



PM Modi inaugurates
Kochi-Mangaluru
Natural Gas pipeline
page 8



Budget session of
Parliament expected
to begin on January 29
page 9



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NEARBY



For 4th day, Delhi sees less than 500 new cases

NEW DELHI

The Capital witnessed 442 fresh COVID-19 cases over 24 hours, taking the total to 6,27,698, stated a health bulletin released by the Delhi government. This is the 12th day in a row that the number of new cases has been less than 1,000 and the fourth consecutive day on which it has been less than 500.

CITY ▶ PAGE 3

Roof collapse: NSA to be invoked against accused

GAZIABAD

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has said that incidents like Muradnagar crematorium roof collapse occur because of poor monitoring of civil projects by supervising officers and that the National Security Act would be invoked against those found guilty, an official release said. The CM also said that the cost of the damage would be recovered from the contractor and the engineer.

NORTH & WEST ▶ PAGE 5

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OPPORTUNITIES ▶ PAGE 5

SC clears Centre's plan to build a three times bigger Parliament

Majority judgment brushes aside charge of foul play in Central Vista project

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court, in a majority judgment, on Tuesday, gave its go-ahead to the multi-crore Central Vista redevelopment project, which proposes to build a new Parliament three times bigger than the existing 93-year-old heritage building and modify the use of 86.1 acres of land, home to India's power corridor in the national capital.

In their majority opinion, Justices A.M. Khanwilkar and Dinesh Maheshwari said the court cannot order the government to desist from spending money on one project and use it for something else. They said the government did not act against public trust.

They brushed aside allegations that the government committed foul play and illegally carved out the Parliament project from the Central Vista project.

The majority opinion said the project did not involve any "radical" change in land use. The proposed change in landscape would not limit "recreational spaces" for the public.

It dismissed notions that the project was "sui generis" (unique) and deserved a "heightened" judicial review.

Path cleared

A chronology of the Central Vista project

Sept. 2019: Govt. announces Central Vista revamp plan; it envisages a new triangular Parliament House with a seating capacity for 900 to 1,200 MPs and several govt. buildings

Feb. 11, 2020: Delhi HC asks Delhi Development Authority to approach the court before notifying any change in the Master Plan before going ahead with the project

July 17: Supreme Court starts hearing a batch of pleas raising various issues, including environmental clearance and land use, related to the project

Dec. 7: SC allows Centre to proceed with foundation stone-laying ceremony for the Central Vista project but restrains it from starting construction

Dec. 10: Prime Minister Narendra Modi lays the foundation stone for the project

Jan. 5, 2021: SC clears the decks for construction of the ambitious project



'Objections to project not considered by govt.'

Public ignored, says Justice Khanna

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Justice Sanjeev Khanna, in his separate dissent, on Tuesday said the Centre had failed to produce even a single document to show that the objections and suggestions made in the Central Vista project were considered by it.

"Deliberative democracy accentuates the right of participation in deliberation, in decision-making, and in contestation of public decision-making... Central Go-

vernment has not placed on record even a single document or minutes to show that the objections and suggestions were considered by it," Justice Khanna wrote in his dissent.

Public participation
Adequate public participation and hearing out of the objections avoid a sense of injustice and is "reflective of democratic principle at the heart of our society".

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

Filled to the brim



When it pours: Water being discharged from the Red Hills reservoir near Chennai on Tuesday after it reached full capacity following heavy rain in the city and suburbs. ■ B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

+ U.K. PM Boris Johnson calls off India visit

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has cancelled his visit to India in the last week of January, when he was to be the chief guest at the Republic Day parade.

The U.K. Foreign Office said the decision was taken in view of the escalation in the COVID-19 situation.

"The Prime Minister spoke to Prime Minister Modi to express his regret that he will be unable to visit India later this month as planned," a statement from 10 Downing Street said.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

States on alert as fear of bird flu grows

21,000 birds culled in Kerala; 2,000 migratory birds found dead in Himachal

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Several States on Tuesday sounded an alert to contain avian influenza, or H5N8, while Kerala began culling of thousands of ducks.

Nearly 2,000 migratory birds were found dead in Himachal Pradesh, while Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh reported deaths of several hundred birds. In Haryana, the "unusual" deaths of four lakh poultry birds have been reported in the past 10 days, but there is no confirmation on whether they died of avian influenza.

Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, both neighbouring Kerala, put their Animal Husbandry and Forest Departments on alert as fears of the bird flu spreading grew.

In Kerala, after H5N8 was detected among ducks in the Kuttanad region, authorities on Tuesday began culling birds within a 1 km radius of the infected areas. Officials said rapid response teams had culled more than 21,000 birds, mostly ducks, at Nedumudi, Thakazhi, Pallippad



Safety net: Animal Husbandry Department officials taking precautionary measures in Alappuzha district of Kerala. ■ PTI

being checked for fever and other ailments.

Tamil Nadu

The Tamil Nadu government has activated all check posts to prevent the entry of poultry from Kerala into the State.

Personnel from the Animal Husbandry Department have been deployed at the border at Puliyarai to stop vehicles carrying chicken, ducks and eggs. The department has advised poultry farms in Namakkal, a major poultry hub, to take precau-

tionsary measures.

The Rajasthan government sounded an alert and established a State-level control room in Jaipur to monitor the situation after the disease was identified by Bhopal's animal disease laboratory in the samples sent from Jhalawar, Kota and Baran districts.

Crows comprised the majority of about 600 birds that have died in the State so far, while other birds included heron and baya weaver, Principal Secretary (Animal Husbandry) Kunji Lal Meena said. Fifteen districts have reported the disease.

Himachal Pradesh

In Himachal Pradesh, close to 2,000 migratory birds, including endangered species, have died at the Pong dam lake in Kangra district.

Confirming the deaths, Kangra Deputy Commissioner Rakesh Prajapati ordered a complete lockdown in the four sub-divisions to check the spread of the disease.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

In a related development, the State Health Department launched a survey in the infected areas, and people are

REVIEW



Shades of dissent: Tents on the Delhi-Meerut Expressway during the ongoing farmers' protest in Ghazipur; farmers keep themselves warm at the Singhu border; volunteers prepare langar at the protest site on Tuesday. ■ SANDEEP SAXENA AND SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA



Farmers keep chin up despite rain woes

Protesters find ways to stay dry, urge PM Modi to see conditions in which women, children are living

HEMANI BHANDARI
NEW DELHI

Since the heavy downpour on Monday morning, protesting farmers at the Singhu border have found ways to protect themselves from the rain by digging up roads to clear clogged water, removing water from tarpaulins using their hands and placing sandbags near their tents.

Balwinder Singh, 58, a resident of Moga, said he was lying on a mattress placed on the road under a tarpaulin when it started raining on Monday morning.

"Water started seeping through and the blankets got wet. We covered ourselves with a cloth when we went to eat dinner," he said, adding that a few "good souls" handed them chappoys as well as a thick black tarpaulin, and also langar to those who needed it.

'Not here for picnic'

"Picnic ke liye nahi aaye hain. Majboori hain [We are not here for a picnic. We're forced into this]," said Parminder Singh, standing next to Mr. Balwinder.

Sukhchain Singh, 67, pointing towards the holes in a plastic sheet, urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to look at the conditions in which women and children are living there. "But it's okay, we don't have any problem living like this".

Couldn't sleep all night, said Amarjeet Singh from Haryana's Kaithal, while showing soaked blankets.

On Tuesday afternoon, he and other fellow farmers sat under makeshift tent while it rained. "If we don't get more blankets, then the four

of us will share one," he said. Darbjet Singh, 29, from Nawan Shahar, who shares a tent with 20 others, came up with an idea to save their shelter from water. They bordered it with sand.

"We made a border with elevated sand on Tuesday morning so that water doesn't seep into our tents and beds. We have also put wood underneath our mattresses," he said.

But for Hardev Singh, 37, and 26-year-old Virender Singh, both residents of Ludhiana, the loss was more

than just blankets and mattresses. They lost kilos of vegetables, pulses and rice.

"Rice, pulses, radish and peas were lying in the open. Everything got wasted," said Mr. Virender, adding that the tarpaulin also broke because of the wind.

On Tuesday, some of the road were dug up to clear the clogged water.

To ensure protesters don't get drenched while attending the speeches at the main stage, a waterproof tent has been put up near the stage.



Farmers take refuge inside tents at a petrol station; labourers build a temporary shelter at the Singhu border on Tuesday. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

JNU violence: a year on, students await justice

Protest marches held across campus as probe authorities trying to shelve matter'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

A year after masked miscreants entered the JNU campus, "attacked" a JNTUA event at Sabarmati T-point and entered hostels and residential areas, protest marches were held on the campus condemning the violence and demanding a speedy investigation into the incident.

While the RSS-affiliated ABVP on Tuesday organised a "padyatra against communist brutality" on the campus, the Left parties and the NSUI, along with the JNTUA, organised a human chain and an evening vigil against the "fascist attack".

Blame game

The blame game that began a year ago between the Left-wing students and the Right-wing students continued with student leaders from both sides recounting their version of what transpired on the campus that evening.



Students during a candlelight vigil to mark one year of the JNU campus violence on Tuesday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHKAR

With the Delhi police providing no closure, both sides demanded justice.

Speaking at the vigil, JNU-SU president Aishe Ghosh who was attacked during the violence and suffered a head injury said, "We are fighting for a socially inclusive and gender-inclusive JNU and even if we are attacked again and again, we will continue to show our dissent and speak our voice."

'Won't back down'

"We have gathered to sent a message to the government, the police and the JNU administration that we have not forgotten the incident and we will not back down until

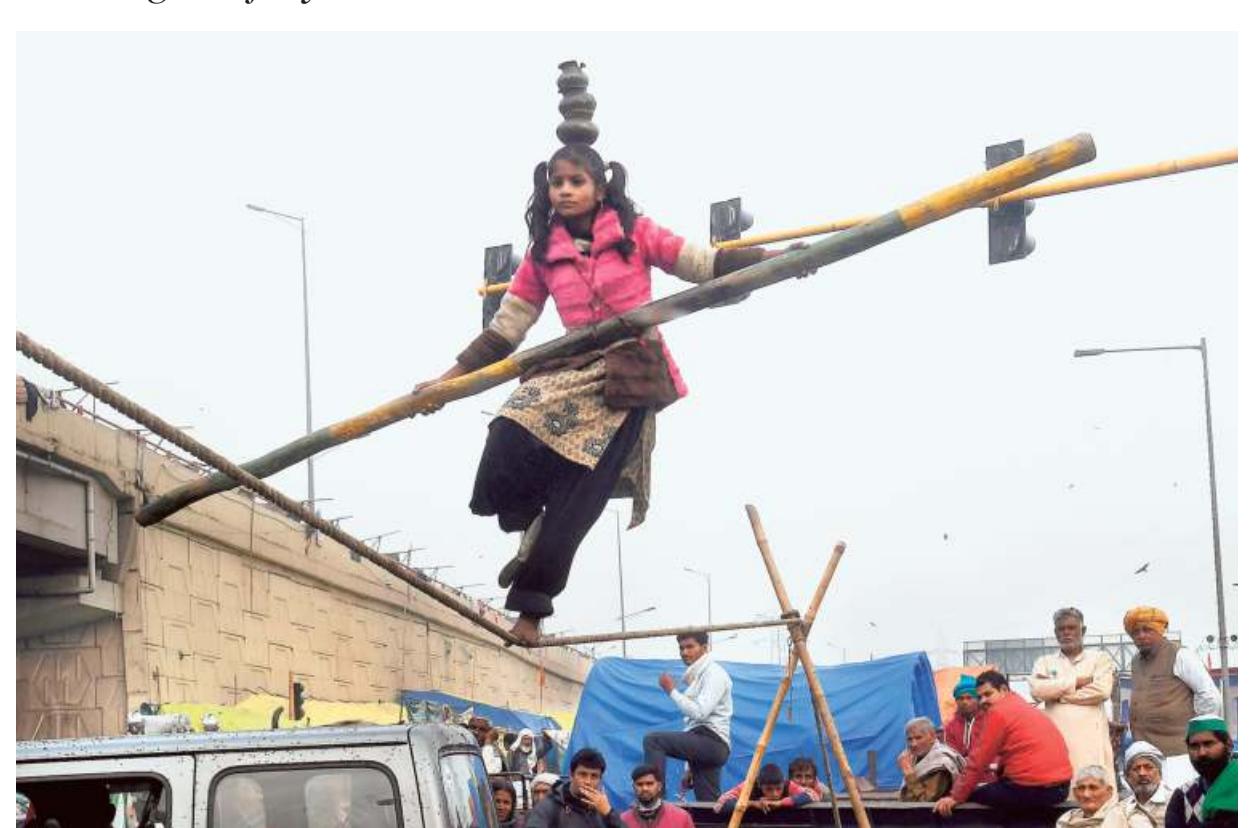
the members of the ABVP who perpetrated the violence are not arrested," Ms. Moon said.

ABVP's JNU president Shiva Chaurasia said: "It is really sad to see how the Communists turned violent after they could not reach an amicable solution over the fee hike issue last year. Several ABVP activists and sympathisers were targeted and beaten with rods and sticks. Even the common students were not spared."

Govind Dangi, secretary of ABVP-JNU, said that it was unacceptable that the JNU administration and the police have still not taken any disciplinary and legal action against the miscreants.

The AISA said, "Screenshot of WhatsApp messages exchanged before the attack clearly points to a planned attack and the involvement of both insiders and outsiders, including known ABVP activists from JNU and DU."

Treading carefully



A young street performer does a balancing act at Ghazipur on the Delhi-Uttar Pradesh border on Tuesday. ■ SANDEEP SAXENA

We are taking all necessary COVID 19 Precautionary Measures.

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- PUNCHKUAN ROAD, Garwal Bhawan, (Near Jhandewalan, Gole Chkr)
- WAZIPUR A-5, Near Richi Rich Banquet (Opp. Shalimar Bagh)
- JANAKPURI B-1/2, Main Najafgarh Road, Opp. Metro Pillar 543
- NOIDA, Nirula's Sec-2, Near Metro Station, Sec-15, Noida, UP
- LAJPAT NAGAR, 49, Main Ring Road, Adj. Haldi Ram, Near Moolchand Crossing

SEARCH FOR MISSING

General public is hereby informed that a lady namely Komal, W/o Mohit Kumar R/o H.No. F-127, Bhagat Singh Park, Siraspur, Delhi has been missing since 13.12.2020 from her house. In this regard, DD No. 81-A dated 14.12.2020 has been registered at P.S. Samaypur Badli, Delhi. Sincere efforts have been made by the local police to trace out the missing lady but no clue has come to light so far. The description of the missing lady is as under:

Name: Komal, **Gender:** Female, **Age:** about 24 years, **Height:** 5'2", **Complexion:** Fair, **Face:** Round, **Built:** Medium, **Wearing:** Black colour suit, pajama, red colour shawl and slippers on her feet.

If anyone has any information regarding this missing lady, kindly inform SHO/ Samaypur Badli, Delhi.

E-mail : cic@cbi.gov.in
Ph.: 011-24368638, 24368641
Fax : 011-24368639
P.O. Box No. 011-26645050, 26643200



Komal

Mercury may dip from tomorrow

AQI 'moderate' for second day as rain continues to lash city

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Intermittent showers continued to lash the national capital for the third consecutive day on Tuesday with the minimum temperature rising to 13.2 degrees Celsius, six degrees above normal for this time of the year.

The maximum temperature was recorded at 20.8 degrees Celsius, one degree warmer than the normal.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecast party cloudy sky with very light rain/drizzle on Wednesday. The maximum and minimum temperatures

Air Quality of Delhi-NCR	
Delhi	140
Ghaziabad	148
Noida	149
Greater Noida	
Good	83
Satisfactory	138
Moderate	120
Poor	101-200
Very Poor	201-300
Severe	301-400
Air Quality Index at 4 p.m. yesterday (Average of past 24 hours) Source: CPCB	

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Air Quality Index at 4 p.m. yesterday (Average

Timings
DELHI

WEDNESDAY, JAN. 06
RISE 07:15 SET 17:40
RISE 00:00 SET 12:14
THURSDAY, JAN. 07
RISE 07:15 SET 17:41
RISE 00:53 SET 12:50
FRIDAY, JAN. 08
RISE 07:16 SET 17:42
RISE 01:57 SET 13:28

Delhi Weather	max	min
Delhi City	21	13
Safdarjang	21	13
Palam	19	14

Delhi Palam Today
20°C A short spells of rain may occur during morning at some places and dense fog also. Clouding would decrease gradually.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow
19°C Drop in temperature with light cool wind. Dense fog at many places in morning. Dry weather likely.

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THE HINDU
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Less than 500 new cases for fourth straight day

Work on central vaccine storage facility almost complete

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Capital witnessed 442 fresh COVID-19 cases in the last 24 hours, taking the total number of cases to 6,27,698, according to a health bulletin released by the Delhi government on Tuesday.

This is the 12th day in a row that the number of new cases has been less than 1,000 and the fourth consecutive day on which it has been less than 500. The last time the number of new cases was 1,000 or more was on December 24, when there were 1,063 new cases.

Also, 12 more deaths have been reported in the past 24 hours, taking the total number of deaths to 10,609, as per the bulletin.

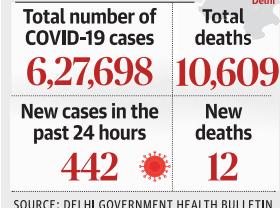
Of the total cases, 6,12,527 people have recovered and there are 4,562 active cases and 79,777 tests were conducted in the past 24 hours.

The test positivity rate of COVID-19 cases was 0.55% on Tuesday and the overall positivity till now was 6.97%,



North Delhi residents register themselves for the rapid antigen test. ■ FILE PHOTO: SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

Virus spread



as per the bulletin.

Out of the total 13,954 beds available for COVID-19 treatment in the city, 12,184 were vacant, as per the bulletin.

letin. There were 3,400 containment zones in the city as of Tuesday.

Meanwhile, the work on a central vaccine storage facility for the city at the Delhi government-run Rajiv Gandhi Super Speciality Hospital is almost complete, as per hospital authorities.

Training for drive

The training of the health-care workers and police for the vaccination drive have also been completed, said the officials.

meanwhile, the work on a central vaccine storage facility for the city at the Delhi government-run Rajiv Gandhi Super Speciality Hospital is almost complete, as per hospital authorities.

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Meanwhile, AAP MP Sanjay Singh said the BJP is showing "shameful reluctance" to accept demands of protesting farmers.

The temple was demolished on January 3.

Mr. Bharadwaj also denied the BJP's allegations about AAP demolishing the Hanuman temple in Chandni Chowk and termed them "false".

"How is it possible that without informing the Mayor and the Standing Committee of the BJP, their top official is writing an affidavit and saying we have done all the preparations and the temple will soon

be demolished? BJP leader Adesh Gupta should answer this," he added.

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Vaccine dry run in Haryana on Jan. 7

It will be conducted at six locations in each district

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

A dry run to prepare for the COVID-19 vaccine roll-out in Haryana will be conducted on January 7. It will be conducted at six locations in each district – three each urban and rural points – from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Vijai Vardhan, Haryana Chief Secretary, presiding over a meeting on Tuesday, said all guidelines issued by the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare would be followed at the time of dry run. On the new strain of the virus found in people

coming from Britain, he said tracing and testing of such people should be done on priority.

Recording details must Mr. Vardhan said recording the details of healthcare workers included in the dry run was mandatory.

Additional Chief Secretary, Health and Family Welfare Department, Rajeev Arora said as per the scheme of the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, a dry run was conducted on January 2, 2021, in Panchkula. Taking this forward, now

on January 7, a dry run will be conducted across the State, which aimed to practice the entire process of COVID-19 vaccine roll-out so that all the challenges in its implementation could be identified. He added that the platform of existing universal immunisation programme of State with enhanced capacity would be used for providing the vaccine.

Prabhjot Singh, Mission Director, National Health Mission, Haryana, said about 67 lakh people would be vaccinated this year.

Civic body seizes AMU accounts

Corporation says ₹14 cr. property tax not paid; case on, says varsity

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

GAZIABAD

Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) on Tuesday clarified that it had written letters to the Union Minister of Education and the University Grants Commission to settle the issue of payment of property tax dues of the Aligarh Nagar Nigam.

The municipal corporation had seized some accounts of the University on Monday over nonpayment of property tax of over ₹14 crore.

Vinay Kumar Rai, Nigam's Chief Taxation Officer, told reporters that the body had given many opportunities to the University to pay the dues. "An amount of ₹14.83 crore is due from the University. After giving

them many chances, including issuing a notice of demand and personal contact, we have attached the accounts of AMU in the State Bank of India, because the financial interests of the Corporation were getting affected," he said.

Week's time given

A week has been given to AMU to deposit the amount but if it still fails, the amount in the account will be transferred to the Corporation, Mr. Rai said.

In an official release, AMU pointed out that the matter was *sub judice* and pending in the Allahabad High Court and a court of small causes was also hearing AMU's plea.

The University, the release said, had been paying house tax for residential areas, and it got exemption for the classrooms, laboratories and libraries from the Aligarh Municipal Council. In 2006, when the Aligarh Nagar Nigam came into being, it reversed the decision and the University approached the High Court.

AMU spokesperson Shafey Kidwai said the University had an outstanding amount of over ₹9 crore against the Nigam as it has not paid electricity consumption charges for its tubewells. He added Banaras Hindu University and some other central institutions also got house tax exemption from the court and no tax was levied on classrooms, etc.

Congress MLA loses Oppn. Leader status in Assam Assembly

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

GUWAHATI

Congress Legislature Party leader Debraj Saikia has lost the status of the Leader of the Opposition in the 126-member Assam Assembly.

An official notification said the Assembly has withdrawn the status from Mr. Saikia as the present strength of the Congress is one less than the required number of 21 MLAs. "The present strength of the Congress in Assembly is not equal to the quorum fixed to constitute a sitting of the House that is one-sixth of the total number of Members of the House as required," the notification said. It added that Speaker Hitendra Nath Goswami withdrew the recognition to Mr. Saikia as the Leader of the Opposition from January 1.

'Unfortunate, shocking'

The Congress reacted on Tuesday, saying, derecognising Mr. Saikia as the Leader of the Opposition at the fag-end of the Assembly was "unfortunate and shocking".

"Due to the sudden demise of a few members and defection of a few others, the number of (Congress) members has decreased but we are still the single-largest Opposition party in the House," Durga Bhumij, Congress MLA from Doomdooma, said.

He reminded the Speaker of States where the Leader of the Opposition is recognised despite the Opposition party bagging far fewer seats than the "one-sixth rule of the quorum". He cited the cases of Chhattisgarh where BJP has 14 out of 90 seats, Delhi where BJP has three out of 70 seats and West Bengal where the Congress has 23 out of 294 seats.

Assam group to take anti-CAA fight to Delhi

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

GUWAHATI

An influential students' organisation in Assam, the Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuba Chakra Parishad (AJYCP), has decided to take the movement against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act to New Delhi for mobilising public support.

AJYCP had petitioned the Supreme Court for the implementation of the British-era Inner Line Permit (ILP) system that restricts the entry of people from elsewhere in India.

"Apart from staging protests, our objective is to bring different political parties on board for the intervention of the Central government in CAA and ILP," AJYCP general secretary Palash Changmai said on Tuesday.

He added that AJYCP and other like-minded organisations would be reviving the anti-CAA movement in Assam, with the first mass protest across all districts and sub-national headquarters of the State scheduled on January 9.

SOUTH EAST CENTRAL RAILWAY

E-TENDER NOTICE

Sr. Divisional Engineer (Co.) S.E.C. Railway, Nagpur acting for and on behalf of President of India invites E-Tender for execution of work mentioned below - **St. No. 1 Name of the Work:** Miscellaneous Pway work for maintenance of track in KRCL Pattern under the jurisdiction of SSE (Pway) / Guwahati under ADEN/NIR. **Tender Notice No. N/29/NGP/2020-21 Approx Tender Value (₹) : ₹ 36,90,823.06 Earnest Money (₹) : ₹ 73,800/- Completion Period : 12 (Twelve) Months. Tender Form Cost (₹) : ₹ 0/- Sr. No. 2 Name of the Work: Execution of Civil Zonal Work (including white washing/colour washing / painting and repairs to road work) for the period ending upto 30.06.2021 in the section Itwari (Ex) to Nainpur (Ex) under the jurisdiction of ADEN/Chhindwara. **Tender Notice No. N/29/NGP/2020-21 Approx Tender Value (₹) : ₹ 56,00,000/- Earnest Money (₹) : ₹ 1,120,000/- Completion Period : 30.06.2021. Tender Form Cost (₹) : ₹ 0/- Sr. No. 3 Name of the Work: Execution of Civil Zonal Work for Horticulture works (Maintenance of Garden, Lawn etc.) for the period ending upto 30.06.2021 under the jurisdiction of ADEN/Works/Nagpur. **Tender Notice No. S/24/NGP/2020-21 Approx Tender Value (₹) : ₹ 14,00,000/- Earnest Money (₹) : ₹ 28,000/- Completion Period : 30.06.2021. Tender Form Cost (₹) : ₹ 0/- Sr. No. 4 Name of the Work: 1) Rain water Harvesting near Milan hall and RPF Barrack at Gondia 2) Provision of pipe line from water recycling plant to platform No. 1, 3 & 4 at Gondia 3) Ground water recharge by making pond and providing tube well at Gangajahi. **Tender Notice No. E/32/NGP/2020-21 Approx Tender Value (₹) : ₹ 337,916/- Earnest Money (₹) : ₹ 67,600/- Completion Period : 06 (Six) Months. Tender Form Cost (₹) : ₹ 0/- Bidders will be able to submit their original / revised bids upto 15.00 Hours on 29.01.2021 only. Manual offers are not allowed against these tenders and any such manual offers received shall be rejected. Details are available on our website: www.irrps.gov.in********

Superintending Engineer, PWD., WRD., Parambikulam Aliyar Basin Circle, Pollachi-3.

GOVERNMENT OF TAMILNADU

HIGHWAYS DEPARTMENT

TENDER NOTICE

Tender No. 23/2020-2021/SDO/DL.05.01.2021

For and on behalf of Governor of Tamil Nadu Percentage tender through online only will be received upto 10.02.2021, 15.00 hours by the Superintending Engineer (H) NABARD & Rural Roads, Chengalpattu Circle for Packages No.6,7,8,9 & 10 in respect of Chengalpattu (H) NABARD & Rural Roads Division and Packages No.11,12 & 13 in respect of Cuddalore (H) NABARD & Rural Roads Division and Packages No.14 & 15 in respect of Villor (H) NABARD & Rural Roads Division under Upgradation of Panchayat Union roads and Panchayat Roads to ODR Standards.

Details of Name of works, approximate value of works, EMD, availability of tender documents and all other details are available from 18.01.2021 onwards in the Government website <https://tntenders.gov.in>. If any Changes/Corrections/ Amendments etc. to the tender, it will be published on the above Government website only.

All other general conditions can be seen from the above website in which the tender notice is published.

Further particulars can be had from the office of the Superintending Engineer, PWD, WRD, Parambikulam Aliyar Basin Circle, Pollachi during office hours on all working Days.

DIPR/073/TENDER/2021

Office Of The Superintending Engineer

9th Circle Public Work Department
Dehradun

Letter:- 07/1C-9/2021

Dated: 01/01/2021

Government of Uttarakhand

NOTICE INVITING TENDER (NIT)

On behalf of the Governor of Uttarakhand, the Superintending Engineer, 9th Circle, PWD, Dehradun hereby invites proposals from eligible NABL accredited laboratories for Concurrent Evaluation of Construction works in the District of Dehradun, Uttarakhand for various construction works under Scheme for Special Assistance to State for Capital Expenditure.

The Request for Proposal (RFP) document shall be available online on the e-tender portal of Government of Uttarakhand, <https://www.uktenders.gov.in> from 06 January, 2021 (from 1500 hrs IST) bid must be submitted online at e-tender portal of PWD Uttarakhand on or before 21 January, 2021 (upto 1500 hrs IST). All relevant information about the assignment may be obtained from the RFP Document. All Corrigendum, Addendum, Notices, etc. shall be uploaded in <https://www.uktenders.gov.in> website only.

Superintending Engineer

9th Circle, PWD, Dehradun

Uttarakhand

DIPR/UK/14650

APPEAL FOR IDENTIFICATION

General public is hereby informed that

one male namely Unknown S/o

Unknown R/o Unknown. Age about 30

years, Height 5'2", Complexion wheatish,

ID mark: A cross (+) tattoo mark on

the neck at right side, wearing half sleeves

dharidar white T-shirt and grey pant was

found dead at Nikku Chowk, Opposite

Rajdoot Hotel, Hazarat Nizamuddin,

New Delhi on 04.01.2021.

In this regard a DD No. 5-A dated 04.01.2021 has been

lodged at PS Hazarat Nizamuddin, New Delhi.

Any person having any information or clue about this

deceased person may kindly inform to the undersigned at

the address or telephone nos. given below.

SHO

PS Hazrat Nizamuddin, New Delhi

Ph. 011-24355758, 9654957750

DP/346/SE/2021

DEATH

SAD DEMISE

With Profound Grief & Sorrow We Inform the Sudden Demise of Our Beloved Son

RIYANSH SHAH

S/o. Veena Bhavesh Shah, G/o. Meena Raichand Shah

Deeply Mourned By

The Management & Staff's of

JAIN TIMBER TRADERS | JAIN TPLY LLP

JAIN PLYWOODS | RAJSH SAW MILL

Chennai

HOTEL SUPREME, Madurai.

RSVP 81440 06803

25.09.1998

04.01.2021

OBITUARY & REMEMBRANCE

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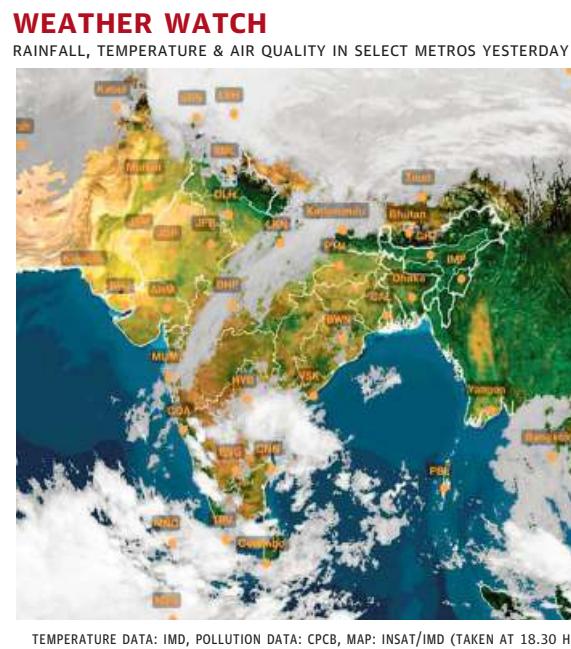
Chennai

HOTEL SUPREME, Madurai.

RSVP 81440 06803

25.09.1998

04.01.2021</div



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD, POLLUTION DATA: CPCB, MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 18.30 HRS)

Forecast for Wednesday: Heavy rainfall very likely at isolated places over south interior Karnataka, Kerala, Mahe, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry and Karaikal

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	—	27.8	12.6	Kozhikode	—	33.0	24.8
Ahmedabad	—	25.9	13.5	Kurnool	—	30.1	19.1
Aizawl	—	24.0	12.4	Lucknow	1...	27.8	15.0
Allahabad	—	22.1	15.0	Madurai	0.4	29.2	22.3
Bengaluru	—	27.3	18.7	Mangaluru	—	34.5	23.5
Bhopal	2.1	25.3	16.7	Mumbai	—	29.3	19.7
Bhubaneswar	—	31.8	14.0	Mysuru	—	31.0	18.6
Chandigarh	—	21.9	16.0	New Delhi	4.7	20.8	13.7
Chennai	44.6	24.6	23.3	Patna	—	25.9	13.0
Coimbatore	1.8	28.5	21.0	Port Blair	—	30.7	26.1
Dehradun	4.5	18.5	14.0	Puducherry	5	25.2	21.8
Gangtok	—	15.3	7.8	Pune	—	28.1	19.4
Goa	3.2	31.9	23.6	Raipur	—	29.5	13.0
Guwahati	—	27.0	11.4	Ranchi	—	29.0	12.2
Hubballi	—	29.0	21.0	Shillong	—	23.2	9.3
Hyderabad	—	30.2	18.9	Shimla	—	12.0	10.4
Jaipur	—	26.4	2.5	Srinagar	30.7	26.6	0.2
Kochi	2.5	23.0	15.1	Thiruvananthapuram	13	31.5	24.2
Kohima	—	32.0	24.4	Tiruchirappalli	0.4	28.8	22.4
Kolkata	—	15.0	4.0	Vijayawada	—	30.0	21.2
Visakhapatnam	—	29.0	15.5	Vishakhapatnam	—	29.5	21.0

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing

CITIES	SO ₂	NO _x	CO	PM2.5	PM10	CODE
Ahmedabad	25	93	60	263	173	...
Bengaluru	1	55	15	40	81	...
Chennai	11	10	46	37	62	...
Delhi	—	44	100	161	212	...
Hyderabad	.6	110	12	85	110	...
Kolkata	23	28	92	303	212	...
Lucknow	11	40	.75	444	435	...
Mumbai	.5	6	49	326	165	...
Pune	—	34	49	168	119	...
Visakhapatnam	18	50	38	158	141	...

Yesterday

In observation made at 4:00 p.m. Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 397 indicating an unhealthy level of pollution. In contrast, Aizawl, Mizoram recorded a healthy AQI score of 22

Air Quality Code: ■ Poor ■ Moderate ■ Good (Readings indicate average AQI)
SO₂: Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.
NO_x: Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.
CO: Carbon monoxide. High concentration in air reduces oxygen supply to critical organs like the heart and brain. At very high levels, it can cause dizziness, confusion, unconsciousness and even death.
PM2.5 & PM10: Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease

Rajasthan schools, colleges + to reopen from January 18

Situation better than what it was earlier

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

JAIPUR

Schools, colleges, universities, coaching centres and the government's training institutes in Rajasthan will reopen from January 18 after a gap of more than nine months because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The schools will run classes for IX to XII standards, while students of final year degree courses will attend classes in colleges.

Announcing the decision at a review meeting on the pandemic situation on Tuesday, Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot said educational institutions could start functioning in the "improved

scenario", with the recovery rate touching 96.31% and some of the districts reporting zero positive cases. "The situation is far better [now] than what it was a month ago," he said.

The classrooms in schools and colleges will maintain the presence of 50% of the total strength of students every day on an alternating basis. The teachers will be given training by the Health Department on health protocol and prevent infection, according to official orders.

Mr. Gehlot said medical and dental colleges would be allowed to reopen from January 11.

ATS unearths purchase link in charas hauls

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

MUMBAI

An Anti Terrorism Squad (ATS) probe has found that two people arrested in Charkop in Mumbai with charas last week have links to the drug bust at Pune railway station some days ago, an official said on Tuesday.

An ATS official said Vivek Kumar Singh (35), arrested along with Suraj Shelar (39) with 564 grams of charas on New Year's eve in Charkop, had bought two kg of the contraband from Lalitkumar Sharma, who was held at Pune railway station on December 20.

"The case was transferred to the ATS as the drug network is spread across several States. We have visited Himachal Pradesh, Goa and Bengaluru so far. The charas in the Charkop and Pune cases has been procured from Kullu in Himachal Pradesh," ATS Deputy Inspector General Shiveep Lande said.

BJP, MNS oppose naming of Navi Mumbai airport after Balasaheb Thackeray

RAINA ASSAINAR

NAVI MUMBAI

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) have strongly objected to Thane Guardian Minister Eknath Shinde's demand that the Navi Mumbai international airport be named after Balasaheb Thackeray.

Both parties have been demanding that the airport be named after Dinkar Balu Patil known as DB Patil among the masses. BJP MLA Prashant Thakur said that so far no major project in Navi Mumbai had been dedicated to late DB Patil who had all his life fought for the welfare of farmers.

"When the CIDCO had acquired land in Navi Mumbai for construction of the city, Patil had led several protests for farmers. At an agitation in 1984, four farmers died and eventually the 12.5% scheme of the CIDCO was launched for farmers, and now it is applicable across the State. He fought for the villagers in the Uran area when the JNPT acquired the land. He had even steered



The Navi Mumbai international airport site at Ulwe. ■ FILE PHOTO

protest sitting in ambulance," Mr. Thakur said.

MNS leader Gajanan Kale said if Mr. Shinde had sought the opinion of local leaders all would have suggested DB Patil. "We have written to the Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray requesting him to dedicate the airport to Patil," he said, adding, "It is just another way of the Sena to start a political clash for no reason."

One week ago, Mr. Shinde had written to the CM seeking that the airport be named after the late Sena founder.



The Navi Mumbai international airport site at Ulwe. ■ FILE PHOTO

From the time the airport was planned, all parties had agreed to the idea of naming the project after Patil, Mr. Thakur said. "No one has made an official request in this regard till date as the airport is still shaping up but it is known to all," he added.

Patil was a lawyer while his father was a teacher and farmer. They were residents of Panvel taluka where the airport is being constructed. He was a five-time MLA, once an MLC, and two-time MP. He had started his political career from the Peasants and Workers Party.

HC permits transgender to contest panchayat poll from women's category

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

MUMBAI

The Bombay High Court's Aurangabad Bench has allowed a transgender to contest village panchayat polls in women's category, saying that such persons have the right to "self-perceived gender identity".

A single judge Bench of Justice Ravindra Ghuge on January 2 allowed a petition filed by Anjali Guru Sanjana Jaan challenging the December 31, 2020, order passed by a returning officer that rejected her nomination for contesting a gram panchayat election in Jalgaon district.

In the nomination form, the petitioner had chosen female gender and submitted the form to contest from a ward reserved for women's general category.

The form was, however, rejected as the petitioner was a transgender and there was no transgender category in the present village panchayat elections.

The petitioner's advo-

cate, A.P. Bhandari informed the court that the petitioner has always chosen female gender for all purposes and will not be switching over to male gender anytime in the future.

The court in its order said that the Union government has introduced the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, and has permitted a transgender person to have a right to self-perceived gender identity.

"In the present case, the petitioner has opted for the female gender as her self-perceived gender identity and also makes a statement that henceforth in her lifetime, she would not switch over to male gender driven by opportunism and would continue to opt for female gender, in future, save and except if there is a reservation provided for transgenders in public life," the court said.

The court quashed the rejection order passed by the returning officer.

Ghaziabad crematorium roof collapse: NSA to be slapped against accused

NHRC seeks report within four weeks

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

GHAZIABAD

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has said that Madrasagar like incidents occur because of poor monitoring of civil projects by supervising officers and that the National Security Act would be invoked against those found guilty in investigation, an official release said.

ical examination of the project was not conducted when clear orders were given last September that every project above ₹50 lakh was to be physically verified. A task force was also formed to monitor the quality of projects.

Apart from an ex gratia compensation of ₹10 lakh each to the family of deceased, the CM also announced that the homeless among the affected would be provided with a roof under government schemes.

Meanwhile, the National Human Rights Commission sent a notice to the State government on the mishap and sought a detailed report on the incident in four weeks.

At the district level, the process of blacklisting contractor Ajay Tyagi, who was arrested late on Monday night, started. On Tuesday, his associate Sanjay Garg was also arrested and both were sent to 14-day judicial custody by a local court. Police sources said Tyagi had admitted that he gave commission to civic officials.

Roadside vendor booked for selling shoes with 'Thakur' embossed on sole

Complaint lodged by right-wing leader in Bulandshahr

ANU KUMAR

GHAZIABAD

A roadside vendor was detained by the Bulandshahr police on Tuesday for selling shoes with 'Thakur' embossed on the sole. Nasir was taken into custody after a local right-wing leader complained against him.

Vishal Chauhan, the coordinator of Bajrang Dal in Gujrali town of Bulandshahr, told reporters that he was informed by one of his associates that a Muslim vendor was selling shoes with 'Thakur' written on the soles. "We went to his shop and handed him over to the police," he said.

In a video, an exasperated Nasir could be heard reasoning that the word was embossed by the manufacturer and he didn't have anything to do with it; the person making the video could be heard chastising him for not being able to hide them when the 'group' came.

The police booked Nasir

OPPORTUNITIES

HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT • JOBS • TECHNOLOGY

GENERAL



NLC India Limited

"Navratna" - Government of India Enterprise

Regd. Office: 'Neveli House', No.135, E.V.R. Periyar High Road, Kilpauk, Chennai - 600 010.

Corp. Office: Block-1, Neveli - 607 801, Cuddalore District, Tamil Nadu.



Moribund governance

The Ghaziabad disaster underscores the need for regular audit of civic projects

Even to those familiar with the anarchy that characterises India's public spaces, the collapse of a newly-built shelter in a crematorium in Muradnagar, in U.P.'s Ghaziabad district, killing at least 24 people, is a shock. A group attending a funeral sheltered from rain in the structure, when its roof crumbled. The deaths and injuries have left families distraught. Since women are not part of funeral rites in crematoria, they came to know of the fate of the men much later. A token solatium has been announced by the U.P. government for the next of kin of the dead and relief measures for others, but the loss of breadwinners who were in low-paying jobs has left the family members destitute. The State has shown great alacrity in arresting four people including a junior engineer, besides the contractor, citing culpable homicide, causing hurt and endangering lives. There are indications that it may use the National Security Act against some of the accused. Such measures cannot produce consistent improvement to governance, but the Yogi Adityanath government's favoured image is that of strong enforcement, which it has sought to demonstrate time and again by shooting down in 'encounters' those with a criminal record. That approach can do little to improve U.P.'s standing. The Ghaziabad disaster is clearly the product of a system that lacks transparency and audits, and does not yield to quick fixes or measures meant to aid deterrence.

Every year, the monsoon extracts a penalty in the form of collapsed buildings in several States. Just over three years ago, several people died when part of a bus stand caved in near Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu. Appalled by the 41 deaths in a building disaster at Bhivandi, Maharashtra in September last year, the Bombay High Court framed questions for municipal authorities, including the basic premise: are those in authority completely helpless in preventing the collapse of structures and stopping the loss of life? The court also emphasised that citizens have a right to live in safe buildings and environment, within the meaning of Article 21. What happened in Ghaziabad is particularly deplorable, as the cremation ground is an essential facility, and entirely within the ambit of public authorities to maintain. There are suggestions that the structure was poorly designed, lacking stability due to use of inferior materials, while the contractor had several projects assigned to him in the district. These and other charges, including favouritism involving politicians, are best probed by an independent judicial member. Mr. Adityanath should realise that U.P., a laggard on many development metrics, can transform itself only through rule of law and efficient implementation of public projects. The horror of Muradnagar should impel his government to act.

England in lockdown

The rapid spread of the new COVID-19 variant should alert other countries to remain vigilant

In a bid to control the spread of the highly transmissible new COVID-19 variant (VOC 202012/01), the U.K. announced on Monday a fresh lockdown in London and southeast England, which is expected to be in force till mid-February. The decision comes after much dithering; the scientific advisory panel had recommended days before Christmas that the government consider a national lockdown, including shutting down educational institutions. As on January 4, the U.K. has reported 2.7 million cases and over 75,500 deaths, the second-highest toll in Europe. More than 50,000 new cases have been reported daily since December 29, 2020, with a peak of nearly 59,000 cases on January 4 and over 400 deaths daily. On Monday, more than 26,000 COVID-19 patients were admitted in hospitals, an increase of 30% from the previous week. Though the new variant does not cause increased disease severity or mortality, a surge in cases and hospitalisation can lead to more deaths. It is more transmissible, the reason why the reproduction number (number of people a person can infect) is 1.5-1.7; the spread is considered to be under control when the reproduction number is less than 1. Based on an analysis of cases and genome sequences of nearly 44,500 samples collected from England between September 21 and December 13, it was found that even during the previous lockdown, the new variant spread in many locations. This even as fresh cases were generally dropping due to reduced spread of the then dominant strain.

There is evidence that the earlier lockdown was effective in containing the previously predominant strain, suggesting that the new variant grew in absolute terms. The rapid spread of the new variant even during the previous lockdown might not reflect a general failure of control measures but highlights the inherent nature of the new variant to rapidly spread given its higher transmissibility. That areas with slower baseline virus spread also reported a slightly reduced spread of the new variant suggests that it is indeed possible to reduce if not suppress the transmission of the new variant if the lockdown is stricter and compliance is better. It is for this reason that unlike in the previous lockdown, schools and universities too are to be closed now. The new variant appears to affect a greater proportion of individuals under 20 years. The selective spread among the young might probably be more because educational institutions were open during the previous lockdown than due to the inherent nature of the virus. Since a resurgence of the new variant is likely when the lockdown is lifted, the focus is on accelerating vaccine roll-out so that much of the population is protected and transmission is cut. The spread of new variants should alert other countries, particularly South Africa where a problematic mutation has been found, to remain vigilant.

The dark step of writing hate into law

The new marriage laws put state power and the law behind majoritarian communal biases, boosting regressive mores



SEEMA CHISHTI

Chaudhary Charan Singh, the former Prime Minister, made a proposal to Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in 1954. As a Minister in the Uttar Pradesh government, he wanted Nehru to pass a law so that jobs as gazetted officers could only be for those who wanted to or had married outside their caste (<https://bit.ly/3oc4ALv>). Nehru turned the proposal down because this struck at the exercise of the free will of individual citizens in India.

Setting a precedent

It is an indicator of the distance travelled since that Charan Singh's State (Uttar Pradesh) has an ordinance which criminalises inter-faith marriages. The U.P. government's focus is firmly on 'protecting' Hindu women from marrying Muslim men. It does this under the pretext of regulating religious conversions.

The law in U.P. has already set a precedent for other States ruled by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) such as Madhya Pradesh. In another BJP-ruled State, neighbouring U.P., namely Uttarakhand, a routine press release from the Social Welfare department highlighted a scheme incentivising inter-faith and inter-caste marriages. This threatened the communal world view being rapidly ushered in through a series of so-called 'Freedom of Religion' laws in BJP-ruled States. The press release was seen as out-of-step by the State government, that an inquiry was ordered by the Chief Minister.

In 1872, the colonial state drew up a law after it received petitions

from Keshub Chandra Sen of the Brahmo Samaj demanding that people of different backgrounds be allowed to marry according to their 'rites of conscience'. The Special Marriage Act, in 1954, took this further in independent India by taking away the colonial law's requirement to renounce religion. However, it still allowed intrusion by the state, unlike under personal laws, by demanding notices to be put up in advance. This was done to ensure there were no living spouses or minors being married, but this clause was misused by communal social groups to stop such unions (<https://bit.ly/3okStM4>).

In BJP-ruled States, there are many other recent 'laws' – on slaughter of cattle, marriage, and religious conversions – which taken together, target Muslims, both by denying them shared social spaces and their rights as equal citizens of the republic. It also destroys the long-standing fraternity in everyday lives that has long defined India. The ordinance by U.P., the Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Ordinance, 2020, and the Madhya Pradesh Freedom of Religion Bill, 2020 are particularly vicious on at least four counts.

Fundamentally wrong

Under the Constitution, it is the individual citizen who has and exercises rights and obligations. But these new laws treat religious communities, instead of individual citizens, as basic entities. By taking away the agency that the Indian Constitution allows each individual to exercise, this fundamentally distorts the framework of our republic.

For those who argue that the Constitution does address communities when speaking of minority rights and untouchability, it is to only acknowledge and overcome social discrimination be-



cause that impedes the ability of those citizens to exercise their rights as individuals. By seeing the world as split between 'Hindus' and 'Muslims', a khap-ian universe, a fundamental modern characteristic of the guarantee of autonomy to all Indians as individuals is broken.

Violate privacy, choice rights

Second, these laws blatantly violate the Right to Privacy, which the Supreme Court of India in a much-lauded judgment in 2017, decreed to be fundamental. The level of state interference in a civil union, which is a solemnisation of a relationship between two individuals, breaches the basic structure of the Constitution.

Third, the provisions impede the exercise of an individual's right to choose her faith without seeking state sanction. Under these new laws, everyone – from the police, local administration and communal groups and families – are given ample time to interfere and deny the individual, without any locus to do so. In matters of change of profession, nationalities, electoral choices and even political parties, no such interference is brought into play. The ruling by the Supreme Court (1977), which upheld earlier restrictions to convert by the States of Madhya Pradesh and Odisha (<https://bit.ly/394c4tv>), said it did so to prevent

"conversion by force, fraud or by allurement. The other element is that every person has a right to profess his own religion and to act according to it. Any interference with that right of the other person by resorting to conversion by force or allurement cannot, in our opinion, be said to contravene Article 25(1) of the Constitution of India, as the article guarantees religious freedom subject to public health (<https://bit.ly/2LJX8zm>)". By making "propagation" contentious, the 1977 ruling pushed back freedoms in Article 25, so the mass conversion of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar to Buddhism could invite a jail sentence! Instead of rescinding the 1977 ruling, these laws further criminalise an individual's choice of faith.

Fourth, the basis of the new law is deeply patriarchal. The nightmare that India traversed in the 1920s, with competitive communalism fanning charges of Hindu *bhetis* in North India being taken away like cattle, are being relived now. The pernicious myth of 'love jihad' where adult women are seen as property, is not just a pamphlet or WhatsApp message. It is now the law. We saw a brief preview in 2017 of the dark consequences of the 'Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Ordinance, 2020' when the law confronted Hadiya, a 25-year-old health professional from Kerala, for her marital choice a year after converting to Islam. This law targets Muslim men, but is also a living hell for Hindu women.

Cost of inaction

It is with good reason that India is said to have effected a social transformation, thanks to the values spelt out and written into the law of the Republic. The Constitution offered high principles to aspire for, which Indians may never fully live up to. But that may have been the intention, to set high standards and ensure we were always jumping just a little bit, to be better. All laws should meet that brief. However, these new laws do the opposite; they put state power and the law itself behind majoritarian communal biases which empower regressive social mores governing marriage and fellowship. Inter-religious marriages may be less than 2.5% of all marriages, but the promise they hold goes beyond numbers. They reaffirm the fundamental constitutional premise of all citizens being equal, besides promoting the ideals of freedom and fraternity.

It is diabolical

To fan rumours of 'love jihad' even as the government confirmed in Parliament that there was no evidence of it, is diabolical. But more than that, it is downright dangerous as it seeds mistrust, and changes fundamental and basic ground rules that all plural democracies must live by. It is for the court to *suo motu* strike these laws down if it wants to preserve the basic structure of the constitution edifice.

In September 1935 when Hitler enacted the Nuremberg Race Laws, it was fear of the Mischling or the German-Jewish children of 'mixed' descent that haunted the Nazi mind obsessed with purity. At 50% Jew and 50% Aryan, they were a threat to Nazi ideas. Closely linked to preventing such marital and sexual unions was the Nazi belief in dodgy eugenics. The tragedy was that these laws were not protested enough when they were enacted. They ended up guiding Nazi racial policy for the remaining decade of the Reich (<https://bit.ly/2Mo5LL>).

We must never forget the price a society and a country pays for writing hate into law.

Seema Chishti is a journalist based in New Delhi

Shock treatment will not work in agriculture

Post-1991, changes in industry caused a second de-industrialisation; the results in agriculture are likely to be no different



SARTHI ACHARYA &
SANTOSH MEHROTRA

Almost all sections of people including farmers agree that the Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC)-mandi policies for agricultural marketing, initiated in the 1960s for a few crops, have outlived their utility and the system needs a new policy in the face of the agricultural sector's growth slowdown, the crop composition not widening, and investments in land not happening.

Recently, the government of the day has opened up the output market with the aim to let market forces improve efficiency and create more value for farmers and the economy. These laws state that farmers are now free to sell all their products anywhere and to anyone beyond the physical premises of APMC markets. Additionally, the laws promote contract farming through establishing partnerships between farmers and food-processing companies, and also permit unlimited hoarding of food except in special circumstances.

What farmers want

Three main suggestions were put forth by farmers when we recently made enquiries with them: one, their produce prices should be the cost of production plus a reasonable mark-up; two, fluctuations in prices should be minimal; and

three, there should be little or no interface with legal or administrative officials – they are not comfortable dealing with the "sahibs and the police". All these farmer concerns have been ignored in the way the current laws are drafted. Additionally, as the old laws are being repealed, they said that there is a need for a wider view of the sector to include more crops. Thus, if the government encourages farmers to move from wheat to vegetables, markets for the latter should address all the above three aspects.

New markets are an unknown

The first law of the Minimum Support Price-mandi is a known devil, but the new markets will be an unknown ghost with no control over them by anyone. Thus, while "malpractices" in mandis are known and local leaders (Members of Parliament, Members of the Legislative Assembly, panchayats) are often brought in to vent farmers' anger or arbitrate in difficult situations, malpractices in the new systems are neither foreseeable nor is there any authority to report to. Next, while the government says that the mandi-MSP system will continue, the question is, for how long? If the alternative traders offer better prices, farmers will go there and not to the mandis (as is already the case, highlighted in the recent media article by Gurcharan Das; <https://bit.ly/3928m3R>). What happens after two to three years when the regulated mandis become weaker or begin to shut down due to lack of business?

There are many issues here. Traders could reduce the prices



on more than one pretext, such as finding faults with the product; declining to buy on the pretext of glut (a wait and watch strategy); defaulting on payments, and so on. Since traders are few (at least locally) they can form cartels, while farmers many: this is imminent possible. The farmers are further handicapped by the fact that they come from long distances with loads of several quintals/tonnes of produce on hired tractors; going back owing to the transport cost incurred is not an option for them. Their situation worsens when their cash needs are immediate, which is the case for the small farmers who constitute 90-plus% of those who sell at the mandis at MSP.

Advantage corporate buyers

The second law has somewhat similar issues. The corporate-buyers might just not buy the full quantity of the product on one or another pretext or delay payments; and if farmers complain, the corporates have access to a battery of lawyers, the fine print in contracts, the advantage of language, and, above all, the capacity to wait it out.

In both the above cases, the problem is of contracts between unequal: whether it is traders or

corporates, they are far fewer and with deeper pockets, and they will deal with (poor/little-educated) small farmers (about 85% have two or less hectares of land), resulting in unequal outcomes.

The other issue is in regard to different regions and crops. Many proponents of the agri-marketing laws maintain that farmers from outside the wheat-rice belts in northern India are not protesting. Evidently so, since the country is diverse with some 15 agroclimatic zones and has over 50 crops grown.

Issues and farmers' reactions

We also forget that farmers protest against policies in areas where they hail from: like in eastern India, farmers revolted in 1860 against indigo-farming. Mappilas revolted in 1921, or even the Warli Adivasi Revolt of 1945. More recently, in the 1970s to 2010s, Sharad Joshi led agitations for the farming sector mainly in Maharashtra, or farmers in Tamil Nadu had protested demanding Cauvery water. There are many more examples. Farmers protest against problems that affect them: they are not a homogeneous lot.

If in 2020 a new policy is being formulated, why is it (ironically) uniform for all farmers, all land and all crops, of opening up the markets; markets which are almost fully opaque, unequal and having imperfect information? What happens to the semi-arid areas and the farmers therein, where crop outcomes are uncertain? What happens to small and marginal farmers who have little to market and are largely inarticulate? How will risk be mitigated if

farmers move from wheat-rice cultivation to more volatile crops such as vegetables and fruits, or pest-prone crops such as cotton? Or what happens to landless labourers who have migrated from far away to work in fields (such as from Bihar to Punjab)? Should there not be a comprehensive policy in regard to the agricultural sector rather than a "shock treatment" for agri-markets alone?

Expert recommendations
The so-far neglected problem of stagnation and high input prices in agriculture can be addressed through a systematic approach proposed in the M.S. Swaminathan Commission and/or the Ashok Dalwai Committee. Typical examples are transitions being worked out for farmers to move out of water-soaking paddy crop in Punjab-Haryana to other crops; say, in five years, they would reduce the area under paddy by 25-30%, and the loss they incur in the short run, will be compensated for by the government. This could, for example, also be done for sugarcane in western Maharashtra.

Shock treatments do not work anywhere, be it agriculture, industry or the economy. Many an industry, post-1991, shut down due to "shock treatment" then, resulting in a second de-industrialisation and the loss of hundreds of thousands of industrial jobs. The results in agriculture are likely to be no different in the face of shocks.

Sarthi Acharya is Delhi Chair Professor, Institute for Human Development.
Santosh Mehrotra is the editor of 'Reviving Jobs. An Agenda for Growth'

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

Spotlight on housework

Paying homemakers for their work at home is a good idea and proposition, but how far it will be feasible remains to be seen (Editorial page, "A nod to recognising the value of housework", January 5). First and foremost, the very mindset and thinking that homemakers are 'jobless' must undergo a sea change. The undeniable fact is that they are the lifeblood and the engine that drive every family forward. Every beneficiary of housework must not only learn to recognise and appreciate its vital importance but also

extend a helping hand to homemakers in their work. Such an approach and attitude itself is more satisfying than monetary rewards. Those who go out and earn must gratefully remember the homemakers who successfully manage multiple tasks at the same time in their homes. It is indisputable that homemakers help earning members not only earn, but also earn better. It is apt to say that behind every happy and contented family there is a homemaker 'standing in the kitchen' without any demur or displeasure. It is

time that their role is valued and recognised. C.G. KURIAKOSE, Malippara, Kothamangalam, Kerala

■ Basically, the work done by women in their houses is a kind of work done in a social setting called family which cannot be monetised. In a patriarchal society such as India, household chores are generally seen as a sole responsibility of women. Even working women have to spend extra time apart from their office time in doing their household work. Also, there are no holidays. Before the state recognises household work comes in,

the family concerned has to recognise it as a shared responsibility. There are some forms of work which we cannot monetise and household work is one. Women doing domestic work in other houses should be seen as labour and minimum wages provided. They need social security.

BALAJI AKIRI, Hyderabad

The left-arm er
India's new bowling sensation T. Natarajan could potentially go on to make his Test debut at Sydney, and if he does, will become the only player to earn the

national cap in all three formats of the game in the same series, despite not figuring in any of the original squads. It will be to India's advantage if he plays at Sydney, since being a left-arm bowler, he adds variety to the pace attack. He may not possess the ability to

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:
In an Editorial

The hurdles in Xi's great power ambitions

To achieve global leadership, China needs more than wealth and military power



YOGESH GUPTA

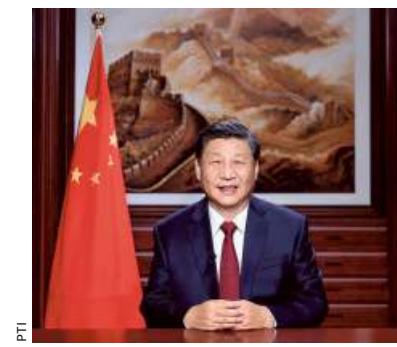
We will all remember 2020 in terms of how COVID-19 spread to the world from Wuhan, China, despite an alert by a dedicated doctor, because the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leadership dithered in informing the world and the World Health Organization on time. Instead of cooperating in finding the origin of the virus, Chinese President Xi Jinping decided to use the 'strategic opportunity' to launch military assaults against Taiwan, India, Vietnam, the Philippines, and Japan to fortify China's claims on disputed territories.

Xi's dream

Signs of Mr. Xi being an ambitious leader were visible early on. Following his appointment as Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission in October 2010, there was a spurt in China's militarisation of the South China Sea including recurrent forays into disputed territories. After taking over as General Secretary of the CCP in November 2012, Mr. Xi consolidated his hold by eliminating his rivals in an anti-corruption campaign, pushing his relatives and friends into the politburo, and demolishing patronage networks of rival leaders.

In November 2014, Mr. Xi summoned China's foreign policy and military elite to Beijing and told them that it was time for China "to embrace big country diplomacy". The following month, he informed politburo members that he planned to make China's voice heard in the international fora. In October 2017, Mr. Xi spoke of his dream of restoring China to a great power status (on par with the U.S.) by 2049 and building a world-class army by 2035.

But the policies Mr. Xi is following – state domination of the economy with increasing reliance on the public sector, slowing down of market reforms, accumulation of high debt, unproductive expenditures, lack of reforms in education and health, erosion of human freedoms, and increasing isolation of China due to its aggressive policies – will not take China towards greatness; rather, they will slow down economic growth.



China does not have the cheap migrant labour and favourable international environment that it had in Deng Xiaoping's era.

Mr. Xi and other Chinese leaders have closely followed how the U.S. obtained its great power status: by mastering emerging technologies, modernising the armed forces, and setting up a network of allies.

Mr. Xi has used all the tricks available to achieve supremacy in 5G, artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and new materials, including forced transfer and stealing of technologies. The concept of restructuring the armed forces and, particularly, introducing joint theatre commands has been borrowed from the U.S. Mr. Xi has commenced a rapid military build-up that is unprecedented in peacetime in recent history. This is aimed at rivalling the U.S.'s military capability in a few years. China has the biggest navy in the world.

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) was announced in 2013 to seek new markets and allies for political, economic and strategic use. New ports for civilian and military use are being sought at Gwadar (Pakistan), Jask (Iran), Djibouti, Hambantota (Sri Lanka), Sihanoukville (Cambodia) and other places, to project power overseas.

Scaling back plans

Not unsurprisingly, all this has been done under the CCP's programme of "socialism with Chinese characteristics". Little attention has been paid to improve the quality of education in science, technologies and mathematics, which underpins the West's success in its advances in technology. The capability of high technology equipment like the fifth-generation fighter aircraft, aircraft carriers and long-range bombers remains inferior in China as the country is unable to procure or indigenise advanced technologies. Several

American experts believe that Chinese equipment is at least one generation behind theirs.

Debt-ridden China is scaling back its BRI projects as many have become financially unviable; these were conceived to please Mr. Xi and never took into account the vulnerabilities of recipient countries. Concerned about the growth of corruption and its impact on the control of the party, Mr. Xi has slowed down market reforms, which were the backbone of China's prosperity in the last three decades.

The U.S. model

Despite being the second largest economy, China has few allies and friends (except Pakistan and North Korea). Mr. Xi fails to realise that the U.S.'s status as a global leader was based not only on its wealth and military power but also the lure of its governance model, ability to coordinate responses to international crises, and provision of global public goods such as freedom of ideas, quality education, foreign aid, encouragement of free trade, security of international shipping lanes and fight against terrorism. China has shown little interest in delivering global public goods.

Mr. Xi believes that China will be able to impose its will on the rest of the world by sheer use of power forgetting that besides China, there are a number of other countries such as the U.K., France, Japan, India and Australia which have also acquired economic and military power and are capable of resisting its abusive behaviour.

Worried at the prospect of President-elect Joe Biden uniting the U.S.'s allies and partners in resisting China's practices, the Xi regime is trying to divide the transatlantic alliance by offering increased market access to EU countries and vaccines against COVID-19 to ASEAN. How much these efforts will succeed remains to be seen.

There is growing concern that Mr. Xi's unfettered ambition to seek global dominance will create newer conflicts which a pandemic-affected and recession-hit world can ill afford. Given that his colleagues in the politburo are unable to put brakes on his hegemonic ambitions, this year will tell us if the new U.S. President acting with his allies and partners will be able to do so to prevent the world from sliding into new catastrophes.

Yogesh Gupta is a former Ambassador

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An arbitrary directive

The Centre's directive to the Bengal government goes against the norms governing deputation of officers

M.P. NATHANAEL

Recently, the Centre and the West Bengal government were engaged in a tussle. The Centre directed the State government to relieve three IPS officers on Central deputation; the State government refused. The Centre's move followed the incident that took place in early December when BJP president J.P. Nadda's convoy travelling from Sirakol to Diamond Harbour in West Bengal was attacked by stone-throwing protesters carrying Trinamool Congress flags. The three IPS officers in question had been posted as in-charges of the police district, range, and zone where the incident took place. The Centre's directive not only reeks of vengeance but goes against the norms governing deputation of officers to the Centre.

When officers are forcibly deputed to Central organisations, they go with the perception that they have been deputed on grounds of inefficiency or as a punishment. Demoralised officers who become victims of political manipulations cannot be expected to give their best.

According to a MHA memorandum of April 2000, "the two-way movement of officers from State to Centre and back is of mutual benefit to the States and Government of India on the one hand and to the officers concerned on the other." How far it would benefit demoralised officers who are forced to join Central organisations is anybody's guess. The message that goes out to personnel of Central organisations is that these organisations are dumping grounds for those unwanted in the States or those whom the Centre wants to penalise for dereliction of duty, a formal inquiry followed by penal action, if necessary, would have met the ends of justice.

Ostensibly, the Centre's decision was taken to teach the officers a lesson that they were at its mercy, as the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) is the controlling authority for all IPS officers. The three officers have been posted to the Indo Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), the Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) and the Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPRD).

The process for deputation

In normal course, officers willing to be deputed to the Centre are asked to apply through the States. A panel of selected officers is prepared after which they are deputed to various Central Armed Police Forces (the Central Reserve Police Force, the Border Security Force, the Central Industrial Security Force, ITBP and SSB) and even to Central Police Organisations like the Intelligence Bureau, the Central Bureau of Investigation, the Research and Analysis Wing, the National Investigation Agency, and BPRD. It is important to note that the officers are selected af-

ter their dossiers are scrutinised and not nominated as the MHA has done with respect to the three officers. Even when the officers opt for Central deputation, they give their choice of the organisation where they would like to serve. Selection is done strictly on merit, based on their annual performance reports.

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A proposal to reduce CDR

The Central government is already working on a proposal to reduce the Central Deputation Reserve (CDR) of IPS officers from 1,075 to about 500. This is being done as most States are not willing to spare officers to serve on Central deputation. In 2019, only 428 officers were working on Central deputation against the strength of 1,075. Most officers avoid Central deputation as they enjoy better perks and powers in the States. On the other hand, Central deputation could mean a posting in the Northeast or in a Left Wing Extremism-affected State. Hence, when there is already a proposal to slash the strength of the CDR, the Centre's insistence that the three officers should be relieved appears farcical.

Since the States are bound to oppose tooth and nail such arbitrary directives by the Centre, such orders are best avoided.

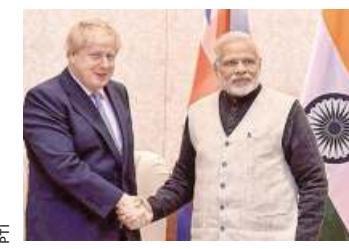
M.P. Nathanael is Inspector General of Police (Retd.), CRPF

Changing contours of India-UK. ties

The two countries have a shared past and need to chart a different shared future



KRISHNAN SRINIVASAN



as an invitee to the G-7, and the UN Climate Change Conference.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has made many sudden and surprising decisions: some felicitous, others disastrous. Among the former were invitations to leaders of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation to attend his 2014 swearing-in and his visit to Lahore in 2015; among the latter were demonetisation and the 'Namaste Trump' spectacle last February. Yet to be defined in either category is his startling invitation to British Prime Minister Boris Johnson who, due to the ravages of COVID-19 mutations in the U.K., has expressed his inability to attend a truncated version of India's Republic Day parade this month. Mr. Johnson is a colourful and controversial character, often portrayed in the British media as a clown, but no one can doubt his capacity for manoeuvre and staying power.

Choosing a chief guest
The nomination of a chief guest for the Republic Day parade is the Prime Minister's exclusive gift, and he or she is not known to consult others in or outside the Cabinet. American President Donald Trump was Mr. Modi's first choice for January 2019 but the honour eventually fell to Mr. Trump's alter ego, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro. Mr. Modi's selections are revealing: U.S. President Barack Obama in 2015, French President Francois Hollande in 2016, the Crown Prince of the United Arab Emirates in 2017, the ASEAN leaders in 2018, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa in 2019, Mr. Bolsonaro in 2020, and Mr. Johnson for 2021. With 193 countries in the United Nations, the Prime Minister's choices have mostly been leaders identified with the Western camp. Besides this, the invitation to Britain was the sixth to that country, more than to any other nation.

India has a shared past with Britain and needs to chart a different shared future, now that Britain has left the European Union (EU). One joint enterprise will be as members of the UN Security Council where Britain has permanent status and India holds a non-permanent seat this year and next. And this year, Mr. Johnson will be hosting India

when six major agreements were concluded. It is unlikely that any assessment has been made of the implementation of those accords, but in contemporary diplomacy, it is common for a raft of new treaties to be superimposed on existing ones even where there is insufficient progress.

A fortuitous invite

From Britain's point of view, Mr. Modi's invitation to its Prime Minister was fortuitous because Brexit necessitates that every effort be made to seek commercial advantage in Asian countries with high growth rates. India has been fruitlessly negotiating a trade agreement with the EU since 2007, during which Britain was considered the main deal-breaker. The EU wanted duty reductions on autos, wines and spirits and wanted India to open financial sectors such as banking and insurance, postal, legal, accountancy, maritime and se-

curity and retail. India, as always, sought free movement for service professionals.

The same obstacles with post-Brexit Britain will arise, because the export profile of both countries is predominantly services-oriented. In response to free movement for professionals, Britain will refer to its new points-based system for immigrants, while after withdrawing from the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, India is cautious about negotiating any new trade agreement, and will place greater stress on aspects related to country of origin and percentage of value addition in exports. Therefore, when the time comes for a discrete agreement with Britain, the two countries may settle for a limited one perhaps covering pharmaceuticals, financial technology, chemicals, defence production, petroleum and food products.

Close relations

India-U.K. links are substantial. One and a half million persons of Indian origin reside in Britain, 15 of them are Members of Parliament, three in Cabinet and two holding high office as Finance and Home Ministers. Before COVID-19, there were half a million tourists from India to Britain annually and twice that figure in the reverse direction. Around 30,000 Indians study in Britain despite restrictive opportunities for post-graduation employment. Britain is among the top investors in India and India is the second-biggest investor and a major job creator in Britain. India has a credit balance in a total trade of \$16 billion, but the level is below India's trade with Switzerland, Germany or Belgium.

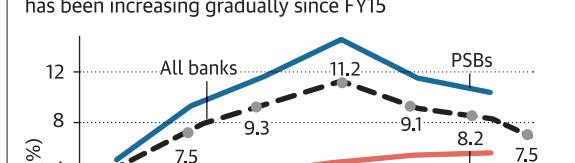
In one aspect of his invitation to Mr. Johnson, Prime Minister Modi was remarkably prescient. In November last year, when the invitation was extended, there were short odds against Mr. Johnson continuing as Prime Minister beyond March this year. With the EU-British trade agreement concluded in the dying hours of 2020, the betting now is that Mr. Johnson will lead his Conservative Party into the next election in 2024 as Prime Minister. Mr. Modi would now be well advised to cut back further on Republic Day celebrations, in recognition of the country's sufferings during the past year.

Krishnan Srinivasan is a former Foreign Secretary

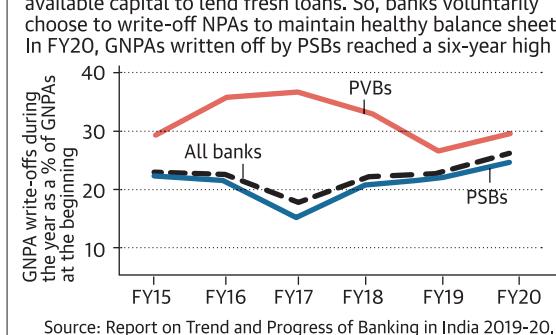
DATA POINT

Breaking bad loans | The ratio of Gross Non-Performing Assets (GNPA: loan accounts overdue for > 90 days) in Indian banks decreased in FY20 and FY21 (upto September) despite the impact of COVID-19 and the economic downturn that preceded it. This was mostly due to three factors: 1) Banks wrote-off relatively more NPAs in FY20 to clean their balance sheets; 2) Some large NPA accounts got resolved through debt-recovery channels; and 3) It is not known what share of loan accounts, which were under COVID-19-related moratorium, will turn into NPAs in the immediate future. By Vignesh Radhakrishnan

1. FALL AND RISE | After peaking in FY18 (11.2%), the GNPA ratio of all commercial banks fell in FY19 (9.1%) and FY20 (8.2%). It continued to decline in FY21 (7.5% as of Sept. 2020). The GNPA ratio of Public Sector Banks (PSBs) mimicked this trend. However, the GNPA ratio of Private Sector Banks (PVBs), though always lower than that of PSBs, has been increasing gradually since FY15



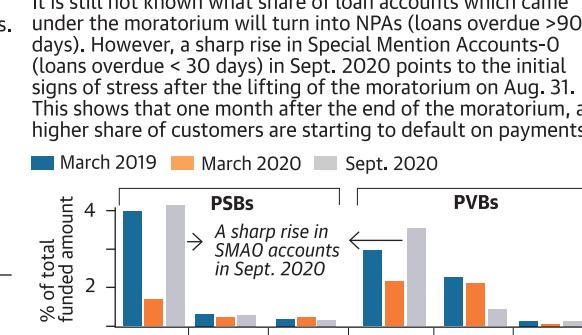
2. WRITE-OFFS INCREASE | The fall in NPAs in FY20 can be largely attributed to loan write-offs. Banks have to set aside (or provision) a part of their profit as a buffer for potential losses that may arise from NPAs. Thus, NPAs reduce a bank's available capital to lend fresh loans. So, banks voluntarily choose to write-off NPAs to maintain healthy balance sheets. In FY20, GNPA written off by PSBs reached a six-year high



3. RECOVERIES PEAK | Through various debt recovery channels, ₹1,72,565 crore worth of NPAs was recovered in FY20, the highest in many years. Resolution of some large NPA accounts helped reduce the GNPA ratio in FY20. The graph plots the NPAs of all banks recovered through various channels. In FY20, the recovery reached a peak



4. FUTURE TENSE | As of Aug. 31, customers accounting for 41% and 34% of all outstanding loans in PSBs and PVBs, respectively, opted for the loan moratorium. Thus, the GNPA ratio of 7.5% in September 2020 is a conservative estimate. It is still not known what share of loan accounts which came under the moratorium will turn into NPAs (loans overdue >90 days). However, a sharp rise in Special Mention Accounts-0 (loans overdue < 30 days) in Sept. 2020 points to the initial signs of stress after the lifting of the moratorium on Aug. 31. This shows that one month after the end of the moratorium, a higher share of customers are starting to default on payments



FROM PAGE ONE

SC clears Centre's plan for a bigger Parliament

Justice Khanna said public consultation was neither sensible or meaningful. He quashed the land change notification and referred the project back to the Heritage Conservation Committee to ensure better public participation.

He said the "access of the common people to the green and other areas in the Central Vista would be curtailed/restricted".

Green clearance
Justice Khanna also disagreed with the majority view and set aside the environmental clearance given by the Ministry to the Parliament building project.

"The public should be

provided not only with information about the draft scheme but also an outline of realistic alternatives and indication of main reasons for the authority's adoption of the draft scheme," Justice Khanna noted.

Justice Khanwilkar, however, maintained there was nothing "clandestine" about the project. He said a personal communication was sent to all the 1,292 objectors.

But Justice Khanna pointed out that the SMS and emails of the public notice of hearing was sent out at the "last moment". Objectors did not get reasonable time to orally state their point of view.

'Objections to project not considered by govt'

Justice Khanna said a reading of the notice inviting tenders, published by the Central Public Works Department inviting design and planning firms for the "Development / Redevelopment of Parliament Building, Common Central Secretariat and Central Vista at New Delhi", indicates that the proposed project did envisage extensive change to the landscape.

"The impact of the changes envisaged are not minor and what is envisaged is complete redevelopment of the entire Central Vista, with site development infrastructure, landscape design, engineering design and services, mobility plan, etc. The expenditure to be incurred and demolition and constructions as proposed indicate the expansive and sweeping modifications/changes purposed," Justice Khanna highlighted.

In his dissent of 179 pages, Justice Khanna said the "indirect participation of the citizens is critical to democracy".

Unlike the majority opinion by Justices A.M. Khanwilkar and Dinesh Mahesh

wari, which berated the petitioners' enthusiasm to question policy matters through public interest petitions, Justice Khanna said contesting a government decision in a constitutional court is also one form of "public participation".

But litigation post the decision is not as efficacious as a full-fledged public participation before the decision-making stage. "Citizens approach elected representatives and through them express their views both in favour and against proposed legislations and policy measures... Vested interests can be checked. Difficult, yet beneficial, decisions can be implemented," Justice Khanna wrote.

Justice Khanna said it is just not right to ignore government's failure to provide "intelligible and adequate disclosure to fulfil the requirement of public participation" in the decision-making process for the Central Vista project.

"The historic and iconic nature of the Central Vista is too apparent to even consider any counter argument," Justice Khanna observed.

Pune hub to track vaccine chain across 41 key cities

The SOPs will ensure that a consignment doesn't take more than 30 minutes from the moment it enters a cargo terminal till it is loaded onto an aircraft and not more than six minutes after being offloaded from an aircraft at the destination airport and shifted to an insulated van outside the airport.

Various airlines, and officials of the AAICLAS, Bureau of Civil Aviation Security, Indian Air Force as well as Serum Institute of India will be meeting at Pune airport on Wednesday to discuss manpower and infra-

structure requirement following which corrective measures will be taken, Airport Director, Kuldeep Singh Rishi said. The airport in Pune belongs to the IAF.

Airports such as the Indira Gandhi International Airport have state-of-the-art temperature controlled zones with separate cool chambers ranging from +250C to -200C. Cool dollies or mobile temperature-controlled facilities help in movement of temperature sensitive cargo between terminals and aircraft to ensure an unbroken cold chain.

U.K. PM Boris Johnson calls off India visit

"In light of the lockdown announced last night and the speed at which the new coronavirus variant is spreading, the Prime Minister said it was important for him to remain in the U.K. so he can focus on the domestic response," the statement added. A Ministry of External Affairs statement said the

two Prime Ministers reviewed the ongoing cooperation between the countries, especially with regard to countering the pandemic.

"Prime Minister expressed his understanding of the situation in the U.K., and conveyed his best wishes for the quick control," the release stated.

States on alert as fear of bird flu grows

Punjab Health Minister B.S. Sidhu said no case had been reported so far in the State. "We have already put the official machinery on alert to deal with the situation," he told this newspaper.

A total of 155 dead crows

in Indore in Madhya Pradesh have been found with the virus since the pathogen was first detected here a week back, an official said on Tuesday.

(With bureau reports and PTI inputs)

PM inaugurates Kochi-Mangaluru LNG pipeline

Government has concrete plan to move towards gas-based economy: Modi

ANIL KUMAR SASTRY
MANGALURU

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said that as part of efforts to make India a natural gas-based economy, 10,000 more CNG (compressed natural gas) stations would be opened and several lakh PNG (piped natural gas) household connections given in the coming days.

Inaugurating the 450-km Kochi-Koottanad-Mangaluru LNG (liquefied natural gas) pipeline through video conferencing on Tuesday, Mr. Modi said the facility was part of his government's "one nation, one gas grid" policy. The government has a concrete plan to move towards a gas-based economy that would be cheaper, convenient and environment-friendly, he said.

The Prime Minister said the government would make

substantial investments in coal and gas sectors. The plan was to increase the share of natural gas in the energy sector from the present 6% to 15% by 2030.

Energy-sufficient

Mr. Modi said the government had definite plans for the future to make the country energy-sufficient and reduce expenditure on foreign exchange through diversification of energy requirement. Focus was being given on increasing production of ethanol to increase its content in petrol to 20% from the present 5%. The world's largest hybrid energy plant (wind and solar) was coming up in Gujarat. The electric mobility sector too was being encouraged. Through these, alternative, cheap and pollution-free fuel and energy would be made available



Key link: PM Narendra Modi inaugurating the LNG pipeline via video conferencing on Tuesday. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

to people, he said.

Giving out statistics on efforts to boost the alternative energy sector, Mr. Modi said while 15,000 km of LNG pipeline was laid between 1978 (when the first inter-State pipeline was commissioned) and 2014, work on 16,000 km that started in 2014 would be completed in the next four years.

As against 900 CNG stations between 1992 and 2014, 1,500 new stations were built thereafter and the numbers would increase to 10,000 soon. As against 25 lakh PNG connections till 2014, 72 lakh PNG connections were given till date.

The Kochi-Mangaluru pipeline would provide another 21 lakh PNG

connections.

Union Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas Dharmendra Pradhan, in his introductory address, said the new pipeline would have international importance, wherein the carbon footprint would get substantially reduced. Stating it was a classic example of cooperative federalism, Mr. Pradhan congratulated the Kerala and the Karnataka governments for their support.

Kerala Governor Arif Mohammed Khan, Karnataka Governor Vajubhai Vala, Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, Karnataka Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa, Union Minister for Coal and Parliamentary Affairs Pralhad Joshi, Minister of State for External Affairs V. Muraleedharan and others were present.

IN BRIEF



Thaha Fazal surrenders before NIA court

KOCHI Thaha Fazal, the second accused in the Pantheerankavu Maoist case, surrendered before a National Investigation Agency (NIA) court here on Tuesday. The Kerala High Court had on Monday cancelled the bail granted to him by the NIA court.

Talking to mediapersons, he said he had never been involved in anti-national activities and had not propagated Maoist ideals.

Church case: Division Bench recuses itself

KOCHI A Division Bench of the Kerala HC recused itself from hearing an appeal filed by the State government against a single judge's directive to the Deputy Inspector General of Police, Central Reserve Police Force, Group Centre, Thiruvananthapuram, to take over the Kothamangalam Marthoman church and its movables if the Ernakulam District Collector did not comply with the court's earlier directive in this regard by January 8.

Yakshagana artiste dies while performing on stage

MANGALURU 58-year-old veteran Yakshagana artiste Sadhu Kothari died after suffering a heart attack while performing on stage in Shiryara village, near Kota, of Udupi district in Karnataka on Tuesday morning. According to eyewitnesses, Mr. Kothari had severe chest pain while performing on the stage around 3 a.m. Other artistes shifted him to a private hospital in Brahmapur, where he was declared brought dead.

NIA chargesheets 20 in gold smuggling case

Sandeep Nair is not in the list of accused in the case and it is likely he may have turned approver

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOCHI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Tuesday submitted the chargesheet before the NIA Special Court, Kochi, in the diplomatic channel gold smuggling case, leaving out Sandeep Nair from the list of accused.

Sandeep Nair is the fourth accused in the case.

The chargesheet lists 20 persons, including P.S. Sarith, Swapna Suresh and K.T. Ramees, as accused. Sandeep may have turned approver in the case. The NIA has invoked Sections 16, 17, 18, and 20 of the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) against the accused.

While Section 16 deals with punishment for terrorist activities, Section 17 deals with punishment for



raising funds for terrorist act and Section 18, punishment for conspiracy. Section 20 deals with the punishment for being a member of a terrorist organisation.

Terror activities

Earlier, the agency had contended that the accused



might have used the proceeds of gold smuggling for terrorist activities or funding terrorism.

It had also stated before the NIA court that some of the accused might have established links with underworld gangs operating from Tanzania and illegally

brought gold from there to India. The agency also submitted before the court that it suspected that some of the accused had ties with the criminal gang led by Dawood Ibrahim.

It was on July 10 last year that the NIA booked the case against Sarith, Swapna, Faisal Fareed, Sandeep Nair and others following the seizure of around 30 kg of gold by Customs officials at the Thiruvananthapuram international airport.

The case was that gold was smuggled into the country as diplomatic cargo addressed to the Charge D'Affairs at the Consulate General of the United Arab Emirates, Thiruvananthapuram.

The agency has arraigned 31 persons who, it said, "con-

spired and financed gold smuggling besides facilitating the disposal of the contraband and transferring the proceeds thereof to the UAE through hawala channels, for purchasing and smuggling more gold, with the intention of threatening the economic security of India."

Eight persons are absconding.

The NIA case is that the accused had knowingly conspired, raised funds and smuggled 167 kg of gold from the UAE through import cargo addressed to diplomats at the Consulate General of the UAE in Thiruvananthapuram.

It also contends that the key accused had planned to smuggle more gold from countries such as Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Malaysia.

Baby found in garbage heap dies hours later

It had heart-related complications

STAFF REPORTER
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

A newborn baby, found abandoned at Kalluvathukkal in Kollam district early on Tuesday and later admitted to SAT Hospital here, died on Tuesday evening.

The baby had heart-related complications, hospital authorities said.

The body was shifted to the mortuary for post-mortem examination.

The two-day-old baby boy was found abandoned near the Ooriyakode temple in Kalluvathukkal, a state-ment from the hospital said.

The police first rushed

the child to the Government Medical College Hospital, Paripally, but shifted him to SAT Hospital for specialist treatment.

According to PTI, the baby, fully dressed, was rescued from a garbage heap behind a house.

A resident came to know about the presence of the child after hearing his cries early on Tuesday.

The police said they had no clue who abandoned him. A case has been registered and investigation is on, they said.

The police also informed the District Child Welfare Committee.

Why were over 700 U.K. passengers not tested for COVID-19, asks HC

Only 2,292 of 3,062 passengers since December 7 tested

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BENGALURU

The High Court of Karnataka asked the State government on Tuesday to clarify why close to 700 of the 3,062 passengers who arrived in the State from the U.K. since December 7 were not subjected to RT-PCR test for COVID-19.

A Division Bench comprising Chief Justice Abhay Shreenivas Oka and Justice Aravind Kumar passed the order while hearing PIL petitions related to issues that have cropped up owing to the lockdown and COVID-19 health management.

The court sought this clarification as the government's

data showed that only 2,292 were subjected to RT-PCR test.

The government data also showed that 75 passengers were yet to be traced.

Also, 19 of the returnees and 14 of their primary contacts had tested positive for COVID-19.

Nine passengers and one of their primary contacts had tested positive for the new strain of the virus.

The government also told the court that a total of ₹29,520 in fines had been imposed on seven private laboratories for delayed uploading of RT-PCR test results on the Indian Council

of Medical Research portal, in violation of the guideline stipulating the declaration of test results within 24 to 48 hours.

Also, the government informed the court that 25% of the reimbursement amount – about ₹9 crore – claimed by private laboratories had been withheld following discrepancies in the maintenance of records.

The government also stated that in 24 instances of excess billing, action had been initiated against private hospitals designated for treating COVID-19 patients.

Ordinance on cow slaughter promulgated

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BENGALURU

The Karnataka government on Tuesday promulgated the Karnataka Prevention of Slaughter and Preservation of Cattle Ordinance, 2020, to ban slaughter of cows. It also bans slaughter of bulls of all ages and buffaloes aged below 13.

The Karnataka Prevention of Slaughter and Preservation of Cattle Bill, 2020, was passed in the Assembly during the winter session, but was not cleared in the Legislative Council. Therefore, the government issued a gazette notification promulgating the Ordinance. The new law will not stop slaughter of buffaloes aged above 13. Hence, slaughterhouses could continue to operate, and there will not be a blanket ban on beef.

Two-day Asian Waterbird Census off to a flying start

At least two dozen sites will be covered under the exercise

STAFF REPORTER
CORINGA (EAST GODAVARI)

The two-day Asian Waterbird Census-2020 commenced in Andhra Pradesh on Tuesday under the aegis of experts from the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), covering at least two dozen sites, including Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary, Kolleru Lake and Krishna Sanctuary.

BNHS Assistant Director P. Sathiayelvam, S. Siva Kumar and BNHS Andhra Pradesh coordinator K. Mutyunjaya Rao trained amateur bird-watchers on Tuesday on technical aspects of the bird census and challenges, enabling them to conduct the task on their own.

Dr. Sathiayelvam, who had previously explored the avian diversity in the Godavari estuary, has presented a demonstration on the 90 species of birds sighted in the Godavari estuary and finalised 12 sites being covered in the exercise.

Species breeds on the Kakinada coast, which supports a great number of Indian Skimmers. In Godavari estuary, the Kumbabhishekam mudflat, the wetland opposite the Coromandel industrial area



Trees are already being cut. This project is an encroachment of open places, which are meant for the public, by the government. This is land grabbing in every way

BHAVNEEN KANDHARI
Environmentalist



They do not care about spending ₹20,000 crore while people are starving, people are unemployed. And they are pushing this project, it is a shame

BRINDA KARAT
CPI(M) leader



Such projects are taken up once or twice in a century. I think it is high time to go for the new structure because India is the largest democracy in the world

PRASANNA ACHARYA
Biju Janata Dal spokesperson



More deliberation and public consultation in a project of this nature is required. Are we leaving something for our children that we will be proud of?

LT. COL. ANUJ SRIVASTAVA (RETD)
Architect and activist

A case of misplaced priority, says Congress

'Colossal waste of public money'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Congress on Tuesday described the Central Vista redevelopment project as a case of "misplaced priority by a whimsical autocrat", with Deputy Leader of the Congress in the Rajya Sabha Anand Sharma tweeting that he was "saddened" by the Supreme Court's go-ahead for the project.

The Congress has been arguing against the ₹13,450-crore project during the pandemic and an economic recession.

On December 10, Congress' parliamentary leaders, along with other key Opposition leaders, had boycotted the "bhoomi pojan" (ground breaking) ceremony by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

In a series of tweets on Tuesday, Mr. Sharma said it



Anand Sharma

is the time to reflect on the state of the Republic.

"We are living in strange times. No relief for the migrant labour. No justice for farmers fighting."

Congress' chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala tweeted, "The ₹13,450-cr Central Vista project is not a legalistic issue but a case of 'misplaced priorities' of a 'whimsical autocrat' seeking to etch his name in the annals of history with cement & mortar."

SC says 'no' to intense judicial review

'Not the court's concern to query govt. priorities'

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday refused to treat the Central Vista project as a unique one requiring greater or "heightened" judicial review.

A majority view of the Supreme Court said the government was "entitled to commit errors or achieve successes" in policy matters without the court's interference as long as it follows constitutional principles.

"Government may examine advantages or disadvantages of a policy at its own end, it may or may not achieve the desired objective. It is not the court's concern to enquire into the priorities of an elected government. Judicial review is never meant to venture into



Behind the scenes: The Central Vista project site covers a 3 km-stretch from the Rashtrapati Bhavan to India Gate. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

the mind of the government and thereby examine validity of a decision," the majority opinion by Justices A.M. Khanwilkar and Dinesh M. Rathore said.

The majority judgment said there was absolutely no legal basis to "heighten" the judicial review by applying a yardstick beyond the statutory scheme, especially when the government itself had ac-

corded no special status to the project. The court said the government had gone through the ordinary route of development projects under law in the Central Vista proposal too. It was up to the government to decide whether or not to accord a unique, or *sui generis*, status to a project.

"Once the government decides to construct a new

space for its sitting or to construct a highway or water dam or school or university and follows the procedure prescribed under law commensurate with the nature of project, then the court cannot act as a multiplier of regulations and add its own notion as to what ought to be additional essential procedure for going ahead with a particular project," it said.

Govt. will meet standards, says Hardeep

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

With the Supreme Court upholding the environmental clearance and notification for change in land use for the Central Vista project, Minister for Housing and Urban Affairs Hardeep Singh Puri on Tuesday said the government welcomed the judgment.

"Central govt. has always been sensitive to environmental concerns and will continue to adhere to the highest standards during the period of construction," Mr. Puri tweeted.

The Minister said, "Delhi is on course to becoming a world class capital city and in the first step, by the time the nation completes 75 years of its Independence in 2022, a new Parliament building will be ready reflecting the aspirations of new India."

IN BRIEF



I-T dept. again records Vadra's statement

NEW DELHI

The Income Tax department recorded the statement of Robert Vadra, husband of Congress leader Priyanka Vadra, for the second consecutive day on Tuesday. On Monday, an I-T official had said Mr. Vadra's

statement was being recorded in connection with an investigation under the Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Act.

HC notice to Centre, Punjab on RIL plea

CHANDIGARH

The Punjab and Haryana High Court on Tuesday issued notices to the Centre and the Punjab government on a petition filed by Reliance Jio Infocomm Ltd, a subsidiary of Reliance Industries Limited, seeking action against vandalism of its mobile towers and disruption of telecom services in Punjab.

J&K govt. grapples with heavy snowfall impact

SRINAGAR

The J&K administration on Tuesday grappled with the aftermath of a heavy spell of snowfall, with road connectivity and electricity supply badly affected. Three days of closure of air and surface traffic also forced the authorities to put a limit on fuel sale to consumers. The J&K Disaster Management Authority has issued medium to low level avalanche warnings for higher reaches.

Punjab BJP leaders meet PM Modi over farm laws

CHANDIGARH

Amid the ongoing farmers' agitation against the Centre's farm laws, two senior BJP leaders from Punjab met Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi on Tuesday. Surjit Kumar Jyani, a former Minister, and Harjeet Singh Grewal met the Prime Minister to discuss issues surrounding the State. Both leaders had been members of the BJP's Kisan Coordination Committee which interacted with farmers in Punjab last year.

Demands increase for ouster of Odisha Minister

Bhubaneswar

Both the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Congress on Tuesday stepped up their agitation across the State demanding the ouster of Odisha Law Minister Pratap Jena, who was named in the police complaint pertaining to the murder of two BJP leaders in Cuttack district. Members of BJP's youth wing staged demonstrations in front of all police stations in the State.

Union Budget set to be presented on Feb. 1

Parliament session is expected to begin on January 29

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Budget session of Parliament is expected to begin on January 29, government sources said, with the Budget being presented as per schedule on February 1.

The decision was taken by the Cabinet Committee on Parliamentary Affairs or CCPA, but an official announcement has not been made so far.

As is the norm, the Budget session will be conducted in two phases. The first, beginning on January 29, will conclude on February 15.

The second phase will run from March 8 to April 8, sources said.

They said that at least for part one of the Budget ses-

sion, all the precautions that were in place during the monsoon session will continue.

These restrictions will also mean that the Rajya Sabha and the Lok Sabha will meet alternatively. During the monsoon session, the Rajya Sabha met for four hours in the morning, and post lunch, the same chambers were used for the Lok Sabha, which met for another four hours till the evening. The arrangement is likely to continue for the Budget session too.

The government had cancelled the winter session of Parliament citing a rising number of COVID-19 cases.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Prahlad Joshi had said in a letter to the Congress's

Lok Sabha leader that all political parties were in favour of scrapping the session to arrest the spread of COVID-19. The Congress's Rajya Sabha chief whip Jai Ram Ramesh and Trinamool leader Derek O'Brien both the government did not hold discussions with any Opposition parties before making this decision.

The only two sessions of Parliament that have been held during the pandemic – Budget session in March last year and the monsoon session – had to be cut short.

The Budget session which was scheduled to have 31 sittings was brought to a close after 23 sittings.

The monsoon session which was to have 18 sittings could manage just 10.

West Bengal Minister quits Trinamool

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

West Bengal Minister of State for Youth Affairs and Sports and former Indian cricketer Laxmi Ratan Shukla on Tuesday resigned from the Trinamool Congress.

Mr. Shukla, the Howrah North MLA, wrote to Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee about his decision. The former Indian cricketer will remain an MLA till the term of the State Assembly expires.

Ms. Banerjee, who accepted the resignation, said the Minister wanted to retire from politics to concentrate on his sports activities. "Laxmi is a good boy. He has written in his letter that he wants to retire from politics to concentrate on his sports... I want him to do well in his sports and we wish him well," she said.

Tractor rally around Delhi put off due to bad weather

It will touch all major protest sites on January 7

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Protesting farmer unions have decided to postpone their tractor rally on the outskirts of Delhi to January 7, when thousands will march along the eastern and western expressways surrounding the capital.

The rally was initially scheduled to be held on Wednesday, but has been deferred due to a poor weather forecast.

Rain lashed Delhi several times over the past few days.

"The tractor rally will take place in all the four corners of Delhi. This will be the trailer for the tractor parade planned for Republic Day within Delhi," said Swaraj India president Yogendra Yadav, addressing a press conference after consultations



Rain or shine: Farmers taking shelter from the showers at the Singhu border protest site on Tuesday. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VARMA

between the Punjab farm unions and the wider coordination team of the Samyukt Kisan Morcha.

He explained that the rally, beginning at 11 a.m., would touch all the major protest sites, at Singhu, Tikri, Shahjahanpur, Palwal and Ghazipur.

Every village will send at

least ten tractor trolleys for the parallel tractor parade in the capital on January 26, said Joginder Nain, who heads a faction of the Bhartiya Kisan Union in Haryana. He called on every farming family to send a member of their household for the parade.

Custody of alleged PFI members extended

Four persons were arrested in October on their way to Hathras

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GAZIABAD

more time to deliberate on the sensitive material found in the laptop and mobiles of the accused and to question them on their links with members of SIMI and PFI.

He said if the court was satisfied with the report of the public prosecutor, the period of the investigation could be increased from 90 to 180 days under section 43D (2) of UAPA, 1967.

The STF said it would also interrogate Campus Front of India secretary K.A. Rauf Sherif who was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate in a money laundering case and is lodged in Kakkadan district jail. The information gathered from him would be verified with the four men.

'Not satisfied'

Defence lawyer Madhuvan Dutt Chaturvedi told *The Hindu* they were not satisfied with the order as "our objections on jurisdiction of court, empowerment of STF and legal position of prosecutor have not been discussed therein. Neither is the compelling necessity to extend the limit mentioned in it". He said they would challenge the order in the Allahabad High Court. "The entire proceeding is going beyond the law," he argued.

Rejecting their default bail application under section 167 (2) of CrPC on their completing 90 days in custody, Additional District and Sessions Judge Anil Kumar Pandey accepted the plea of the prosecution lawyer and extended the investigation period from 90 to 180 days.

Citing the application of U.P. Special Task Force, Mr. Pandey said the prosecution wanted

KERALA WATER AUTHORITY e-Tender Notice

Tender No : 46 to 49/SE/PHC/PKD Jal Jeevan Mission 2020-21 - Supplying and laying distribution system, construction of OHSR and providing FHTCs in Kannadi, Elappully, Mannur & Keralassery Panchayaths. EMD : Rs. 200000 to 50000/- Tender fee : Rs. 11200 to 16800/- Last Date for submitting Tender : 27-01-2021 03:00 pm Phone : 0491 2544927 Website : www.kwa.kerala.gov.in www.etenders.kerala.gov.in

KWA-JB-GL-6-775-2020-21 Superintending Engineer PH Circle, Palakkad

INDIRA GANDHI MEDICAL COLLEGE & RESEARCH INSTITUTE
(A Government of Puducherry Institution)
Vazhudavour Road, Kathirkamam, Puducherry - 605 009.
Ph:0412-2277545, 0412-2277289 Website: www.igmcri.com
INTERVIEW FOR RECRUITMENT OF TWO POSTS OF PROFESSOR THREE POSTS OF ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR & THIRTEEN POSTS OF ASSISTANT PROFESSOR ON CONTRACT BASIS

Applications are invited from eligible candidates for the Two posts of Professor Three posts of Associate Professor & Thirteen posts of Assistant Professor on contract basis. The last date for receipt of application is 20.01.2021 by 5 p.m.

The details regarding vacancies, age limit, education qualifications, remuneration, method of selection, other conditions etc., can be viewed in the official website www.igmcri.com.

F.No.2-3/IGMC&RI/Ett.Acad/2020-21 Administrative Officer

Rajasthan Council of School Education

Dr. Radha Krishnan, Siksha Sankul, Block-6, JLN Marg, Jaipur 302017 Email ID : rose.ict@gmail.com Date : 31/12/2020

No. -> RCSCE/Jal/ICT/DigitalClass/2020-21/3141 Date : 31/12/2020

NIB 19/2020-21 Bid for Establishment of Digital Classroom in 101 Government School With 3 Year On-Site Comprehensive Warranty Are invited from interested bidders up to 03:00 PM on Date 21-01-2021 Other Particulars of the bid may be visited on the procurement portal (<http://eproc.rajasthan.gov.in>, <http://sppp.raj.nic.in>) of the state; and "www.rajsmsa.nic.in" Department website. UBN - RSE2021GLOB00120 Est. Amount : 2,42,40,000/-

Raj.Samwad/C/8489/2020-21 State Project Director

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'After govt. nod, vaccine can be rolled out in days'

No ban on export of India-made shots: Health Secretary

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan said on Tuesday that the Ministry was prepared to roll out the vaccine for COVID-19 within 10 days of emergency use authorisation clearance and subject to final approval by the Union government.

The announcement comes just days after the Drugs Controller General of India approved the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, Covishield, manufactured by the Serum Institute of India and Bharat Biotech's indigenous Covaxin for restricted emergency use.

Stating that there is no ban on the export of Indian-manufactured COVID-19 vaccines, Mr. Bhushan told presspersons that the CoWIN app, which allows people to register themselves for the vaccine, already had the data of priority groups.

He noted that CoWIN offers Aadhaar authentication and SMS services in 12 languages. "This technology is also available for any other



C The idea is to provide maximum coverage and India is lucky that it has several promising vaccine candidates

V.K. PAUL
NITI Aayog member (health)

country in the world that wants to use it," he said.

Mr. Bhushan said India had four primary vaccine stores called the government medical store depots, under the Medical Stores Organisation, in Karnal, Mumbai, Chennai and Kolkata and 37 State vaccine stores that branched into district vaccine stores, which were monitored in real time.

"The facility is monitored for the number of vaccines

stored, and temperature is tracked and updated. We have this facility for over a decade in the country," he said.

Also speaking at the press conference, NITI Aayog member (health) V.K. Paul said that India was trying to get sufficient doses of vaccine to cover its priority group by July.

"Work is also on to specify the criteria for vaccinating beneficiaries with co-morbidities. Right now, the idea is to provide maximum coverage and in that case India is lucky that it has several promising vaccine candidates in the pipeline," he said.

Mr. Bhushan said that, at present, 44% of active COVID-19 cases were recovering in hospitals as they had moderate or severe symptoms, while 56% of cases were very mild or asymptomatic and in home isolation. "The number of active cases in the country is less than 2.5 lakh and continues to decline. The positivity rate is at 1.97%," he said.

The next meeting on Thursday, when the panel

is insisted on efficacy data for establishing proof of protection of Covaxin to approving it for emergency use in a "clinical trial mode".

The panel had been insisting on the data at least since December 9. The minutes of the meeting, made public on Tuesday, show that the committee on December 30 directed Bharat Biotech to provide updated "safety, immunogenicity and efficacy data" from its ongoing Phase-3 trial. It was scheduled as a placebo-controlled trial involving 25,800 volunteers across the country where some get the actual vaccine and some don't.

These data were furnished on December 30 too, and again the committee recommended that Bharat Biotech "expedite the recruitment and perform an interim efficacy analysis for further consideration of restricted emergency use approval".

Just a day later, at another

Mutation threat swung it for Covaxin?

Panel changed stance from insisting on efficacy data to nod for emergency use

JACOB KOSHY
NEW DELHI

The threat from a 'mutated' novel coronavirus appears to have helped Bharat Biotech secure an emergency use permission for Covaxin, a perusal of meeting records show.

In three marathon meetings from December 30 to January 2, the Subject Expert Committee of the Drug Controller-General of India changed its stance from insisting on efficacy data for establishing proof of protection of Covaxin to approving it for emergency use in a "clinical trial mode".

The minutes of the meeting, made public on Tuesday, show that the committee on December 30 directed Bharat Biotech to provide updated "safety, immunogenicity and efficacy data" from its ongoing Phase-3 trial. It was scheduled as a placebo-controlled trial involving 25,800 volunteers across the country where some get the actual vaccine and some don't.

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Just a day later, at another



Countdown on: A dry run for COVID-19 vaccination being held at a hospital in Ahmedabad on Tuesday. ■ VIJAY SONEJI

approved the Serum Institute's Covishield vaccine, the committee does not appear to have considered additional data. It relied on safety and immunogenicity data and those on "severe adverse events" from the ongoing Phase 3 (without specifying how many).

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Just a day later, at another

meeting of the committee on January 2, the company presented "further updated data [it isn't mentioned what] and requested that their proposal be considered in the 'wake of incidence of new mutated coronavirus infection'".

No placebos

Here the committee accorded its approval, though specifying that this be done only in a clinical trial mode. Balram Bhargava, Director General, Indian Council of Medical Research, a partner in the Covaxin project, said at a press briefing on Tuesday that the clinical trial mode

implied that there would be no placebo shots. Everyone eligible would be given the actual vaccine and followed up for reports on adverse events, as in a trial.

In a statement, the All India Drug Action Network (AIDAN) said, "We are perplexed at the abrupt change in thinking of the committee from the first two meetings to the third day on which approval was recommended while apparently discounting the need for efficacy data."

Krishna Ella, chairman, Bharat Biotech, said on Monday that the Phase-3 trial would continue and efficacy data would be available in March. He said a scientific publication from his company was coming within a week on the Covaxin strain's response to mutated SARS-CoV-2.

Meanwhile, a release issued by the Health Ministry stated that all those with the virus variant are under observation. "All these persons have been kept in single room isolation in designated health care facilities by the respective State Governments. Their close contacts have also been put under quarantine," it said.

71 samples test positive for virus variant

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

NITI Aayog member (health) V.K. Paul said on Tuesday that 71 samples have tested positive and been isolated for the U.K. variant of the novel coronavirus.

He told reporters that there has been no emergence of clusters in the country. "So far, so good," Dr. Paul said at a press conference.

Positive samples are being tested at 10 INSACOG labs across the country (NIBMG Kolkata, IIS Bhubaneswar, NIV Pune, NCCS Pune, CCMB Hyderabad, CDFD Hyderabad, InSTEM Bengaluru, NIMHANS Bengaluru, IIGB Delhi and NCDC Delhi) for genome sequencing.

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Vaccine firms bury the hatchet

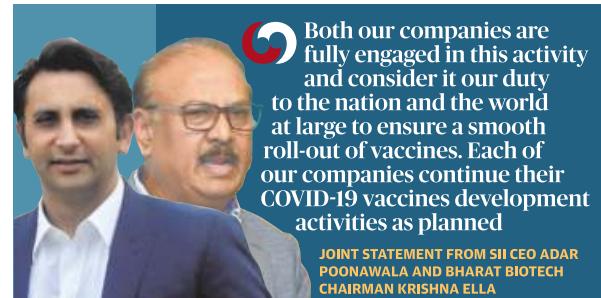
SII, Bharat Biotech issue joint statement promising a smooth roll-out

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Stating the important task in front of them is saving the lives and livelihoods in India and the world, Adar Poonawala, chief executive officer of Serum Institute of India, and Bharat Biotech chairman Krishna Ella on Tuesday issued a joint statement on behalf of the two companies communicating their combined intent to develop, manufacture and supply the COVID-19 vaccines for India and globally.

The statement that follows a series of cross-statements made by them in the past two days said: "Vaccines are a global public health good and have the power to save lives and accelerate the return to economic normalcy at the earliest."

They said now that the two vaccines had been is-



sued EUA (emergency use authorisation) in India, the focus was on manufacturing, supply and distribution so that populations that needed them the most received high quality, safe and efficacious vaccines. "Both our companies are fully engaged in this activity and consider it our duty to the nation and the world at large to ensure a smooth roll-out of vaccines. Each of our companies continue their COVID-19 vaccines development activities as planned."

They said they are fully aware of the importance of the vaccines for people and countries alike. "We hereby communicate our joint pledge to provide global access for our COVID-19 vaccines."

The joint statement follows a tweet by Mr. Poonawala on Tuesday afternoon: "I would like to clarify two matters; as there is confusion in the public domain, as planned," the statement said.

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7-seat MG Hector Plus

Along with a facelift for the entire Hector line up, MG will add a new seven-seat variant to the Hector Plus range. While the three-row Hector Plus was launched in 2020 with a six-seat layout comprising captain-seats for the second row, the seven-seat version will instead feature a bench-style middle row. There will be no mechanical changes with the Hector Plus continuing with its 1.5-litre turbo-petrol, 1.5-litre mild-hybrid turbo-petrol and 2.0-litre diesel engines. The wider choice of seating configurations should help the MG hold its own better in the face of competition, including the upcoming Tata Gravitas and the new Mahindra XUV500.



Jeep Compass facelift

The India-spec Jeep Compass facelift is set to be revealed on January 7. It will come with a cosmetic makeover in line with the international model, which was updated late last year. Chief among the styling changes will be a refreshed front end with revised headlights and integrated LED DRLs, re-worked seven-slat grille with honeycomb-like inserts and a new front bumper. The interiors of the Compass will receive significant updates as well with a restyled dashboard and new AC vents and HVAC controls. There will be no updates under the hood.

Tata Altroz Turbo

Tata's first premium hatchback, the Altroz, will soon receive a new turbo-petrol engine option. The Altroz Turbo is slated for a January 13 débüt. While the engine in question will be the same 1.2-litre, three-cylinder turbocharged unit from the Nexon, it will be tuned down slightly in the Altroz to produce 110hp and 140Nm, compared to the SUV's 120hp and 170Nm output. Initially, Tata will offer the engine with a 5-speed manual but a DCT automatic gearbox will also join the range later. Apart from the updated mechanics, Tata is not expected to change much in the way of styling or the equipment list.

Tata Gravitas

The Tata Gravitas is set to soon become the Indian carmaker's new flagship. First unveiled at the Auto Expo 2020 almost a year ago, the production-spec Gravitas will debut on January 26. Though the Gravitas will closely resemble the Harrier up front, it will have distinctive styling around the back where its longer overhang and stepped roof will stand out. On the equipment front, expect it to have quite a bit in common with its five-seat sibling. Under the hood, the Gravitas will be powered by Harrier's 170hp, 2.0-litre turbo-diesel engine, and will get the same 6-speed manual and automatic gearbox options.

Ringing in the new year

The year is off to a great start with a slew of new cars launching in January 2021

NISHMANYA BAHADUR

After a challenging 2020, many carmakers are set to hit the ground running this year with a number of new launches and unveilings lined up in January. These are the new cars and SUVs to look out for this month:

MG Hector facelift

The MG Hector facelift will be launched this month. MG will leave the running gear as it is with the 143hp, 1.5-litre turbo-petrol and turbo-petrol mild-hybrid, and 170hp, 2.0-litre diesel engines being carried forward unchanged. The facelift will see the Hector receive mild cosmetic upgrades inside and out. The list of updates will include a revised front grille with horizontal slats, and new five-spoke alloy wheels which will be larger 18-inch units, unlike the current model's 17-inches. However, the cabin layout will largely remain unaltered.



BMW 3 Series Gran Limousine

BMW will launch the 3 Series Gran Limousine on January 21 with India effectively becoming the first right-hand drive market to get the stretched 3 Series. At 2,961mm, the new Gran Limousine's wheelbase will be 110mm longer than the regular model and the overall length will be up by 120mm as well. While the difference won't be perceptible for the front seat occupants, it will be the rear passengers who will make the most of the car's extended dimensions with an extra 43mm of legroom. Engine options will likely include a 258hp, 2.0-litre turbo-petrol engine and a 190hp, 2.0-litre turbo-diesel unit, same as in the standard 3 Series. While the features list is likely to be carried over unchanged, expect the upmarket model to command a higher price tag than the regular sedan.



Q AND A WITH HORMAZD



Luxury brands or Skoda Superb?

Is there a big difference between the Skoda Superb, Mercedes-Benz C-class, BMW 3 Series and Audi A4? Is it worth buying those luxury brand cars or should I go with the Superb?

Dharani Dharan, Tirupur

Frankly, the Skoda Superb offers almost everything a luxury brand does at a more affordable price. What you do lose out on is a bit of refinement and some luxury touches such as the switchgear, and some trim bits that are of a slightly higher level in German luxury brands. So, if you aren't hung up on owning a car with a premium badge, the Superb is a more sensible choice.

Which automatic do I choose?

I am confused amongst the automatic Nexon, Ford EcoSport and Hyundai Creta. I also thought about the Nexon EV, but I heard about multiple issues with electric cars.

Sundeep Kumar B, Hyderabad

If you don't need the extra space and can do without some features, you can give the Creta a pass and save a lot of money. Between the Nexon and EcoSport automatics, the Ford wins due to a better automatic transmission. The Nexon EV is the most affordable high-voltage EV in the market and worth looking at only if you plan on driving in the city as the lack of charging infrastructure limits its use on highways. We have not heard of any serious issues with the Nexon EV.

Hormazd Sorabjee is the editor of Autocar India. Mail your feedback and queries to roadshow@thehindu.co.in

CYK

Tweaked for the better

Minor improvements ensure the BMW G310R and G 310 GS do not ride on good looks alone

FIROZE IRANI

BMW has updated both the G 310 R and the G 310 GS. The most significant change comes in form of the massive price cut, but both bikes are also on the receiving end of a minor makeover. We spent some time with the naked offering, the G 310 R, and this is what we think of it.

The bike now looks more exciting, particularly in the optional ₹ 10,000 extra 'Style Sport' colour scheme, with its red frame, wheels and bold graphics. Not only is this unlike BMW's usual stuff, but it also follows a loud theme, similar to its successful competitor from Austria.

We got the bike in the more reserved Cosmic Black colour scheme, and it still turned a few heads. Some of that could be due to the few design updates the G 310 R has received. While the bulk of the tank looks similar to the older bike, the sides have been redesigned and the propeller badge now sits on a new, neat-looking panel below it.

The new LED headlamp looks far more modern, thanks to the darker internals and the unique DRL strip. The turn indicators have got the LED treatment as well, and they are a lot more compact this time around. Another minor improvement comes in form of the levers because both of them are now adjustable.

The engine also looks different because it is now finished in black instead of silver, but the mechanicals within are the same. The 313cc, single-cylinder, liquid-cooled, fuel-injected



A fine balance The G310R offers both an agile and comfortable ride • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

SPECIFICATIONS	
ENGINE	313cc, single-cylinder, liquid cooled, fuel injected
POWER	34hp at 9250rpm
TORQUE	28Nm at 7500rpm
GEARBOX	6-speed
WEIGHT	164kg
WHEELBASE	1380mm
SEAT HEIGHT	785mm
BRAKES (F/R)	300mm disc/240mm disc
SUSPENSION (F/R)	USD Fork/Monoshock
FRONT WHEEL	17 inches
FRONT TYRE	110/70
REAR WHEEL	17 inches
REAR TYRE	150/60

speed gearbox remains quite chunky. As for ride-by-wire, the system remains easy to modulate at city speeds and the bike has not become jerky or over responsive.

Speaking of city speeds, this is where the G 310 R impresses most. It can hold high gears at low speeds and it does not heat up all that much. However, it feels a little dull as you move



along and the plain exhaust note doesn't help either. The bike only really wakes up when you cross 5,000rpm, but after that it has got juice all the way up to 10,000rpm. The BS6 G 310 R is only 0.5sec slower than the BS4 model in the sprint to 100kph. While vibrations can still be felt, especially through the foot pegs, they are better controlled than on the TVS Apache RR 310.

The 2020 G 310 R weighs 5.5kg more than its predecessor, but it continues to feel quite light and the 785mm seat height means this remains one of the best bikes for short riders at this price point. Something else that remains unchanged is the instrumentation, and unlike the RR 310

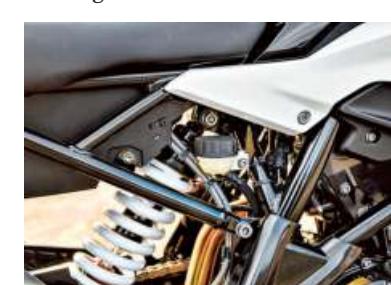
with its new TFT display, the BMW continues with an LCD dash.

It also continues with the Michelin Pilot Street tyres, which are alright in the city but lack feel and feedback when pushed hard. It is a pity this bike does not get the new Road 5 tyres that are now on the TVS 310.

Both the USD fork and preload adjustable monoshock remain unchanged, and the bike continues to strike the right balance between managing potholes and being quite agile and comfortable. The brakes have a dull initial bite, but the 300mm disc and four-piston caliper offer a decent amount of feedback and stopping power when needed.

With its ₹55,000 price drop, the G 310 R (at ₹2.45 lakh) now costs ₹13,000 less than the KTM 390 Duke and is the same as the TVS Apache RR 310. It is a nicer urban bike than both, but the RR is better equipped while the KTM is on a different level in terms of performance.

BMW says it has also worked on aftersales costs, but there is still the relatively tiny dealer network to consider. Nevertheless, it is a well-rounded motorcycle and it packs unbeatable badge value, if you are into that kind of thing.



The tale of a COIN



Impressions of history
(Clockwise from far left) Artist P Gunasekaran making the replicas; tags with added information; the coins • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

SOMA BASU

Think of coins and what comes to mind are the flat round pieces of metal. But in some Madurai homes – those with children and adults interested in history – the replica of a fancy Pandya coin stands like a decorative plaque. Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) Madurai chapter is trying to generate academic interest in the significance of ancient Tamil coinage among the people here.

"Antiquated coins contain a lot of history and are a means to understand how civilisations flourished in the past. But due to the lack of a widely understood script, we tend to ignore the importance," says Rajesh Kannan, an executive member who came up with the idea of using the replica of a coin as teaching tool. Coin replicas are usually done by collectors, out of commercial interests. This is perhaps the first time that an INTACH chapter has replicated a coin, in the size of a tablet that also makes a nice souvenir for locals and tourists alike.

Kanna's interest in coins is motivated by his interest in Tamil lifestyle and culture. And the INTACH has also sponsored the souvenir for 30 Government schools where they will be used in classroom teaching.

Kanna was first drawn to the coins of Tamil Nadu after meeting Thanjavur-based numismatist Arumuga Sitaraman. For the replica model, he chose a square-shaped copper coin weighing 10.6 grams that was traded under the rule of the Pandya kings in Madurai during 1 BC. According to Sitaraman, there is no clear explanation of the value of each coin. But what can be broadly understood is that bigger the coin, the more value it had.

Kanna says he got curious about the six symbols along with an elephant, a trident and the divine carved on one side and a stylised fish symbol, the royal insignia of the Pandya's, on the other. The particu-



INTACH Madurai launches replicas of a Pandya coin as souvenirs, to promote understanding and learning of ancient Tamil life

lar characteristics, as interpreted in various books, have been compiled in a small note that comes with the souvenir.

The elephant had a place of honour in ancient Tamil life, and the trident was a prominent weapon of the times. Auspicious symbols lined on top include a fenced tree and a lucky four-leaf plant, and the inference is drawn from the literary work *Agananoor*, that mentions a clay wall of a temple, built around a banyan tree. The crescent symbolises the knowledge of the Tamils, who studied the impact of phases of the moon on nature and human body. The musical instrument was widely used to make important announcements; the sea farers held the conch as a sacred object in rituals; the women loved to wear anklets in the shape of a golden tube embedded with pearls and semi-precious stones.

"The Tamils divided the land into *kurinji* (mountain), *mullai* (forest), *marutham* (agriculture), *neythal* (sea) and *paalai* (dry and sandy). Each type had its own occupation, flora and fauna and the produce was shared by all creating a self-sufficient society. This coin is, therefore, a symbol of prosperity of the Sangam Age, and a lesson in learning," explains Kanna.

What currency tells us

The numismatics of Tamil Nadu are as vast as an ocean. But not everybody is a numismatist. "To keep a replica as a souvenir at home will at least have some capacity to evoke and preserve for us the image of a world that is now past," says Kanna and adds, "Items of antiquity have a lot to do with people of that era. Knowing and learning a bit of history is important for all."

During the lockdown everybody

took to pursuing different interests. So it was with Kanna, who attended online lectures and read books on the Sangam Age, associated with the period from 300 BC to 300 AD, marking the southern dynasties of the Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas.

"The life of Sangam Age man in harmony with nature fascinated me and I shortlisted few items that could be made by artists as gift items. The launch of the Pandya coin replica is the first step in this direction," he says. It is also a way to promote artists during the difficult pandemic months.

Madurai artist P Gunasekaran fulfilled this vision, by making the plaques in fibre glass with the sculpted features and painting it to an antique finish. Since its launch, INTACH has sold 100 of these pieces priced at ₹450 each.

Individual and bulk orders can be placed on 9443332292

and the Gujarati portion in *Ram Leela's* 'Nagada Sang Dhol' toward the end, set to a brilliant Supriya Pathak on the verge of hysteria.

I am the kind of person who has to go back and look at the lyrics of every song I hear. I am quite interested in learning new languages, the meaning of words and the history behind them," says Uma, over phone from Mumbai. She also regularly puts up music recommendations on her page, through 'Songscapes' – bite-sized translations of lines that stand out for her, and the history of the lyrics. "I actually started this page to share music, translating mainly songs from films. But then I realised I can expand it to poetry, *aartis* and *garbas*," she says.

Uma is fluent in Marathi, Gujarati, Hindi and English, with a keen interest in Punjabi and Urdu as well. For the other languages, she collaborates with other content creators who help her translate and proofread. "Translating is something I have been doing for a long time. I used to work at a travel agency, where I would be required to translate content like itineraries from English to Hindi and Marathi for the regional market," says Uma.

Going forward, she hopes to discover and share more songs from the North-Eastern and Southern states. "This hobby kind of helped me get through the lockdown, and helped me connect with people with similar tastes in Arts and Culture," she says.



and that is when I took the plunge.

You have made short films earlier...

• Yes. I had to see if I had it in me. I directed *Kaar* and *Sangaati*, which are now available on Shee Tales. When I approached a few major producers, these were the films I showed along with the script of *Window Seat*. That brought Jack Manjoo on board as the producer. He was a huge strength as I was a first time director and his experience in promotion and releasing the film came in handy.

When were you bit by the direction bug?

• I play myself. I have used my name in the film and play an ex-journalist. The film was shot in my office, but only that much of Sheetal Shetty is true to life. The character and the story are a blend of fiction and reality. Jayanth had crafted the idea long ago, but we did not get attention since it was a small budget film. The film was screened in BIFFes last year and was received well.

What has your experience as a director been?

• One observation I made was that there are hardly any women directors. When you approach people, they look at you with doubt wondering if you will be able to pull it off... But, luckily for me, with *Window Seat* Nirup was encouraging.

Journalist turns director

After anchoring news Sheetal Shetty takes on the mantle of direction with *Window Seat*

in your passion?

• Definitely. Being a journalist, you are well informed, have easy access to information, contacts, get to meet people from various fields and know many stories.

Making a film is tough. Conceptualising a film and realising your vision are very different things. I discovered the challenges of making a film when I

actually stepped into the pool of film-making.

Could you tell us about your role in 96?

• I play myself. I have used my name in the film and play an ex-journalist. The film was shot in my office, but only that much of Sheetal Shetty is true to life. The character and the story are a blend of fiction and reality. Jayanth had crafted the idea long ago, but we did not get attention since it was a small budget film. The film was screened in BIFFes last year and was received well.

When were you bit by the direction bug?

• I met with an accident in 2014. I was advised bed rest and had nothing to do. That is when I started writing *Window Seat*. When friends heard it, they encouraged me to direct it. I laughed at the thought, but they pushed me into it

SHILPA ANANDRAJ

She is a familiar face on Kannada news channels. Sheetal Shetty, who has anchored many news shows, is now creating news herself. She is not only acting in the thriller 96, directed by Jayanth Sege, but is also set for her directorial debut with *Window Seat*. Produced by Jack Manju, the film stars Nirup Bhandari, Amrutha Iyengar and Sanjana Anand.

The songs, composed by Arjun Janya, were released online to much appreciation from stars and audience.

Sheetal's career in films started off with a role in Rakshit Shetty's *Ulidavaru Khandante*, where she plays an investigative journalist. 96, where she plays herself, is set for a theatrical release.

She talks to *MetroPlus* about the challenges of making a film.

Edited excerpts:

When did the switch from



Looking ahead (Right) Sheetal Shetty amid the shoot • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

journalism to acting happen?

• I was always interested in movies and have been a film buff. When I worked in *Ulidavaru....* I was bowled over by the theme of the film and the manner in which it was made. That inspired me and I started writing *Window Seat*.

Has your profession helped you

PEARLS BEFORE SWINE



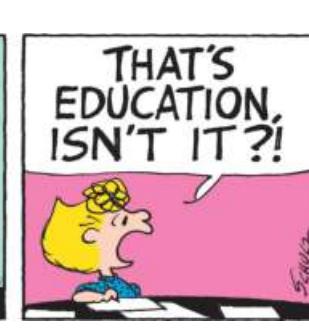
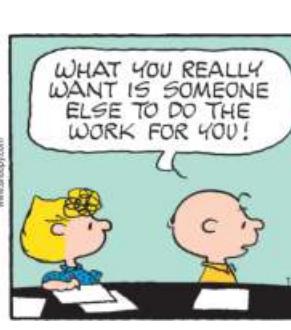
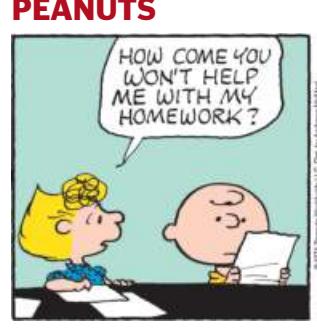
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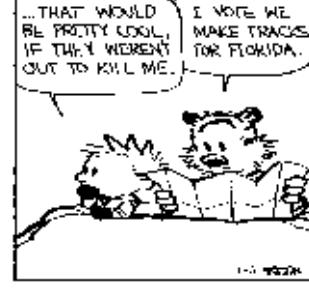
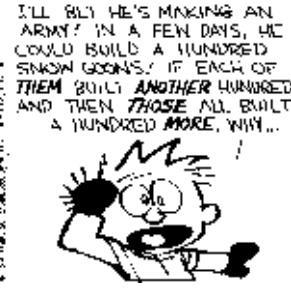
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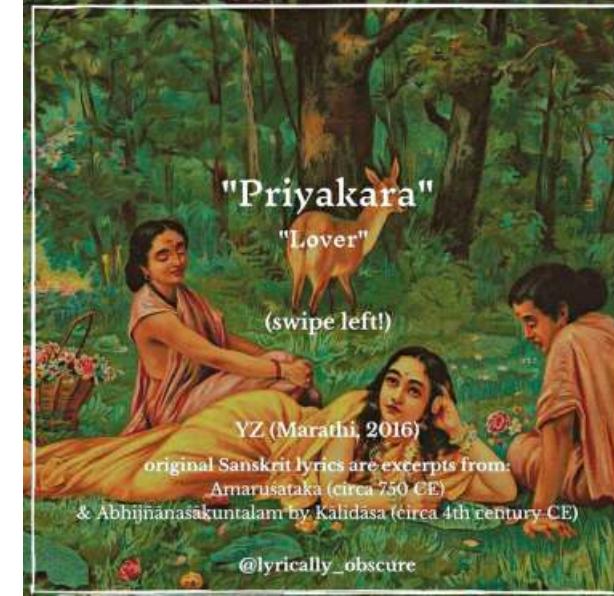
CALVIN AND HOBBES



Language love (Below) Uma Shirodkar • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Wondered what the Malayalam portion in Jiya jale means?

Lyrical Obscure provides English translations of everything from film songs to garbas and aartis



The magic of words

SWETA AKUNDI

"Main, kaidi number 786..."

[I, prisoner number 786...]"

Actor Shahrukh Khan's monologue from the 2004 movie *Veer Zaara* has always moved Mumbai-based digital marketer Uma Shirodkar. The movie is a big part of her childhood. The poem, penned by Aditya Chopra, is the latest that she has translated into English for her Instagram page Lyrically Obscure.

In the past few months, Uma has taken up translating songs from Bollywood and regional movies, poems, and even devotional songs and aartis as a serious hobby. On her page, she says she hopes to "decode and delve into South Asia's rich musical landscape, one word at a time".

She brings light to Marathi ghazals such as 'Kehvatari patate' (somewhere around dawn), written by poet and author Suresh Bhat, who is credited with adapting ghazals to the Marathi language. "I first heard this song in school, on a cultural programme called Nakshatranchi Dene (Gifts of the Constellation)," Uma writes on Instagram. Some of them serve to introduce the audience to quintessentially Indian words we may have heard in songs: such as the Gujarati word *bhunga* – the traditional round houses of Kutch.

And then there are translations of regional language snippets in popular songs, such as the Malayalam "Punjiri thanji konjikko" portion in Dil Se's 'Jiya jale' (posted on Onam, it

is easily her most liked translation) and the Gujarati portion in *Ram Leela's* 'Nagada Sang Dhol' toward the end, set to a brilliant Supriya Pathak on the verge of hysteria.

"I am the kind of person who has to go back and look at the lyrics of every song I hear. I am quite interested in learning new languages, the meaning of words and the history behind them," says Uma, over phone from Mumbai. She also regularly puts up music recommendations on her page, through 'Songscapes' – bite-sized translations of lines that stand out for her, and the history of the lyrics. "I actually started this page to share music, translating mainly songs from films. But then I realised I can expand it to poetry, *aartis* and *garbas*," she says.

Uma is fluent in Marathi, Gujarati, Hindi and English, with a keen interest in Punjabi and Urdu as well. For the other languages, she collaborates with other content creators who help her translate and proofread. "Translating is something I have been doing for a long time. I used to work at a travel agency, where I would be required to translate content like itineraries from English to Hindi and Marathi for the regional market," says Uma.

Going forward, she hopes to discover and share more songs from the North-Eastern and Southern states. "This hobby kind of helped me get through the lockdown, and helped me connect with people with similar tastes in Arts and Culture," she says.



and that is when I took the plunge.

You have made short films earlier...

• Yes. I had to see if I had it in me. I directed *Kaar* and *Sangaati*, which are now available on Shee Tales. When I approached a few major producers, these were the films I showed along with the script of *Window Seat*. That brought Jack Manjoo on board as the producer. He was a huge strength as I was a first time director and his experience in promotion and releasing the film came in handy.

When were you bit by the direction bug?

• I met with an accident in 2014. I was advised bed rest and had nothing to do. That is when I started writing *Window Seat*. When friends heard it, they encouraged me to direct it. I laughed at the thought, but they pushed me into it

'Will fight like hell to save presidency'

Trump appeals to Republican lawmakers to object to certification of votes in Congress session

ASSOCIATED PRESS

DALTON

With mounting desperation, Donald Trump declared on Monday night he would "fight like hell" to hold on to the presidency and appealed to Republican lawmakers to reverse his election loss to Joe Biden when they convene this week to confirm the Electoral College vote.

Electoral voters won by President-elect Biden are "not gonna take this White House!" he shouted as supporters cheered at an outdoor rally in Georgia. Mr. Trump's announced purpose for the trip was to boost Republican Senate candidates in Tuesday's runoff election, but he spent much of his speech complaining bitterly about his election loss — which he insists he



Final battle: Donald Trump addressing a rally in Dalton, Georgia, on Monday. AP

won "by a lot".

Earlier, in Washington, he pressed Republican lawmakers to formally object to certification of results on Wednesday at a joint session of

Congress that is to confirm Mr. Biden's victory in the Electoral College, which in itself is a confirmation of Mr. Biden's nationwide victory on November 3.

Though he got nothing but cheers on Monday night, Mr. Trump's attempt to overturn the presidential election is splitting the Republican Party. Some GOP lawmakers backing him are rushing ahead, despite an outpouring of condemnation from current and former party officials warning that the effort is undermining Americans' faith in democracy. All 10 living former Defense Secretaries wrote in an op-ed article that "the time for questioning the results has passed".

It is unclear the extent to which GOP leaders in Congress will be able to control Wednesday's joint session, which could drag into the night, though the challenges to the election are all but certain to fail. Mr. Trump him-

self is whipping up crowds for a Wednesday rally near the White House.

Vice-President Mike Pence, who is under pressure to tip the results for Mr. Trump, will be closely watched as he presides in a ceremonial role over Wednesday's session. "I promise you this: On Wednesday, we'll have our day in Congress," Mr. Pence said while himself campaigning in Georgia ahead of Tuesday's runoff elections that will determine control of the Senate.

Mr. Trump said in Georgia, "I hope that our great Vice-President comes through for us. He's a great guy. Of course, if he doesn't come through, I won't like him quite as much."

He added, "No, Mike is a great guy."

Gulf leaders sign deal to end years-long dispute

Saudi Arabia's crown prince MBS welcomes Qatar's Al-Thani

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

AL-UHLA

Gulf leaders signed a "solidarity and stability" deal on Tuesday after leaders of Saudi Arabia and Qatar publicly embraced, bringing Doha back into the regional fold after a three-year-long rift.

Saudi Arabia had led a coalition of countries in the Gulf and beyond to cut ties and transport links with Qatar in June 2017, charging that it was too close to Iran and backed radical Islamist groups — allegations that Doha denied. Those countries, along with Oman and Kuwait, which have mediated between the two sides, signed a deal in Al-Ula, after



Mohammed bin Salman, right, with Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani on Tuesday.

nian regime's nuclear and ballistic missile programme and its plans for sabotage and destruction," said Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

The details of the agreement were not immediately released, and analysts warned that any deal could be preliminary in nature and may not immediately end all the measures taken against Qatar. But the warm welcome Prince Mohammed extended to Qatar's ruler Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, with the pair embracing at the airport and then chatting animatedly, indicates a significant breakthrough.

IN BRIEF



China court sentences ex-banker to death

BEIJING

Lai Xiaomin, former chairman of Hong Kong-listed China Huarong Asset Management Co. and former Communist Party member, was sentenced to death for soliciting \$260 million in corruption, bribery, and also bigamy. AFP

South Korean destroyer reaches waters near Iran

SEOUL

A destroyer carrying members of South Korea's anti-piracy unit arrived in waters near the Strait of Hormuz, Seoul said on Tuesday. The country said it will send a delegation to Iran to negotiate the release of a seized oil tanker, Hankuk Chemi, which was allegedly carrying 7,200 tonnes of "oil chemical products". AFP

Georgia goes to polls for key Senate runoffs

Over 3 million people have voted early

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

ATLANTA

congressional runoffs in U.S. history.

Polls open at 7 a.m. in the southern State. A record three million-plus people have voted early, election officials say, and final results may not be known for several days.

Massive spending

A staggering \$832 million has been spent on the two contests, including spending in the primary and general elections, according to the Center for Responsive Politics.

If Democrats flip both seats, they win back the Senate, effectively handing Mr. Biden all the levers of political power in Washington and helping him enact his ambitious legislative agenda.

An Indian gift helps Sri Lanka's COVID-19 fight

The free ambulance service, launched in 2016, proves crucial in the country's response to the virus

MEERA SRINIVASAN

COLOMBO

Less than five years after its launch, an India-funded free ambulance service is playing a vital role in Sri Lanka's COVID-19 response, according to health sector officials.

"Over the last few months, the '1990 Suwa Seriya' Emergency Ambulance service has doubled its efforts, attending not just to medical emergencies, but also helping us transfer COVID-19 patients, including those with co-morbidities, to hospitals swiftly," said Dr. Sunil de Alwis.

Additional Secretary, Medical Services, Ministry of Health. For this, the service coordinates with the Health Ministry, Public Health Inspectors, and the Epidemiology Unit to ensure that COVID-19 patients are able to access treatment at the right hospital, without losing time.

On Sri Lanka's request, India provided a grant of \$7.56 million for the Suwa Seriya [vehicle or journey for good health] service, launched first in 2016, in Sri Lanka's Western and Southern Pro-

vinces, with 88 ambulances.

In the next couple of years, the '1990' service was expanded to cover all nine provinces on the island, with a fleet of 297 ambulances — Sri Lanka purchased them from Tata Motors — with an additional Indian grant of \$15.09 million. It is India's second largest grant project in the island, after the housing project of more than 60,000 houses, with a nearly \$400-million grant.

The idea of launching such an ambulance service came not at any high-level bilateral discussion. It was a proposal made by Harsha de Silva, then a junior Minister and now opposition parliamentarian. "Sri Lanka didn't have a pre-hospital emergency ambulance service until 2016," Mr. de Silva, an MP with the main opposition party Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB), or United People's Front, told *The Hindu*.

The grant, he recalled, was in the context of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Sri Lanka in March 2015. "The Indian side put forward only one condition.



A Suwa Seriya ambulance carrying a patient in Sri Lanka.

That after the launch and the initial phase, the government of Sri Lanka must take over the ambulance service and run it. We readily agreed."

Resistance to service

Following bilateral deliberations and paperwork, the service was launched about a year later. Not without resistance, though.

Some, including national

ist groups and an influential

trade union of government

doctors, vehemently op-

posed the "Indian am-

bulance", on grounds that Sri

Lankan health workers

when Sri Lanka's first wave of the pandemic struck, the 1990 call centre noticed a surge in calls — from about 5,300 a day to 9,000. It meant that the ambulances were attending to at least 500 more cases than the daily average of 1,050. Sri Lanka contained its first wave of COVID-19 effectively, but the second wave since October has proved rather challenging. During this time, the number of COVID-19 fatalities rose from 13 to 215, while the number of infections went up from 3,300 to over 45,000.

"Attending to COVID-19 cases isn't easy, as all the staff have to be in full PPE and disinfect the vehicle after every hospital transfer," Dr. de Alwis said. "But we are really happy with this service and greatly appreciate the Indian assistance. In fact, it would be wonderful if India can help us expand this service even more," he said.

"The success of this service is seen in the trust people have on it. No greater validation than that," Mr. de Silva said.

Alibaba to stop online music streaming service amid probe

Embattled Internet firm cites 'operational adjustments'

ANANTH KRISHNAN

China's e-commerce giant, the Alibaba Group, on Tuesday announced it will close a popular music streaming platform, Xiami Music. The announcement comes amid continuing investigations into the group and questions surrounding the future of its founder, Jack Ma.

Xiami Music said it will stop the service "due to operational adjustments" from February 5, marking an end to Alibaba's online music streaming platform. It was launched in 2008 and acquired by Alibaba five years later. It remains unclear if the closure of the platform will be followed by further restructuring of Alibaba's businesses, which have expanded beyond e-commerce to financial services — which is currently under the scanner by regulators — and a range of other online businesses.

The troubles for Alibaba

started on the eve of the initial public offering (IPO) of its Ant Group, its financial arm and the company behind Alipay, China's biggest digital payments company.

The IPO was expected to be a world record-breaking one and was likely to raise \$35 billion. But it was suspended by regulators in early November. This followed a speech by Mr. Ma in Shanghai at a high-profile financial forum. The speech was thought to have angered regulators as Mr. Ma took aim at China's financial system and labelled state-run banks, whose monopoly has been challenged by his group's entry into online financial services, as "pawn shops".

Monopolistic acts

On December 24, the State Administration for Market Regulation said it had launched a probe into Alibaba's "suspected monopolistic acts", including "forcing merchants to choose one

platform between two competitors".

China's state media said Mr. Ma was "summoned" for talks ahead of the IPO, and talks with regulators are ongoing. The People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, said last month that it was, along with the banking and insurance regulator and the securities regulator, holding talks with the Ant Group that were aimed at "implementing financial regulatory requirements, holding onto fair competition and protecting consumers' legitimate rights".

Mr. Ma has cut back on public appearances since his high-profile attendance at the Shanghai forum and the ensuing controversy. So far, neither regulators nor the state media in China have accused Mr. Ma of personal wrongdoing, but he has been asked, according to *Bloomberg*, to stay in the country while investigations into the group continue.

Monopolistic acts

On December 24, the State Administration for Market Regulation said it had launched a probe into Alibaba's "suspected monopolistic acts", including "forcing merchants to choose one

England's lockdown could last into March, says Minister

Country announces strict measures to beat new virus strain

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

LONDON

England on Tuesday entered a strict national lockdown aimed at stemming a steep rise in COVID-19 cases that a senior government Minister warned could last into March.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced the measures, including school closures and a ban on leaving home except for exercise and essential shopping, on Monday evening.



Michael Gove
Cabinet Office Minister Michael Gove told *Sky News* on Tuesday morning that he

could not say precisely when the lockdown, announced as lasting six weeks, would be lifted, warning of "very, very difficult weeks".

The measures will be reviewed from February 15, he said, but the government cannot "predict with certainty whether they will be lifted then", said Mr. Gove.

"I think it is right to say that as we enter March, we should be able to lift some of these restrictions but not necessarily all," he added.

Office of the Project Director, Madhya Pradesh Skills Development Project, Directorate of Skill Development, Madhya Pradesh

Date: 08.01.2021

Invitation for Bids No.: MPSDP/R/2020-21

Loan No. and Title: No. Loan No.: 3710-IND/ Madhya Pradesh Skills Development Project,

Contract Package No. and Title: MPSDP/ITI/Equipment/03: Procurement of RAC LAB Equipments for 6 ITIs;

Deadline of Submission of Bids: 09.02.2021 at 13:30 hrs. (IST)

1. The Government of India has received a loan from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) towards the cost of the "Madhya Pradesh Skills Development Project" and it intends to apply part of the proceeds of this financing to the payment under the Contract Package named above. Bidding is open to Bidders from eligible source countries of ADB.

2. The Project Director, Madhya Pradesh represented by The Director ("the Purchaser") invites sealed bids from eligible Bidders for the Procurement of RAC LAB Equipments for 6 ITIs including installation and commissioning at the Industrial Training Institutes.

3. National Competitive Bidding will be conducted in accordance with ADB's Single-stage: Two-envelope bidding procedure and is open to all Bidders from eligible countries as described in the Bidding Document.

4. To obtain further information and inspect the bidding documents, Bidders should contact: The Project Director, Madhya Pradesh Skills Development Project, Directorate of Skill Development, 1st Floor, Global Skills Park- City Campus, ITI Campus Govindpura, City: Bhopal, District: Madhya Pradesh ZIP code: 462023 Country: India, Telephone & Fax: 0755-2986606, Email: proc.mpsdp@gmail.com

5. To purchase the bidding documents in English, eligible Bidders should write or visit at the office of the Purchaser at address stated above and pay a non-refundable fee of INR 5,000 in the form of Bank Demand Draft. In case of written request, the document will be sent by post and no liability will be accepted for loss or late delivery.

6. The eligible bidders may otherwise purchase the bidding document in English language by downloading the document from the website <http://mpspdp.mp.gov.in>. Such bidders shall be required to submit INR 5,000 with their bid in the form of Bank demand draft in the name of the Project Director, Madhya Pradesh Skills Development Project, Directorate of Skill Development, Bhopal towards the cost of purchasing the bidding document following provisions in the bidding document (Section 2: Bid Data Sheet, ITB clause 11.2(1)).

7. Deliver your bid to the address above or before the deadline: 09.02.2021 at 13:30 hrs. (IST) together with a Bid Security as described in the Bidding Document.

8. Bids will be opened on 09.02.2021 at 14:00 hrs. (IST) in the presence of Bidders representatives who like to attend.

9. The Purchaser will not be responsible for any cost or expenses incurred by the bidder in connection with the preparation or delivery of bids.

G-17374/2021

Directorate of Skill Development

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राजस्थान राज्य प्रशासन के पास नियमित कार्यालय / Ministry Owned by Government of India

राजस्थान राज्य प्रशासन के पास नियमित कार्यालय / Ministry Owned by Government of India

CIN NO : U22213DL2006G0144763

MARKET WATCH

	PRICE	CHANGE
Sensex	48,438	-0.54
US Dollar	73.17	-0.08
Gold	50,969	-0.66
Brent oil	53	-1.98

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	499.45	0.55
Asian Paints	2793.85	40.15
Axisc Bank	664.45	39.75
Bajaj Auto	3492.65	-29.80
Bajaj Finserv	8820.85	-77.90
Bajaj Finance	5119.00	-97.20
Bharti Airtel	514.00	-3.10
BPCL	392.00	-3.35
Britannia Ind	3551.10	-1.80
Cipla	827.25	-5.00
Coal India	135.15	-2.10
Divis Lab	3842.10	-20.15
Dr Reddys Lab	5286.90	14.65
Eicher Motors	2674.90	19.20
GAIL (India)	129.30	-1.30
Grasim Ind	961.30	-3.15
HCL Tech.	991.35	10.95
HDPC	2651.85	73.35
HDPC Bank	1426.70	10.70
HDPC Life	713.75	17.90
Hero MotoCorp	3067.20	23.35
Hindalco	250.30	-4.00
Hind Unilever	2450.55	24.05
ICICI Bank	537.25	5.55
IndusInd Bank	921.65	23.80
Infosys	1293.80	5.55
Indian Oil Corp.	93.00	-0.85
ITC	211.45	-1.95
JSW Steel	395.25	-7.85
Kotak Bank	1959.75	-5.80
L&T	1306.30	-8.30
M&M	740.10	-9.00
Maruti Suzuki	7655.45	-46.85
Nestle India Ltd.	18558.25	180.30
NTPC	97.60	-1.45
ONGC	94.95	-2.00
PowerGrid Corp	188.00	-0.45
Reliance Ind	1966.10	-24.75
SBI Life	905.55	-5.85
State Bank	281.75	0.70
Shree Cement	23895.50	-138.70
Sun Pharma	603.45	-0.95
Tata Motors	193.20	1.90
Tata Steel	680.55	-12.45
TCS	3093.00	53.55
Tech Mahindra	1003.85	1.90
Titan	1570.95	20.05
UltraTech Cement	5341.20	14.00
UPL	471.25	-1.90
Wipro	406.30	-9.90

EXCHANGE RATES

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	72.98	73.30
Euro	89.62	90.02
British Pound	99.19	99.63
Japanese Yen (100)	70.98	71.29
Chinese Yuan	11.29	11.34
Swiss Franc	82.93	83.30
Singapore Dollar	55.35	55.60
Canadian Dollar	57.30	57.56
Malaysian Ringgit	18.16	18.26

Source: Indian Bank

IN BRIEF



Audi unveils latest A4 sedan at ₹42.34 lakh

MUMBAI German luxury carmaker Audi on introduced the latest version of Audi A4 sedan in India at a starting price of ₹42.34 lakh ex-showroom. The fifth-generation sedan boasts of a new design and a more powerful 2.0-litre petrol engine, the company said. Balbir Singh Dhillon, head of Audi India, said, "We are confident that the new Audi A4 will be a game-changer in the arena."

Learning app Practically raises \$4 mn to expand

HYDERABAD Learning app Practically has raised \$4 million in a pre-Series B round led by deep tech investor Siana Capital. The funding will be used for expanding operations. Existing investors YourNest Venture Capital and Exinity Ventures also participated in this round. "Our expansion plan includes establishing a footprint pan-India in the next 12 months," co-founder and COO Charu Noheria said.

Orial unveils Elaria nano soaps to fight COVID-19

KOCHI Kerala-based soap makers Orial Imara has introduced 'Elaria' nano soaps in tablet strips for travellers to fight COVID-19. Each soap weighs about 2 gm and is enough for one hand wash, according to Jaber KC, MD. The product is available in supermarkets and drug stores across Kerala and Karnataka. It will now be taken to other markets in the South while export to Qatar had already begun.

DICV onboards women to boost diversity

CHENNAI Daimler India Commercial Vehicles (DICV) has onboarded 46 women workers for shop floor operations at its Oregadam plant as part of its 'Divein' (Diversity & Inclusive) initiative to boost diversity for a more inclusive workforce. "Diversity is critical to the long-term success of any organisation. At DICV, we're promoting inclusivity by welcoming women to our factory" said Satyakam Arya, MD and CEO.

CM
YK

Surging stocks boost MF assets to ₹29.7 lakh cr. in Dec. quarter

SBI MF tops list, with average assets under management worth ₹4.56 lakh crore

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI Mutual fund asset base rose by 7.6% to ₹29.7 lakh crore in the quarter ended December, mainly on account of the rally in equity markets.

The average assets under management (AAUM) of the industry, comprising 45 players, was at ₹27.6 lakh crore in July-September quarter, according to data by Association of Mutual Funds in India (AMFI).

The surge in asset base comes on the back of excellent stock market performance over the last three months, with Nifty 50 rising by 3.15% in October, 12.02% in November and 14.9% in December, Gopal Kavalireddi, head of research at FYERS, said.



There have also been net outflows from mutual funds in the quarter, says an analyst. ■ GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

"The increase in quarterly asset base is majorly due to mark-to-market gains in equity-oriented mutual funds. Markets being at an all-time high has resulted in this, although there have been net outflows in this quarter," said Omkeshwar Singh, head, RankMF at

Samco Securities. Of the 42 operational AMCs, the top four AMCs – SBI MF, HDFC MF, ICICI Prudential MF, Aditya Birla Sunlife MF – continue to dominate and account for 50% of total assets of the mutual fund industry.

With an asset base of ₹4.56 lakh crore, SBI Mutual

Fund continues to be the largest fund house in India during the December quarter. It had an average AUM of ₹4.21 lakh crore in the preceding quarter. This indicates a growth of 8.3% quarter-on-quarter.

HDFC MF, which is at the second position, saw its asset base rising to ₹3.89 lakh crore from ₹3.75 lakh crore in the September quarter.

ICICI Prudential MF came in third with an average AUM of ₹3.8 lakh crore compared to ₹3.6 lakh crore.

Aditya Birla Sunlife MF, has seen its average AUM growing to ₹2.55 lakh crore from ₹2.39 lakh crore. The asset base of Kotak Mahindra MF soared 13% to ₹2.16 lakh crore at the end of the December.

Rising steel prices to impact realty margins'

TMT bar prices higher by up to 40%

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

KOLKATA

A surge in prices of steel products, used in the construction sector, is having an adverse impact on real estate companies as these entities are not in a position to pass on the additional cost to buyers and may see margins shrinking by 4-6%, realtors said on Tuesday.

Steel prices have risen at a time when demand for property is slowly getting back on track with government measures and low interest rates, they said.

Prices of construction steel, or TMT bars, had recently touched ₹45,000 a

tonne in some markets, which was at least 30-40% higher than the rate in the pre-COVID-19 period.

Prices under pressure

"The steel price rise is hurting real estate companies as property prices are under pressure. The additional cost will result in a shrinkage of gross margin by 5-6%", said Bengal Peerless Housing Development Company CEO Ketan Sengupta.

Real estate industry body CREDAI Bengal president Nandu Belani said the spurt in steel prices will reduce margins by 4-5%, which is quite high for the sector.

Insurers to offer standard fire cover

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

HYDERABAD

From April 1, all general insurers dealing in fire and allied-perils insurance business have to offer three standard products designed by Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) covering the risks of dwellings and micro and small enterprises.

This follows the regulator issuing guidelines replacing the Standard Fire and Special Perils (SFSP) policy under in the erstwhile All India Fire Tariff (AIFT) 2001 with the three standard products.

The general insurers would have to mandatorily offer Bharat Griha Raksha, Bharat Sookshma Udyam Suraksha and Bharat Laghu Udyam Suraksha from April 1, according to the insurance regulator.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

Fiat Chrysler Automobiles announced an expansion in the local product line-up at an investment of more than ₹250 million.

The new line-up includes the 2021 made-in-India Jeep Compass, a locally-produced and 'global-first' three-row Jeep SUV as well as the iconic Jeep Wrangler and next generation Grand Cherokee, which would both be locally assembled at FCA's joint venture manufacturing facility at Ranjanagan in Maharashtra.

The products would be on Indian roads by the end of 2022, the company said.

"Our new investment of ₹250 million will give us a competitive edge in multiple segments with our new Jeep SUVs rolling out of Ranjanagan," said Partha Datta, said.

MD, FCA India. "This investment is in addition to the ₹450 million we have already committed to our Indian operations over the past five years."

FCA recently announced its footprint expansion in India with investment in a global digital centre in Hyderabad. It also recently expanded its engineering operations and will create 1,000 new jobs by the end of 2021, it had said.

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"Currently, we enjoy a market share of 2.5% of instant coffee market valued at ₹2,200 crore. We hope to end the current fiscal at 3% and capture 5% by March 2022," he said.

To achieve this, Levista plans to more than double the number of outlets in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka from 42,000 to one lakh units, besides increasing the number of modern trade outlets across the country from 1,000 to 5,000. The firm also plans to enter A.P. and Telangana in the first quarter of FY22.

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Fiat Chrysler to invest ₹250 mn in product line

Plans four new vehicles by 2022-end



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NYSE scraps plans to delist three China telcos

Decision after talks with regulators'

REUTERS

The New York Stock Exchange said on Monday it no longer intends to move forward with the delisting of China Mobile Ltd., China Telecom Corp. Ltd. and China Unicom Hong Kong Ltd.

The exchange said in a statement published on its website that it made the decision "in light of further consultation with relevant regulatory authorities." The NYSE had said last week it would delist the three companies following the U.S. government's move in November to block investment in 31 firms deemed to be owned or controlled by the Chinese military.

Rohit set to pad up at SCG; toss up between Shardul and Saini

Some seniors feel that Saini's pace will unsettle the Aussies; decision on the third fast bowler delayed as the centre strip was covered due to overcast conditions

INDIA IN AUS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
SYDNEY

The Indian team management is weighing its options for the third pacer's slot, with Shardul Thakur and Navdeep Saini in contention, but Rohit Sharma is certain to replace Mayank Agarwal at the top of the order against Australia in the third Test starting here on Thursday.

Matter of time

While Mayank's axing was only a matter of time after seven failures in the last eight Test innings, the choice for the third pacer's slot has got a bit tricky with divergent

opinions emerging on who could fit the role best in the absence of an injured Umesh Yadav.

Raw pace

A few days back, Mumbai seamer and useful lower-order batsman Shardul Thakur was considered a favourite but it is learnt that there are some senior players who feel that Saini, India's fastest bowler by a distance, could be used to unsettle the wobbly Australian batting line-up with his raw pace.

The Indian team had a net session at the overcast Sydney Cricket Ground on the day and all eyes were on Rohit Sharma, who looked pret-

ty comfortable against both pace and spin.

The decision on the third pacer has been primarily delayed because, on Tuesday, the SCG centre strip was covered due to overcast conditions.

Decisive choice

On Wednesday, a look at the strip and the conditions will probably help them make a decisive choice.

If the conditions are overcast and there is a bit more moisture on the surface, then Shardul is expected to be preferred.

If the track is on the flatter side, Saini, with his pace and ability to reverse the old ball, suggested.

could prove to be a handful against a batting order that is struggling to put up even 200 runs on the board.

If Saini plays, it will be his debut in the longest format while for Shardul, it would be like a debut as he couldn't even finish his first over when it was officially his debut two years back.

Third angle

There is a third angle to the pacer's debate and that is T. Natarajan, who has had a meteoric rise in the past four months and is ready to be handed the red cherry in whites as his tweet after Monday's photo-shoot suggested.



No matter what... The Indian team, beset by injury issues, will be determined to repeat the MCG show at the SCG. ■ AP

Rahul out with sprained wrist

He will not be available for the remaining two Tests

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
SYDNEY

India's injury-hit squad suffered another blow on Tuesday when experienced wicketkeeper-batsman K.L. Rahul was ruled out of the rest of the series against Australia with a sprained left wrist.

The right-hander hurt himself while batting in the nets at the Melbourne Cricket Ground during a practice session on Saturday.

India's cricket board said he will "not be available for the remaining two Tests of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy as he will need about three



Setback: K.L. Rahul will return without playing a Test. ■ TWITTER

weeks time to recover completely and regain full strength".

The 28-year-old, who has

played 36 Tests but was left out at Adelaide and Melbourne, will head to the NCA in Bengaluru to recover.

Ganguly to be discharged today

SHIV SAHAY SINGH
KOLKATA

Well-known cardiologist Devi Shetty on Tuesday called on BCCI president Sourav Ganguly and met the team of doctors treating him at a city hospital and announced that the former Indian captain will be discharged from the hospital on Wednesday.

Speaking to journalists at the Woodlands Hospital where Ganguly has been admitted, Dr. Shetty said that the mild heart attack which he suffered has not caused any damage to his heart and will not affect his life style and life span.

"Sourav didn't have any major problem. This is the problem which most Indians experience at some point in time, which is a blockage in the coronary artery. Did he have heart damage? No. He had a blockage and he was getting some discomfort, but at the right time he landed in the right hospital and he had the right treatment," he said.

Williamson completes a double

Nicholls, Mitchell also hit centuries as the Kiwis pile it on

PAKISTAN IN NZ

REUTERS
WELLINGTON

Skipper Kane Williamson smashed his fourth double-hundred while Henry Nicholls and Daryl Mitchell notched up centuries to fuel New Zealand's bid for a 2-0 series sweep in the second and final Test against Pakistan on Tuesday.

Williamson scored 238 and collaborated in a marathon 369-run partnership, a New Zealand record for the fourth wicket, with Nicholls, who made 157 (291b, 18x4, 1x6).



Daryl Mitchell... memorable maiden Test hundred. ■ AP



Kane Williamson... memorable maiden Test hundred. ■ AP

Williamson then allowed Mitchell to complete his maiden Test century (102 n.o., 112b, 8x4, 2x6) before declaring New Zealand's first innings on 659 for six.

Pakistan, which managed 297 in the first innings, finished the day three on eight for one, still 354 behind and staring at an innings defeat at Hagley Oval.

Williamson became the third New Zealand batsman, after Stephen Fleming and Ross Taylor, to score 7,000 Test runs.

Currently the top-ranked

Test batsman, Williamson took a single off Shaheen Afridi to also equal Brendon McCullum's record of four Test double-hundreds by a New Zealand batsman.

SCOREBOARD

Pakistan — 1st innings: 297.

New Zealand — 1st Innings: T. Latham c Sohail b Afridi 33, T. Blundell lbw b Ashraf 16, K. Williamson c Masood b Ashraf 238, R. Taylor c Masood b Abbas 12, H. Nicholls c Shah b Abbas 157, B-J. Watling c Sohail b Afridi 7, D. Mitchell (not out) 102, K. Jamieson (not out) 30; Extras (b-27, lb-8, w-17, nb-12); 64; Total (for six wkt. dec'd. in 158.5 overs): 659.

Fall of wickets: 1-52, 2-52, 3-71, 4-440, 5-452, 6-585.

Pakistan bowling: Afridi 35.5-8-101-2, Abbas 34-11-98-2, Shah 26-2-141-0, Ashraf 28-4-106-2, Masood 2-0-17-0, Gohar 32-0-159-0, Sohail 1-0-2-0.

Pakistan — 2nd innings: S. Masood c Southee b Jamieson 0, Abid Ali (batting) 7, M. Abbas (batting) 1; Total (for one wkt. in 11 overs): 8.

Fall of wicket: 1-3.

New Zealand bowling: Southee 6-4-5-0, Boult 3-2-2-0, Jamieson 2-1-1-1.

IPL 2021: no decision yet on host country

AMOL KARHADKAR
MUMBAI

Irrespective of whether the Indian Premier League's 2021 edition is played in India or the United Arab Emirates (UAE), it is likely to be staged at a limited number of venues.

The Hindu understands that the IPL Governing Council, which discussed various possibilities during its meeting on Monday, decided to wait and watch before finalising the host country for IPL 2021, which is likely to begin in the second week of April.

"The MoU with the Emirates Cricket Board has been signed for the long term, so shifting it to UAE, like in 2020, won't be too much of a hassle," a BCCI insider revealed.

"It will be best to wait for around a month more and judge the possible impact of the pandemic on the IPL."

The governing council, chaired by former India cricketer Brijesh Patel, is learnt to have factored in the possibility of restricting the number of IPL venues in

India, instead of allotting games to the base city of every franchise.

"Yes, that's something that'll need to be looked at. Four or five at the most, ideally to maintain biosecure bubbles, but the franchises will have to be taken into confidence for that," added the source.

Should the venues be limited, the top contenders for staging the tournament include Ahmedabad, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chennai and Kolkata. These venues were under consideration even last year before the pandemic forced the BCCI to move the IPL to the UAE, where it was played at three venues.

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SA gallops to series win

SL IN SA

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
JOHANNESBURG

Dimuth Karunaratne's century could not prevent South Africa from completing a 2-0 series win on the third day of the second Test against Sri Lanka on Tuesday.

Sri Lanka was bowled out for 211 in its second innings. Set to make 67, the hosts sealed victory without losing a wicket.

Karunaratne, the Sri Lankan captain, made 103 after starting the day on 91. His dismissal started a collapse as Sri Lanka lost its last six wickets for 35 runs. Lungi Ngidi took four for 44 and



Lungi Ngidi. ■ AFP

fellow fast bowler Lutho Sipamla ripped through the tail to take three for 40.

SCOREBOARD

Sri Lanka — 1st innings: 157.
South Africa — 1st innings: 302.

Sri Lanka — 2nd innings: D. Karunaratne c Mulder b Nortje 103, K. Perera b Ngidi 1, L. Thirimanne c de Kock b Ngidi 31, M. Mendis c de Kock b Ngidi 0, M. Bhawuk c Mahajab b Nortje 1, N. Dickwella c Bavuma b Ngidi 36, D. Shanaka c Sipamla b Mulder 8, W. Hasaranga b Sipamla 16, D. Chameera c de Kock b Sipamla 0, Vishwa Fernando (not out) 1, Asitha Fernando b Sipamla 0; Extras (b-9, lb-2, nb-2, w-1): 14; Total (in 56.5 overs): 211.

Fall of wickets: 1-1, 2-86, 3-92, 4-109, 5-176, 6-181, 7-190, 8-209, 9-210.

South Africa bowling: Ngidi 15-5-44-4, Nortje 19-2-64-2, Mulder 13-3-52-1, Sipamla 9.5-1-40-3.

South Africa — 2nd innings: A. Markram (not out) 36, D. Elgar (not out) 31; Total (for no loss in 13.2 overs): 67.

Sri Lanka bowling: Vishwa Fernando 4-0-23-0, Asitha Fernando 4-1-20-0, Hasaranga 2.2-0-16-0, Shanaka 3-1-8-0.

South Africa won by 10 wickets to clinch the two-Test series 2-0.

SUDOKU

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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★☆

Solution to puzzle 13137

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TV PICKS

ISL: Star Sports 2 (SD & HD) & Star Sports 3, 7.30 p.m.
Serie A: Sony Ten 2 (SD & HD), 5 p.m. onwards; Sony Six (SD & HD), 7.30 p.m.

IN BRIEF



Becker's former coach Bob Brett passes away

Australian Bob Brett (67), who coached Boris Becker in his standout 1989 season during which he won Wimbledon and the US Open, passed away due to cancer on Tuesday. Brett coached Becker from November 1987 to February 1991. Brett also worked with Johan Kriek, Goran Ivanisevic, Mats Wilander and Marin Cilic. AFP

Al-Attiyah wins third stage of Dakar rally

Qatari driver and three-time winner Nasser al-Attiyah claimed the third stage of the Dakar Rally in Saudi Arabia on Tuesday, holding off the challenge of French arch-rival Stephane Peterhansel. AFP

Riya Bhateria bows out

Two-time National champion Riya Bhateria lost 6-2, 6-1 to Irina Feteacu in the first round of the \$565,530 WTA tennis tournament here on Tuesday.

The results:

\$565,530 WTA, Abu Dhabi: Qualifying singles (first round): Irina Feteacu (Rou) bt Riya Bhateria 6-2, 6-1.

\$15,000 ITF, Monastir,

Tunisia: First round, men: Paras Dahiya bt Alessandro Bega (Ita) 7-5, 2-0 (retired); **Women:** Zeel Desai bt Hanna Bougouffa (Fra) 6-4, 1-6, 6-2.

\$15,000 ITF men, Cairo: First round: Faisal Qamar bt Dimitri Voronin (Rus) 6-4, 5-7, 7-5; **Doubles (pre-quarterfinals):** Maxence Beauge & Mathieu Perichot (Fra) bt Aryan Goveas & Dhruv Sunish 6-3, 6-4.

Ings' strike leaves Klopp's men red-faced

Defending champion has now gone three games without a win



Match-winner: Southampton's Danny Ings fires in the lone goal in the encounter against Liverpool on Tuesday. ■ AP

EURO LEAGUES

ASSOCIATED PRESS
SOUTHAMPTON

Liverpool slumped to a second loss of its title defence in the English Premier League after a second-minute goal from former player Danny Ings earned Southampton a 1-0 win on Monday.

The champion has gone three games without a win – after back-to-back draws against West Bromwich Albion and Newcastle – and leads on only goal difference from Manchester United, which has played one game fewer.

Ings, who had an injury-plagued spell at Liverpool from 2015-18, lifted a shot over goalkeeper Alisson Becker and into the far corner after latching onto a free kick by James Ward-Prowse.

From then, it was attack vs. defence but Southampton held firm, meaning Liverpool failed to score in successive games for only the second time in Jurgen Klopp's five-year tenure.

Gomez bails out Valencia In LaLiga, forward Maxi Gomez equalised late (79th minute) for Valencia to draw with Cadiz 1-1 at home on Monday. Anthony Lozano had given the visitors the lead in the 58th minute. Cadiz improved to 10th in the standings, and Valencia to 17th.

The results:

Premier League: Southampton 1 (Ings 2) bt Liverpool 0.

LaLiga: Valencia 1 (Gomez 79) drew with Cadiz 1 (Lozano 58).

to sixth place. Four points separate Liverpool from seventh-place Everton, with 10th-placed West Ham seven points off the lead after nearly half of the campaign.

Lacking the cutting edge Indeed, such has been Liverpool's lack of cutting edge of late that Klopp's team has managed just seven shots on target in the past three games.

The Saints with this impressive win have moved up

from ninth to eighth.

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