congress.

## US EXECUTES DRIVER WHO KILLED HIS CHILD

Terre Haute (US), Dec. 12: The Trump administration continued its unprecedented series of post-election federal executions by putting to death a Louisiana truck driver who severely abused his 2-year-old daughter for weeks in 2002, then killed her by slamming her head against a truck's windows and dashboard. Alfred Bourgeois, 56, was pronounced dead at 8.21 pm. Eastern time on Friday after receiving a lethal injection at the federal prison in Terre Haute, Indiana.

His lawyers argued Bourgeois had an IQ that puts him in the intellectually disabled category, saying that should have made him ineligible for the death penalty under federal law. Victor J. Abreu, said it was "shameful" to execute his client "without fair consideration of his intellectual disability." In his last words, Bourgeois offered no apology and instead struck a deeply defiant tone, insisting that he neither killed nor sexually abused his baby girl.

## LETTER FROM 'ZODIAC KILLER' DECODED

Los Angeles, Dec. 12: A team of cryptography enthusiasts announced on Friday they had successfully cracked one of the coded messages sent over 50 years ago by the "Zodiac Killer," who terrorised northern California in the late 1960s and remains unidentified.

The message was sent in November 1969 to the *San Francisco Chronicle* newspaper by the alleged serial killer, its code consisting of a series of cryptic letters and symbols.

Sleuths hoped the coded message contained the identity of the killer, who committed at least five murders in 1968 and 1969 but claimed 37 in total and inspired other serial killers.

According to the trio said to have broken the code, the message includes boasts and defiance of authorities without any real clues on motive or identity.

It includes to message: "I hope you are having lots of fun in trying to catch me... I am not afraid of the gas chamber because it will send me to paradise (sic) all the sooner because I now have enough slaves to work for me."

## Trump forces US regulator to approve Pfizer vaccine faster

FDA chief told to quit if drug regulator does not clear vaccine by end of day

Washington, Dec. 12: US President Donald Trump on Friday piled pressure on the US drug regulator to quickly approve the Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine as America readied to roll out mass immunisations.

The *Washington Post* reported that the White House told the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) chief Stephen Hahn to submit his resignation if the agency does not clear the vaccine by the end of the day.

Hahn later disputed the characterization of the call, but the alleged threat came as Trump tweeted that the agency was a "big, old, slow turtle" and told Hahn to get the "dam" vaccines out immediately.

An expert committee had already voted to grant an emergency use authorisation, which was expected within days, as the FDA worked to iron out last-minute details with Pfizer.

These included a fact sheet for doctors. The FDA has said it wants to warn people with severe allergies to avoid the shots for now. Trump's intervention reinserts politics into the scientific process, which could undermine vaccine confidence in the world's hardest-hit country, where the death toll is nearing 3,00,000.

It was also not clear whether having an EUA a day or two earlier than expected would change when the first Americans — nursing home residents and health care workers — would get their injections, which is expected Monday or Tuesday. The country hopes to have 20 million people inoculated this month.

The government also

Washington, Dec. 12: Congress sent a temporary government-wide funding bill to President Donald Trump on Friday that would avert a federal Shutdown at midnight and buy time for on-again, off-again talks on Covid-19 aid.

The bill sets a new deadline of midnight next Friday. The short-term measure passed the Senate by a unanimous voice vote without much drama and sent senators home for the weekend without a clear picture of what awaits next week. The House passed the bill Wednesday.

Trump was expected to sign it before midnight. The talks are stalled but there is universal agree-

said on Friday that it is buying 100 million more doses of the Moderna vaccine candidate, amid reports the government passed on the opportunity to secure more supply of the Pfizer jab.

The purchase brings its total supply of Moderna doses to 200 million, enough to immunize 100 million people with the two-shot regimen, which is yet to be green-lighted by authorities. Two other vaccine candidates stumbled on Friday.

France's Sanofi and Britain's GSK said on Friday their vaccine would not be ready until the end of 2021. — AFP

● THE BILL sets a new deadline of midnight next Friday. The short-term measure passed the Senate by a unanimous voice vote without much drama and sent senators home for the weekend without a clear picture of what awaits next week. The House passed the bill Wednesday.

ment that Congress won't adjourn for the year without passing a long-delayed round of pandemic relief. An emerging \$900 billion aid package from a bipartisan group of lawmakers hit a rough patch after Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky,

swung against the effort. Still, negotiations are ongoing and pressure remains intense.

The House has recessed for a few days, with leaders warning members to be prepared to return to Washington to vote on the year-end deals. Negotiators on a separate \$1.4 trillion omnibus spending bill appeared to be moving in a positive direction, said the chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, Sen. Richard Shelby, R-Ala. This bill would serve as a vehicle to carry any year-end virus assistance. "I'm hopeful we're going to get there on both the omni and the Covid package," McConnell said. — AP

## SOUTH KOREA SEES STEEP SURGE IN COVID CASES

Seoul, Dec. 12: South Korea on Saturday reported its highest daily number of Covid cases so far, with a surge centered in the capital sparking fears the country could lose control of the spread. Officials announced 950 new infections after several days reporting numbers ranging from about 500 to 600.

Some 669 were reported in the greater Seoul area, according to Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency, prompting worries about a major outbreak in the densely populated area — home to half the country's 52 million people.

"This is the last hurdle before the roll-out of vaccines and treatments," President Moon Jae-in said, calling the situation "very grave". — AFP

## Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, Sputnik to be mixed for trial

London, Dec. 12: The Oxford University and AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine, currently awaiting regulatory approvals, is set to be used for a "mix and match" trial with Russia's Sputnik vaccine against the Coronavirus, according to UK media reports.

The two sets of experts are to join forces to explore if a combination of the two jabs, both using a benign virus

called adenovirus, could prove effective in offering people long-term protection against Covid-19.

According to *The Times*, the idea is that by using different vaccines, each shot may prompt a stronger immune response. AstraZeneca, the pharmaceutical major which produces the Oxford University's vaccine, has agreed to collaborate with Sputnik in a

deal apparently sealed after an offer was made on Twitter, the newspaper said.

Early results from the final-stage trial of the Sputnik vaccine showed it was 90 per cent effective and findings that involved more cases with the Oxford vaccine indicated it was 62 per cent effective in one regimen and 90 per cent in another. — AP

## French police protest



French police officers gather on the Trocadero square in front of the Eiffel Tower to protest in Paris. About 50 cops gathered with their vehicles and blared their sirens to protest President Emmanuel Macron saying it is "unbearable" that people of color are more likely to be stopped by law enforcement than white people. Two unions threatened to stop carrying out identity checks after Macron's remarks a week ago in an interview with the online outlet Brut, meant to capture the youth audience. "We just want to say to the president and politicians that we are neither racist nor violent," one officer said. — AP

## SCOTUS dismisses Texas election suit

Washington, Dec. 12: The US Supreme Court has rejected a lawsuit filed by Texas, along with 17 other States, and backed by President Donald Trump seeking to overturn the results of the presidential elections in several key battleground States won by Democratic candidate Joe Biden who now is the president-elect.

"Texas has not demonstrated a judicially cognisable interest in the manner in which another State conducts its elections. All other pending motions are dismissed as moot," the Supreme Court said in a brief unsigned order on Thursday, delivering a devastating blow to the efforts of Trump to challenge and overturn the election results decisively won by Biden.

Supreme Court Justices Samuel Alito and Clarence Thomas said they believed the court was required to hear the case but expressed no position on Texas' claim. — AP

## CUOMO AMONG CONTENDERS FOR ATTORNEY GENERAL PICK

Washington, Dec. 12: New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo is one of several contenders under consideration by President-elect Joe Biden for the role of attorney general, a person with knowledge of the search process said on Friday.

The other three contenders at the moment include former Alabama Sen. Doug Jones, federal appeals court judge Merrick Garland and former Deputy Attorney General Sally Yates, said the person, who cautioned that no decision had been reached and no announcement was expected imminently.

The person was not authorised to discuss the search process by name and spoke on condition of anonymity. — AP

## Iran executes ex-oppn figure Ruhollah Zam

Tehran, Dec. 12: Iran authorities on Saturday executed Ruhollah Zam, a former opposition figure who had lived in exile in France and was implicated in anti-government protests, days after his sentence was upheld.

State television said the "counter-revolutionary" Zam was hanged in the morning after the supreme court upheld his

sentence due to "the severity of the crimes" committed against the Islamic republic.

Judiciary spokesman Gholamhossein Esmaili had on Tuesday said Zam's sentence was upheld by the supreme court "more than a month ago".

London-based human rights group Amnesty International, in a statement after his verdict was

confirmed, described Zam as a "journalist and dissident". It said the confirmation marked "a shocking escalation in the use of the death penalty as a weapon of repression".

Iran's Revolutionary Guards announced the arrest of Zam in October 2019, claiming he had been "directed by France's intelligence service".

State television said he

was "under the protection of several countries' intelligence services".

The official IRNA news agency said he was also convicted of espionage for France and an unnamed country in the region, cooperating with the "hostile government of America", acting against "the country's security", insulting the "sanctity of Islam" and instigating vio-

lence during protests in 2017.

At least 25 people were killed during the unrest in December 2017 and January 2018 that was sparked by economic hardship.

Zam, who was granted political asylum in France and reportedly lived in Paris, ran a channel on the Telegram messaging app called Amadnews. — AFP

## Britain promises to stop funding fossil fuel projects

London, Dec. 12: Britain is to end government funding for fossil fuel projects overseas, Prime Minister Boris Johnson said on Friday, on the eve of an international climate change summit.

Johnson announced a halt to funding of new crude oil, gas and coal projects before opening the Climate Ambition Summit co-hosted by Britain, the United Nations and France on Saturday.

"I'm pleased to say today that the UK will end taxpayer support for fossil fuel projects overseas as soon as possible," Johnson said in a statement released by his office.

Britain has been criticised for sending billions of pounds abroad to help extract and refine fossil fuels and build power stations.

It has promised to end this soon, while saying there will be "very limited exceptions".

"Calling time on financing overseas fossil fuel projects really is a welcome move," said the policy director at Greenpeace UK, Doug Parr.

Christian Aid's head of campaigns and UK advocacy Pete Moorey said to tackle the climate crisis, 80 percent of known fossil fuels needed to be left in the ground.

"The UK government is right to heed this warning and end support for fossil fuels overseas," he added.

"Developing countries need investment to leapfrog the dirty energy that has led us into this crisis and access the clean renewable that can both accelerate their development and tackle the climate emergency."

## UN CHIEF URGES 'CLIMATE CRISIS' DECLARATION

London, Dec. 12: UN chief Antonio Guterres on Saturday urged world leaders to declare a "state of climate emergency" and shape greener growth after the Coronavirus pandemic, as he opened a summit marking five years since the landmark Paris Agreement.

The Climate Ambition Summit, being held online, comes as the United Nations warns current commitments to tackle rises in global temperatures are inadequate.

The commitments made in Paris in 2015 were "far from enough" to limit temperature rises to 1.5 degrees Celsius, the UN secretary-general said in his opening address to the summit, which is co-hosted by Britain and France. — AFP

Downing Street said it intends to implement the policy by November next year, when Britain will host the UN summit on climate change COP26, in Glasgow.

Over the last four years, the British government "supported 21 billion (\$28 billion, 23 billion euros) of UK oil and gas exports through trade promotion and export finance", it added.

Britain has been criticised by watchdogs and activists including Swedish campaigner Greta Thunberg for financing dirty energy projects abroad. — AFP

## Relatives seek info on Hong Kong detainees in China

Hong Kong, Dec. 12: Relatives of a dozen Hong Kong residents who have been detained in mainland China for more than 3 1/2 months made a plea on Saturday to be informed of the timing of any trials and whether they can attend.

The request underscored the sharp contrast between the relatively open legal system in Hong Kong, a semi-autonomous Chinese territory, and that of the mainland, where often little information is divulged until a trial is over.

"I miss my son so much," the mother of Wong Wai-yin, one of the detainees, said, choking up. "I want to visit him so badly. I haven't seen my son in a very long time — it's almost four months. Please tell me (about the trial). I'm just an

ordinary mother."

The 12 were arrested at sea in August while they were apparently making a bid to flee to Taiwan after a tough national security law took effect in Hong Kong earlier this year.

They were picked up after entering mainland waters for crossing the maritime border without permission. At least some took part in anti-government protests in 2019 and were facing charges in Hong Kong.

Though Hong Kong is a part of China, travelers must still pass through immigration when going to and from the mainland. Two are being held on suspicion of organising an illegal border crossing. The group has been locked up in Shenzhen, a southern Chinese city that borders Hong Kong.

— AP

## PRO-CHINA NEWS CHANNEL TAKEN OFF AIR

Taipei, Dec. 12: Employees and supporters rallied for a Taiwanese pro-China cable news channel as it was taken off air on Saturday, after the government refused to renew its license, citing accuracy issues.

CTiTV's channel 52 broadcast a countdown and then went black after midnight. The cable network, whose non-news channels were not affected, plans to continue putting news on YouTube and other digital platforms. A large crowd chanted "Hang on, CTiTV" and held up signs reading "Thank you CTiTV, we will see you again." — AP

95-metre *Aurora Australis* was launched in September 1989

## FERRY | FAREWELL

## Icebreaker leaves Oz after 150 trips

Hobart, Dec. 12: The giant orange icebreaker *Aurora Australis* left Australia for the final time on Saturday after more than 150 trips to Antarctica. Next stop: a shipyard in Dubai, where it will be refurbished and either leased or sold.

The Australian Antarctic Division announced earlier this year that after 30 years of sailing to the frozen continent for research and to support Australian bases in Antarctica, the *Aurora*

*Australis* would be replaced by a larger ship.

The 95-metre (312-foot) *Aurora Australis* was built in Newcastle north of Sydney and launched in September 1989. It undertook its maiden voyage to Heard Island, an external Australian territory in Antarctica, in 1990.

It has since ferried researchers, crucial food and fuel supplies and been involved in several rescues. Sean Lawrence, a seaman for 14 years on the

vessel, planned to toast the icebreaker with a beer as he watched it leave the River Derwent. "You form a bond when you're isolated and working in extreme conditions," he said.

"To suddenly have that leaving your life, it leaves a bit of a hole," Lawrence was aboard the *Aurora Australis* when it ran aground near Mawson Station in Antarctica during a blizzard in 2016. — AP



Australian icebreaker the *Aurora Australis* docked at Franklin Wharf in Hobart, Australia. The giant orange icebreaker *Aurora Australis* left Australia for the final time on Saturday. — AP



## SHORT TAKES

## Everton blame Covid for loss

**London:** Everton have announced club record losses of £140 million after the implications of the coronavirus pandemic significantly impacted revenues. The Toffees said the impact of Covid-19 amounted to an unforeseen loss of £67.3 million due to a cut in match-day revenue and television rebates. However, the figures show Everton would still have made a huge loss without the disruption of the pandemic after also posting a then-record loss of £111.8 million last year. The club spent £113 million on new players for the 2019/20 season and have splashed another £70 million in the most recent transfer window as well as recruiting Carlo Ancelotti as manager on a lucrative four-and-a-half year deal in December 2019. The sacking of former manager Marco Silva and his coaching staff a year ago amounted to £6.6 million in compensation costs, while another £20 million was spent on preparation for a new stadium. Everton chief executive Denise Barrett-Baxendale said: "The impact of Covid-19 having a profound, wide-reaching and material impact on our figures."

— AFP



Patrick Reed

## Reed opens up two-shot lead

**Dubai:** Former Masters champion Patrick Reed opened up a two-shot lead at the halfway stage of the DP World Tour Championship on Friday as he attempts to become the first American to top The Race to Dubai Rankings. The 30-year-old followed his opening 70 with an eight-under 64 to go to 10 under for the tournament. "Anytime you shoot eight under par you're always happy," Reed, who heads into the weekend two clear of England's Matthew Fitzpatrick, told *europesport.com*. "I feel like today I got off to a little better start than I did yesterday and the putter was working a little bit. "I was able to warm up a little bit last night on the range after the round and tighten things up, and today I gave myself a lot of chances." A birdie at the second was followed by further gains at the third, fifth and seventh as Reed turned in 31. After another birdie on the tenth, Reed dropped his first shot of the week at the 12th and was in danger of running up another bogey after a poor tee shot on the 13th. However, he produced a remarkable up and down before converting from 20 feet on the 15th, six feet at the next and closing out his round with a gain from five feet at the last.

— AFP

## Harden sits out of Rockets opener

**Los Angeles:** James Harden has ended his training camp hold-out, but that hasn't put a lid on the controversy surrounding the disgruntled Houston Rockets star. The 31-year-old American appears likely to begin the season with the Rockets despite a trade demand from the team he has spent the last eight years with. Harden showed up late for the Rockets training camp and must have six straight negative Covid-19 tests before the league will clear him to practice or play with the team. He was not in the lineup when the Rockets opened the preseason with a 125-104 win over the Chicago Bulls on Friday. It was one of five contests to begin the preseason following the shortest offseason in NBA history. Just two months have passed since the Los Angeles Lakers won their 17th NBA title by beating the Miami Heat in six games. Harden has reportedly requested to be traded to a contender. Philadelphia, Brooklyn, Miami and Milwaukee are among the teams that he could end up with if the Rockets grant his wish. — AFP

## Vallejo saves Valencia

Manu's late goal salvages a point for VCF in La Liga

**Valencia, Dec. 12:** Manu Vallejo's 83rd minute strike helped Valencia eke out a 2-2 draw against Athletic Bilbao in the Spanish La Liga on Saturday.

Both Valencia and Athletic Bilbao were looking to return to winning ways and the match turned out to be an entertainer.

Carlos Soler scored the opening goal for Valencia by converting a penalty, while Asier Villalibre produced an equaliser in the 55th minute.

Earlier, Center forward Shon Weissman's first goals for Real Valladolid made a difference as they came from behind to beat Osasuna 3-2.

Weissman was signed in the summer and the Israeli went scoreless for his first 11 games until Friday when he scored the first and last goals, both headers into the bottom right corner.

A third header was saved, and moments later he was substituted after receiving a yellow card.

Valladolid moved two points above the drop zone, while Osasuna dropped one place to 19th in the 20-team standings led by Atletico Madrid.

Weissman's opener in the seventh minute was matched within 20 minutes by Ante Budimir's own header for Osasuna. Pressure continued to build and Roberto Torres put them ahead two minutes before half-time, the score reflecting Osasuna's dominance. But Valladolid's comeback was sustained, as Fabian Orellana blasted in a penalty for Sergio Herrera's foul on Joaquín Fernández, and Weissman put them back in front in the 76th.

— Agencies



Valencia's Manu Vallejo (third from left) scores against Athletic Bilbao in their La Liga match in Valencia on Saturday. — valenciacf.com

## Conte says he needs time to build 'skyscraper'

**Milan, Dec. 12:** Antonio Conte told Inter Milan fans on Saturday he needed time to turn Inter Milan into "a skyscraper" in European football.

Inter's season in Europe is over after finishing bottom of their Champions League group, a third consecutive financially-damaging exit in the first round.

"The fact that the league and Coppa Italia are all that remain for us is painful for me," Conte said before Sunday's Serie A game against Cagliari.

"Our elimination from the Champions League burns and those who know me know how I'm feeling about it.

"I want to send a message to Inter fans, we're

not giving in to those who hope to destroy what we are trying to create after a year and a half of work.

"There is too much negativity, even if I understand that there is impatience after ten years without trophies.

"But we started from the ground up, we need time. Once the base has been built, one can think of the skyscraper, the

kind Inter fans deserve."

Inter are second in Serie A, five points behind leaders AC Milan.

The 18-time champions have not won the league since 2010, having finished runners-up last season.

But Conte said he had not shirked from the difficulties he knew existed when he took over in 2019. — AFP

## Verstappen snatches pole

**Yas Marina (UAE), Dec. 12:** Red Bull's Max Verstappen clinched his maiden pole position of the campaign on Saturday for the season-ending Abu Dhabi Grand Prix.

The Dutch driver edged Valtteri Bottas in second and the Finn's Mercedes team-mate Lewis Hamilton, who is racing for the first time since winning the championship after contracting coronavirus, in third for Sunday's Grand Prix.

It was Verstappen's first pole since the 2019 Brazilian Grand Prix

and the third of his career after clocking his best lap in one minute and 35.246 seconds to beat Bottas by 0.025 seconds.

The top three were separated by only 0.086sec, but it was a disappointment for Mercedes who missed out on pole for only the second time this year. Lance Stroll of the Mercedes-powered Racing Point team claimed the other.

Lando Norris, equalling his previous best, was fourth for McLaren ahead of Alex Albon in the second Red

Bull and Carlos Sainz in the second McLaren.

Having said on Thursday he expected to claim 'his seat' for third place again, Verstappen was delighted.

"I am very happy with that. Luckily, for me, everything came together in that final lap. It seems like we have a decent top speed this weekend so, hopefully, this will work out for tomorrow," he said.

"It's a long season for everyone with a lot of races in a row so this was good for the whole team." — AFP



Red Bull's Max Verstappen in action during the final qualifying session for the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix at the Yas Marina circuit on Saturday. — AP

## MARY KOM A BIG SOURCE OF INSPIRATION FOR BALA

**New Delhi, Dec. 12:** Star Indian woman footballer Bala Devi says she took inspiration from boxing legend Mary Kom, who achieved unprecedented success as a sports person despite having humble roots.

Bala, the first Indian woman to play professional football in a top-flight league in Europe, talked about an interaction with six-time world champion and Olympic bronze medalist Mary Kom during the 2014 Asian Games.

"Mary Kom is a big source of inspiration for me. She came from such humble beginnings and through her hard work, she broke so many records. Even after becoming a mother, she continues to break records and win laurels for the country," Bala said.

"We interacted at the Asian Games in 2014 and watched her train. She is a very friendly person and also supported us during our games," Bala told AIFF TV.

Bala recently scored her first goal for the Rangers FC in the Scottish Women's Premier League in a 9-0 decimation of Motherwell



Bala Devi

FC. She signed an 18-month contract with Rangers in January.

"After the goal, a lot of people wished me and many were talking and writing about it, which made me feel very proud. After that, I was nominated for the AFC Player of the Week and seeing my name on the list alongside such icons made me happy," she said.

"I just want everyone to continue supporting us so we can keep achieving bigger things for the country in the future," the 30-year-old said. — PTI

## SEXUAL ABUSE | CASE

## FIFA sends new officials to Haiti

**Zurich, Dec. 12:** FIFA will send an emergency management team to run soccer in Haiti, saying it believed the top official it banned for life for sexually abusing players is still running the sport and intimidating witnesses.

Yves Jean-Bart was expelled from soccer last month after a FIFA ethics committee investigation confirmed claims by female national team players of systematic sexual abuse since 2014.

The 73-year-old Jean-Bart has been president of the Haiti Football Federation (FHF) for 20 years.

"There are strong indications that (Jean-Bart) is still exerting his influence within the FHF by being involved in the running of its daily affairs," FIFA said in a statement on Friday. Multiple sources have asserted that there has been continuous interference from the suspended FHF president and his associates that seeks to prevent and/or discourage victims and witnesses from giving testimony in the ongoing investigations. FIFA said.

Soccer's world body said it gave interim management a two-year mandate and will help ensure that the ongoing ethics investi-

● **Yves Jean-Bart was expelled from soccer last month after a FIFA ethics committee investigation confirmed claims by female national team players of systematic sexual abuse since 2014.**

● **The 73-year-old Jean-Bart has been president of the Haiti Football Federation (FHF) for 20 years.**

gations may continue unimpeded.

New leadership will be appointed by FIFA and the Miami-based North American soccer body Concacaf. Jean-Bart has denied the allegations and pledged to appeal his FIFA ban to the Court of Arbitration for Sport in Switzerland. The Haitian judicial system has declined to file charges.

The abuse is said to have happened at the country's national training center at Croix-des-Bouquets, known as The Ranch, which FIFA helped fund. — AP

## NATIONAL | FOOTBALL

## U-17 girls get AIFF support

**New Delhi, Dec. 12:** India senior men's and women's team members, including the head coaches, lauded All India Football Federation (AIFF) for sharing with the U-17 women's national team members a roadmap for them.

They were given assurances that they still have a lot to look forward to despite the postponement of next year's FIFA U-17 World Cup to 2022.

Arjuna awardee custodian Gurpreet Singh Sandhu has always been vocal about his support for women's football in India.

The seasoned Blue Tigers goalkeeper termed this as a "great step" for Indian football to move forward. "A great step towards the right direction," Sandhu tweeted.

With the FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup India being shifted to 2022, AIFF president Praful Patel stated that the players will receive many opportunities to represent the country in the future and highlighted that the AIFF is committed to developing women's football on a long-term basis.

He mentioned that Indian Arrows team for girls will be formed that will take part in the Hero Indian Women's League.

"We want to give them the opportunity to play at the Asian Games and like we formed the Indian Arrows boys' team, we will form an Indian Arrows team for girls that will take part in the Hero Indian Women's League," Patel said. — PTI

"We are committed to women's football and want to keep moving forward. As women's football continues to progress, we hope to see the Indian team participating in the FIFA Women's World Cup and I am hopeful that by the 2027 edition, with the continuous support, this team can represent the nation very well."

India senior men's team coach Igor Stimac tweeted, "Our U-17 girls are the future of @IndianFootball Women's team and it's great to see their future is so meticulously planned. @praful\_patel & @KirenRijju have always promoted women's football and it shows how Indian Football is moving forward."

His female counterpart Maymol Rocky also tweeted in the same line, saying "It's always great to see Shri @praful\_patel Sir and Shri @KirenRijju Sir sharing the long-term plan with our U-17 girls who'll be the backbone of our Senior National Team in near future. Best of luck, girls!"

Indian women's team captain Ashalata Devi also took to Twitter to thank the sports administrators.

"Girls, there is a long way to go and we wish you all the best for your next endeavour. Thank you @praful\_patel Sir and @KirenRijju Sir for taking time out from your busy schedule and discussing the long-term plan with our U-17 girls," Ashalata wrote. — PTI

## Women's hockey coach happy with fitness level of team

**Bengaluru, Dec. 12:** Indian women's hockey head coach Sjoerd Marijne on Saturday said that the team has achieved their primary target of improving fitness level of the players as they were left with practically no competition this season due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The team did not play any competition since February when it had travelled to New Zealand. Since then it has been camping at the Sports Authority of India (SAI) Centre here. The camp ends on Saturday.

"One of our goals was improving fitness and that worked out very well. In the past few weeks, we also worked with the junior men's team in a few sessions to test our speed and handling skills and I am happy with the

**We have done well so far in utilising this time and our primary focus is the Olympics. We are hopeful of playing good matches early next year that will show where we stand and we can plan the months leading up to the Games keeping in mind the areas that require improvement basis our performance in these tours**

— SJOERD MARIJNE  
Indian women's hockey coach

progress we have made as a group," Marijne said. He believes the core group had worked hard towards a good build-up to the Olympic Games next year.

"We have done well so far in utilising this time and our primary focus is the Olympics.

"We are hopeful of playing good matches early next year that will show where we stand and we can plan the months leading up to the Games keeping in mind the areas that

require improvement basis our performance in these tours," the head coach explained.

Marijne said the break the players are getting will help them recover from the mental fatigue.

"The players have worked hard these past four and half months and they have done it without complaining about anything — be it living in a bio bubble with zero outside interaction or living away from their families for so long.

"I am extremely happy with the attitude they have showed these past four months and I understand that the training camp was physically and mentally quite challenging. This break will be especially good to recover from the mental fatigue."

The players are given certain team-related assignments when they are on a break.

"I would want the players to enjoy time with their family and follow the Hockey India SOP when they meet people and socialise because the pandemic is still not over," the coach said.

"They have all been given some homework to do as well because this break is part of our training schedule except, they won't be using the stick and the ball." — PTI



Indian women's hockey head coach Sjoerd Marijne (centre) in a file pic.



## SHORT TAKES

## Harris added to Australia squad

**Sydney:** Victoria's Marcus Harris was on Saturday added to an injury-plagued Australia squad for next week's first Test against India after Will Pucovski was ruled out of the series opener alongside David Warner. The four-match series begins with the day-night Test at Adelaide from December 17. Harris was drafted into the squad for the seasoned Warner, who suffered a groin injury during the second one-day international against India, while Pucovski sustained a concussion while batting for Australia A in a tour match against the visitors at Drummoyne Oval in Sydney. Cricket Australia (CA) said both batsmen will target a return ahead of the Boxing Day Test, scheduled to be held in Melbourne from December 26-30. — PTI

## Windies struggle against Kiwis

**Wellington:** Kyle Jamieson has made a reputation in his short Test cricket career for New Zealand as a man who makes things happen. He enhanced that reputation on the second day of the second test, taking 5-34 as New Zealand had the West Indies 124-8 at stumps in reply to its first innings of 460. The tourists need 136 to avoid the follow on. It was Jamieson's second five wicket bag in only five tests in which he has increased his claim to the designation allrounder with a half a century and two innings of 40 or more. — AP

## Angulo on target as Goa post win

**Goa:** A second successive win helped FC Goa climb to fourth on the ISL Season 7 table as they beat a gritty Odisha FC 1-0 at the GMC Stadium on Saturday. Igor Angulo (45+1') netted the winner to help Juan Ferrando's side register another victory. Arshdeep Singh shone for Odisha between the sticks but their inefficiency upfront meant Stuart Baxter's side remained winless in the competition. Vinit Rai was handed his first start of the season as Odisha made four changes to their line-up. Ferrando rang in just one change as Alberto Nogueira replaced Edu Bedia. Goa outplayed their opponents in the first half and headed into the break with a one-goal lead. — Agencies

## Ashwin, Amir steal the show

**Coimbatore:** The season's opening round of the 23rd JK Tyre - FMSCI National Racing Championship (JKNRC) witnessed lots of excitement, with Ashwin Datta and Amir Sayed stealing the show on Day 2 here on Saturday. The 16-year-old Sayed from Kottayam proved his class winning every other race, four in all, with ease in the JK Tyre Novice Cup. It was his first visit to this circuit but he mesmerised one and all with his magic on the wheel. Even as the others struggled to tackle the tricky and slow first corner, Sayed, despite limited track time, handled it with ease. In fact, he turned it to his advantage winning both the races on Friday in a commanding manner. He further shifted top gear to win two more races on Saturday and also earned a good round of applause from the crowd.

## Live on TV

## CRICKET

**Australia 'A' vs India:** Day 3 from 9 am on Sony Six, HD

## FOOTBALL

**English Premier League:** Southampton vs Sheffield United from 5.30 pm; Crystal Palace vs Tottenham Hotspur from 7.45 pm; Fulham vs Liverpool from 10 pm; Arsenal vs Burnley from 12.45 am (Monday) on Star Sports Select 1, Leicester vs Brighton from 12.45 am (Monday) on Star Sports Select 2

**Indian Super League:** NorthEast United vs Chennaiyin from 4.50 pm; Bengaluru vs Kerala Blasters from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

**Italian League:** Cagliari vs Inter Milan from 5 pm; Napoli vs Sampdoria from 7.30 pm; Genoa vs Juventus from 10.30 pm on Sony Ten 2, HD

## FORMULA ONE

**Abu Dhabi Grand Prix:** Main race from 6.35 pm on Star Sports Select 2, HD

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## ROHIT OR MISS?

## Sharma 'clinically fit', to be reassessed in Oz

**New Delhi, Dec. 12:** The BCCI on Saturday declared senior batsman Rohit Sharma "clinically fit" to join the Indian team in Australia but said a call on his participation in the last two matches of the Test series there will be taken after a reassessment by the squad's medical team.

Rohit had sustained a hamstring injury during the IPL, which led to him missing the white-ball leg of the ongoing Australia tour. He is out of reckoning for the first two Tests of the four-match series. The opening Test starts at Adelaide on December 17.

"He has been given a detailed programme to follow for the duration of the two weeks he will be quarantined for. He will be reassessed by the Team India medical team post his quarantine to establish his fitness status and a call on his participation in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy will be taken accordingly," the BCCI said in a statement.

Rohit on Friday cleared an eagerly-watched fitness test at the National Cricket Academy in Bengaluru and will leave for Australia on December 14, three days before the start of the marquee Test series against the world's number one team.

"... Rohit Sharma has completed his rehabilitation process at the NCA in Bengaluru and is now clinically fit. He has been rehabilitating and training at NCA since 19th November following a high-grade left hamstring injury suffered during the Indian Premier League (IPL)," the statement said.

The BCCI said the NCA medical team is satisfied with Rohit's fitness but added that he will need to work on his endurance. Rohit's fitness test took place under the supervision of NCA director Rahul Dravid, who was entrusted with the responsibility of giving him his fitness certificate. — PTI



Rohit Sharma



Hanuma Vihari (left) and Rishabh Pant during their unbeaten century stand in a tour match at Sydney. — BCCI

## PANT, VIHARI STAKE CLAIM AS INDIA DOMINATE

**Sydney, Dec. 12:** Rishabh Pant and Hanuma Vihari put themselves in the reckoning for next week's first Test with contrasting hundreds as India thoroughly dominated Australia A in the pink ball warm-up match here on Saturday.

Needing 19 runs to reach his century when Jack Wildermuth commenced the second evening's final over, Pant clobbered him for 4, 4, 6, 4, 6, 4, to remain unbeaten on a blistering 103 off only 73 balls.

Overall, he hit nine fours and six sixes.

At the other end, Vihari laboured his way to a fine 104-run knock off 194 balls.

Also staking a claim for selection is young Shubman Gill, with an elegant 65 off 78 balls and 10 sweetly-timed boundaries.

In the final session of play, Pant's aggressive approach paid dividends as he smashed the Australia A bowlers to all corners of the Sydney Cricket Ground, the

southpaw making a strong case for himself for the wicketkeeper's job in Adelaide ahead of Test specialist Wriddhiman Saha.

To cite an example of his power-hitting, Pant swept one over the cow corner for a six, leaving Nic Maddinson to search for the ball among the rows of chairs at the SCG.

At the close of play, India were strongly placed at 386 for four for an overall lead by 472 runs, having bundled out the home team out for a

paltry 108 in their first innings on Friday.

In their first innings, India were all out for 194, which would have been far less if not for pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah's maiden first-class fifty, but the visitors staged a strong comeback with both bat and ball. — PTI

## BRIEF SCORES

**India 194 and 386/4 in 90 overs (Hanuma Vihari 104\*, Rishabh Pant 103\*, Shubman Gill 65; Steketee 2/54) vs Australia 'A' 108.**

## Siraj earns praise for sporting gesture

**Sydney, Dec. 12:** India fast bowler Mohammed Siraj's fine gesture of rushing in and attending to rival Cameron Green after he was hit on the head during the opening day of the warm-up game here has got praised from the Australian media.

Green attempted a catch off a straight drive from Jasprit Bumrah off his own bowling but the ball flew through his fingers and hit on the right side of his head.

Siraj immediately dropped his bat and rushed to check on Green. Bumrah also did the same following his teammate.

Green, who suffered concussion, was later ruled



Mohammed Siraj (right) rushes to check on Cameron Green, who got hit on the head by a Jasprit Bumrah straight drive. — BCCI

out of the remainder of the three-day pink warm-up game between the Indians and Australia 'A' side. "Indian cricketer Mohd Siraj has been praised for his sportsmanship in helping young all-rounder Cameron Green after he suffered a blow to the head during the match," tweeted 9News Australia.

"Non-striker Mohammed Siraj and umpire Gerard Aboud rushed to check on the star all-rounder, who patted Bumrah on the leg to assure him he was OK," said abc.net.au.

"Mohammed Siraj, at the non-striker's end, dropped his bat and im-

mediately rushed to check on the injured bowler," wrote cricket.com.au.

Siraj's gesture has also taken the internet by storm with netizens lauding him for his sportsman spirit. "Absolutely brilliant from Mohammed Siraj ... did not care about the run and straightaway dropped his bat and checked on Green. Top spirit by him," wrote a Twitter user.

The Indian Board also shared a picture in which Green can be seen on his knees after the blow on his head and Siraj standing next to him and checking on the Australian bowler. — PTI

## Wolves outfoxed by 10-man Villa

**London, Dec. 12:** Aston Villa snatched a 1-0 win at Wolverhampton Wanderers in the Premier League on Saturday after substitute Anwar El Ghazi drilled in a stoppage-time penalty as both sides finished the game with 10 men.

Villa had Douglas Luiz sent off in the 85th minute and Wolves midfielder Joao Moutinho was dismissed shortly after the visitors scored against the run of play to register their fourth away win of the season.

The result lifted Villa up to eighth on 18 points from 10 games while Wolves, again sorely missing injured striker Raul Jimenez, stayed 11th on 17 points from 12 games.

El Ghazi said he felt relaxed about taking the penalty.

"I practise penalties a lot, even if I am not playing," the Dutch midfielder told the BBC.

"I did not feel a lot of pressure to be honest. I appreciate Jack Grealish gave it to me, but he knows my capabilities."

The home side looked more likely to grab the winner in a dour clash, with their 18-year old striker Fabio Silva hitting the post midway through the second half as he made his first start for the club.

Villa keeper Emiliano Martinez pulled off several fine saves, taming a stinging low shot from Daniel Podence before he somehow kept out a fierce Leander Dendoncker volley 10 minutes from time.

When the match seemed to be heading for a draw, Nelson Semedo hauled down John McGinn in the penalty area and El Ghazi made no mistake with the spot-kick as he blasted the

## THE RESULTS

**Wolves 0**  
**Aston Villa 1**  
(Anwar El Ghazi 90+4 p)

**Leeds United 1**  
(Mateusz Klich 6 p)  
**West Ham 2**  
(Tomas Soucek 25, Angelo Ogbonna 80)

ball past keeper Rui Patricio.

Wolves manager Nuno Espirito Santo said he wanted his team to be more ruthless.

"In the first half it was an intense game and both teams were tight," he said. **Moyes fumes**

West Ham United manager David Moyes has taken aim at the video assistant referee (VAR) after a decision went against his side in the 2-1 win at Leeds United on Saturday and called on the Premier League's more influential managers to protest.

West Ham goalkeeper Lukasz Fabianski conceded a penalty in the second minute when he brought down Patrick Bamford but seemed to have redeemed himself by saving Mateusz Klich's spot kick.

But after a review by VAR, a retake was ordered due to Fabianski leaving his line, and Klich scored at the second attempt.

"Until we get the rules sorted out I don't think I'm going to be too happy," said Moyes, whose side fought back to clinch victory with headed goals by midfielder Tomas Soucek and defender Angelo Ogbonna.

"There are some terrible decisions that are happening. Whoever saw it must have had (Fabianski's foot) X-rayed. The decision was rubbish." — Reuters



Anwar El Ghazi (centre) celebrates after converting a penalty for Aston Villa. — Twitter

## I AM READY TO BAT AT ANY POSITION: MARNUS

**Adelaide, Dec. 12:** Australia batsman Marnus Labuschagne on Saturday said there has not been any talk about him opening the batting in the first Test against India but he is ready to bat at that slot if the team management asks him to do so.

With both David Warner and Will Pucovski ruled out of the first Test, and Joe Burns short of runs, Labuschagne is an opening option for the home side in the day/night match starting here on December 17.

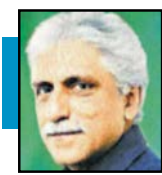
No, there has not been (any talk on batting position) ... currently I think number three. But I am just preparing to bat, if that's No.1 or No.3, it doesn't matter. I am ready to face the ball, no matter what the circumstances are," he said during a virtual press conference.

Look, I finished last summer at three, so hopefully at three. But my job is to face the ball that is coming down to me wherever I am batting," said the 26-year-old, who has played 14 Tests so far.

He said he is ready to do whatever is the best for the team.

"If the team needs me to open, that's what I will do. It's a team sport, it's about winning games. We'll have to wait and see how things pan out with a few other moving parts currently." — PTI

## India's batting needs to deliver in Test series

Ayaz Memon  
Over The Top

By the time you read this, Rohit Sharma will hopefully have joined the Indian team in Australia. A 14-day quarantine period is mandatory Down Under so Rohit will perforce have to miss the first two Tests. Considering his experience and caliber, this is a setback for India.

There has been so much debate on the Rohit issue that I have nothing further to add save that this unsavoury episode need never have been had key

members in the Indian cricket establishment shown better co-ordination and communication. There's a serious lesson to be learnt.

Of immediate importance, however, is how the Indian team in Australia can make the Test rubber, which starts on December 17, rewarding too after having shared honours in the white ball series.

In ODIs, India evaded a whitewash with a fine performance in the third match. Likewise, Australia

prevented a clean sweep by India in the T20s, winning the last match. Both teams missed key players in one or the other series, so there was no advantage for either.

Keen competition in the ODIs and T20s has set the tone for the marquee show on this tour, the Test matches. White ball cricket can't be compared to the longest format, but seeing the intensity of players from both side, my appetite is whetted for a stirring contest.

In 2018, India had created history winning a rubber for the first time ever Down Under. That this had taken 70 years (Independent India's first assignment was against Don Bradman's team in 1947-48) shows what a massive psychological hurdle

beating Australia in Australia had been.

Doubtless the Australians will be revenge hungry this time. Of the two major domos missing in 2018, David Warner has unfortunately injured himself and will not play at Adelaide. But Steve Smith has looked in ominous touch this season, and young Marnus Labuschagne has taken the cricket world by storm since the 2019 Ashes.

The big challenge for India, however, is not so much in keeping the Aussie batsmen quiet, but for their own batsmen to come good on pacy, bouncy pitches and give their bowlers enough runs to defend.

In 2018, Bumrah, Shami and Ishant performed magnificently, but without

the dogged and determined batting of Pujara — ably supported by Kohli — the best efforts of the bowlers would have been in vain. As a ball park figure, India's batting needs to deliver 380-400 runs first up to be competitive.

With Rohit not available for the first two Tests and Kohli returning home after Adelaide, India's batting has a vulnerability about it that the formidable Aussie attack of Cummins, Hazlewood, Pattinson/Starc and Lyons will want to exploit.

In the two warm up games, the team has shown spirit, skill and ambition. Both in batting and bowling there have been some fine performances, though it must be said that most of the front-line Aussie players were

not involved.

The second match at Sydney, which finishes today, was the more important being a day-night affair played with a pink ball, in preparation for the first Test.

Several Indian players (Shaw, Gill, Vihari, Pant, Saha, Saini, Siraj) are on trial, some key ones (Bumrah, Shami, Rahane, Agarwal) were looking to get into rhythm before the first Test. In the two days play as yet, India have been quite impressive.

Bundled out for a paltry 194 on a spicy pitch — largely through a sponky 71-run partnership between Bumrah and Siraj — India's pace bowlers struck back marvelously to bowl out the opponents for 108. The hostility with which Bumrah, Shami,

Saini and Siraj bowled wouldn't have been lost on the Aussies.

In the second innings, with the pitch having eased considerably, India (barring Shaw who threw his wicket away) batted consistently down the order to swell the lead past 325 and put themselves in a potentially winning position.

But this success has also created a vexing situation for the think tank: there are multiple claimants for the second opener's spot, the number 6 slot, the wicket-keeper, the spin all-rounder, and the 3rd/4th seamer should be.

Skipper Kohli and chief coach Shastri have a head scratching dilemma of getting the right combination for Adelaide over the next few days.