

THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI FRIDAY 4 DECEMBER 2020



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Diljit Dosanjh, Kangana in unseemly Twitter spat over protest by farmers



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MDH's Mahashay Gulati, India's Spice King, leaves behind ₹15,000-cr empire

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Urmila Matondkar says she's committed to uplift society



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RNI No. 57290/94, Regd No: DL-SW-05/4189/15-17

Vol. 27 No. 288 | 16 PAGES | ₹5.00



Barcelona's French midfielder Antoine Griezmann celebrates scoring during the UEFA Champions League match with Ferencváros TC in Budapest on Wednesday.

India, China agree to another round of LAC talks: Delhi

New Delhi: New Delhi on Thursday said both India and China had "agreed to have another round of senior commanders' meeting at an appropriate time" for disengagement of troops of both sides from the LAC, adding, in a strong thinly-veiled message to Beijing, that previous bilateral agreements stipulating that there should not be amassing of troops should be respected and that no unilateral action should be taken to alter the LAC.

Dy Army Chief for strategy gets nod

New Delhi: At a time of military stand-off with China in eastern Ladakh, the Centre has finally cleared hurdle in the reorganisation of Army headquarters by approving creation of all powerful post of Deputy Chief of Army Staff (Strategy).

Covid-19 recoveries high: 40K in 24 hrs

New Delhi: India has now started reporting higher numbers of daily recoveries with 40,726 people having recovered and 35,551 fresh infections being reported on Thursday. India now has 95.35 lakh total cases, while deaths are close to 1.39 lakh. In the last 24 hours, 526 new fatalities were recorded.

COUNTERPOINT



They are blocking roads in support of farmers' agitation!

WEATHER

Max: 27°C
Min: 13°C
RH: 52%
Rain: Nil%

Forecast: Sunny

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Dakshinayana
Tithi: Kartika Bahula
Chavithi till 7.59 pm
Star: Punarvasu till 1.35 pm
Variyam: 9.51 pm to 11.30 pm
Durmuhurtam: 8.47 am to 9.31 am; 12.28 pm to 1.12 pm
Rahukalam: 10.30 am to noon
SUNSET TODAY 5.23 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.58 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 8.49 PM
MOONSET TODAY 10.16 AM

Farmers' unions won't budge on demand for laws' repeal; refuse lunch & tea in 7-hour meet

Govt is ready to discuss all 'valid concerns'; Tomar claims 'open mind', 'no ego involved'

Talks deadlocked, next round tomorrow

ANIMESH SINGH
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, DEC. 3

The marathon fourth round of talks on Thursday between the farmers' organisations and the Centre on the three controversial farm laws, which lasted for over seven hours, failed to break the impasse and the two sides are expected to meet again on Saturday, December 5. Union agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar, however, said after the meeting that the government had "no ego" over the issue, and the new laws ensure safety for marginal farmers and the minimum support price will always remain.

The government assured the group of nearly 40 farmers' leaders that "all their valid concerns" would be discussed and "considered with an open mind", but the other side flagged several loopholes and deficiencies in the laws, which they said were passed hastily in September.

The farmers said they didn't get any concrete assurance from the Centre on doing away with the laws. The representatives of farm unions stuck to their line that no amendments in the laws would be accepted by them.

At the same time, there are some indications that when the talks resume on Saturday, contentious issues like an assurance on MSP for farm produce, stubble burning and the grievance resolution mechanism under the sub-divisional magistrates' courts will be discussed.

Sources said the government is considering the farmers' demand that

FARMERS said they didn't get any concrete assurance from the Centre on doing away with the laws. The representatives of farm unions stick to their line that no amendments in the laws would be accepted by them.

they can approach the courts in case of a dispute over contract farming. Under the current rules, such a dispute can only be resolved by the sub-divisional magistrate.

At the end of Thursday's talks, All India Kishan Sangharsh Coordination Committee general secretary Hannan Mollah said all the farmers' outfits would meet at 11 am on Friday to take a collective call on the next round of talks with the government on Saturday.

Another farmers' leader, Kulwant Singh Sandhu, said the government offered many proposals, including on MSP and the procurement system, which will be discussed among the farmers' organisations on Friday.

Earlier, the farmers had warned that the December 3 meeting was the government's "last chance" to call a special session of Parliament and repeal the three contentious laws.

The three laws include the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act 2020, which gives farmers the freedom to sell their produce outside Agricultural Produce Market Committees (APMCs), or mandis. The APMC fall under the

■ **Turn to Page 4**



Farmers block a part of the Delhi-Meerut national highway during their protest march against the Centre's new farm laws in New Delhi on Thursday.

— PTI

'Security at stake': Capt. asks Shah to resolve row

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 3

Punjab chief minister Capt. Amarinder Singh, who met Union home minister Amit Shah on Thursday, cautioned that the ongoing farmers agitation will not only have an impact on the state's economy but would also have an implication on national security.

During his 30-minute meeting with Mr Shan, Capt. Singh urged that Centre to try and resolve the issue at the earliest so that protesting farmers can lift the roadblock along Delhi's main entry points.

Talking to the media after his meeting, he said, "Discussions are on

ACCORDING TO sources, the meeting with Capt. Singh, which was slated in the morning, was delayed by over two hours and started around noon

between the farmers and the Centre, there's nothing for me to resolve. I reiterated my opposition in my meeting with the home minister and requested him to resolve the issue as it affects the economy of my state and the security of the nation."

Asked if he was trying to mediate between the agitating farmers and the Central government, Capt. Singh said a discussion is going on between

the two sides.

"It is for them to resolve... we have reiterated Punjab's position," he said.

The meeting was held simultaneously with the interaction between the agitating farmer leaders and the government at Vigyan Bhavan, sources said.

According to sources, the meeting with Capt. Singh, which was slated in the morning, was delayed by over two hours and started around noon.

The Punjab Assembly has already passed Bills to oppose the three contentious agriculture laws that were brought by the Centre and are being opposed by various farmers' groups.

Huge jams in Delhi: Alert on routes to UP and Haryana

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA
NEW DELHI, DEC. 3

With no let-up in the farmers' protests, the Delhi police on Thursday intensified its security arrangements and suggested alternative routes to commuters entering or leaving the city.

Huge traffic jams were seen in several areas, particularly in outer and east Delhi, with several border points linking Delhi with Haryana and Uttar Pradesh shut. Commuters were alerted on the closure of Singhu, Lampur, Auchandi, Chilla and other points. Those going to Haryana can use Dhansa, Daurala, Kapashera, Rajokri NH-8, Bijwasan/Bajghera, Palam Vihar and Dundaheera, the police said.

"Singhu border is still closed from both sides. Lampur, Auchandi & other small borders also closed. Traffic is diverted from Mukarba Chowk & GTK Road," the police tweeted.

It advised commuters to avoid Noida Link Road and use NH 24 and DND as the Chilla border on Noida Link Road was closed. "Tikri, Jharoda borders are closed for any traffic. Badusarai border is open only for light motor vehicles like cars and two-wheelers," it added.

■ **More on Page 2**

Badal returns his Padma Vibhushan in act of protest

Chandigarh, Dec. 3: Akali Dal stalwart and former Punjab chief minister Parkash Singh Badal on Thursday returned his Padma Vibhushan award in protest against the Centre's new farm laws.

In a separate announcement, dissident Akali leader and Rajya Sabha member Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa also said he will return the Padma Bhushan conferred on him last year. Earlier, some former Punjab sportsmen too have threatened to return their awards.

Mr Badal's move follows over two months after his Shiromani Akali Dal pulled out of the BJP-led NDA at the Centre, protesting against the three laws. His daughter-in-law Harsimrat Kaur Badal had also quit the Union Cabinet as protests.

"I am who I am because of the people, especially the common farmer. Today when he has lost more than his honour, I see no point in holding on to the Padma Vibhushan honour," Mr Badal said in his letter to President Ram Nath Kovind.

— PTI

ED searches 26 places in 9 states in its probe on PFI

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 3

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Thursday conducted searches at 26 premises across nine states linked to the Popular Front of India (PFI) in connection with its money laundering probe against the banned radical outfit.

The Central probe agency also raided the premises of PFI's chairman O.M. Abdul Salam and Kerala state president of the outfit, Nasaruddeen Elamarom.

The ED is investigating PFI's financial links on alleged charges of fuelling the anti-Citizenship (Amendment) Act protests in the country and the Delhi riots in February this year, among other things.

The searches were aimed at collecting evidence in multiple money laundering cases that have been clubbed into one and are being probed against the PFI and those linked to it, sources said.

The ED had said in November it was investigating financial links between the PFI and Bhim Army in its money laundering case registered to investigate allegations of illegal funds being used to "fuel" the anti-CAA protests.

The agency is investigating the PFI under the PMLA since 2018.

■ **More on Page 4**

Navy pitches for 3rd aircraft carrier



Chief of Naval Staff Adm. Karambir Singh, speaking in New Delhi Thursday on the eve of Navy Day, said his force was ready to face the "dual challenges" of Covid-19 and China, as he pitched for a

third aircraft-carrier to enhance the Navy's maritime capabilities. The Navy Chief also said it was moving towards procuring six more submarines.

■ **Report on Page 3**

— PTI

Trump mulls a flurry of pardons: Friends, family, maybe himself?

Washington, Nov. 3: Advocates and lawyers anticipate a flurry of clemency action from US President Donald Trump in the coming weeks that could test the limits of presidential pardon power.

Mr Trump is said to be considering a slew of pardons and commutations before he leaves office, including potentially members of his family, former aides and even himself. While it is not unusual for presidents to sign controversial pardons on their way out the door, Mr Trump has made



clear that he has no qualms about intervening in the cases of friends and allies whom he believes have been treated unfairly, including his former national security adviser, Michael Flynn.

The list of potential candidates is long and colorful: Trump's former campaign chairman, Paul Manafort, imprisoned for financial crimes as part of the Russia investigation; George Papadopoulos, who pleaded guilty to lying to the FBI, just like

Flynn; Joseph Maldonado-Passage, aka "Joe Exotic," who starred in the the Netflix series "Tiger King"; and former contractors convicted in a Baghdad firefight that killed more than a dozen civilians, including women and children.

Mr Trump has expressed worry to confidants in recent weeks that he, his family or his business might be targeted by President-elect Joe Biden's justice department, although Mr Biden has made clear he won't be part of any such decisions.

MLA hits out at TMC: How can you call PM outsider?

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, DEC. 3

Joining the league of rebel Trinamul Congress M L A s ahead of the West Bengal Assembly polls, Bally legislator Baishali Dalmiya, daughter of late ICC chief Jagmohan Dal-miya, has stumped her party by wondering how its leaders could call Prime Minister Narendra Modi an "outsider" when he is the "head of our family".

In a video message that has gone viral, she was heard saying: "These people are calling our honourable PM an outsider! Whenever someone comes here from another state, he is labelled as an outsider. They do not even know that India is a country. The PM is the head of our family. He is seen in that way. When the PM, being the head, is tagged as an outsider in India, then whom am I?"

Ms Dalmiya's outburst, after several posters, demanding no party ticket for an "outsider" in the next Assembly polls, were

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Rajini takes the political plunge, start party in '21

Says formal announcement on Dec. 31

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR and D. SEKAR
CHENNAI, DEC. 3:

Announcing that the time has come for him to take charge of the fate of Tamil Nadu, film actor Rajinikanth announced on Thursday that he would launch his political party in 2021 and make a formal announcement with details on December 31.

Along with the hashtag "will change, will change everything... If not now, never" in Tamil, Rajinikanth announced his decision on Twitter and then, around noon, emerging from his house to meet the media which had been waiting for hours.

"I don't mind giving my life... political change is very, very important. It's a compulsion. So I am starting a party," he said and added that he has never gone back on his word. If he loses election it would be the people's loss and if he wins it will be the people's victory, he said.

Recalling that he had said in 2017 that he would field candidates in all 234 constituencies of Tamil Nadu and was planning to tour the state, he said that his plans got derailed because of various things, including the



Actor-turned-politician Rajinikanth during a press conference to announce the launch of his political party in Chennai.

— PTI

Coronavirus. Since his kidney transplant, his body has had less immunity and so he could not take the risk of moving around and meeting people, he said. "I came back alive from Singapore only because of the prayers of the people of Tamil Nadu," he added.

Rajinikanth also introduced two office-bearers of his to-be-launched party. Tamilaruvimaniyan will be the overseer of the party and Ra Arjunamurthy, who was the state president of the BJP's intellectual wing, would be the chief coordinator.

Soon after the announcement, state BJP general secretary Karu

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SHORT TAKES

'AAP GOVT FAILED IN COVID FIGHT, JAIN MUST QUIT'

New Delhi: Delhi Congress leaders and workers, on Thursday, during protests across the city, alleged that the AAP government has "failed" to make arrangements to fight Covid-19 and demanded the resignation of health minister Satyendar Jain. "Chief minister Arvind Kejriwal should remove Jain," city Congress president Anil Chaudhary said while citing that the national capital has recorded over 9,000 deaths due to the novel coronavirus. No immediate reaction was available from the ruling AAP. As per official figures, Delhi has so far recorded over 5.7 lakh Covid-19 cases and 9,342 deaths. Meanwhile, over 5.38 lakh patients have recovered.

Mr Chaudhary said that protests were held at nearly 75 places across the city against the Kejriwal government. The AAP government has failed to make arrangements to fight Covid-19, he added. Mr Jain, on Wednesday, had said that Covid-19 severity is coming down in Delhi and the positivity rate has declined to five per cent. The minister had, on Monday, attributed the high Covid-19 death rate in the city to pollution caused by stubble burning and expected a downtrend in it in the next two-three weeks. He said that pollution caused problems in breathing and Covid-19 patients inhaled the smoke that aggravated the seriousness of the disease.

Manoj Tiwari seeks quashing of summons

New Delhi: BJP MP Manoj Tiwari Thursday urged the Delhi High Court to quash the summons issued to him in a criminal defamation case filed by Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia for allegedly levelling corruption charges against him. The high court asked Tiwari's counsel to file legible copies of certain documents as also the physical copies of judgements relied upon by him. Justice Anu Malhotra listed the matter for further hearing on December 7. During the hearing, senior advocate Pinky Anand, representing Tiwari, argued that the summoning order of the trial court was based on legally inadmissible evidence so it was illegal. She further claimed that the trial court's November 28, 2019 order was bad in law and it should be quashed. BJP MLA Vijender Gupta, represented through senior advocate Sonia Mathur, has also challenged the trial court's order summoning him as an accused in the defamation complaint. Delhi government standing counsel (criminal) Rahul Mehra submitted that several documents placed by Tiwari are not legible and the leader be asked to file typed copies. The HC found the submission to be correct and asked the petitioner's counsel to file legible copies of the documents. It also asked the HC registry to ensure that before the matter is listed for hearing, legible copies of the documents are placed on record.

Gunshots fired during quarrel over accident

New Delhi: A man sustained a bullet injury during a quarrel between two parties after their vehicles brushed past each other, police said on Thursday. The incident took place in Uttam Nagar area on the intervening night of Sunday and Monday. According to police, a quarrel broke out between a car driver, Kalu Singh, and a motorcycle rider, Neeraj, after their vehicles brushed past each other, but as Singh's wife reached the spot, the motorcycle rider fled the spot. However, a few minutes later, the motorcycle rider came there again with his associate Rohit and opened three rounds of fire with an intention to kill the car driver, an officer said. Out of the three bullets fired, one of them hit a person named Vipin, who was also at the spot at the time of incident. During inquiry, it emerged that Vipin had come there as member of band party in a nearby wedding function, he said. The injured was taken to a nearby hospital and is stated to be stable, he said. A case was registered and efforts are on to nab Neeraj who opened fire, while Rohit has been arrested, police said.



Members of various farmer organisations serve langar to fellow farmers during their Delhi Chalo protest march against the new farm law at Ghazipur Delhi-UP border in New Delhi on Thursday. — PTI

Major traffic jams were witnessed in several parts of city**Farmers' stir: Key routes connecting Delhi-UP shut**

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 3

With no let-up in the farmers' protest against the Centre's new farm laws, the Delhi police, on Thursday, intensified its security arrangements and suggested alternative routes to commuters entering or exiting the city.

Major traffic jams were witnessed in several parts of the city, especially in Outer and East Delhi areas, because of the closure of several border points connecting the national capital with Haryana and Uttar Pradesh.

Police on Thursday closed routes on two national highways connecting Ghaziabad to Delhi.

"The local police have closed the routes on NH-9 and NH-24 from Ghaziabad to Delhi. On NH-1, both sides of the route have been closed near Shani Mandir," the Delhi Traffic Police tweeted.

Commuters were advised to use the Apsara border on GT Road, Bhopura border on Wazirabad road and the DND flyover for Delhi from the UP side



Traffic jam on the Delhi-Sonapat highway near Mukarba Chowk after restrictions were put in place by the security personnel in the view of farmers' Delhi Chalo protest against new farm laws in New Delhi on Thursday. — PTI

In a series of tweets, the Delhi traffic police alerted commuters about the closure of Singhu, Lampur, Auchandi, Chilla, and other borders in view of the farmers' protest.

It, however, said that those wanting to travel to Haryana can take Dhansa, Daurala, Kapashera, Rajokri NH 8, Bijwasan/Bajghera, Palam Vihar, and Dundahera borders.

"Singhu border is still closed from both sides. Lampur, Auchandi, and other small borders also

closed. Please take alternative routes. Traffic has been diverted from Mukarba Chowk and GTK Road," the traffic police tweeted.

The police also advised commuters to avoid Noida Link Road and instead use NH 24 and DND as the Chilla border on Noida Link Road remained closed for traffic.

As part of their 'Delhi Chalo' march, farmers have been staging protests at four busy border points of the national capital—Singhu, Noida, Ghazipur,

and Tikri—to press their demands for repealing the agri-marketing laws.

About the other borders, the traffic police alerted that Tikri border, Jharoda border, and Jhatikra border are closed for any traffic movement. The alert says that Badusarai border is open but that too only for two-wheeler traffic.

The local police, however, said that one carriageway going towards Noida from Delhi through Chilla border has been open since Wednesday afternoon after the protesting farmers shifted their protest to the Noida to Delhi carriage-way.

"Noida to Delhi carriage-way is closed. Only one carriageway was opened by farmers on Wednesday, which is Delhi to Noida," said DCP (East) Jasmeet Singh.

The traffic police also posted an alert regarding obstruction in traffic in the carriageway from Akshardham towards Noida-Chilla border due to overturning of a light goods vehicle near Mayur Vihar Phase-1 flyover. Commuters have been advised to avoid the stretch.

Covid caseload in India breaches 95 lakh mark

AGE CORRESPONDENT
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, DEC. 3

As the country eagerly awaits vaccination against novel coronavirus, India has now started reporting higher numbers of daily recoveries than the daily new cases. On Thursday, while 35,551 persons were found to be infected with Covid in the country, India also registered 40,726 new recoveries leading to a decline of 5,701 cases from the total active caseload in the last 24 hours. Union health ministry officials said the new recoveries continue to overtake the daily new cases continuously since the past six days.

Till Thursday, India had 95.35 lakh total cases of novel coronavirus while total deaths are close to 1.39 lakh. In the last 24 hours, 526 new fatalities were recorded.

Director of All India Institute Of Medical Science-Delhi Dr Randeep Guleria pinned his hopes on the five Covid vaccine candidates which are in advanced stages of clinical trial in India, stating they are logistically feasible for distribution in both urban and rural areas. Dr Guleria expressed hope

Steady rise in Delhi containment zones

New Delhi, Dec. 3: The Covid positivity rate in the national capital has slumped in the last one week, dropping from 8.65 per cent on November 26 to 5 per cent on December 2, even as the count of containment zones has grown steadily in the same period, according to official data. In this duration, nearly 100 containment zones have been added each day, rising to 5,772 on Wednesday.

The national capital, meanwhile, recorded 3,734 new Covid-19 cases, taking the infection tally to over 5.82 lakh, while with 82 more fatalities the death toll rose to 9,424.

that by the end of this month or early next month, at least one of the five vaccines being locally-tested should get emergency use authorisation from the drug regulator to be administered to the public starting with priority groups.

"Hopeful by the end of this month or early next month we should get emergency use authorisation from Indian regulatory authorities to start

This is the highest number of tests conducted in a day till date and also the first time when over 70,000 tests were done.

The positivity rate has been steadily dropping since November 26 till date, except on November 29 when it marginally rose to 7.64 per cent compared to 7.24 per cent on November 28, as per the official figures shared by the Delhi health department. The positivity rate was 8.65 per cent on November 26 when 5,475 fresh cases were recorded, and 8.51 per cent on November 27 when 5,482 cases were reported.

giving vaccine to public," Dr Guleria said. He added that there is good data available that the vaccines are safe.

"Safety and efficacy of vaccines is not compromised at all. About 70,000-80,000 volunteers have been given vaccine shots globally, and no significant adverse effects have been seen. Data shows that in the short term vaccine is safe," he said.

No night curfew in Delhi for now, govt tells HC

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 3

The Delhi high court, on Thursday, directed the AAP government to "focus on testing and tracing" to deal with the Covid-19 infection numbers in the national capital.

The AAP government informed the Delhi high court on Thursday that no night curfew would be imposed in the national capital, or parts of it, for now, to contain the spread of coronavirus.

The national capital, meanwhile, recorded 3,734 new Covid-19 cases, taking the infection tally to over 5.82 lakh, while with 82 more fatalities the death toll rose to 9,424.

According to the Delhi

health bulletin, these fresh cases came out of 75,230 tests conducted the previous day, including 33,298 RT-PCR tests, while the positivity rate dropped to below five per cent. Eighty-two more fatalities were recorded, pushing the toll in the national capital to 9,424.

The active cases tally on Thursday dropped to 29,120. The total number of cases has climbed to 5,82,058.

The highest single-day spike till date — 8,593 cases — was reported on November 11.

Delhi health minister Satyendar Jain on Wednesday said the coronavirus positivity rate in the national capital is falling rapidly and it should drop to below 5

per cent level in the next few days.

A bench of Justices Hima Kohli and Subramonium Prasad also said that the time to declare results should be brought down to within 24 hours from 48 hours or more even now.

The court said the labs can message the results to people on their mobile numbers, which are taken at time of sample collection, and it can be put up on the websites later.

The directions and suggestions by the court came while hearing a PIL by advocate Rakesh Malhotra seeking increase in the Covid-19 testing numbers in the national capital and getting speedy results.

Man arrested for running human trafficking racket

New Delhi, Dec. 3: The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has arrested a man for his alleged involvement in running a human trafficking racket under the guise of placement agencies in Delhi, an official said on Thursday.

Gopal Oraon (28), a resident of Jharkhand's Khunti, was arrested on Wednesday in connection with the case, a spokesperson of the National Investigation Agency said.

Oraon was a close associate of arrested accused Panna Lal Mahto and was actively involved in the human trafficking racket, the official said.

The case arose out of an FIR registered on July 19 last year in Khunti under sections of the IPC and sections of the Bonded Labour

System (Abolition) Act. The NIA re-registered the case on March 4 and took up the investigation.

Mahto and his wife Sunita Devi were running this racket under the guise of three placement agencies in Delhi

official said.

They used to bring poor and innocent minor boys and girls from Jharkhand on the pretext of providing them jobs in Delhi and neighbouring states but never paid them salaries. Oraon used to help them in this exploitative work, according to the National Investigation Agency official.

Searches were also conducted at the residential premises of facilitators located in four different districts of Jharkhand — Pakur, Sahibganj, Gumla and Khunti, the official said.

Several incriminating documents, railway tickets and mobile handsets have been seized, the official said.

Further investigation in the case is underway, the spokesperson added. — PTI

Two men injured while trying to intervene in clash

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 3

Two men were injured when they tried to rescue a person who was being beaten up by a group of people after he refused to share cigarettes, police said on Thursday.

Police have arrested three men —Deepu Pathak (20), Sachin (22) and Happy (20) — in connection with the incident that took place in south Delhi's Nebsarai area.

On Tuesday, a heated argument ensued between Masoom and the three accused after he refused to share cigarettes with them, deputy commissioner of police (South) Atul Kumar Thakur said.

The verbal confrontation turned into a violent clash when the accused, along with their associ-

POLICE HAVE arrested three men —Deepu Pathak (20), Sachin (22) and Happy (20) — in connection with the incident that took place in south Delhi's Nebsarai area

ates, reached Masoom's house in Shiv Park with sticks and a firearm.

They started assaulting him and also opened fire. Nurul and Bhulla rushed to help Masoom but sustained head injuries during the clash, following which they were rushed to AIIMS, the DCP said.

Police registered a case and analysed the CCTV footage of the area to identify the accused.

Happy was arrested from Khanpur area and subsequently, his co-accused Deepu and Sachin were also nabbed, Thakur added.

IP University launches course in fire, safety audit

New Delhi, Dec. 3: Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia on Thursday inaugurated a "first-of-its-kind course in India", a post graduate diploma in Fire and Safety Audit which will be offered by the Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University (GGSIU)'s Centre for Disaster Management Studies.

The course will be offered in technical collaboration with the National Fire Service College, Nagpur to support and

train the firefighting professionals in the country.

"Fire and life safety has been one of the most challenging and pressing issues in India. It becomes especially tough in metro cities, and urban conglomerates due to lack of public awareness, and non-adherence to building codes," said Sisodia.

"Keeping in mind, the first-of-its-kind course by a university in India is a step forward in the right direction for safeguarding the needs for a safer society at large. We want to give



Manish Sisodia

more well-rounded fire professionals to the society so they can contribute to the nation, and save more lives," he said.

"I don't want this course to produce fire and safety audit robots. Instead, they should be progressive professionals with new analytical thinking. They should enable best safety practices using minimum resources as it is a pressing need of the

day," he added.

Mr Sisodia, who is also the education minister, urged the university to ensure that the course evolves with time as it gains popularity, and adopts a dynamic structure.

"As the world progresses, and urbanises more, we need to prepare for its cost. I am extremely happy that the university has conceptualised, and designed the course curriculum to address the requirements necessary to minimise the danger to

life from fire," he Sisodia.

"This course will help bridge the gap in the existing safety system, and the needs of the society for fire and life safety audit, especially in urban spaces like hospitals, hotels, commercial centres, academic institutions, residential complexes and more by following a standard procedure," he said.

"This will definitely help in developing new skills in aspiring youth and fire professionals, and enable them to become self-reliant," he added. — PTI

City's Covid situation under control, cases going down, says CM

New Delhi, Dec. 3: Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday said the Covid situation in the national capital is "under control" and the number of cases are also going down.

At a meeting with a delegation of Delhi Bar Council and Coordination Committee of Bar Associations of Delhi, the chief minister said his government invested the most in the field of health and education and the result of that investment in the health sector is visible now during the pandemic.

Delhi has shown the path to other states by first implementing the welfare scheme for lawyers, and now other states can follow suit, he said.

The chief minister said, "Delhi is showing the path in various sectors. Now the Covid cases are also going down in the capital and the situation is under control. Delhi has fought a very difficult battle at the time of the Covid pandemic."

During the third wave of Covid pandemic, Delhi reached a peak of 8,500 cases one day and around the world, there is no such city where so many cases were reported, he said. "During the peak of corona in New York, the patients were lying on the streets, but due to our strong hospital management system, nothing such has happened."

"Even at the peak of 8,500 cases a day, Delhi had 7,500 empty beds," he said. — PTI

'Covid vaccine may become reality soon'

New Delhi, Dec. 3: The coronavirus pandemic will be a thing of the past when the vaccine becomes a reality, but the loss of education suffered by students cannot be compensated, Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia said on Thursday.

Mr Sisodia, who is also Delhi's education minister, said while efforts were being made to provide online education as schools remain closed, providing access to these classes to students who lack internet facilities or devices continues to be a challenge.

"Soon, the corona vaccine will be released around the world, and this pandemic would be a matter of history. But the loss of education that our students are facing today cannot be compensated by any vaccine. To minimise this loss, we are consistently working on solutions," Sisodia said at an event, where tablets were distributed among students of Class 11 of Delhi government schools.

"Due to the closure of schools, efforts were made to provide online education in Delhi government schools. However, it continues to pose a challenge to the students who lack access to the internet or devices to study," he added. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

Ex-DGP of Punjab gets anticipatory bail

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Thursday granted anticipatory bail to the former director general of Punjab Police Sumedh Singh Saini in a 30 year old case of alleged abduction and murder of Junior Engineer Balwant Singh Multani in 1991. A Bench headed by Justice Ashok Bhushan and comprising Justice R. Subhash Reddy and Justice M.R.Shah directed that in case of the arrest of Saini in the said case he will be released on furnishing a personal bond of ₹1 lakh and two sureties of the like amount. Having granted anticipatory bail, Justice Shah speaking for the bench said that Saini will surrender his passport and cooperate with the investigation. "...in case of arrest of ... Sumedh Singh Saini ..., he shall be released on bail on furnishing personal bond in the sum of ₹1,00,000/- ... and two sureties of the like amount and to surrender the passport and to cooperate with the investigation" said the order passed today.

Illegal lime quarries found near Gir in Guj

Kodinar (Guj): The police have raided illegal limestone quarries located on the border of the Gir forest in Gujarat, the last abode of Asiatic lions, an official said on Thursday. Acting on a tip-off, a team of 20 police personnel raided mining sites outside Ghantvad village in Kodinar tehsil of Gir-Somnath district on Wednesday night. The village is on the border of the Gir forest. In-charge district Superintendent of Police Om Prakash Jat, who led the operation, said these quarries were on private as well as the village panchayat's land. Limestones were being excavated illegally and cut using machines, he said. In Saurashtra region, limestone blocks are widely used as an alternative to clay bricks in house construction. — *PTI*

Woman held after 8 yrs for killing hubby

Latur: Over eight years after police registered a case of accidental death of a man in Maharashtra's Latur district, his wife has been arrested for allegedly plotting the murder of her husband with others for ₹1 crore insurance money, police said on Wednesday. A case of accident was registered by AUSA police in the district in 2012 after Annarao Bansode's family members claimed he had been killed in a road accident near Babhalgaon village, an official said, adding that the case was closed later. However, the matter resurfaced after the insurance company doubted the death-by-accident version, he said. After visiting the spot of the incident, the insurer lodged a complaint of cheating with the police. — *PTI*

RAHUL GANDHI'S CONSISTENCY IS AN ISSUE: PAWAR

Pune: Commenting on Rahul Gandhi's credentials as national leader, NCP Chief Sharad Pawar on Thursday said that he seems to lack "consistency" to some extent. Mr Pawar, an ally of the Congress, however, took exception to Barack Obama's unflattering comments on the Congress leader. Mr Pawar was being interviewed by Lokmat Media chairman and former MP Vijay Darda. When asked if the country was ready to accept Rahul Gandhi as leader, Pawar said, "There are some questions in this regard. There seems to be less consistency. Mr Obama, in his recently published memoir, has said that the Congress leader appeared to be like a student eager to impress the teacher but lacking aptitude and passion to master the subject. Asked about this, Mr Pawar said it was not necessary that we should accept everybody's view. "I can say anything about the leadership in our country. But I will not talk about the leadership in another country. One should maintain that limit....I think Obama crossed that limit," he said. Asked about the Congress's future and if Rahul Gandhi was becoming a "hurdle" for the party, Pawar said the leadership of any party depends on what kind of acceptance he or she has within the organisation. "Though I had differences with Sonia Gandhi and the Gandhi family, even today Congressmen have a sense of affection for the Gandhi-Nehru family," the NCP chief, who quit the Congress over the leadership issue, said. — *PTI*

Ready to tackle Covid and China: Navy Chief

‘Navy working in synergy with Air Force and Army on LAC’

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 3

Navy Chief Admiral Karambir Singh said on Thursday that his force is ready to face "dual-challenge" of Covid-19 and China, even as he pitched for a third aircraft carrier to enhance Navy's maritime capabilities.

Mr Singh said that aircraft carriers are "absolutely necessary" for an aspirational India that has nearly one-fifth of the global population and want to raise its overall international stature.

Mr Singh said that Navy was moving forward with its plan to have a third aircraft carrier and will place a case for it before the government after collecting all required technical details.

"We are very clear about the utility of the aircraft carrier. Because



ADMIRAL SINGH said that Navy was moving forward with its plan to have a third aircraft carrier and will place a case for it before the government after collecting all required technical details.

the air operations are absolutely integral in naval operations. Air power at sea is absolutely important," he said.

Currently Indian Navy is operating only one aircraft carrier — *INS Vikramaditya* and the indigenously built aircraft carrier (IAC) *INS Vikrant* is under advance stage of construction expected to be fully operational by 2022. Indian Navy has been asking about a third aircraft carrier to deal with China which has been hugely investing in its Navy.

"The year 2020 has been

and the Air Force to tackle the Chinese challenge on the LAC.

"We have deployed the P-8I aircraft at various locations on the requirement of Army and Indian Air Force. In addition, we have deployed the Heron surveillance drones on the northern borders," he said.

Navy Chief said that as of now, three Chinese warships are in the Indian Ocean Region. "The Chinese have been maintaining three ships since 2008 for anti-piracy patrols," he said.

Admiral Singh said Indian Navy's 'mission based deployment' philosophy has enhanced its presence across the region enabling rapid responses to emerging security challenges. "The Navy has established a persistent footprint in our areas of interest, including at various choke points in the Indian Ocean," he said.

LAC: India & China to have another commanders' meet

‘No unilateral action should be taken to alter LAC’

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 3

New Delhi on Thursday said that both India and China had "agreed to have another round of Senior Commanders meeting at an appropriate time" for disengagement of troops of both sides from the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the Ladakh sector, adding — in a strong thinly-veiled message to Beijing — that previous bilateral agreements stipulating that there should not be amassing of troops should be respected and that no unilateral action should be taken to alter the LAC. In response to another question, India also hinted that ongoing tensions between China and Australia had indeed been discussed during talks between India and Australia.

MEA spokesperson Anurag Srivastava on Thursday said, "I would stress that the core issue remains that both sides need to strictly follow the various

IN RESPONSE to another question, India also hinted that ongoing tensions between China and Australia had indeed been discussed during talks between India and Australia.

bilateral agreements and protocols in their entirety including the 1993 and 1996 agreement on maintenance of peace and tranquillity along the LAC in the border areas which require that there should not be amassing of troops, each side should strictly abide by and respect the LAC and should not take any unilateral action to alter it."

He added, "As we have conveyed earlier, the two sides continue to maintain communication through diplomatic and military channels with the objective of ensuring complete disengagement in all friction points along the LAC in the Western sector and full restoration of peace and tranquility. Both sides have

agreed to have another round of Senior Commanders meeting at an appropriate time."

He also said, "India and Australia enjoy strong bilateral relationship and both are democratic nations with shared values based on commitments to rule-based global order. Recently the India-Australia bilateral relationship has been elevated to Comprehensive Strategic Partnership ... This year Australia participated in the recently concluded Malabar Exercise 2020. Australia is an important partner in the implementation of the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative tabled by India, as well as in the post-Covid-19 economic re-balancing through building more resilient supply chains. Given the depth and importance of our bilateral relations, naturally, we exchange views on regional and global developments as well as current issues of concern."

Centre opposes ban on convicted leaders

New Delhi Dec. 3: The Centre has opposed in the Supreme Court the amended PIL seeking imposition of lifetime ban on convicted politicians from contesting elections, saying the elected representatives are equally bound by law.

BJP leader and lawyer Ashwini Upadhyay, in his amended PIL, has sought lifetime ban on convicted persons including politicians, from contesting elections as against the six-year ban from the date of release after serving the jail terms of two years or more as provided under the Representation of Peoples Act (RPA).

The law ministry, in its affidavit, said: It is submitted that the application for amendment is devoid of merits and does not justify the challenge to the vires of the statutory provisions under the RPA, 1951."

The affidavit, filed through the ministry's official S. Mahesh Babu said the amended application does not indicate existence

of any conclusive and factual material to substantiate the contention that the provisions challenged are unconstitutional and ultra vires. "The elected representatives are ordinarily bound by oath that they have taken to serve the citizens of their constituency in particular and country in general. Their conduct is bound by propriety and good conscience. Elected representatives are not above the law and are equally bound by provisions of various statutes in force. Thus no distinction between public servants and elected representatives," it said.

The Centre has also referred to the fact that the apex court, in its judgement in the case of Public Interest Foundation vs Union of India, had already dealt with this aspect and moreover, the legislature had clearly enumerated the grounds for disqualification of an elected representative. — *PTI*

Supreme Court upholds levy of GST on lotteries

Taxable amount will also include prize money

PARMOD KUMAR NEW DELHI, DEC. 3

The Supreme Court on Thursday upheld the levy of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) imposed on the sale of lotteries and would also include the prize money as provided under the statutory scheme.

A bench comprising Justice Ashok Bhushan, Justice R. Subhash Reddy and Justice M.R. Shah in a judgment pronounced on Thursday said, "We, thus, conclude that while determining the taxable value of supply the prize money is not to be excluded for the purpose of levy of GST"

Speaking for the bench, Justice Bhushan said, "When there are specific statutory provisions enumerating what should be included in the value of

the supply and what shall not be included in the value of the supply we cannot accept ... that prize money is to be abated for determining the value of taxable supply"

Referring to the contention relating to provisions of the GST laws in different countries including United Kingdom, Canada, Singapore, New Zealand, and Sri Lanka where the prize money of the lottery ticket are not computed for levy of tax, the court said, "we are of the view that legislative scheme of other countries may not be relevant for determining the issue which has been raised before us. The taxing policy and the taxing statute of various countries are different which are in accordance with taxing regimes suitable and applicable in dif-

ferent countries. The issue which has been raised before us has to be answered by looking into the statutory provisions of the Act, 2017 and the Rules framed therein which govern the field."

The top Court said this while dismissing a plea by Skill Lotto Solutions Pvt. Ltd — authorised agent, for sale and distribution of lotteries organised by Punjab government challenging the definition of goods under Section 2(52) of Central Goods and Services Tax Act, 2017 and consequential notifications to the extent it levies tax on lotteries. Skill Lotto Solutions Pvt. Ltd had sought declaration that the levy of tax on lottery is discriminatory and violative of Articles 14, 19(1)(g), 301 and 304 of the Constitution of India.

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 3

India on Thursday said that it has been "carefully monitoring all developments on the Brahmaputra River as a lower riparian state with considerable established user rights to the waters of the trans-border rivers" and has been urging China "to ensure that the interests of downstream states are not harmed by any activities in upstream areas", adding that China has conveyed "on several occasions that they are only undertaking run-of-the-river hydropower projects which do not involve diversion of the waters of the Brahmaputra".

This comes in the wake of a controversy triggered over China's reported plans to construct a dam on the Brahmaputra river (called Yarlung Zangbo by China) which could have severe implications for India.

THIS COMES in the wake of a controversy triggered over China's reported plans to construct a dam on the Brahmaputra river (called Yarlung Zangbo by China) which could have severe implications for India

The MEA said, "The Government carefully monitors all developments on the Brahmaputra River. As a lower riparian state with considerable established user rights to the waters of the trans-border rivers, Government has consistently conveyed its views and concerns to the Chinese authorities and has urged them to ensure that the interests of downstream states are not harmed by any activities in upstream areas."

The MEA added, "The Chinese side has conveyed to us on several occasions that they are only under-

taking run-of-the-river hydropower projects which do not involve diversion of the waters of the Brahmaputra. Various issues relating to trans-border rivers are discussed with China under the ambit of an institutionalised Expert Level Mechanism which was established in 2006, as well as through diplomatic channels. We intend to remain engaged with China on the issue of trans-border rivers to safeguard our interests.

The Chinese embassy had earlier on Wednesday said any project undertaken will have "full consideration for the impact on the downstream areas and the interests of both upstream and downstream countries", adding that "at present, the downstream development of the Yarlung Zangbo River is still in the stage of preliminary planning and demonstration".

PILs in SC challenging laws against conversions

New Delhi, Dec. 3: Two PILs challenging the laws of Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand to deal with religious conversion for the sake of marriage were filed on Thursday.

The first PIL filed by Vishal Thakre, Abhay Singh Yadav and Pranvesh sought direction for declaring the laws as ultra vires and null and Void as they disturb the basic structure of the Constitution. They have used the term "Love Jihad" in the petition to challenge the laws that deal with religious conversion for the sake of marriage.

The laws passed by the two states are against the Public Policy and society at large, the plea said.

The petition contends that the ordinance passed recently by UP is against the provisions Special Marriage Act, 1954 and it will create fear in the society who are not part of Love Jihad and they can be falsely implicated.

The PIL said the ordinance can become a potent tool in the hands of bad elements of the society.

It has sought direction not to give effect to impugned provisions/ordinance and withdraw the same or in the alternative modify it.

The second PIL has been filed by advocate Neeraj Shukla against the law 'Prohibition of Unlawful Religious Conversion ordinance, 2020', passed by Uttar Pradesh.

The Uttar Pradesh government on November 24 approved the ordinance to deal with religious conversion for the sake of marriage, which could land violators in jail for up to 10 years.

Uttar Pradesh governor Anandiben Patel on November 28 gave assent to an ordinance against forcible or "dishonest" religious conversions. — *PTI*

NORTHERN RAILWAY CORRIGENDUM
Notice inviting tender No. CtgSMU04 to CtgSMU17-2020 published in various newspapers on 11.11.2020 for Publication of open tender for Allotment of 13 Catering Stalls (Special Minor Units) at various A & B category of Stations over Delhi Division for a period of five (5) years, which is scheduled to be open on 04.12.2020, is cancelled due to administrative reason.
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IN BRIEF

MALEGAON BLAST TRIAL TO START ON DECEMBER 19

SHAHAB ANSARI
MUMBAI, DEC. 3

A special NIA court on Thursday directed all the seven accused in 2008 Malegaon bomb blast case to remain present before the court on December 19, as the trial in the case would begin on regular basis from that day. The court passed this order on Thursday, as BJP MP Pragya Singh Thakur, Lt Col Prasad Purohit and two other accused failed to appear before the court despite an earlier court direction. Meantime, the Bombay High Court on Thursday clarified that it has not stayed the trial in the 2008 Malegaon blast case, and said the trial must go on. The lawyers of the absent accused told the special NIA judge P.R. Sitr that their clients were absent due to the Covid-19 situation. Following this the court directed all the accused to be present before it on December 19. A division bench of Justices S.S. Shinde and M.S. Karnik was hearing a plea filed by Lt. Col. Prasad Purohit, seeking that charges against him be quashed because prior sanction was not taken to prosecute him.

Rajini takes political plunge

■ **Continued from Page 1**
Nagarajan issued a statement saying that Arjunamurthy's resignation has been accepted and that he has been relieved from all responsibilities in the party permanently. Reacting to Mr Arjunamurthy's appointment, Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK) general secretary Thol Thirumavalavan tweeted that Rajinikanth would only function as another face of the BJP. President of Tamil Maanila Muslim League Sheikh Dawood said that Rajinikanth will divide the votes of the Congress-DMK, enabling the AIADMK to emerge victorious in the elections. Rajinikanth's entry into politics would not affect the people of the state, he said. "The key battle will probably be between Rajinikanth and Sasikala. BJP will be in a dilemma," said BJP leader Subramanian Swamy in a tweet, suggesting that the AIADMK may suffer. Many BJP leaders, including S. Gurumurthy, and fans of the actor, were euphoric over the decision. Rajinikanth tweeted that he would usher in Tamil Nadu a politics based on honesty, integrity, transparency and spirituality without depending on caste or religion. "It will be a miracle, a wonder. Will happen," he promised.

MLA hits out at Trinamul

■ **Continued from Page 1**
circulated allegedly by the TMC in her Assembly constituency in Howrah, came ahead of Mr Modi's visit, being finalised now, to the state on December 24 to inaugurate the Dakshineswar-Noapara Metro network and convocation of Visvabharati, a Central university of which he is the chancellor. The TMC, meanwhile, said rebel Nandigram MLA Shubhendu Adhikari was a "closed chapter" after his rebuttal to its claims of reaching a truce with him. The former state minister, expected to make an announcement on December 6, is all set to quit his posts in the TMC though it remains a secret on whether he would resign as an MLA before his defection to the BJP. Senior MP Saugata Roy said: "I will not comment on Shubhendu any more. It's a closed chapter now. I do not know where Shubhendu is heading to. When a ship shakes a bit, rats feel it will sink and try to save themselves by jumping into the sea. But the ship later becomes steady again. Similarly, many are planning to leave, suspecting that the TMC is weak now. They will meet the same fate as the rats." Taking potshots at senior TMC leaders in Kolkata, Mr Adhikari said at Garbeta in East Midnapore: "It was claimed in the media that I do politics in a comfort zone. Before 2011 it was only me who used to come here the most. Now someone, who stays in a flat, faces problems as the village boy (me) has been out on the road."



Nihangs join farmers' "Delhi Chalo" protest against the new farm laws at Singhu border in New Delhi on Thursday.

— PTI

Farm laws: Mamata warns of a nationwide agitation

Bengal CM to hold party meet today, says Centre must withdraw new laws

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, DEC. 3

ODISHA FARMERS EXTEND SUPPORT TO STIR IN DELHI

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, DEC. 3

As the farmers' protest against three laws continues, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday demanded that the Centre withdraw the laws immediately. Otherwise, she threatened to launch her agitation nationwide. The Trinamul Congress supremo's threat came within few days of her support to the farmers' agitation and offer to join them, if invited, as the Left has already hit the streets over the issue in the state ahead of the Assembly election. In a Facebook post, Banerjee said, "I am very much concerned about the farmers, their lives and livelihood. GOI must withdraw the anti-farmer bills. If they do not do so immediately we will agitate throughout the state and the country. From the very start, we have been strongly opposing these anti-farmer bills."

Clarifying her party's stand, she added, "We have called a meeting of the All India Trinamul Congress on Friday, December 4. We will discuss how the Essential Commodities Act is

Farmers in Odisha on Thursday extended support to the 'Delhi Chalo' protest by staging demonstrations here in state capital Bhubaneswar. They echoed, among others, the demands for scrapping the recent farm laws enacted by the Parliament, legal assurance with regard to continuance of Minimum Support Prices (MSP) for agriculture produces and withdrawal of cases slapped on the agitating leaders. Several farmer organisations under the banner of All India Kisan Sangharsha Coordination Committee gathered at the Lower PMG Square here and tried to march towards the state Assembly.

impacting common people and resulting in sky rocketing prices. The central government must withdraw this anti-people

Cong demands special Parl. session to repeal farm laws

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC 3

Congress on Thursday demanded a special session of Parliament to discuss the "repeal" of the three recently passed farm laws and the Covid-19 vaccination programme. In a letter to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, Congress Leader in Lok Sabha Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury demanded that the former convene a short winter session of the House to discuss several issues, including the farmers' agitation and preparation for Covid-19 vaccine. The letter asked Birla to convene the winter session of the House with all the Covid-19 protocols in place to help the people understand the important

issues the country is facing at present. "There are a number of very important issues that the nation is facing in present times. The most notable among them are the ongoing farmers agitation and the status/preparation of the Covid-19 vaccine," it said. Chowdhury listed issues like "economic slowdown, unemployment scenario, continuous stand-off along the India-China border and unabated ceasefire violation along the India-Pakistan border". "There is a need for a thorough and transparent discussion on all the above mentioned important issues," he said. Meanwhile, former Congress President Rahul Gandhi demanded a repeal of the new farm laws. He said accepting

anything less than a complete repeal of the new farm laws would be betrayal with the country and its farmers. Incidentally, Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh met Union home minister Amit Shah on Thursday morning to work out a solution to the farmers protest against the Centre's agri-marketing laws. Farmers have been staging protests at four busy border points of the national capital — Singhu, Noida, Ghaziपुर and Tikri — to press their demands for repealing the agri-marketing laws. Gandhi also attacked the Centre over its statement that it had never spoken about inoculating everyone with a vaccine against Covid-19.

law." Banerjee also slammed the Centre, alleging "The GOI is selling everything. You cannot sell Railways,

Air India, Coal, BSNL, BHEL, banks, defence, etc. Withdraw ill-conceived disinvestment & privatisation policy. We must not

allow treasures of our nation to be transformed into Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) personal assets."

ED raids premises of PFI, its chief

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 3

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) conducted searches at 26 premises in nine states linked to the Popular Front of India (PFI) in connection with its money laundering probe against the banned radical outfit. The agency also raided the premises of PFI's chairman O.M. Abdul Salam and Kerala state president of the outfit Nasarudheen Elamarom. The ED is investigating PFI's financial links on alleged charges of fuelling the anti-Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) protests in the country, the Delhi riots that took place in February this year and few other instances. "Searches were conducted in Chennai, Tenkasi and

Madurai (Tamil Nadu), Bengaluru, Darbhanga and Purnea (Bihar), Lucknow and Barabanki (Uttar Pradesh), Aurangabad in Maharashtra, Kolkata and Murshidabad (West Bengal), Jaipur, Shaheen Bagh area in Delhi and in Kochi, Malappuram and Thiruvananthapuram districts of Kerala under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA)," sources said. The action was aimed at collecting evidences in multiple money laundering cases that have been clubbed into one and are being probed against the PFI and those linked to it, they added. The ED, last month, had said it was investigating financial links between the PFI and Bhim Army in its money laundering case registered to investigate

allegations of illegal funds being used to "fuel" the anti-CAA protests. The agency is investigating the PFI under the PMLA since 2018. Salam has been posted at the regional audit office of the Kerala electricity board in Manjeri town of Malappuram. PFI and Salam called the raids a gimmick and an attempt to divert attention from the farmers' issue. "Simultaneous raids were carried out by ED at the houses of Popular Front national leaders across the country. We believe this to be a politically motivated action from the part of the agency. Such raids usually happen in our country whenever the government in power comes under the pressure of popular anger and it wants to divert

national attention from it." The ED had said that at least ₹1.04 crore was deposited in several bank accounts linked to the organisation between December 4 last year and January 6 this year in various parts of the country. Sources had said a total amount of ₹120 crore, credited to bank accounts linked to the PFI, is under the ED's scanner. Sources further claimed that these dubious deposits were either made in cash or through the immediate payment service (IMPS) and a number of such instances were seen in Uttar Pradesh, where the maximum number of violent anti-CAA protests were reported to have taken place. The ED had also sent a report in this connection to the Union home ministry.

Diljit, Kangana in Twitter spat on farmers' stir

New Delhi, Dec. 3: Actors Diljit Dosanjh and Kangana Ranaut were embroiled in a bitter war of words over the farmers' protest on Thursday, a Twitter spat that began with Shaheen Bagh protester Bilkis Bano but soon spilled over to name calling, Punjabi identity, the Delhi riots and even some muscle flexing over the mother figure. The two, one a celebrity singer-actor from Punjab and the other a Bollywood star known for her combative comments, began bickering on the social media platform on Wednesday evening and continued till well into Thursday. Earlier this week, Ranaut misidentified a woman farmer from Punjab as Bilkis Bano, the octogenarian who made international headlines during the anti-CAA protests earlier this year in the Delhi neighbourhood of Shaheen Bagh. She shared a tweet alleging that the "Shaheen Bagh dadi" also joined the farmers' agitation over the new agri laws at various border points of the national capital. She retweeted the post with pictures of two elderly women, including Bilkis Bano, and wrote that the "same Dadi" who featured in *Time* magazine was "available in 100 rupees". When Twitter users pointed out that both the women were different, Ranaut reportedly deleted her tweet. The floodgates opened after that. Dosanjh shared a BBC interview of the woman who Ranaut had wrongly identified as Bilkis Bano and tweeted on Wednesday that her name is Mahinder Kaur. "Listen to this with proof, Kangana. One shouldn't be so blind... You are saying just about anything," the actor, who hails from Dosanjh Kalan village near Jalandhar, said in Romanised Punjabi. As the protest by farmers, gathered momentum, he found support from fellow Punjabi star singers Ranjit Bawa and Himanshi Khurana. In the vitriolic exchange that followed, Ranaut called Dosanjh filmmaker Karan Johar's "pet", a bootlicker and asked if he wasn't ashamed of defending somebody who instigated the Delhi riots earlier this year. She also said her comments were directed towards Bilkis

Farmers who end life are cowards: K'taka minister

Bengaluru, Dec. 3: Karnataka agriculture minister B.C. Patil said the farmers who commit suicide are cowards. "The farmers who commit suicide are cowards. Only a coward who can't take care of his wife and children commits suicide. When we have fallen (in the water), we have to swim and win," Patil said at Ponnampet in Kodagu district of Karnataka. The minister was explaining to bamboo growers how profitable the agriculture business is, but some cowards do not realise that and commit suicide. To buttress his point, Patil cited an example of a woman who was wearing gold bangles. "When I enquired with her how her hands were full of gold bangles, You know what she said? She said, 'This mother earth has given me for my 35 years of toil. Doesn't this please you all after listening to this?'" Patil told the gathering. — PTI

Bano and not Mahinder Kaur, someone she said she didn't even know. Dosanjh, a popular name in Punjabi films who shot to national fame with the 2016 drug drama *Uda Punjab*, in turn asked if she was a sycophant of everyone she has worked with. "Then the list will be long," he said. "These people aren't from Bollywood, they are from Punjab. You know how to lie and instigate people by playing with their emotions," he added. Asserting his Punjabi identity, Dosanjh said Ranaut, even as a woman, doesn't have the manners to talk to someone's mother or sister. "Every word you say is like that, what do you want? They are like God for us. Did nobody teach you any etiquette of speaking? Punjabis will teach you how to speak to those who are elder to you," he added. And so it went on. When Ranaut called Punjab "the heart of the country" which needed to be rid of "terrorists", Dosanjh said India was not hers alone. He also accused Ranaut of trying to derail a peaceful protest. — PTI

MEA STILL MUM ON BORIS AS R-DAY GUEST

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 3

At its weekly media briefing on Thursday, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) evaded a question from reporters on whether British Prime Minister Boris Johnson had been invited by India to be the chief guest at the Republic Day parade next month, saying that in such matters on the chief guest attending the Republic Day event, "the announcement is made closer to the event". There had been reports on Wednesday that had said that the British Prime Minister had been invited by India to be the chief guest at the Republic Day parade. It may be recalled that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had spoken on phone to Johnson just last week on November 27 in which the two "leaders agreed that officials from both sides would continue their work to quickly finalise an ambitious long-term roadmap for the India-UK partnership". It had said last week, "The two leaders exchanged thoughts about the challenges posed by the Covid-19, and reviewed the promising cooperation between India and United Kingdom in the area of vaccine development and manufacturing."

Talks deadlocked, next round tomorrow

■ **Continued from Page 1**
states' jurisdiction, so technically and constitutionally only the states can frame such a law. Also, the APMCs regulate buyers and agents and ensure farmers get MSP for their produce. It is feared this law has done away with the assurance of MSP for farmers and encourages distress selling. The second controversial law is the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Act 2020, which

allows farmers to enter into contract farming with private entities. It is felt this would endanger rights of small and marginal farmers who own small parcels of land and put them at the mercy of corporate bodies, who can manipulate contracts according to their whims. The third law is the Essential Commodities Amendment Act 2020, which has done away with the stock limit on essential commodities like pulses, wheat and cereals, which farmers allege will encour-

age hoarding if the prices of these commodities soar. Mr Tomar told reporters after the meeting that the Centre had "no ego involved" over the issue, and it will ensure vexed issues like registration of traders, assurances on MSP and safety for small and marginal farmers are resolved. He tried to reassure the unions that the farm laws give complete safety for small farmers and their lands would not be usurped by corporates. "MSP has always been

there and will remain so in the future as well," the minister said. The government is also open to looking into the farmers' concerns on an ordinance on stubble burning and an electricity-related law, Mr Tomar said. The farmers had demanded a special session of Parliament to repeal the three laws, saying this is the "last chance" for the government. Earlier in the day, after a meeting with Union home minister Amit Shah,

Punjab chief minister Capt. Amarinder Singh appealed to both sides to resolve the issue, saying the unrest affects his state's economy as well as national security. Ahead of the meeting, the farmers said that simply giving MSP a legal status "will not serve the purpose". They said that "nothing less than repealing the three laws" will do. They then added: "We will not leave till the government repeals the three laws. We will give our demands again."

In what clearly reflected the mood among the farming community, when the deliberations paused for lunch, the farmers refused to have the food offered to them by the government. They insisted on having their own food which they had brought with them. In Maharashtra's Nashik, which is among India's most prominent onion markets, various farmer unions under the umbrella of the All India Kisan Sabha, have announced solidarity with the Delhi protesters.

THE ASIAN AGE

4 DECEMBER 2020

Amid challenges, there is hope Covid's end is near

The British government clearing the vaccine against coronavirus, developed and manufactured jointly by German startup BioNTech and US pharma major Pfizer, so that vaccination in that country could start as early as next week, is perhaps the biggest news of 2020. The pandemic, Covid-19, which the virus causes, has made six crore ill and killed more than 14 lakh people, rendering itself into the biggest threat to public health in recent times. A vaccine to keep it at bay now offers humanity a reason to look at their lives and livelihoods with a little more hope than that they have done with in the past 10 months.

It was a truly global endeavour that resulted in the development of the vaccine at a record speed — the lead was taken by a Turkish couple who set up their startup in Germany and was supported by a US pharma major. And the final product, which the whole world was waiting for, was cleared for by the British regulator. The mRNA vaccine, or memory RNA vaccine, uses a fragment of genetic code from the coronavirus to teach the body how to prompt an immune response and fight the disease. It is for the first time that such a process has resulted in a vaccine that's authorised for public use. Reports say the vaccine is 95 per cent efficient, particularly among the elderly adults. The British regulator has insisted that the vaccine candidate has been subjected to thorough quality checking, allaying fears of expediency leading the push.

The challenges are not over. The vaccine needs to be stored at around minus 70 degrees Celsius, a logistical challenge only a few countries can take up. Mass production, safe distribution and proper administration based on a transparent protocol could still pose difficulties before the vaccine reaches all the needy people. One can take comfort from the fact that there are at least five more candidates that are easier to store and distribute and are in the final stages of clinical trials. Their arrival in the next few weeks will ease the situation substantially.

Now that science has done its job of coming up with an answer to a potential danger to human race, it's time for politics to take over and design a formula, which can address the needs of the last man on the street. Reports offer no hope in this, though: the entire bulk of early production has been pre-ordered by the rich western nations. India's hopes rest on its vast vaccine manufacturing capabilities built over decades; still the government has sounded cagy vis-a-vis assurances of inoculating everyone. Then there are nations with neither the money nor the production capacities but still house millions of vulnerable people. Their cries of desperation could easily be lost in the cacophony of global marketplace, which recognises only a few ideas, such as capital and profit. It is incumbent on countries, such as India, which in the past have used their leverage to amplify the voice of the less privileged on the global scene. There is a lot to gain by saying, "I am my brother's keeper", especially if he is a potential target of a deadly disease.

Cricket: Individuals shine

On the current tour of Australia, Virat Kohli passed the milestone of 12,000 ODI runs in fewer innings than Sachin Tendulkar, who with 18,426 ODI and 15,921 Test runs, remains cricket's greatest gatherer of runs. More significantly, India stopped a run of seven ODI defeats on the trot since 2019 with a consolation win over Australia after having been comprehensively outplayed in the first two ODIs in Sydney when the series was alive. The celebration of Kohli's feat amid what is for him a leaner time at the crease in comparison to his purple patches in his more prolific years in international cricket since his debut in 2008 is, however, a pointer to how Indian cricket is extremely rich in individual feats of record breakers while rating considerably lower as a team.

The pattern of ineffectual cricket stemming from a lack of mental preparedness to be combat-ready even for what is considered a great rivalry with Australia was in stark evidence in the two defeats at the Sydney Cricket Ground, which presented belters for batsmen. The bowling attack was clueless about adjusting to the challenge and was taken to the cleaners twice by Australian batsmen, most of all Steve Smith who held out impressive lessons in how to make adjustments after a particularly poor IPL outing. Those Indian cricketers who seemed heroic match winners at times in the same IPL were found wanting when it came to chipping in for the national team cause.

A run of seven years without a trophy from any rated global event like the World Cups in the 50 overs and T20 formats or the Champions Trophy is a telling comment on Team India's record. The skipper Kohli's inability to inspire his team in the manner of Mahendra Singh Dhoni is clear even if he remains his team's pre-eminent performer, averaging an unprecedented 50+ in all three formats. Impressive as the comeback win in Canberra was, Team India's performances have been generally dissatisfactory. Fans must begin to appreciate that occasions arise for true celebrations when India performs as a combination in a team sport.

THE ASIAN AGE

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Editor in Chief

Printer & Publisher: K. SUDHAKAR

The Asian Age office is located at:

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

Published and Printed on behalf of and for

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

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

RNI Registration number: 57290/94

Subhani



Keeping Big Biz out of banks not a good idea



Sanjeev Ahluwalia

It's curious how resistance to any big change, invariably, comes from the "progressives" within a political system.

Farmers in Punjab and Haryana — the "gold standard" of agricultural productivity in India — are up in arms over the government's hurried attempts to liberalise the marketing of agricultural produce, allowing farmers to sell to anyone they wish. So why are the farmers outraged?

They say that they never asked for this "gift", so why was it being imposed on them? They suspect that it is a move to allow the "back-door" entry of "corporates" enabling them to get control over the agricultural sector. Never mind that nothing is envisaged to stop farmers who are happy to sell to "Ardhtia" cartels in Central government-regulated mandis (markets) to continue to do so. Conspiracy theories, once born, acquire a life of their own.

In a similar vein, otherwise forward-looking Indian economists of the "left liberal" American tradition condemn the recommendation by a working group of the Reserve Bank last month that industrialists should be allowed to own banks, albeit with suitable checks, to create a "Chinese wall" (bad name this one!) around the banking operations of such business groups, to avoid "connected or mutual" lending.

Never mind that the only "unconnected" lending in Indian banking is when a middle-class woman goes to a bank for a loan to buy a house or a scooter! For all other personal or business lending, the bank must know and trust the borrower. How else do you explain the constant socialising that rotund banking types engage in? Networking has always been

the traditional "oil" in the banking sector, and "connections" matter.

So why are economists of repute up in arms despite these ground realities. They say that "big business" cannot be "trusted" to play with a straight bat and would bend the rules to favour lending and, more important, soft-soap defaults, by borrowers connected to them.

Pause here for a fact check. The ₹10 trillion-plus non-performing loans, even before the Covid-19 pandemic, are not the result of happenstance. Much of this is "directed" lending to unworthy "favoured" business borrowers. These came to light when growth stalled, pulling out the plug from various ponzi schemes in real estate and the stock markets. Stiffer asset classification rules from the RBI also helped to unearth the scams. Publicly-owned banks are the most affected, though poor governance and low managerial propriety standards were visible in some private banks as well.

Formalising the reality of this "jugalbandi" by letting big business own banks transparently, rather than remain the unseen puppeteer, can only help reduce the existing systemic risk rather than increase it. Private banks should grow their asset share to equal that of public banks (which is now 70 per cent) while boosting credit levels to equal the GDP, up from 60 per cent today. Timely and forceful intervention by the RBI against delinquent management — private or public — as in the recent case of the Lakshmi Vilas Bank, is the way to go, to contain the rot, not to pull up the drawbridge against industry ownership in banks.

Consider the oldest, iconic Indian "brand" — the Tatas. Do we envisage a Tata, a Godrej, a Bajaj

or a Mahindra managed bank being less sound than the "diversified ownership" private banks in operation today? Look at the "newbie" business brands — Jio for instance. Does Mukesh Ambani need to own a bank to get access to credit or to nudge its flow? What if N.R. Narayana Murthy or Azim Premji were to float banks. What could possibly compel them to damage their international stature and credit rating by committing irregularities in their banking operations?

We have moved well beyond the stymied sources for wealth creation which existed in 1949, when the Banking Regulation Act was framed. Regulatory systems and public expectations have evolved. Even the 2013 guidelines, liberalising the entry of private banks, did not specifically bar big business from owning banks. Forty per cent of the capital of the best private banks is held by international investors. The gains from retaining a healthy and "sustainable" asset profile and international governance standards far outweigh the domestic "benefits" from bending licensing norms for dodgy loans.

Left-leaning consumer activists raise the spectre of "concentration of wealth" and "higher inequality" if business is let in through the banking door. These fears are overblown. Increasing the number of well-capitalised private banks will induce competition and dilute the concentration of economic power. The way to reduce inequality is not by preventing billionaires from becoming richer, but by improving

public services, creating decent jobs and enhancing the incomes of the poor.

Globalisation, corporatisation and industrialisation do tend to concentrate surpluses at the top. But they also expand the economic pie. Walking away from these pervasive global trends is not an option if growth is to be preserved. Pushing it to the high single digits, requires extensive liberalisation — cutting through the post-1991 residual red tape and "re-liberalisation" — hacking through the new accumulation since then with a motorised saw.

The key to manage big corporates is to have strong community-based governments with heightened accountability to the people, so that "cozy deals" and "crony capitalism" — a much larger generic problem beyond banking — are exposed and the guilty brought to book.

Are we there yet? Possibly not. Can we get there. Yes, we can. But not by stepping into Emperor Xi's boots and undermining the public profile of big business — just to keep them in respectful submission. The Chinese regulators, last month, torpedoed the giant \$35 billion IPO of the Ant Group in Shanghai and Hong Kong to rein in the "outsipoken" Jack Ma (shades of Rahul Bajaj?), who criticised the government publicly.

Efficient banking is a key "commanding height" of the Indian economy. Accountability of banks to their creditors and minority shareholders needs to be strengthened. The RBI recognises that. But to shun the financial heft and managerial excellence of big business in scaling up bank services is like marching into the future with one hand permanently tied behind our back — ideologically pure, possibly. But irresponsibly courageous and blindly devotional to the blunt governance strategies of an earlier era.

The key to manage big corporates is to have strong community-based governments with heightened accountability to the people, so that 'cozy deals' and 'crony capitalism' are exposed and the guilty brought to book

The writer is adviser, Observer Research Foundation

LETTERS

CRIMINAL INABILITY

Everyday we read news reports of snatchings, burglaries, looting of banks, murders and rape. The main reasons for this spurt in crime are economic.

Following the slump due to lockdown for months together, there has been a steep increase in unemployment. The government's Ghar Ghar Rozgar scheme has been rendered ineffective, as so many could not get even a Class IV job. It should give serious thought to the problem and make efforts to fight this demon. Unless it is slain, there will be no let-up in crime.

Neha Jamal
Chandigarh

MSP MUSING

THOSE WHO ARE agitating for the minimum support price, or the MSP, are farmers who produce sub-standard grain. Will these farmers from Punjab and Haryana accept MSP for basmati rice? Today the states of Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat produce much better quality rice and wheat compared with Punjab. From Gujarat, there is a rice called Kolam. See its quality. Most of the food grain collected by Food Corporation of India is not fit for consumption. It is a fraud on taxpayers. Also, cash crop farmers are happy with the new laws.

C.K. Ramani
Mumbai

OWN YOUR GREENERY

VINOD KARTAVYA, a scientist with DRDO, and his friends, has taken up an initiative to remove nails, posters and stickers from trees in Bengaluru. This will help the community develop a sense of responsibility towards the environment. The "Nails-Free Trees" challenge on social media encourages people to post their photos after removing nails from trees. It has generated a healthy response. Embedding nails on tree trunks reduces their life expectancy by a major 60-70 per cent. Thus the need to save trees from this menace assumes utmost importance.

Gautam S.R.
Bhopal

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

SHORT TAKES EXPLOSION AT WAREHOUSE IN ENGLAND

London, Dec. 3: UK emergency fire and rescue crews are dealing with what has been described as a large explosion at a warehouse in Avonmouth near Bristol on south-west England on Thursday. South Western Ambulance Service said it was responding to a "serious incident" and a witness reported hearing a "very loud explosion" that "shook buildings".

"South Western Ambulance Service is responding to a serious incident at premises on King's Weston Lane, Avonmouth, Bristol. We have attended with multiple resources alongside fire service and police personnel," the ambulance service statement said. Local media reports said that casualties have been reported but no further details are available on the cause of the "ongoing incident". Photos from the scene showed police cars, fire trucks and a helicopter in attendance and other images appear to show a damaged tank and what looks like smoke rising from behind a mound. Bristol Waste, which runs a nearby Avonmouth recycling centre, tweeted it had closed the site temporarily.

MURAL AT BLACK ARCHIVE VANDALISED

Amsterdam, Dec. 3: Vandals daubed white paint over the faces of Black historical figures on a mural outside a Black cultural archive in Amsterdam in what one of the archive's founders called a racist attack Thursday.

The vandals also stuck stickers on the mural saying in Dutch "soot-smudge Pete is genocide," a reference to the long-running and increasingly polarised debate about the children's holiday season character Black Pete, who is seen by Black activists and others as a racist caricature.

"It's super shocking and worrying. We see it as an attempt at racist intimidation," said Mitchell Esajas, one of the founders of The Black Archives, a collection that documents the history of Black emancipation in the Netherlands. Esajas said that archive staff have filed a criminal complaint with police. Black Pete is a helper of Sinterklaas, the Dutch version of Saint Nicholas, who delivers gifts to children on Dec. 5.

The character is often portrayed by white people in blackface makeup. Amid protests about racism, the character increasingly is portrayed with gray "soot smudges" on his face instead of blackface. Anti-racism activists say that does not go far enough.

INDO-AMERICAN RAO TIME'S 1ST 'KID OF THE YEAR'

New York, Dec. 3: 15-year-old Indian-American Gitanjali Rao, a "brilliant" young scientist and inventor, has been named by TIME magazine as the first-ever 'Kid of the Year' for her "astounding work" using technology to tackle issues ranging from contaminated drinking water to opioid addiction and cyberbullying.

"The world belongs to those who shape it. And however uncertain that world may feel at a given moment, the reassuring reality seems to be that each new generation produces more of what these kids...have already achieved: positive impact, in all sizes," Time said. Rao was selected from a field of more than 5,000 nominees as TIME's first-ever Kid of the Year. She was interviewed by actor and activist Angelina Jolie for the TIME special.

"Observe, brainstorm, research, build and communicate," Rao told about her process during a virtual talk with Jolie from her home in Colorado. She spoke about her "astounding work using technology to tackle issues ranging from contaminated drinking water to opioid addiction and cyberbullying, and about her mission to create a global community of young innovators to solve problems the world over.

"Even over video chat, her brilliant mind and generous spirit shone through, along with her inspiring message to other young people: don't try to fix every problem, just focus on one that excites you,"

Time said. "If I can do it," she said in the interview, "anybody can do it." Rao said her generation is facing many problems that they have never seen before. "But then at the same time, we're facing old problems that still exist. Like, we're sitting here in the middle of a new global pandemic, and we're also like still facing human-rights issues.

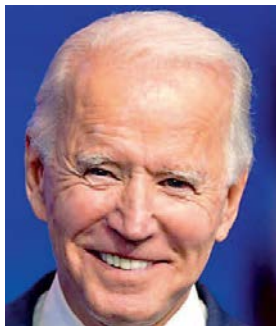
Pressure growing on Biden over defence secretary pick

President-elect being told to appoint an African-American or pick a woman

Washington, Dec. 3: President-elect Joe Biden is facing escalating pressure from competing factions within his own party as he finalises his choice for secretary of defense. Black leaders have encouraged the incoming president to select an African-American to diversify what has so far been a largely white prospective Cabinet, while others are pushing him to appoint a woman to lead the Department of Defence for the first time.

At the same time, a growing collection of progressive groups is opposing the leading female contender, Michele Flournoy, citing concerns about her record and private-sector associations. A coalition of at least seven progressive groups warned Biden to avoid Flournoy in an open letter to Biden obtained Wednesday by The Associated Press that referenced her record of "ill-advised policy decisions" — particularly in relation to Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Afghanistan — and an "opaque history of private-sector activity."

"Ms. Flournoy's consistent support for military interventions has contributed to devastating crises around the world, including in Yemen," said Jehan Hakim, chairperson of the Yemeni Alliance Committee, which helped organise the letter. Other contenders are



Joe Biden

emerging, including retired Army Gen. Lloyd Austin and Jeh Johnson, who served as the Pentagon's top lawyer and then as head of the Department of Homeland Security during President Barack Obama's second term.

Both Austin and Johnson are Black. The competing pressures are intensifying less than a month into Biden's urgent push to build an administration while trying to preserve the broad coalition that fuelled his victory over President Donald Trump last month. And facing massive governing challenges once he takes office on Jan. 20, Biden can perhaps least afford to lose the backing of the Democratic Party's fiery progressive base.

Nearly 100 House Democrats belong to the Progressive Caucus, which may wield significant influence over Biden's policy agenda. — AP

Don: Prepared to accept poll defeat if it's accurate

Washington, Dec. 3: Donald Trump has said that he is prepared to accept any poll result if it is "accurate", even as the US President repeated his unsubstantiated allegations of large-scale voter fraud and electoral malpractice in the presidential election.

Democratic leader Joe Biden has defeated incumbent president Trump, Republican, in the November 3 presidential election. However, Trump has not conceded and has sought legal recourse in challenging the results. "I don't mind if I lose an

election, but I want to lose an election fair and square. What I don't want to do is have it stolen from the American people. That is what we are fighting for, and we have no choice (but) to be doing that," Trump told his supporters at a holiday party gathering at the White House on Wednesday.

A video of the event, which was closed for the press, was posted online on Wednesday.

"We already have the proof, we already have the evidence, and it is very clear," Trump said. — PTI

DON TO FLEX PARDON POWERS

Washington, Dec. 3: Advocates and lawyers anticipate a flurry of clemency action from President Donald Trump in the coming weeks that could test the limits of presidential pardon power. Trump is said to be considering a slew of pardons and commutations before he leaves office. Trump has made clear that he has no qualms about intervening in the cases of friends and allies whom he believes have been treated unfairly. — AP

Next House Foreign Affairs Panel chair bats for strong ties with India

Washington, Dec. 3: US Congressman Gregory Meeks, who is set to be the next chairman of the powerful House Foreign Affairs Committee, has said that he supports a stronger relationship with India, as he underlined that most of the Covid-19 vaccines will be coming from India.

In a virtual interaction with a group of eminent Indian-Americans on Wednesday, Meeks said it is important to continue to work with friends like India for a stronger relationship. Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi also attended the meeting.

Stating that most of the Covid-19 vaccines will be coming from India, Meeks said that the United States needs to work with India with a special relationship. He did not elaborate on the vaccine part.

The 67-year-old Democratic lawmaker is slated to be elected on Thursday as the next Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee — which has jurisdiction over bills and investigations related to the foreign affairs of the US. Meeks said he looks forward to going to India again and recalled his earlier visit to the country last year with his elder daughter. — PTI

log for an Indian national to get permanent residency or Green Card is more than 195 years. The new legislation also establishes transition rules for employment-based visas from FY2020-FY2022, by reserving a percentage of EB-2 (workers with advanced degrees or exceptional ability), EB-3 (skilled and other workers), and EB-5 (investors) visas for individuals not from the two countries with the largest number of recipients of such visas. — PTI

California fire rages on



Firefighters battling the Bond Fire haul hose while working to save a home in the Silverado community in Orange County, California, on Thursday. — AP

Will have good India communication: China on Brahmaputra new dam plan

Beijing, Dec. 3: China on Thursday played down its plan to build a major dam in the lower reaches of the Brahmaputra river in Tibet, saying there is no need to have "any anxiety" over the project and Beijing will continue to have "good communication" with lower riparian states — India and Bangladesh.

China's plan to build the dam over Brahmaputra river, reportedly at Medog in Tibet, which borders Arunachal Pradesh, was

disclosed by Yan Zhiyong, chairman of the Power Construction Corp of China, at a conference recently. The over 3,800-km-long Brahmaputra, one of the longest rivers in the world passes through China, India and Bangladesh and has several tributaries and sub-tributaries.

Yan said China will "implement hydropower exploitation in the downstream of the Yarlung Zangbo River (the Tibetan name for Brahmaputra)

and the project could serve to maintain water resources and domestic security", the *Global Times* reported on Sunday.

Asked about China's plans to build the dam over the river near the Line of Actual Control (LAC) near Arunachal Pradesh where the Brahmaputra enters India, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying told a media briefing on Thursday that the "hydropower development in the lower

reaches of Yarlung Zangbo river is China's legitimate right. When it comes to use and development of cross border rivers, China always acts responsibly."

"We have a policy featuring development and conservation and all projects will go through science-based planning and assessment giving full consideration to impact downstream and accommodating the interests of upstream and downstream regions," Hua said. — PTI

HK MEDIA TYCOON JIMMY LAI DENIED BAIL

Hong Kong, Dec. 3: Outspoken Hong Kong pro-democracy advocate and media tycoon Jimmy Lai was refused bail on Thursday on a fraud charge amid a growing crackdown on dissent in the semi-autonomous city. Jimmy Lai of Next Digital, which publishes the *Apple Daily* newspaper, was among 10 people arrested on August 10 on what police said was suspicion of violating a national security law and collusion with a foreign country.

Lai, 73, was later released on bail but police raided his company's offices in October and took away documents. On Wednesday, Lai and two Next Digital executives were charged with fraud over accusations that they violated lease terms for Next Digital office space. Lai appeared in court Thursday and was denied bail. His case has been adjourned till April 16. — AP

HK former lawmaker goes into exile

Copenhagen, Dec. 3: A Hong Kong pro-democracy activist and former lawmaker who is visiting Denmark said Thursday he is going into exile and will soon move to Britain. "I hereby announce that I will go into exile and will withdraw my membership in the Democratic Party of Hong Kong," Ted Hui said. "There is no word to explain my pain and it's hard to hold back tears." Britain has extended residency rights for up to 3 million Hong Kongers. — AP

US passes bill to end per nation immigrant cap

Washington, Dec. 3: The US Senate has unanimously passed a bill that eliminates the per-country numerical limitation for employment-based immigrant visas and raises it for family-based visas, a legislation that will hugely benefit hundreds of thousands of Indian professionals in America who have been waiting for years to get their green cards.

The passage of the Fairness for High-Skilled Immigrants Act by the Senate on Wednesday comes as a big relief to Indian IT professionals who come to the US on H-1B work visas and their current waiting period for Green Card or permanent residency is running into decades.

Originally passed by the US House of Representatives on July 10, 2019 by a bipartisan 365 to 65 votes, the legislation increases the per-country cap on family-based immigrant visas from seven per cent of the total number of such visas available that year to 15 per cent. It was sponsored by Republican Senator Mike Lee from Utah in the Senate.

The legislation eliminates the seven per cent cap for employment-based immigrant visas, a provision that will facilitate removal of the massive backlog of Indian IT professionals in the US. It also removes an offset that reduced the number of visas for individuals from China.

Because of arbitrary per-country caps, the legal status of Indian IT professionals was constantly in jeopardy. In fiscal year 2019, Indian nationals received 9,008 category 1 (EB1), 2,908 category 2 (EB2), and 5,083 category 3 (EB3) Green Cards.

EB1-3 are different categories of employment-based Green Cards. In July, Senator Lee had told the Senate that the back-

US PASSES BILL TO DELIST FRAUD CHINESE FIRMS

Washington, Dec. 3: The US Congress has passed a bill that prohibits companies from being listed on American stock markets if they fail to provide the regulators access to their audit information for three years in a row, paving the way to delist deceitful Chinese companies from the US securities exchanges. The bipartisan Holding Foreign Companies Accountable Act will help protect American investors and their retirement savings from foreign companies that have been operating on US stock exchanges while flouting oversight. The bill was passed by the House of Representatives on Wednesday. It was passed by the Senate on May 20.

The bill now heads to the White House for President Donald Trump to sign it into law. The bill prohibits securities of a company from being listed on any of the US securities exchanges if the company has failed to comply with Public Company Accounting Oversight Board audits for three years in a row. — PTI

UNGA fails to admit violence against Buddhists, Hindus

United Nations, Dec. 3: Calling out the "selectivity" at the United Nations in condemning acts of violence against religions, India has said the UN General Assembly has failed to acknowledge the rising hatred and violence against Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism and underlined that the culture of peace cannot be only for "Abrahamic" religions. Addressing the UN General Assembly session on 'Culture of Peace' on Wednesday, First Secretary in India's Permanent Mission to the UN Ashish Sharma said there are "disconcerting trends" in the world of today.

While India fully agrees that anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and anti-Christian acts need to be condemned and the country also firmly condemns such acts, he pointed out that UN resolutions on such important issues speak only of these three Abrahamic religions together. "This august body fails to acknowledge the rise of hatred and violence against Buddhism, Hinduism and Sikhism

also," Sharma said.

"Culture of peace cannot be only for Abrahamic religions. And as long as such selectivity exists, the world can never truly foster a culture of peace," he said. Asserting that the UN is not a body which should take sides when it comes to religion, Sharma said if "we are indeed selective", the world will end up proving American political scientist Samuel Huntington's 'clash of civilisations'. "What we are trying to build here is an 'alliance of civilisations', not set up a clash. I call on the UN Alliance of Civilisation to act likewise and speak for all, not just a select few," he said.

Sharma recalled the shattering of the iconic Bamiyan Buddha by fundamentalists in Afghanistan as well as the terrorist bombing of a gurdwara in the war-torn country in March where 25 Sikh worshippers were killed and the destruction of Hindu and Buddhist temples and minority cleansing of these religions. — PTI

NEW | STUDY Research examines if geothermal or underground heat would have been possible in Noachian era

Probable life on Mars likely lived below the surface

Washington, Dec. 3: If life ever existed on ancient Mars, it would have lived up to several miles below the surface of the Red Planet, likely due to sub-surface melting of thick ice sheets fuelled by geothermal heat, according to a study.

The research, published in the journal *Science Advances*, examined various Mars datasets to see if heating via geothermal or underground heat would have been possible 4.1 billion to 3.7 billion years ago or in the Noachian era.

They showed that the conditions needed for sub-surface melting would have been ubiquitous on ancient Mars. Even if Mars had a warm and wet climate 4 billion years ago, with the loss of the magnetic field, atmospheric thinning and subsequent drop in global temperatures over time, liquid water may have been stable only at great depths, the researchers found. Therefore, life, if it ever originated on Mars, may have followed liquid water to progressively greater

depths, they said. "At such depths, life could have been sustained by hydrothermal (heating) activity and rock-water reactions. So, the sub-surface may represent the longest-lived habitable environment on Mars," said lead author Lujendra Ojha, an assistant professor at Rutgers University-New Brunswick in the US. The study may help resolve what is known as the faint young sun paradox — a lingering key question in Mars science. "Even if greenhouse gases

● **EVEN IF** Mars had a warm and wet climate 4 billion years ago, with the loss of the magnetic field, atmospheric thinning and subsequent drop in global temperatures over time, liquid water may have been stable only at great depths, researchers found.

like carbon dioxide and water vapour are pumped into the early Martian atmosphere in computer simulations, climate models still struggle to support

a long-term warm and wet Mars," said Ojha. "I and my co-authors propose that the faint young sun paradox may be reconciled, at least partly, if Mars had high geothermal heat in its past," he said. The researchers noted that our sun is a massive nuclear fusion reactor that generates energy by fusing hydrogen into helium. Over time, they explained, the Sun has gradually brightened and warmed the surface of planets in our solar system. According to the research-

ers, about 4 billion years ago, the Sun was much fainter so the climate of early Mars should have been freezing. However, the surface of Mars has many geological indicators, such as ancient riverbeds, and chemical indicators, such as water-related minerals.

These suggest the Red Planet had abundant liquid water in the Noachian era, the researchers said. This apparent contradiction between the geological record and climate models is the faint young

sun paradox, they said. On rocky planets like Mars, Earth, Venus and Mercury, heat-producing elements like uranium, thorium and potassium generate heat via radioactive decay. In such a scenario, liquid water can be generated through melting at the bottom of thick ice sheets, even if the Sun was fainter than now. On Earth, for example, geothermal heat forms subglacial lakes in areas of the West Antarctic ice sheet, Greenland and the Canadian Arctic. — PTI

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	44,632.65	0.03
Nifty 50	13,133.90	0.15
S&P 500*	3,678.77	0.27
Dollar (₹)	73.91	-0.13
Pound Sterling (₹)	99.05	-0.54
Euro (₹)	89.46	-0.57
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	48,887.481	0.98
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	48.36	0.11
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.932	0.011
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.938	-0.008

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Chhattisgarh accepts Centre's GST option

Chhattisgarh has accepted the Centre's borrowing proposal and will get Rs 3,109 crore through the special window to meet GST revenue shortfall. With this, 27 states and three union territories have accepted the Centre's borrowing plan, leaving only Jharkhand which is yet to decide. Govt. of Chhattisgarh has communicated its acceptance of option-1 to meet the revenue shortfall arising out of GST implementation, MoF said.

Ultratech to spend over ₹5,400 cr on capacity addition



UltraTech Cement, India's largest cement maker, announced a Rs 5,477-crore investment to add 12.8 million tonnes capacity, taking its overall output to over 136 mt per annum. The company said its board in a meeting approved capacity expansion plan with a mix of brown-field and green-field expansion. "The additional capacity will be created in the fast-growing markets of the eastern, central and northern regions," the firm said.

Standard Life Aberdeen sells HDFC Life stake

UK-based Standard Life Aberdeen said it has sold 1.37 per cent stake in HDFC Life Insurance Company for Rs 1,703.2 crore. Standard Life (Mauritius Holdings), a subsidiary of Standard Life Aberdeen, sold 27,772,684 shares of HDFC Life at an average price of Rs 619.14, receiving about Rs 17,032 million (172 million pounds), net of taxes and expenses, the company said in a filing to the London Stock Exchange.

Tata Power arm CGPL repays ₹1,550 cr loans

Tata Power said its subsidiary CGPL, which runs the Mundra ultra mega project, has repaid Rs 1,550 crore of bank loans. Coastal Gujarat Power Ltd (CGPL) repaid the amount on December 2, Tata Power said in a BSE filing. "With this repayment and the earlier repayment of Rs 2,600 crore of bank loans made in October 2020, the entire bank loans of CGPL aggregating Rs 4,150 crore have been fully repaid.

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

RBI halts card, digital expansion HDFC Bank told to freeze new plans

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, DEC. 3

After several incidents of outages in digital services of HDFC Bank in the last two years, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has temporarily barred the lender from new digital banking launches and issuing new credit cards besides asking the bank's board to examine the lapses and fix accountability. The restrictions do not affect the bank's existing customers.

The private lender's managing director and chief executive officer Sashi Jagdishan on Thursday assured clients that "there is no reason to worry" and that they "can continue to transact with the bank without any concern."

The apex bank's order came on Wednesday, days after the last instance of service outage across its digital banking channels, including internet banking, mobile banking and other payments. The outage, which happened on November 21, had severely inconvenienced customers and was the third major outage faced by the country's largest private lender in a span of two years.

"The RBI has advised the bank to temporarily stop all launches of the digital business generating activities planned under its programme—Digital 2.0 (to be launched) and other proposed business generating IT applications, and sourcing of new credit card customers," the bank



informed the stock exchanges in a filing. HDFC Bank is the largest issuer of credit cards and has 1.49 crore customers as of September this year while it has 3.38 crore debit card-holders.

Started in 2018-19, Digital 2.0 is part of the bank's elaborate strategy to transform itself into a bank of the future. It comprises improving customer experience, using analytics to power customer interactions and developing new applications; empowering virtual banking offerings and bringing in innovation to shape up customer preferences. Under Digital 2.0 partnerships are planned with technology companies and fintech players to improve services.

"We had two outages, one in Nov 2018 and second one in Dec. 2019. We have taken help of external expertise, understood what needs to be done further and have substantially implemented the inputs to strengthen our IT infrastructure and systems. Unexpectedly another incident happened on Nov. 21, 2020 and the pri-

mary reason for the same is the power outage in our Primary Data Centre. We are working on war footing to strengthen this area also now," said Jagdishan in his message to the bank's customers.

"Some of our strategic digital initiatives to improve the front end digital experience, improve digital origination, straight through processing, next generation of mobile and internet banking, APIs based banking on the edge etc would now be readied and launched post the approval and clearance from the regulator," he added.

HDFC Bank shares plunged to a low of Rs 1,374.25 on the BSE before closing at Rs 1,377.05, down 2.13 per cent. The bank's promoter HDFC Ltd's shares also fell 0.95 per cent to close at Rs 2253.90. Shares of its main rival, State Bank of India and its subsidiary SBI Cards and Payment Services, gained 3.87 per cent and 5.31 per cent, respectively.

(With inputs from Ravi Ranjan Prasad)

Rabi sowing moving at a buoyant pace

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, DEC. 3

Rabi crop sowing at the end of November is higher than the levels of last year and the average acreage of the past five years. Estimates show total acreage under rabi crop in the current season would be higher than last year's.

Sowing of the winter crop has already covered 348 lakh hectares as of November 27. This is 4 per cent more than the sowing in the previous season till the end of November and 2 per cent above the average of the past five years, finds Crisil Research. In 2019-20, a total of 662 lakh hectares were under rabi cultivation.

Timely kharif harvest has also ensured that rabi sowing started as per schedule. Last year, kharif harvest was delayed and hence Rabi sowing got delayed. The higher acreage till November is supported by the low base of last year. But last year, sow-



ing picked up from December. Hence, rabi sowing for the current season will be up against the high base from last December.

Rabi sowing has been spurred by abundant rains this year. An overall 9 per cent above-normal monsoon has led to high soil moisture and 19 per cent higher reservoir levels compared with the average of the past five years.

"Oil seeds, including mustard, pulses and jeera are expected to see higher acreage this rabi season. Coriander sowing too had started on a

strong note," said Ajay Kedia, MD, Kedia Commodities.

As per the farm ministry data released last week, rabi oilseeds acreage was at 6.16 million hectares, up from 5.87 million hectares, due to higher sowing of groundnut. Further, farmers have sowed mustard over 5.7 million hectares in 2020-21 rabi season, up 6.6 per cent from the previous year. Rabi chana have been sown across 6.94 million hectares, compared to 6.08 million hectares a year ago.

Jeera sowing, too, is expected to be higher in terms of acreage this rabi season.

Overall, a bountiful monsoon has brought cheer to the farmers, with a record output expected in the kharif season. With reservoirs filled to the brim, output is expected to be bountiful in the rabi season as well. This will increase the purchasing power in the hands of the farmers and increase rural demand.

MDH | DADAJI

Man who started out with ₹1,500 leaves behind a ₹1,500-cr empire

Spice King started his journey in a tonga

New Delhi, Dec. 3: School dropout Mahashay Dharampal Gulati, famously known as 'MDH Dadaji' for repeated appearance in his spice brand's television ads—who passed away on Thursday morning at the age of 97—started his spices business journey at a nondescript shack in Delhi's Karol Bagh after selling his tonga, and went on, at the age of 94, to becoming the highest-paid CEO in the country's FMCG sector.

Gulati, also known as the Spice King, was born in Sialkot—now in Pakistan—on March 27, 1923, and moved to India after Partition and set up his business in Delhi. His father had a spice

shop in Sialkot, called 'Mahashian Di Hatti' (MDH), but the outlet was popularly known as 'Deggi Mirch Wale'.

His family left behind everything during Partition to come and settle in Delhi. Gulati, who dropped out of school in 1933 after class 5, dabbled in many odd jobs, including woodwork and working in soap, fabric and rice factories.

He arrived in Delhi in September 1947 with Rs 1,500 in hand, mentions a bio-sketch of him on MDH's portal.

He used the money to buy a tonga (horse cart) for Rs 650 and drove it from New Delhi Railway Station to Qutab Road and Karol Bagh to Bara Hindu



Dharampal Gulati

Rao for a few days.

He sold his carriage in October 1948 to restart his ancestral business, opening a small shop at Ajmal Khan Road, Karol Bagh.

He never looked back. As the business grew, he himself appeared on television commercials endorsing Deggi Mirch,

Chat Masala, and Chana Masala, among the most famous products from the MDH stable, which has over 50 products.

Over the years, the MDH Dadaji, or Mahashay as he was popularly known, became a household name.

His father Mahashay Chhuni Lal Gulati founded MDH Spices in 1919, and Dharampal would later turn it into a Rs 1,500-crore empire.

The company was officially established in 1959 when Gulati bought land in Delhi's Kirti Nagar and set up a production unit.

Starting with manually ground spices, MDH soon switched over to automatic machines to meet the fast-growing demand for

spices. Today, huge volumes of spices are manufactured and packed by modern machines and sold throughout India and abroad by the company through a network of over 1,000 stockists and over four lakh retail dealers.

Gulati, who took home Rs 21 crore salary in 2017, was said to donate nearly 90 per cent of it to charity through his Mahashay Chhuni Lal Charitable Trust. The Trust operates a 250-bed hospital in Delhi, along with a mobile hospital for slum-dwellers as well as four schools.

Gulati established more than 20 schools. He was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 2019.

—PTI

Self-made women make up a third of India's wealthiest

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, DEC. 3

As many as 31 self-made women have made it to the list of 100 Indian wealthy women. Of the 31 self-made women in the Kotak Wealthy Women List 2020, six are professionals and 25 are entrepreneurs.

With a wealth of Rs 36,600 crore, 67-year-old Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw of Biocon is the richest self-made woman and occupies the second place in the list of the wealthiest women. Out of the 13 women from the pharmaceuticals industry, Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw is also the only self-made woman from the sector. Radha Vembu of Zoho with a wealth of Rs 11,590 crore is the second richest self-made woman and fifth among India's richest women.

Arista Network's Jay-



Roshni Nadar: Wealthiest of All

shree Ullal, with a wealth of Rs 10,220 crore, is the richest professional manager. Indra Nooyi of Pepsico too has figured in the list.

There are six startup founders and of them Falguni Nayyar of Nykaa and Divya Gokulnath of Byju's have registered a wealth of Rs 5,410 crore and Rs 3,490 crore respectively and have built their companies into unicorns.

The 100 richest women have a cumulative wealth of Rs 2,72,540 crore. With a wealth of Rs 54,850

crore, Roshni Nadar Malhotra, chairperson of HCL Technologies, is the wealthiest woman on the list. Among the 100, 38 have wealth of Rs 1,000 crore and more.

With four entrants, Apollo Hospitals Enterprise produced the most number of women leaders on the list, followed by Godrej Group which contributed three entrants to the list.

"The women on the Kotak Wealthy Hurun-Leading Wealthy Women 2020 List are the most successful women business leaders in India. Their stories deserve to be shared and studied. What is it that makes them successful? How did they do it? I hope this list can inspire more women to become entrepreneurs, run businesses or lead companies," said Anas Rahman Junaid, manager director and chief researcher, Hurun India.

SC asks Franklin to consult investors

New Delhi, Dec. 3: The Supreme Court on Thursday asked Franklin Templeton Mutual Fund to initiate steps within one week for calling a meeting of unit-holders to seek their consent for closure of the six mutual fund schemes and said there will be no redemption of units by investors till further orders.

The top court also agreed to hear an appeal filed by Franklin Templeton against the Karnataka High Court order, which stopped the fund house

from winding up its debt fund schemes without prior investor consent.

A bench of Justices S. Abdul Nazeer and Sanjiv Khanna observed that the issue is big and people wanted a refund.

It said that without prejudice to the rights of any party, trustees are allowed to call a meeting of unit-holders to seek their consent for approval and in this regard steps be taken within one week.

Advocate Pratap Venugopal, appearing for the Sebi, submitted that the

regulator has no role in the winding up process but had written to RBI in this regard.

The bench posted the matter for further hearing next week and directed that all cross appeals be placed on record.

On October 24, the Karnataka High Court had said that the decision of the Franklin Templeton Trustee Services Private Limited to wind up six schemes cannot be implemented unless the consent of the unit holders is obtained.

—PTI

Flipkart to hive off PhonePe

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, DEC. 3

Flipkart will partially hive off its digital payment platform PhonePe, valued at \$5.5 billion. After the partial spin-off, Flipkart will have an 87 per cent stake in the digital payments services company, while Walmart will keep 10 per cent direct stake and Tiger Global and other Flipkart investors will have a 3 per cent stake.

On its part, PhonePe will raise \$700 million of capital in two months.

However, the spin-off provides PhonePe an opportunity to constitute a new board of directors focused on supporting its development. The new board will have veterans from the

BFSI sector, apart from representatives of Walmart and PhonePe.

PhonePe will also create a tailor-made equity incentive or ESOP programme for its employees. The employees who earlier were owning Flipkart's ESOPs will have PhonePe's ESOPs.

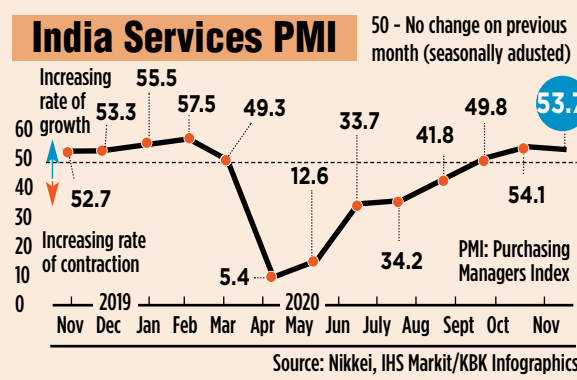
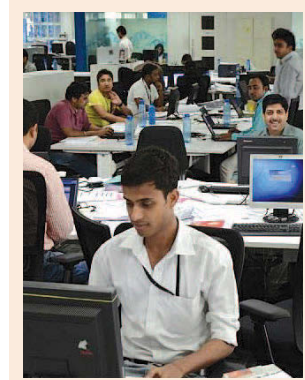
PhonePe will also have the freedom to independently raise funds. It has raised less than \$1 billion from its parent company and its investors till now.

Recognizing the momentum that has been achieved, as well as PhonePe's significant growth potential, Flipkart's board determined that this was the right time to partially spin-off PhonePe so it can access

dedicated capital to fund its long-term ambitions over the next three to four years, the company said in a release.

In a couple of months' time PhonePe will be raising \$700 million in primary capital in two tranches from existing Flipkart investors led by Walmart. The company will be valued \$5.5 billion.

In four years, PhonePe has crossed the 250 million registered user milestone with over 100 million monthly active users generating nearly one billion digital payment transactions in October 2020. Walmart sees value in spinning off PhonePe from Flipkart as the two companies have become large in their respective areas.



New Delhi, Dec. 3:

Ambuja Cements and ACC, both owned by Swiss group LafargeHolcim, on Thursday said they will make investments worth over Rs 780 crore at their plants to reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

The companies will invest in green power generation that will help reduce the carbon footprint, a joint statement said.

The companies will jointly set up waste heat recovery system (WHRS) based power plants at their six cement plants across India. All projects are slated to be completed in 16 to 18 months.

"Six cement plants at both Ambuja Cement and ACC will invest over Rs 780 crore in green power generation, which will lead to a significant reduction of 5.61 lakh tons of carbon footprint annually. This is a major step in our journey towards the reduction of carbon intensity," Neeraj Akhouri, India CEO of LafargeHolcim and MD & CEO of Ambuja Cement, said.

—PTI

FRESHTOHOME EXPANDS FTH DAILY SERVICES

Mumbai, Dec. 3: FreshToHome, which sells fresh fish and meat online, said it has expanded its daily delivery service, FTH Daily, which delivers milk, groceries, fruit, vegetables, and daily essentials, in Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Pune. There is no minimum order and the delivery is free, the firm said.

ITC HOTELS LAUNCHES '100% BACK' OFFER

Chennai, Dec. 3: ITC Hotels has launched '100 per cent Back' offer, which will provide guests hotel credits that can be used against various services. The offer allows guests to book at any of the ITC Hotels and Welcomhotel, and redeem the hotel credits for food and beverage, spa treatments, etc.

SHORT TAKES

Messi fined for tribute to Diego

Barcelona: Lionel Messi was fined 600 euros (\$720) for taking his jersey off to pay tribute to Diego Maradona, the Spanish football federation said. The federation's competitions committee fined the Argentine player for his actions after scoring in Barcelona's 4-0 win over Osasuna in the Spanish league on Sunday. After a strike from outside the box, Messi took off Barcelona's blue-and-burgundy to reveal the red-and-black of Maradona's jersey from his stint at Newell's Old Boys. Messi then blew a kiss with both hands to the sky as he looked upward. After the game, Messi posted a photo of his tribute alongside an older image of Maradona in the same shirt, adding the message Farewell, Diego in Spanish. Maradona died last week at the age of 60. The federation also refused to void the yellow card that was shown to Messi for taking off his jersey, and fined Barcelona 180 euros (\$216). — AP

48 NBA players test Covid positive

Los Angeles: The NBA announced Wednesday that 48 players have tested positive for the Covid-19, a dramatic increase over the zero positive tests reported during last season's quarantine bubble in Florida. The league said the positive tests are the result of 546 tests carried out between November 24-30 as the NBA gets set to begin preseason games in nine days. The zero positive tests were from the beginning of last season's quarantine bubble to the end of the season in mid-October. One team, the Golden State Warriors, has already delayed the beginning of their individual workouts by a day this week because of players testing positive. This was the initial round of tests for players as they returned to their teams ahead of the start of individual workouts on Tuesday. — AFP

Grosjean's fiery crash to be probed

Paris: An investigation has been opened into Formula One driver Romain Grosjean's horrifying crash at the Bahrain Grand Prix, governing body FIA said Thursday. The FIA said it could take up to eight weeks before the conclusions are made public. Grosjean was discharged from a military hospital in Bahrain on Wednesday. "The investigation into the Grosjean incident will look at all areas including competitor safety devices such as the helmet, HANS (a head restraint device), safety harness, protective clothing, survival cell, headrest, in-car extinguisher system and the Halo," the FIA said in a statement. — AP

Sneha retains one-shot lead

Noida: Amateur Sneha Singh retained a one-shot lead over the field with an even par 72 in the seventh leg of the Hero Women's Pro Golf Tour here on Thursday. Sneha had a roller-coaster front nine with three birdies on first, fourth and eighth and dropped shots on second and sixth, as she turned in one-under 35. One shot behind Sneha is Siddhi Kapoor, whose sole win on the WPGT was in her rookie year in 2016, when she won the 14th leg at the Delhi Golf Club. Siddhi rode on her fine start which saw her get to three-under in the first six holes. — PTI

Live on TV

CRICKET

Australia vs India: First T20 from 1.40 pm on Sony Six, Ten 1, HD

South Africa vs England: First ODI from 4.30 pm on Star Sports 1, HD

Lanka Premier League: Colombo vs Jaffna from 8 pm on Sony Six

FOOTBALL

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

FORMULA ONE

Sakhir Grand Prix: Practice-1 from 6.55 pm; Practice-2 from 10.25 pm on Star Sports Select 2, HD

WWE

SmackDown: Bouts from 6.30 am (Saturday) on Sony Ten 1, HD

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

Back to T20 mode

India look to pose tougher challenge to Aussies in T20s

Canberra, Dec. 3: Short of resources in ODIs, India will have enough options to choose from to pose a stiffer challenge to Australia when the two sides clash in a three-match T20 series beginning here on Friday.

The 1-2 ODI series loss reaffirmed that India have a lot of work to do in the 50-over format but they possess a much more balanced squad in the shortest format.

The presence of Washington Sundar, Deepak Chahar and T Natarajan, who did well on his ODI debut on Wednesday, lends much-needed balance to the bowling department.

With Hardik Pandya not bowling regularly, India had only one specialist all-rounder in Ravindra Jadeja in the one-dayers. However, there is a possibility that Hardik can roll his arm over for a brief spell like he did from the second ODI onwards.

Natarajan could also make his T20 debut on Friday having shown enough promise in his maiden international appearance.

Unlike the SCG, the Manuka Oval surface had enough for both the spinners and pacers. It will be interesting to see who opens up the bowling alongside Jasprit Bumrah with the toss-up being between Mohammad Shami and Deepak Chahar.

Yuzvendra Chahal, who had a forgettable outing in the ODIs, will also be looking to bounce back.

In batting, K L Rahul is expected to go back to his preferred opening slot alongside Shikhar Dhawan.

Australia, after naming the same squad for ODIs as well as T20s, would be backing themselves to beat India after a clinical display over the last one week.

Star batsman David Warner is unavailable due to a groin injury and it remains to be seen if Marnus Labuschagne comes alongside Finch on Friday. — PTI

MORGAN FOR USE OF SIGNALS FROM BALCONY

Cape Town, Dec. 3: England one-day captain Eoin Morgan said on Thursday that he would continue to make use of signals from the team balcony.

Television coverage during the third Twenty20 international against South Africa at Newlands in Cape Town on Tuesday captured images of numbers and letters being displayed by video analyst Nathan Leamon.

"There's been no real signals," said Morgan.

"There has always been constant communication, verbal or physical, from the change room to us the field to help improve my decisions as captain and Jos Buttler's decisions as vice-captain," the English skipper and the World Cup winner added. — AFP



Virat Kohli (left) shares a light moment with his teammates in this file photo.

NUMBERS GAME

INDIA-AUSTRALIA IN T20 INTERNATIONALS

Team	M	W	L	T	N/R	Success%
India	134	83	44	3	4	64.55
Australia	128	68	55	2	3	55.07

HIGHEST INNINGS TOTALS:

India: 202-4 in 19.4 overs at Rajkot in 2013

Australia: 201-7 in 20 overs at Rajkot in 2013

LOWEST INNINGS TOTALS:

India: 74 in 17.3 overs at Melbourne in 2008

Australia: 86 in 16.2 overs at Dhaka in 2014

HIGHEST INDIVIDUAL SCORES:

India: 90* Virat Kohli at Adelaide in 2016

Australia: 124* Shane Watson at Sydney in 2016

BEST BOWLING IN AN INNINGS:

India: 4-11 Ravichandran Ashwin at Dhaka in 2014

Australia: 4-21 Jason Behrendorff at Guwahati in 2017

FOR THE RECORD:

● In Twenty20 International matches between the two countries it is 11-8 in favour of India although Australia won the previous series 2-0 in India.

● Virat Kohli, who has scored 24 fifties in 76 innings, needs one more fifty to equal Rohit Sharma's record of the most fifties scored in Twenty20 Internationals. Rohit Sharma has scored four hundreds and 21 fifties in 100 innings.

● Aaron Finch, who has smashed 96 sixes in 64 innings, needs four more to become the first Australian and sixth batsman overall to complete a century of sixes in Twenty20 internationals.

— S. PERVEZ QAISER

WILLIAMSON GIVES KIWIS A FLYING START

Hamilton, Dec. 3: The West Indies delight at winning the toss on a lush green wicket turned to frustration as New Zealand were rarely troubled in posting 243 for two on day one of the first Test in Hamilton on Thursday.

Kane Williamson, despite being troubled with cramp late in the day, produced a masterful innings to be unbeaten on 97 at stumps with Ross Taylor on 31.

Williamson featured in a 154-run stand with Tom Latham for the second wicket before Latham was bowled for 86.

After the start of play was delayed two hours by rain, the Windies were delighted to win the toss with an emerald wicket that potentially offered untold demons for their pace attack.

But after Gabriel bowled Will Young early for five, the tourists found they did not getting the assistance they expected from the wicket.

Chase also saw flaws in the visitors' attack which they failed to rectify.

It appeared to be a case of not doing thorough homework as Latham said the pitch was not unusual for New Zealand.

Williamson, who will resume on Friday requiring just three runs to register his 22nd Test century.

BRIEF SCORES

Day 1: New Zealand 243/2 in 78 overs (T. Latham 86, Kane Williamson 97, Kemar Roach 1/53) vs **West Indies.**

BCCI set to add two teams in IPL

AGM AGENDA

- Election of Vice President
- Election of 2 representatives of General Body in IPL Governing Council
- Adoption of Annual Budget FY 20-21
- Adoption of Ombudsman and Ethics Officer
- Adoption of Cricket Committees and Standing Committees as mentioned in Rules 26 and 25 (Constitution) respectively
- Appointment of Umpires Committee in Rule 27.
- Appointment of representative/representatives in ICC and/or similar committees.
- Approval of two new teams to the IPL.
- Discussion on BCCI's stand on inclusion of cricket in Los Angeles Olympic Games in 2028.
- To update ICC Matters
- To update on NCA matters.
- To update on ICC T20 World Cup 2021 to be held in India.
- To update on India's FTP Program.

New Delhi, Dec. 3: The BCCI will hold its Annual General Meeting on December 24 to discuss the induction of two new IPL franchises besides the appointment of India's ICC representative and three new national selectors.

Also on the agenda is the election of a new vice-president. As per norm, the BCCI has sent a 23-point agenda to all affiliated units 21 days prior to the holding of the AGM.

The most significant point is seeking approval for two new teams to make it a 10-team IPL.

It is understood that the Adani Group and Sanjeev Goenka's RPG (owners of the Rising Pune Supergiants) are interested in owning new teams with one franchise surely from Ahmedabad.

Another important point will be BCCI's representative to the ICC and the Asian Cricket Council. It is expected that secretary Jay Shah will be the BCCI representative in the global committees.

Appointment of three new selectors, along with a chairman of selectors, is also on cards given that Cricket Committees and Standing Committees are part of the agenda.

"Selection committee is a part of cricket committee plus the technical committee also needs to be formed. They are all statutory sub committees," a senior BCCI source said.

The all-important Umpires' sub-committee will also be formed and matters related to the National Cricket Academy will also come up for deliberation.

The agenda also includes discussion on India's

Future Tours Program for 2021, preparation with regards to organisation of next year's T20 World Cup (includes the ICC tax issue) and inclusion of cricket in the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics.

On the administrative front, one of the primary points on the agenda is election of new vice president, a position which has been left vacant after Mahim Verma's resignation.

It is expected that the choice would be unanimous.

Also, two representatives from the governing body will get a seat in the IPL governing council.

— PTI

Krishna dazzles as ATK edge Odisha

Fatorda, Dec. 3: An injury-time winner from Roy Krishna helped ATK Mohun Bagan secure a hard-fought 1-0 victory over Odisha FC in an Indian Super League fixture here on Thursday.

Krishna (90+5'), netted his third goal in as many games to ensure the Mariners climbed to the top of the ISL table.

The first half proved to be a cagey affair but both sides failed to grab their chances and take the lead.

ATKMB dominated the early exchanges and constantly raided the opposition box. However, Odisha did well to close down the spaces and keep things tight at the back.

Despite the dominance displayed by Habas' side early on, it was Odisha who missed a great opportunity to go ahead after the break.

A well-worked set-piece routine during the 38th minute saw Cole Alexander whip in a dangerous cross into the box.

Jacob Tratt, unmarked, got to the end of it but failed to get his header on target.

Despite the miss, Odisha FC kept knocking on the door only for ATKMB's defense to thwart the danger.

The result ensured Odisha FC's winless run continued.

— PTI

BENGALURU, CHENNAIYN TO RENEW RIVALRY

Bambolim, Dec. 3: Bengaluru FC will look for their first win of the season when they take on southern rivals Chennaiyin FC in an Indian Super League match at the GMC Athletic Stadium here on Friday.

Both the teams have played twice so far, with BFC winless following consecutive stalemates, while CFC registering a victory and draw.

The fixture between Chennaiyin and Bengaluru has become a huge rivalry since BFC entered the ISL fold in 2017. The final that season was a closely contested affair that CFC won 3-2 on Bengaluru's turf to lift a second ISL title.

In the head-to-head battle, both the clubs have won three apiece with one draw being played out last season.

It promises to be yet another intense contest, as the likes of Anirudh Thapa, Rafael Crivellaro and Lallianzuala Chhangte aiming to make it two wins out of three.

— PTI

Aussie Cameron in awe of India's 'quality' spin attack

Canberra, Dec. 3: Young Australian all-rounder Cameron Green is in awe of the Indian team's "quality" spin attack and feels no amount of research work can prepare one for the on-field experience.

The prodigiously talented Green made his international debut in the third ODI against India. Although Australia lost the fixture by 13 runs, the rookie gained crucial match experience in the middle.

"Their spinners, I haven't faced quality like that," Green was quoted as saying by *cricket.com.au*.

Chasing 303 for victory, the 21-year-old came in at number five and hit a boundary and a six before a superb catch by

Their (Indian) spinners, I haven't faced quality like that. Jadeja is a beautiful bowler who knows exactly what he's trying to do: Spin some away from you and dart one back in.

— CAMERON GREEN
Australian player



Ravindra Jadeja ended his debut innings on 21.

"Jadeja is a beautiful bowler who knows exactly what he's trying to do: Spin some away from you and dart one back in," Green added.

"You can do as much research and watch as much footage as you want to get an understanding how they bowl. But it's a different beast out in the

middle. I will take a lot out of it," Green said, referring to Kuldeep Yadav and Co.

"Bowling to Virat you can just see there is a step up in how good of a cricketer they are," Green said.

"I tried to bowl a bumper to Virat Kohli and he was onto it so quick," the Australian allrounder added further added.

— PTI



Cristiano Ronaldo (right) of Juventus outruns Dynamo Kiev's Tomasz Kedziora (left) and Denys Popov during their UEFA Champions League Group G match at the Juventus stadium in Turin on Wednesday.

— AFP

Ronaldo rocks; PSG, Barca win

Paris, Dec. 3: Neymar's brace helped Paris Saint-Germain to a vital 3-1 win over Manchester United on Wednesday that took the French club to within touching distance of the Champions League Last 16, while Borussia Dortmund secured their qualification for the next round and Olivier Giroud scored all four goals in Chelsea's 4-0 thumping of Sevilla.

PSG could have been on the brink of elimination from Group 'H' with a defeat at Old Trafford but Neymar put last season's runners-up ahead in the sixth minute and the world's most expensive player sealed their victory in stoppage time.

In between, Marcus Rashford's shot went in off Danilo Pereira to bring United level in the first half

THE RESULTS

Juventus (Chiesa 21, Ronaldo 57, Morata 66)	3	PSG (Neymar 6, 90+1, Marquinhos 69)	3
Dynamo Kiev	0	Manchester United (Rashford 32)	1
Barcelona (Antoine Griezmann 14, Martin Braithwaite 20, Ousmane Dembele 28-pen)	3	Borussia Dortmund (Guerreiro 44)	1
Ferencváros	0	Lazio (Immobile 67-pen)	1
Chelsea (Giroud 8, 54, 74, 83-pen)	4	RB Leipzig (Poulsen 26, Mukiele 43, Olmo 66, Sorloth 90+2)	4
Sevilla	0	Basaksehir Istanbul (Kahveci 45+3, 72, 85)	3

but Marquinhos prodded the French champions back in the 69th minute post which Neymar netted one more goal to send United packing.

There is a three-way tie on nine points at the top of the group with RB Leipzig right in contention after Alexander Sorloth scored in injury time to give them

a 4-3 victory at Istanbul Basaksehir.

Meanwhile, history was made in Turin as France's Stephanie Frappart became the first woman to referee a men's Champions League game when Juventus beat Dynamo Kiev 3-0.

The game was also notable for Cristiano Ronaldo scoring his 750th career goal, his record-extending 132nd in the Champions League.

Federico Chiesa and Alvaro Morata also scored for Juve, who had already qualified from Group 'G' before the game, along with Barcelona.

The Catalans kept up their perfect record and stayed on course to win the group by beating Ferencváros 3-0 in Budapest without the rested Lionel Messi. — AFP