

SHORT TAKES

Delhi's minimum temp rises slightly, air quality 'severe'AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 27

The minimum temperature in the national capital rose slightly on Sunday under the influence of a Western Disturbance affecting the upper Himalayas, according to the India Meteorological Department. The Safdarjung Observatory, which provides representative data for the city, recorded a minimum of 6 degrees Celsius as against 4.6 degrees Celsius on Saturday. However, Kuldeep Srivastava, the head of the regional forecasting centre of the IMD, said the relief will be short-lived. The WD will lead to "scattered to fairly widespread" snowfall in Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand. After the wind system withdraws, cold and dry northerly/northwesterly winds from the western Himalayas will bring the minimum temperature in north India down by three to five degrees Celsius, the IMD said. "Cold wave to severe cold wave conditions are likely in isolated pockets over Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, UP and north Rajasthan from December 28-29. Ground frost and dense fog is likely in isolated pockets in the region," it said. For the plains, the IMD declares a cold wave when the minimum temperature is 10 degrees Celsius or below and is 4.5 notches less than normal. On Sunday last, the Safdarjung Observatory, which provides representative data for the city, recorded a minimum of 3.4 degrees Celsius, the lowest this season so far. Delhi's air quality turned "severe" again on Sunday as high moisture content due to light rains in neighbouring areas made pollutants heavier, weather department officials said.

1 dead, 2 injured in road accident in Nehru PlaceAGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 27

A 55-year-old man was killed and two others were injured in a collision between a tempo and a truck in south-east Delhi's Nehru Place area on Sunday, police said. Police were informed about the accident on Sunday morning, they said. Both the vehicles were found crashed on the Nehru Place flyover towards Kalka Ji temple, police said. "Subedar, a resident of Neb Sarai, was found stuck in damaged cabin of the tempo. He was sent to the AIIMS where he was declared brought dead," deputy commissioner of police (Southeast) R.P. Meena said. Jaichand and Samsheer, who were also travelling in the tempo, were sent to hospital in an injured condition. Police said the truck driver had parked his vehicle on the road in a negligent way, causing danger and obstruction in the line of navigation, resulting in the collision, they said. A case under relevant sections has been registered based on the statement of an eyewitness, police added.

1 killed, some others injured in group clash in TrilokpuriAGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 27

A man was shot dead while some others were injured when two groups clashed with each other after a shop employee was beaten up. Police said that the incident took place on Saturday in East Delhi's Trilokpuri area and several rounds were fired between the groups, who are also neighbours. The deceased has been identified as Shahid. According to Jasmeet Singh, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), East district, the clash took place at around 10 PM on Saturday when Kasim and Shahid, belonging to one group, and the other faction led by Mannan clashed over the issue of beating up of a shop employee. "Bullets were fired by both the groups and some people were injured in the firing. They have been admitted to a hospital. Shahid succumbed to his injuries during the treatment," said the DCP. "A case under relevant sections of Indian Penal Code (IPC) has been registered and there is no communal angle involved in the incident," said the DCP.

Farmers stay put at Delhi borders amid harsh chill

Toll-free movement of vehicles in Haryana till our demands are met: Farmers' unions

SANJAY KAW
NEW DELHI, DEC. 27

Thousands of farmers agitating against the three new Central agriculture laws stayed put at their agitations venues near Delhi, which is going through a harsh spell of winter, unrelenting in their demand of withdrawal of the legislations. Intensifying their agitation against the new agriculture laws, farmer Unions, on Sunday, announced that they will continue to allow toll-free movement of vehicles on highways in Haryana until the Centre accepts their demands.

Initially, farmers said no toll fee would be collected on highways for three days from December 25. But with a large number of people taking to the highways daily to stage protests at toll plazas, the agitators have now decided to make it free for an indefinite period.

The farmer Unions said they will also hold a 'tractor march' from Singhu border on Wednesday if the government does not talk of repealing the farm laws during proposed talks on Tuesday.

The farmer Unions on Saturday decided to resume their dialogue with the government and have proposed December 29 as the date for the sixth round of talks to resolve the deadlock over the Centre's three farm laws.

So far, five meetings held between Union ministers and farmer groups have remained inconclusive. As the stir against the agriculture reform laws entered its fifth week, Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, who has been backing the farmers' stir, along with his deputy Manish Sisodia, visited the Guru Tegh Bahadur Memorial, just metres away from Singhu protest site, to attend 'Safar-e-Shahadat' Kirtan Darbar organised by the AAP government.

Mr Kejriwal said he has

► **ADVOCATE AMARJIT Singh** from Jalalabad in Punjab's Fazilka district was found on the Tikri border after reportedly consuming poison and was taken to a hospital in Rohtak where doctors declared him dead on arrival

not met a single NDA leader who can explain how the agriculture laws can help the farmers. Addressing the farmers at the border, Mr Kejriwal said that it is being alleged that the farmers are being misled.

"I would suggest they (Centre) send their tallest leader, who knows about the laws, to debate with the farmers," he said.

He reiterated that the farm laws will only benefit the corporates.

"The Centre says your land will not be taken away. Is this a benefit? Land was always ours. They are not giving any benefit, only saying that you will not incur any losses. Only the corporates will reap its benefits," he added.

Defending the new agriculture laws, defence minister Rajnath Singh said that the Centre never intended to scrap the minimum support price (MSP) and that no 'Mai Ka Lal' could take away land from the farmers even as protests against the agriculture reform laws entered its fifth week.

Targeting the Opposition, Mr Singh, who has been in the forefront of the government's outreach to farmers, said it was unfortunate that those who had zero knowledge about farming were "misleading innocent farmers."

"It's unfortunate that those who don't even know about farming are misleading innocent farmers. This govt. never intended to stop MSP neither will it in the future. Mandis will also be maintained. No 'Mai Ka Lal'

can take away land from farmers." Mr Singh said while addressing a state-level function to mark the third anniversary of the Jai Ram Thakur-led BJP government in Himachal Pradesh.

Meanwhile, a lawyer from Punjab allegedly committed suicide a few kilometres from the site of a farmers' protest on the outskirts of Delhi.

Two protesting farmers—one from Punjab and another from Kaithal in Haryana—died of cardiac arrest at the Tikri-Bahadurgarh border in the past 36 hours. Nine farmers have so far lost their lives at Tikri border and seven of them died of either cardiac arrest or other ailments.

Advocate Amarjit Singh from Jalalabad in Punjab's Fazilka district was found on the Tikri border after reportedly consuming poison and was taken to a hospital in Rohtak where doctors declared him dead on arrival.

In a purported suicide note, Amarjit Singh said he was "sacrificing his life" in support of the farmers' agitation against the Centre's new farm laws so that the government is compelled to listen to the voice of the people. He wrote that common people like farmers and labourers are feeling "defrauded" by the three "black" agricultural laws and asked Prime Minister Narendra Modi to "listen to the voice of the people."

The police said it is verifying the authenticity of the suicide note dated December 18.

Earlier, at least two suicides have been linked to the farmers' stir, underway at various border points of Delhi for over a month now. A 65-year-old Sikh preacher, Sant Ram Singh, allegedly committed suicide near the Singhu border protest site earlier this month claiming that he was "unable to bear the pain of the farmers."



Workers of a roadside eatery are seen in front of a mural representing awareness against the coronavirus, painted on a wall in New Delhi on Sunday. — AFP

Delhi records 757 fresh Covid-19 cases, positivity 1%

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 27

Delhi recorded 757 fresh Covid-19 cases and 16 more fatalities due to the disease on Sunday, even as the positivity rate stood at 1.01 per cent, authorities said.

The city's infection tally mounted to 6,22,851 and the death toll reached 10,453, they said, adding that over 75,210 Covid-19 tests were conducted on Saturday.

On Monday, 803 coronavirus cases were reported. A total of 939 cases were recorded on Tuesday and 871 on Wednesday.

However, 1,063 cases were reported on Thursday. The number again dropped to 758 on Friday and 655 on Saturday, the lowest in over four months.

The 757 fresh cases on Sunday came out of the 75,210 tests conducted the previous day, including 40,742 RT-PCR tests and 34,468 rapid antigen tests, according to the latest bulletin issued by the

Delhi health department. On August 17, the national capital had recorded 787 Covid-19 cases. The city had reported 652 coronavirus cases on August 16.

The tally of active cases in the national capital dropped to 6,713 on Sunday from 6,921 on Saturday.

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

According to the bulletin, of the total number of 18,774 beds in COVID hospitals, 16,246 are vacant.

The Delhi government has significantly ramped up testing in the past few weeks, with the count crossing the 60,000-mark several times.

The number of tests done per million as on Sunday was over 4.39 lakh, while the total number of tests stood at over 83.5 lakh.

The bulletin said 6,05,685 patients have recovered, have been discharged or have migrated from the city so far.

Saibaba denied woollen cap, other items in Nagpur jail, says lawyer

Nagpur, Dec. 27: The lawyer of former Delhi University professor G.N. Saibaba, who is serving life term in the Nagpur Central Prison for Maoist links, on Sunday alleged that the jail authorities refused to accept a woollen cap and several other items that his family sent to him.

A senior official of the jail, however, said that although they have accepted all the necessary things that Saibaba requires, they cannot allow everything inside.

Saibaba is wheelchair-bound with 90 per cent physical disabilities. In 2017, a court in Maharashtra's Gadchiroli had convicted him and four others for Maoist links and for indulging in activities amounting to waging war against the country. Since his conviction, Saibaba has been lodged at the Nagpur jail.

Talking to a news agency, Saibaba's lawyer Aakash Sarode said that of the 34 different things that Saibaba wanted, the prison authorities accepted only 13 items when he



G.N. Saibaba

went there three days ago to hand them over.

"A month ago, Prof. Saibaba had consulted with the jail authorities about the essential things that he requires and which can be brought from outside. Subsequently, he made a list of the things and submitted an application to the jail authorities so that his family could send those articles," Mr Sarode said.

"Accordingly, his family sent those things to me. On December 24, I went to the jail with all the material along with the list of items. I tried to hand over these things to the authorities. However, the jail

► **SAIBABA IS** wheelchair-bound with 90 per cent physical disabilities. In 2017, a court in Maharashtra's Gadchiroli had convicted him and four others for Maoist links and for indulging in activities amounting to waging war against the country. Since his conviction, Saibaba has been lodged at the Nagpur jail.

► Talking to a news agency, Saibaba's lawyer Aakash Sarode said that of the 34 different things that Saibaba wanted, the prison authorities accepted only 13 items when he went there three days ago to hand them over.

staff refused to accept several things, which neither pose any security threat nor any danger of Covid-19 spread," he said.

Some of the things that the authorities refused to hand over to him were three books, a pack of 200 pages of blank white papers, a note pad, a copy of 'India Today' magazine, and a wrist cuff weighing 1 kg that he needs as part of his physiotherapy, the lawyer said.

"Similarly, a shampoo bottle, a woollen cap (monkey cap), a napkin, a handkerchief, a towel, and a white T-shirt were refused by the jail authorities. In all, there were 34 items, but only 13 were accept-

ed," Mr Sarode added. He said he has e-mailed a letter to the superintendent of the jail about refusal to accept these things.

"I am yet to receive a reply from him," Mr Sarode said.

When contacted, superintendent of Nagpur prison Anup Kumre said that all the necessary things required by Saibaba or any other jail inmates were allowed and given to them as per the jail manual.

"We always accept the things which are necessary and are essential for him. However, we cannot allow everything inside," Mr Kumre added. — PTI



Farmers beat utensils during a protest against the Central government's recent agricultural reforms at Ghazipur along the Delhi-Uttar Pradesh border on Sunday. — AFP

Farm laws: Kejri ignores Tiwari's invite, BJP leaders repeat request

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 27

The BJP on Sunday sought to corner Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal for opposing the new farm laws with the party leaders Aadesh Gupta and Manoj Tiwari asking the AAP chief to fix a date and place of his choice where the "benefits of the legislations" could be explained to him.

This comes after Kejriwal ignored Tiwari's Saturday's invite to his residence on Mother Teresa Crescent Road to clear his "doubts" on the laws. Tiwari said he was waiting for the chief minister at his residence at 3 pm on Sunday.

After the chief minister did not come, Tiwari told the media the AAP leader should either stop "misleading people" on the farm laws or accept his invitation.

Gupta, who was also with Tiwari at his residence, said since the Delhi chief minister could not come to the BJP MP's residence, he may select any place and time where the benefits of the three legislations could be explained to him.

Kejriwal on Friday claimed the Centre's new agricultural reform laws will not benefit farmers in any way and do a lot of harm.

"The BJP says that these laws will not harm farmers. But what is their benefit? They say that now the farmers will be able to sell their crop anywhere outside the market. But outside the market, the crop is sold at half the price. How is this a benefit? The truth is that these

Farmers camping at Delhi borders not on holiday, seek answers from govt: Mollah

New Delhi, Dec. 27: Farmers camping at various Delhi borders are here not for a "holiday" but to seek answers from the Centre to their grievances, farmer leader Hannan Mollah said on Sunday as he criticised the government for a lack of response to their proposal for talks on December 29.

Farmer groups protesting against the Centre's three farm laws have proposed a meeting with the government at 11 am on December 29, but they are yet to receive any response from the government, he claimed. Previously, five rounds of talks between the farmer unions and the government have failed to break the deadlock.

"Thousands of farmers who are bearing the winter chill and have gathered



Hannan Mollah

told them when, where and what of the meeting, there is no response from them. Now, it is for the people to decide who are liars. We acknowledge that there cannot be a resolution without a dialogue with the government," the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) general secretary said.

Mollah said the farmer unions have proposed four specific talking points for the December 29 meeting — the government stating the procedure for repeal-

ing three farm laws, procedure to make minimum support price (MSP) for crops a legal right, release of Punjab farmers arrested in pollution-related cases, and repeal of the Electricity Amendment Bill.

"While there is no response from the government, they are busy pushing an agenda on the movement which was never ours to start with. Out of the 500 organisations which are part of the farmer struggle, around 10-11 would be Left-leaning. They want the people to believe that crores of people are responding to the call of the Left parties? If this were true, then we would have a revolution," the 76-year-old leader, who is also a CPI(M) politburo member, said. — PTI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has explained the benefits of the new laws and senior BJP leaders including Union Home Minister Amit Shah and national president J.P. Nadda have repeatedly assured that the MSP regime and the Mandi system will continue.

Farmers from various parts of the country have been camping at different border points of Delhi for over four weeks now to demand repeal of the three agri laws, which were voted through in Parliament in September amid strong protests by opposition parties.

Central govt must earn farmers' trust, say Cong MPs

New Delhi, Dec. 27: Two Congress MPs from Punjab on Sunday said the Centre should withdraw the recent stubble burning ordinance and the Electricity Amendment Bill before its next round of talks with protesting farmer unions so that the dialogue to end the stalemate over three agri-marketing laws can progress smoothly.

The government must earn trust of the protesting farmers, said parliamentarians Ravneet Singh Bittu and Jasbir Singh Gill who have been staging a sit-in at Jantar Mantar here for three weeks now in solidarity with the ongoing agitation.

Farmer groups protesting against the Centre's three farm laws have proposed a meeting with the government at 11 am on December 29. Previously, several rounds of talks between the farmer unions and the government have failed to break the deadlock.

— PTI

SHORT TAKES

SHOPIAN FAKE ENCOUNTER: CASE ON ARMY OFFICER

Srinagar, Dec 27: Police have filed a chargesheet against three men, including an Army officer, in the Shopian “fake” encounter case of three civilians in July, officials said on Sunday.

The 1,400-page chargesheet was filed in the court of principal district and sessions judge, Shopian on Saturday by the head of the Special Investigation Team (SIT), the officials said. Captain Bhupinder of the Army’s 62 Rashtriya Rifles, Bilal Ahmed Lone and Tabish Nazir were named as accused in the chargesheet for their role in the alleged fake encounter killing of the three men hailing from Rajouri District, they added.

A police spokesperson said the court has issued an order, giving an option to the Army under the relevant sections of law for a trial of Captain Bhupinder alias Major Basheer Khan in a criminal court of ordinary jurisdiction or court martial. The spokesperson said during investigation, it came to light that a conspiracy was hatched by the accused captain and civilians Nazir and Lone to abduct the three civilians and stage the encounter.

“They deliberately and purposefully chose not to follow SOPs, planted illegally-acquired weapons and material on their bodies after stripping them of their identities and tagged them as hardcore terrorists in possession of war-like stores, deliberately providing false information to colleagues and seniors,” he said.

The information obtained from the accused led the SIT to recreate the scenes of the crime, including the routes used after meeting the victims and the place where they were killed, the spokesperson said.

EX-MAYOR IS BJP’S KOLKATA ZONE OBSERVER

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, DEC. 27

More than 16 months after his induction to the BJP, former Trinamul Congress minister and former Kolkata Mayor Sovan Chatterjee has finally got a post in the saffron party ahead of the Assembly Election in West Bengal.

The Behala East MLA, a former confidante of TMC supremo and chief minister Mamata Banerjee who had held three Cabinet portfolios apart from being the city mayor when he was in the ruling party, has been appointed as an observer of the Kolkata Zone of the BJP.

His close friend Baishakhi Banerjee has also been given the post of co-convenor under Mr Chatterjee, a Narada sting accused, in the same wing of the party along with former TMC students’ wing chief Shankudeb Panda and BJP leader Debjit Sarkar.

Ajit Das was appointed as the state chief of the OBC Morcha, MP Locket Chatterjee as the observer of the Kisan Morcha, Mafuja Khatun as the Minority Morcha observer and Raju Banerjee as observer of the Yuva Morcha.

The duo had joined the BJP in New Delhi on August 14 last year. But a spat with the state BJP leadership kept them at bay till they met union home minister Amit Shah during his two-day West Bengal tour on November 5-6. Later Mr Chatterjee asserted that he never quit the BJP while indicating of his return to mainstream politics.



Women and children shout slogans as they take part farmers ongoing agitation over new farm laws, at Tikri border in New Delhi on Sunday

— PTI

■ Telecom services hit as protesters damage 176 telecom towers since Saturday Punjab CM’s appeal fails to stop farmers

Chandigarh, Dec. 27: (PTI) Punjab chief minister Amarinder Singh’s appeal to protesting farmers to not damage telecom infrastructure seems to have failed to deter new attacks, with more than 176 signal transmitting sites being vandalised in the last 24 hours, sources said on Sunday.

While firms belonging to billionaires Mukesh Ambani and Gautam Adani do not procure foodgrains from farmers, the narrative that new farm laws are to benefit them has made them easy targets, with protesting farmers in different places in Punjab having vandalised and damaged Reliance Jio towers, snapping connectivity.

As many as 176 towers have been damaged since Saturday, two sources with direct knowledge of the matter said.

This has taken the total number of telecom tower sites damaged to 1,411, they said.

Incidents of snapping of power lines to attempts to axe the towers have been reported from different parts of Punjab, one of the sources said. “Site managers are slapped and abused for trying to persuade protesters from damaging sites,” he said.

The second source said the telecom towers damaged belong to Jio and common access infrastructure of telecom industry.

The attacks have impacted telecom services and operators are struggling to maintain services in absence of action by law enforcement agencies, the source said.

The Punjab chief minister had on Friday appealed protesting farmers to not cause inconvenience to the general public with such actions and continue to exercise the same restraint as they had shown over the past several months of their agitation.

“Pointing out that telecom connectivity had become even more critical for people amid the Covid pandemic, the chief minister urged the farmers to show the same discipline and sense of responsibility which they had been exercising during their protest at the Delhi border, which has completed one month, and also earlier during their agitation in the state,” a statement issued by the chief minister’s office had said.

Urging the farmers to not

Nadda shares Rahul video to slam Cong on farm laws

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 27

Sharing an old video of Rahul Gandhi’s speech in Lok Sabha in which he seems to be advocating the need for farmers to get rid of middlemen and sell their produce directly to industry, BJP president J.P. Nadda on Sunday accused the Congress leader of playing politics over the ongoing farmers’ protest.

“What is this magic happening, Rahulji? You are opposing now what you had advocated earlier. You have nothing to do with the country’s or farmers’ interests. You have to play politics only. But this is your bad luck that your hypocrisy will not work. People of the country and farmers have recognised your double standards,” the BJP president tweeted in Hindi along with the video clip.

● **FARMER UNIONS** are alleging that these laws will weaken the existing government’s support for the farm sector which has been vehemently denied by the Centre.

● **MR GANDHI** charged that farmers and labourers of Amethi and 10-12 districts of Uttar Pradesh have been fighting for a food park, which the government had denied saying the park never had land.

The Congress and some other Opposition parties are backing the protest against the three agriculture-marketing laws which give cultivators an option to sell their produce directly to private players.

Farmer unions are alleging that these laws will weaken the existing government’s support for the

farm sector which has been vehemently denied by the Centre.

In the video, Mr Gandhi, then an MP representing Amethi parliamentary seat in Uttar Pradesh, can be heard saying that a farmer in UP had asked him to explain the “magic” behind a packet of potato chips costing ₹10 while farmers sell potato for ₹2 per kg. When he asked what they thought was the reason for this, the farmer said factories are located very far from them and if they could sell their produce directly there, they will get all the money without middlemen earning any cut.

Mr Gandhi charged that farmers and labourers of Amethi and 10-12 districts of Uttar Pradesh have been fighting for a food park, which the government had denied saying the park never had land.

Cong, SAD slam BJP for calling farmers Naxals

Chandigarh, Dec. 27: Punjab chief minister Amarinder Singh on Sunday launched a scathing attack on the BJP over the malicious and derogatory terms allegedly used by its senior leaders against protesting farmers.

Mr Singh asked the BJP to stop maligning farmers and their genuine fight for justice by using offensive terms like urban Naxals, Khalistanis, hooligans etc. If the BJP cannot distinguish between anguished citizens fighting for their survival and terrorists, militants and hooligans, it should give up all pretence of being a people’s party, the chief minister said in a statement here.

A party which treats citizens exercising their democratic right of protest as Naxals and terrorists has lost all right to rule over those citizens, he added. The Shiromani Akali Dal too condemned the BJP for allegedly terming Punjab

farmers as urban Naxals.

It is reprehensible that the Punjab BJP unit has fallen so low that it is calling Punjab farmers urban Naxals. This insult is intolerable and I advise the BJP’s Punjab unit to take back this slur inflicted on the annadaata’ immediately and apologize for the same. SAD senior leader and party’s ‘Kisan Wing’ president, Sikandar Singh Maluka said in a statement here.

He said the Punjab BJP should not try to label hard-working farmers of the state simply because they had protested against the anti-farmer statements of its leaders.

Chief minister Singh hit out at BJP general secretary Tarun Chugh over his alleged description of Punjab farmers as “urban Naxals”.

Mr Singh said with these remarks, the BJP leadership had hit a new low in its desperation to promote its political agenda. — PTI

Lawyer from Punjab commits suicide

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA
NEW DELHI, DEC. 27

A lawyer from Punjab who was protesting with farmers allegedly died by suicide on Sunday a few kilometres from the site of a farmers’ protest on the outskirts of Delhi near Tikri border area.

Amarjit Singh from Jalalabad in Punjab’s Fazilka district was found on the Tikri border after reportedly consuming poison and was taken to a hospital in Rohtak where doctors declared him dead on arrival, the police said.

In a purported suicide note, Amarjit Singh said he was “sacrificing his life” in support of the farmers’ agitation against the centre’s new farm laws so that the government is compelled to listen to the voice of the people.

He wrote that common people like farmers and labourers are feeling “defrauded” by the three “black” agricultural laws

and asked Prime Minister Narendra Modi to “listen to the voice of the people”.

The police said they are verifying the authenticity of the suicide note, dated December 18.

We have informed the relatives of the deceased and once they reach here, their statements will be recorded and further proceedings will be conducted,” a police officer from Haryana’s Jhajjar district told a news agency, adding that they were informed

about the suicide by the hospital authorities.

Earlier, at least two suicides have been linked to the farmers’ stir, underway at various border points of Delhi for over a month now.

Thousands of farmers from Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and some other states have been protesting at various border points of Delhi against the three agricultural laws adopted in September.

Enacted in September, the three farm laws have

entirely on online education, but also hampering the daily life of people working from home due to the pandemic,” the statement had quoted the chief minister as saying.

The chief minister’s appeal came in the wake of a request from the Tower

been projected by the central government as major reforms in the agriculture sector that will remove the middlemen and allow farmers to sell anywhere in the country.

However, the protesting farmers have expressed apprehension that the new laws would pave the way for eliminating the safety cushion of Minimum Support Price and do away with the mandi system, leaving them at the mercy of big corporates.

Infrastructure Association (TAIPA), a registered body of telecom infrastructure providers, asking the state government to persuade the farmers to not resort to any unlawful activity in their fight for justice.

— PTI

RAHUL GANDHI FLIES ABROAD FOR SHORT PERSONAL VISIT

New Delhi, Dec. 27: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi left for abroad on Sunday for a short personal visit, the party said.

Though the Congress did not disclose Gandhi’s destination, the chief spokesperson of the party, Randeep Surjewala, confirmed that he will be away for a few days.

“Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has left for abroad for a short personal visit and will be away for a few days,” he told PTI.

Asked where was the former Congress chief headed, Surjewala did not disclose the details. Sources said Gandhi left for Milan in Italy on a Qatar Airways flight in the morning.

His grandmother stays in Italy and he visited her earlier too.

Gandhi’s travel abroad comes a day ahead of the Congress’s 136th Foundation Day celebrations on Monday. The flag of the party will be hoisted at the All India Congress Committee (AICC) headquarters on the occasion.

— PTI

INDIA RECORDS LOWEST COVID CASES IN SIX MONTHS

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 27

India on Sunday recorded the lowest daily rise in the Covid-19 cases in the last six months as fresh detections dropped to 18,732. The last time fresh cases were around this figure was on July 1. The active cases too have slipped to 2.78 lakh after 170 days. The total active cases were 2.76 lakh on July 10. India’s present active caseload consists of 2.74 per cent of the country’s total positive cases.

Union health ministry said the country has reported a trend of sustained decrease in the number of active cases and there has been a sharp rise in recoveries, taking the Recovery rate to 95.82 per cent. Officials said 72.37 per cent of the new recovered cases are observed to be concentrated in 10 states and union territories. Kerala has reported the maximum number of single day recoveries with 3,782 newly recovered cases followed by West Bengal (1,861) and Chhattisgarh (1,764).

India’s Covid-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 30 lakh on August 23 and 40 lakh on September 5. It went past 50 lakh on September 16, 60 lakh on September 28, 70 lakh on October 11 and crossed 80 lakh on October 29 and 90 lakh on November 20.

Among the new cases 76.52 per cent are concentrated in 10 states and UTs. Kerala reported the highest daily new cases at 3,527, followed by Maharashtra (2,854), Delhi, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana that were reporting a very high number of daily cases are now witnessing a low tide with a sharp drop in Covid-19 daily cases.

Yadav accuses govt of hurting democracy

Lucknow, Dec 27: Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav on Sunday accused the BJP-led state government of hurting the foundation of democracy by dissolving village panchayats without conducting elections for them.

Yadav’s allegation prompted a rebuttal from UP BJP vice-president and party’s in-charge of panchayat elections Vijay Bahadur Pathak who said Yadav had been the state’s chief minister and should know that the panchayat elections could not have been held amid the Covid-19. Pathak also expressed the UP government’s commitment to holding the panchayat elections within six months.

“The BJP government in UP has dissolved the village panchayats without conducting the fresh elections for them. Major elections are being conducted, but the government has been finding itself unable to hold elections of the smallest units of public representation. How will this government run Uttar Pradesh?” Yadav said in a tweet in Hindi on Sunday.

“The BJP must not hurt the foundation of democracy,” the former UP chief minister added in his tweet. Rebutting Yadav’s claims, Pathak told PTI, Akhilesh Yadav had been the chief minister of UP. He should know that elections should have been conducted at the stipulated time. — PTI

BIG HURDLES

Disparity in income limits for open category, tribal category biggest hurdle

SONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC
MUMBAI, DEC. 27

A 21-year-old tribal girl Annie Atram, who wants to pursue higher education abroad through a government scholarship scheme, namely ‘National Overseas Scholarship for higher studies’, is running from pillar to post of Maharashtra’s secretariat (Mantralaya) to prove her eligibility for the scheme from last three months.

According to her father, who is a senior official in Mantralaya, the disparity between the income limits of open category and trib-

al category is the biggest hurdle for getting the benefit of the scheme for tribal community. State agriculture minister Dada Bhuse has recommended her name to the tribal minister for the scheme in October 2020, but even that has not helped her.

As per the government resolution (GR) issued by the tribal development department, the income of the candidate’s family should be less than ₹6,00,000 (Rupees six lakhs) for the overseas education. But as per the GR issued by the higher and technical education

department, the income limit for open category is ₹20 lakh (₹ 20 Lakh). The disparity between the income limits for open category and tribal community caused a hurdle for the tribal girl in pursuing of higher education in abroad. The girl’s family hails from Gadchiroli district and earns more than ₹6 lakh per year.

Ms Atram wrote a letter to K.C. Padavi, minister of tribal development department urging him to treat her case as a special case her family can’t afford the expense of her education abroad.

“Forceful disruption of telecom services due to snapping of power supply to mobile towers by farmers in several parts of the state was not only adversely affecting the studies and future prospects of students, who are dependent

Deccan Chronicle is in possession of her letter in which she has stated, “I have fulfilled the main criteria of the said GR but the income criteria is the hurdle in my overseas education. My family is native from Gadchiroli district which is a remote and naxal affected area. I have completed my B.Tech (four years of Bachelor of Technology) in Textile. I have applied to North Carolina State University (NCTU) for Master of Science in Textile. This university is a public school, has QS world ranking of 295, and is well known for Master

of Science in Textile, and this field comes under Engineering (STEM-Science, Technology, Engineering and Math). The University has approved my admission for fall 2021 (August 2021) in Master of Science in Textile.”

“Since I come under ST category, there is a National Overseas Scholarship, in which I am interested. For this, I have appeared for GRE and TOEFL. I have secured a preliminary offer of admission, and I have passed my B.Tech with first class distinction, which makes me an exemplary student. But

I am an independent student and I can’t afford the expenditure in the said university. With all due respect, my father too cannot afford the expenditure state by NCSU for a year is approximately \$ 50,000 USD,” she said in the letter. The student also requested the tribal development minister to remove the barrier of income and consider her for this scholarship on basis merit.

Ms Atram also questioned the rationality behind the different yardstick of income for overseas studies for students of open categories and ST categories.

IN BRIEF

MP: Man dies after assault, 6 booked

Shivpuri, MP: A 50-year-old man who suffered internal organ injuries last month after a group of six people allegedly pumped air into his anus with a compressor machine pipe has died, leading to the suspension of two policemen for dereliction of duty on Sunday, an official from Shivpuri in Madhya Pradesh said. The family of Parmanand Dhakat has claimed he died on December 25 after the manager of a crushing unit, identified as Rajesh Rai, and five of his men, on November 8, inserted the compressor machine pipe in his anus and released air, the police said. The incident took place in Ghazigarh village and Dhakat, a labourer, was taken to Gwalior and Jaipur for treatment before being brought back to the district hospital here where he died of internal organ injuries. — PTI

2 die in temple fire in Mumbai

Mumbai: Two people died and one was injured in a sudden fire that broke out at a temple at Kandivali, in suburban Mumbai on Sunday morning. The incident took place around 4am at Sai Baba Temple, but the cause of fire is still not known. Even though the fire was doused within few minutes, two persons lost their lives in the incident and the third person has received serious burn injuries. The deceased have been identified as Subhash Khode (25) and Yuvaraj Pawar (25). While the third person identified as Mannu Gupta (26) has received 90-95 per cent burn injuries and is currently undergoing medical treatment at Sion Hospital. However, his condition is said to be critical. According to disaster management cell officials, the exact cause of fire is not known but a short circuit might have started the fire.

RAJINI LEAVES HOSPITAL AFTER HEALTH IMPROVES

Hyderabad: Superstar Rajinikanth was on Sunday discharged from a hospital here, where he was treated for blood pressure fluctuation, after his condition improved, authorities said. "His blood pressure has been stabilised and he is feeling much better. In view of his improved medical condition, he has been discharged from the hospital today," a bulletin from Apollo Hospitals said. The 70-year-old actor was admitted to the hospital here on December 25 with severe hypertension and exhaustion, it said. He was kept under close medical supervision and treated by a team of doctors. In addition to medications and diet, Rajinikanth has been advised complete bed rest for one week with regular monitoring of blood pressure, minimal physical activity and to avoid stress in view of his post-transplant status, labile hypertension and age. The *Kabala!* star has also been counselled to avoid any activity that increases the risk of contracting Covid-19. Rajinikanth is in the Telangana capital since December 13 to shoot for his next Tamil film, *Annaatthe*, a Sun Pictures production. He isolated himself after four of the crew members tested Covid-19 positive days ago. The superstar, however, tested negative. The actor is set to launch his own political party next month ahead of the 2021 Tamil Nadu Assembly elections. — PTI

PM urges people...

■ Continued from Page 1
Delhi, demanding that the farm laws, passed in September, be scrapped. After five rounds of talks between the farmers and the Centre failed, the Supreme Court ordered that a committee be formed to address the issue. "We do not think that the farmers will accept your conclusions. Let the committee decide," the top court has told the Centre.

In his last *Mann ki Baat* on November 29, three days after the farmers started their Delhi Chalo protest, Mr Modi had spoken of farm laws and the advantages they bring. "After a lot of deliberation, the Parliament of India gave a legal form to the agricultural reforms. These reforms have not only served to unshackle our farmers but also given them new rights and opportunities," he said,

BJP MP snubs Shah for delay in CAA, may quit

Matua community leader questions Covid-19 excuse

AGE CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA, DEC. 27

Launching a fresh salvo against his party over the delay in the implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), Bongaon BJP MP Shantanu Thakur has questioned Union home minister Amit Shah for offering the ongoing Covid-19 as the reason for putting off the exercise, a key promise of the saffron party to the refugees. Thakur, the BJP face among the Matua community and the voice of the sizeable community of Hindu migrants in West Bengal, argued that had the Covid-19 pandemic been such a hurdle then the Assembly elections should not also have been held in Bihar.

Thakur, the All India Matua Mahasangha joint president, said, "I do not think that the CAA has any relation with the Coronavirus. Was there any link between them in Bihar Assembly polls?"

His target was the Union home minister who, during his last state tour a week ago, said, "The CAA rules are yet to be made. Such a big exercise can not be undertaken now because of Covid. When the vaccine drive will get underway, we will definitely give it a thought."

Giving a veiled threat that he would mount pressure on the Centre for the CAA, Thakur indicated that he may quit the BJP, in a stand that appears to

TMC 'admits' chit scam in slamming ex-min Adhikari

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC
KOLKATA, DEC. 27

Abhishek Banerjee, Diamond Harbour TMC MP and West Bengal Chief Minister's nephew, appeared to have scored two self goals on Sunday when he alleged that newly-inducted BJP leader Shubhendu Adhikari had a role in swindling money in the multi-crore Saradha chit fund scam and in the Narada sting operation case.

"An opportunist leader, who has sold his spine after defecting from the TMC, attacked me from his Midnapore rally with a slogan: *Tolabaj Bhaipo Hatao* (remove extortionist nephew). It is you who was caught in the Narada case for taking money wrapped in paper. Your name features in the

🗣️ Your name features in the Saradha case too. You are Tolabaj (extortionist) while you are shouting *Tolabaj Bhaipo Hatao!*

— ABHISHEK BANERJEE
Diamond Harbour MP slamming BJP leader Shubhendu Adhikari forgetting he was in TMC earlier

Saradha case too. You are *Tolabaj* (extortionist) while you are shouting *Tolabaj Bhaipo Hatao!*" Banerjee said at a party rally in his Lok Sabha constituency.

Banerjee claimed, "I am neither involved in the Saradha nor in the Narada case. Neither the CBI nor the Enforcement Directorate can do anything to me." Banerjee's attack on Adhikari backfired on the ruling Trinamul as the latter was

spell sign for the saffron party four months ahead of the election.

Thakur, the grandson of Matua matriarch, the late Binapani Devi, added, "If the CAA is not implemented, I will continue to be with the greater community of refugees including the Matuas and Namasudras irrespective of

where I stand."

His aunt and former TMC MP of Bongaon Mamatabala Thakur however said, "Riding the support of an organisation and section of Matuas he contested the election earlier. He had then claimed to make our Thakurbari free of politics. But now the BJP has realised that

in Mamata Banerjee's party and came under the central agencies' scanner for his alleged links when the two high-profile cases had unfolded.

In the Saradha case, Adhikari faced questioning by the CBI and ED for his suspected role but he was never arrested or chargesheeted though the chit fund company owner Sudipta Sen's reference to him despite the TMC's claims of political vendetta by the BJP against its leaders in the scam.

In the Narada case, nearly a dozen TMC leaders including Adhikari was booked and chargesheeted by the CBI after they were caught on tape during a sting operation allegedly taking cash.

To save its face, the ruling party had then claimed that its leaders were taking a "donation."

The Matuas have started deserting them. That is why it is not putting the CAA in place. Shantanu is nowhere in the BJP. He is a zero in the party. A mere exit from the party will not be enough. He must quit his MP post to convince us that he has done something in reality for the Matuas."

Bengaluru awash in rainbow colours



Supporters and members of LGBT community during Karnataka Queer Pride rally 2020 in Bengaluru on Sunday. — PTI

ITBP jawans can buy liquor online

New Delhi, Dec. 27: A first-of-its kind Internet-based liquor distribution system has been launched for the serving and retired personnel of the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) force guarding the LAC with China.

The paramilitary force launched the centralised liquor management system (CLMS) sometime back as a solution to the problem of non-availability of the desired liquor brands to its personnel and veterans residing in remote locations.

Paramilitary forces like the ITBP are authorised to get liquor under government rules and this is the first time such an online system has been introduced among these forces that includes the CRPF, BSF, CISF and SSB and other central forces like the NDRF and the NSG.

"There was a long-standing demand of the ITBP personnel that good quality liquor should be made available to them in the vicinity of their native places." "Till now, the system allowed jawans and

officers to purchase authorised liquor only from canteens of the formations/units where they are posted and there was no system which could enable them to take the liquor from the canteens of other units of the force even if that was based near their native place or home town," a senior officer of the force explained.

ITBP chief S.S. Deswal recently launched the CLMS whose link is available at the official website of the mountain-warfare trained force.

Centre extends validity of DL, vehicle registration till Mar. 31

New Delhi, Dec. 27: The union transport ministry on Sunday extended the validity of motor vehicle documents like driving licence (DL), registration certificate (RC) and permits till March 31, 2021, in view of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

The ministry of road transport and highways (MoRTH) had earlier issued advisories dated March 30, 2020, June 9, 2020 and August 24, 2020 in connection with extension of validity of documents related to Motor Vehicles Act, 1988 and Central Motor Vehicle Rules, 1989.

"The Union ministry of Road Transport and Highways has extended the validity of vehicular documents like DLs, RCs, permits etc till March 31, 2021 in the light of need to

● **ENFORCEMENT AUTHORITIES** are advised to treat such documents valid till March 31, 2021, the MoRTH said, adding that "this will help out citizens in availing transport related services, while maintaining social distancing"

prevent spread of Covid-19. The ministry has on Sunday issued a directory to the states and Union Territory administrations in the regard," a MoRTH statement said. Earlier through various notifications, it was advised that the validity of fitness, permit (all types), licence, registration or any other concerned document(s) may be treated to be valid till December 31, 2020. The latest advisory says,

"Taking into consideration the need to prevent the spread of Covid-19, it is further advised that the validity of all of the above referred documents may be treated to be valid till March 31, 2021. This covers all documents whose validity has expired since 1st February, 2020 or would expire by March 31, 2021."

Enforcement authorities are advised to treat such documents valid till March 31, 2021, the MoRTH said, adding that "this will help out citizens in availing transport related services, while maintaining social distancing". "All the states and union territories have been requested to implement this advisory in letter and spirit so that the citizens." — PTI

MP Assembly session put off after 61 staff, 5 MLA test +ve

Bhopal, Dec 27 (PTI) The winter session of the Madhya Pradesh Assembly, which was scheduled to begin on December 28, has been postponed in view of the "Covid-19 situation", an official said on Sunday, hours after protem speaker disclosed that 61 employees and officials of the Assembly secretariat and five MLAs have tested coronavirus positive.

The decision to put off the three-day session was taken at an all-party meeting held here in evening, he said. "The three-day session has been postponed due to

the COVID-19 situation. The three days (of the session which will be now washed out) will be added in the Budget session, which would be a lengthy one."

Legislative Assembly's Principal Secretary AP Singh told reporters.

The all-party meeting was attended by Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, Home Minister Narttam Mishra, state Congress unit president Kamal Nath and others.

Meanwhile, former Union minister Arun Yadav said the Congress will continue to hold protests against the three

farm laws passed by the Centre.

The Congress had earlier announced that the party leaders will reach the Assembly campus on Monday on tractors to protest against these laws.

Earlier in the day, Assembly Protem Speaker Rameshwar Sharma told reporters that 61 employees and officials of the state Assembly secretariat have tested coronavirus positive so far. "Besides, five MLAs were also found infected as per the reports received till now," he said, after taking stock of the preparation for the session. — PTI

Fadnavis alleges Maha policies aid few realtors

SONU SHRIVASTAVA
MUMBAI, DEC. 27

BJP leader Devendra Fadnavis has written a letter to Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray regarding government policies drafted to help the real estate sector.

The opposition leader in Maharashtra Assembly said the state government policies rolled out to help the real estate sector and mitigate the impact caused by Covid-19 pandemic are only helping a few real estate developers to gain. Asking the CM to take remedial steps, Mr Fadnavis said he will file a PIL in the high court if the CM fails to act.

In his letter to the chief minister, the BJP leader alleged that on the pretext of reviving the real estate sector, the government is safeguarding the interest of few private people leading to loss of the thousands of crores from the state exchequer. Therefore, the government should immediately give a stay on the policy.

The letter said that in a bid to revive the real estate sector, a committee headed by Deepak Parekh (co-founder of HDFC Ltd.) was formed to suggest measures to revive the ailing real estate sector. "The Parekh committee had recommended few things to the Maharashtra gov-



Devendra Fadnavis

ernment. But certain selected recommendations are being implemented. While adopting such approach, what impact would it have? Nobody has thought of it. The state will face the loss, while few selected private people would benefit," he said.

"It seems that certain vested interests have colluded for the purpose of extending benefits to a few handful parties at the expense of State exchequer. I must state here that the actions of the State Government must be free from the vice of arbitrariness and must conform to Article 14 of the Constitution of India," the letter reads.

Mr Fadnavis said that he has always supported steps taken to boost the demand during pandemic and decisions like rationalisation of stamp duty rates, Ready reckoner rates and Premiums is a necessary step. However, under the garb of reduction for rationalisation, windfall gains cannot be allowed to a handful few, he said.

FINAL REPORT 5 months ago on, CBI yet to find reasons behind death

Maha seeks SSR death cause from CBI

SHAHAB ANSARI
MUMBAI, DEC. 27

Maharashtra home minister Anil Deshmukh on Sunday urged the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to reveal if Bollywood actor Sushant Singh Rajput's death was a suicide or murder. It has been five months since the investigation was handed over to the CBI and people still don't know if the actor's death was a suicide or murder.

The state minister said this while addressing a press conference in Nagpur.

● **ANIL DESHMUKH** said it is now more than five months since the investigation began but the CBI has not revealed if Sushant Singh Rajput was murdered or died by suicide.

● **HE ALSO** requested the CBI to reveal the findings of its investigation into the case as he was being questioned by people about the progress

dental death report and they were probing the case. However, on August 19, the Supreme Court had upheld the transfer of an FIR, lodged by Rajput's father at Patna in Bihar against the actor's girlfriend Rhea Chakraborty and others for allegedly abetting his suicide, to the CBI.

Anil Deshmukh said that it has been more than five months since the investigation began but the CBI has not revealed if Sushant Singh Rajput was murdered or died by suicide. He also said, "I request CBI to reveal the

findings of the investigation at the earliest."

Deshmukh said he was being questioned by people on what the outcome of the CBI investigation has been so far. "The people of Maharashtra and the country are eagerly awaiting the CBI's report...People ask me about the status of the case," he said.

In October, the medical board of the New Delhi-based All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) had ruled out murder in the death of Rajput, terming it "a case of hanging and death by suicide".

THE ASIAN AGE

28 DECEMBER 2020

Challenge to Vodafone ill-advised, withdraw it

Just a day after India lost its case against the UK-based oil major Cairn Energy Plc at an arbitration court at The Hague over nearly ₹9,000 crore in past taxes, the Indian government announced its decision to challenge the tribunal's verdict in nearly ₹22,000-crore worth retrospective tax case against Vodafone Plc.

In both cases, the central government's tax demands emerge from an amendment introduced by then finance minister Pranab Mukherjee to the Income Tax Act. The legislation was aimed at plugging a loophole in the Income Tax Act, which allowed Hutchison Whampoa to avoid paying ₹ 7,990 crore in capital gains tax while transferring its Indian telecom business to Vodafone in May 2007.

Months later, the government held Vodafone liable for its failure to deduct tax at source from the payment that it had made to Hutchison. The Bombay high court favoured the government, while the Supreme Court upheld Vodafone's interpretation. However, the United Progressive Alliance government amended the law, empowering officials to levy tax with retrospective effect on any foreign transaction that resulted in direct or indirect transfer of an asset located in India.

In 2018, Arun Jaitley, the finance minister of the day, categorised the retrospective taxation as an erroneous decision

The result of the amendment was that Vodafone had overnight become of one of the biggest tax defaulters in the country. The legislation attracted harsh criticism inside and outside the country. The Bharatiya Janata Party, the prime Opposition of the day, was the harshest critic of the retrospective taxation, though it did not vote against the amendment in Parliament.

In 2018, Arun Jaitley, the finance minister of the day, categorised the retrospective taxation as an erroneous decision. Given Jaitley's official stand, it was expected that the BJP government would graciously accept the awards of the arbitration court and consider the matter to be closed. However, the government — despite its claims of being investor-friendly — continued to keep the issue alive by opting for an appeal, which does no good for the country's image.

A stable and predictable policy framework is the bedrock of a good investment climate. While it was obvious that Hutchison and Vodafone had attempted to avoid paying tax by effecting their deal in a foreign country, the government must recognise the difference between tax avoidance and tax evasion. Tax avoidance using loopholes in the law is legal, while tax evasion is not. The Vodafone case is clearly an issue of tax avoidance that emerged from poor drafting of the income tax law 50 years ago. The country should, therefore, not seek to penalise investors for the follies of our past administrators. As a country that is governed by the law, India cannot be seen overriding the judgement of its own apex court, regardless of the reason and provocation. More importantly, India should stop living in the past and look ahead to the future, especially when the country is seeking to position itself as the world's factory.

A step forward, two back

Two young women, both second year degree students, represent two faces of Kerala today. Arya Rajendran, the 21-year-old daughter of an electrician and an LIC agent, will be anointed the mayor of the capital city today. Her election is a foregone conclusion as the CPI(M), her party which leads the Left Democratic Front, has a comfortable majority in the council. She is all set to become the youngest mayor in the country. It's not for want of others that the LDF chose a student; the LDF has 25 other women councillors there. In so doing, the party was acknowledging the role of the youth brigade that it fielded in the local bodies' election in weathering the anti-incumbency factor and the impact of the incessant, and often one-sided, media scrutiny. Ms Rajendran is a dyed-in-the-wool Communist, having joined Balasamgham, the children's organisation of the CPI(M), at five. At present, she heads it, and is sure to bring that experience to address the issues that plague the city.

Contrast her experience with that of Haritha, wife of Aneesh. Aneesh was hacked to death by Haritha's father and uncle on Friday. Unable to stand the "horror" of their daughter becoming the wife of a man whose caste and economic status came a notch below theirs, the patriarchs, in their early forties, did away with the young man even before his marriage had lasted 90 days. It is not the first time that honour killing had claimed the life of a young person in the state: it was in 2018 that a dalit boy, Kevin, was killed by his wife's relatives for similar reasons.

Kerala has a history of more than a century of fighting social and economic oppression. The young mayor represents its success and the young widow the work left unfinished. The state must take it forward aggressively now, lest it slips back into the madhouse that it once was.

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Subhani



Kashmir looks ahead at a winter of discontent



A.S. Dulat

James Baldwin once wrote: "It comes as a great shock to discover that the country which is your birthplace and to which you owe your life and identity has not in its whole system of reality evolved any place for you."

Such is the plight the Kashmiri considers himself in.

Kashmir has been frozen for some time and desperately needs thawing. Chillai Kalan, the harshest part of winter, has just begun, but Kashmir has been freezing since late November. An old friend who called from Srinagar a month ago said Kashmir was frozen not only on the ground but emotionally as well. Kashmiris, he said, were in deep contemplation but no one knew, or no one could tell, what they were thinking. Sounding defeated, he said Kashmir may now remain in perpetual winter bereft of its seasons.

Another Kashmiri friend, a liberal businessman who spends more time out of the Valley than in Srinagar, said in frustration the Kashmiris could not easily get over the abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution.

The recently concluded District Development Council elections may provide a silver lining. Kashmir can always change overnight. Election results rarely, if ever, satisfy everybody in J&K; such is its arithmetic, but the recent results have been almost, perfect providing an opportunity for peace, reconciliation, and resolution. Predictably, the BJP dominated Jammu, and the People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration

(PAGD) the Kashmir Valley. The BJP's three seats in the Valley are significant, but the PAGD's 35 in Jammu even more so. The National Conference again demonstrated that it was the only party with a significant following in both the Jammu and Kashmir divisions of the erstwhile state. The polarisation of Jammu and Kashmir on a religious basis was dangerous as the scholarly Balraj Puri had warned in his relentless pleading for regional autonomy.

Democracy has, in a sense, as Union home minister Amit Shah said, "been revived in J&K", but democracy can only flourish, as Mufti Mohammed Sayeed was wont to say, with a level playing field, without buying and selling, bullying and locking up. The leprechaun cannot easily replace the towering Sher-e-Kashmir in the Kashmiri psyche. New Delhi must demonstrate accommodation, grab the opportunity, and break the lockjam in Kashmir.

Notwithstanding the political rhetoric across the board, Article 370 is not the issue, done and dusted on August 5, 2019, and left only for the Supreme Court to sanctify its burial. It was, in any event, a hollow provision at best, a fig leaf to assuage Kashmiri pride whose erosion had begun as far back as August 9, 1953 with the arrest of Sheikh Abdullah. Sheikh Sahib, who had steadfastly stood for peace and reconciliation, had himself endorsed the mainstreaming of Kashmir with the 1975 Accord. When the Hurriyat Conference leaders agreed to talks with then deputy prime min-

Dr Farooq Abdullah remains the key to peace in Kashmir. The Sphinx must solve his own riddle.

ister Lal Krishna Advani, in early 2004, it was virtually the beginning of the end of separatism. What Kashmir needs is peace, justice, honour and dignity.

Former Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, whose birth anniversary was celebrated last Friday, believed that we needed to move forward in Kashmir and end the permanent confrontation with Pakistan.

Force has never worked in Kashmir, nor has our muscular policy since the abrogation of Article 370. Terrorism has increased; almost 200 local boys mainly from South Kashmir have joined militancy in the last one year, not for *azaadi* or Pakistan but in the name of Allah. These figures are higher than any time since 2007. Pakistan too is back fishing once again in the troubled waters of Kashmir.

The security forces have suffered substantial losses. Suicide and fratricide among the forces, particularly the CRPF, who are in the thick of the anti-terror war, has grown due to stress, duress and trauma due to long-term duties in unfamiliar surroundings.

There is no other way but dialogue and a revival of the political process. Getting the mainstream political parties on board is the primary requirement for achieving peace in J&K today. The establishment of the PAGD makes political sense for Kashmir and also provides an opening for the Centre. How long the three main parties — National Conference, People's Democratic Party and People's Conference — stick together, only time will tell. Kashmiris normally do not, and a crack

or two are already visible. However, it is in New Delhi's interest that they do to further the political and democratic process.

Togetherness would have virtually been impossible without the initiative and resoluteness of the "Big Man". Sadly, New Delhi has never tried to understand Dr Farooq Abdullah, nor does he make it easy for anyone to do so. Earlier, it was his openness which puzzled Delhi, now it is his determination. As a senior colleague in the PAGD said: "Doctor Sahib in his new avatar is like a man possessed, in whose sincerity no one can doubt." Recently, when the Enforcement Directorate threatened to attach his properties, Dr Abdullah, echoing James Baldwin, said, "I will not bow; I will do what I have to." Yet, when he was released from detention on March 14, people who spoke to him would vouch that Farooq bore no ill will and was gracious enough to admit that his meeting with the Prime Minister a couple of days before August 5, 2019 went unbelievably well. Dr Farooq Abdullah has always stood by India, dedicating himself as a bridge between Srinagar and New Delhi but during his last visit to Delhi, somewhat disillusioned, Farooq said: "What is there to talk now, they call me a thief?"

Yet Dr Farooq Abdullah remains the key to peace in Kashmir. The Sphinx must solve his own riddle. There is no one half his stature in the political spectrum in J&K. Statehood assured to the people in Parliament needs to be restored, rather than a carrot kept dangling. And then, hopefully, as in 1996, Assembly elections in October-November next year may pave the way for peace.

Amarjit Singh Dulat is a former chief of the Research and Analysis Wing, India's external intelligence agency

LETTERS

HANDING OUT SOPS

It was good to read that the prime minister, Narendra Modi, has released ₹18,000 crore to over nine crore farmer families under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi programme. This seems to indicate that he is concerned about the farmers' good. However, it is still a mystery why he is unable to accept their demands. The farmers have been protesting against the new agriculture reform laws in bitter cold. They are not unaware about what they are doing; if they are risking their lives in the harsh winter. Some protesters have already lost their lives.

M.N. Alam
Saharanpur

MAGNIFICENT AJINKYA

NO PRAISE is too high for stand-in skipper Ajinkya Rahane on scoring a magnificent century — the first in the series — in the second Test against Australia in Melbourne. Debutant Shubman Gill, Rishabh Pant and Ravindra Jadeja also threw their weight around to put India in the driver's seat. The gutsy performance comes on the back of the visitors being skittled out for their all-time low of 36 last week. Rahane also earned laurels from former stars for his tactical nuance, which helped India bowl out the Aussies for 195.

N.J. Ravi Chander
Bengaluru

TURNCOATS

BJP LEADER and MP Sunil Mondal, who had switched over from the Trinamul last week, on Saturday faced protests by the workers of the ruling party in West Bengal when he was going to an office of the saffron camp in Kolkata. Surprisingly, senior Trinamul MP Sougata Roy justified the attack saying it was people's anger against the turncoats.

Sankar Paul
Chakdaha, West Bengal

₹500 for the best letter of the week goes to Arun Malankar (Dec. 26). Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

Faizan Mustafa



By not letting Assembly meet, did Arif fulfil governor's role?

Historically speaking, the governor's office has been there in India since antiquity. Though loyalists were always appointed as governors, still most governors in ancient and medieval times, in fact, revolted against the Centre and declared themselves as independent. British governors were the most loyal servants of the imperial government and governors of free India preferred to follow the path of their immediate predecessors. Arif Mohammad Khan, just like other governors of the Indian republic, seems to care more for the interests of central government than the Constitution, though under Article 159 of the Constitution he has taken the oath to preserve, protect and defend it. Be refusing to convene the Kerala Assembly session, he has yet again crossed the *lakshman-rekha*. Subsequently, like a true statesman, in an extremely polite letter, he has clarified that since there is nothing like an emergency session, he had to decline the request. He has also emphasized the importance of 15 days' notice. Such technicalities do not deserve much importance as the governor's acting on the advice of government is a constitutional mandate. Last

month itself, he himself assented to a controversial ordinance without even exercising his right to seek reconsideration. Clearly, he was more concerned about the possibility of the Assembly passing a resolution against central farm laws rather than people's rights.

The Constitution gives no discretion to the governors in the matter of convening the session of the Assembly. Parliamentary democracy being the basic structure of our Constitution, this is the prerogative of the Cabinet though Article 174 does say that the governor from time to time summon the Assembly to meet at such time and place 'he thinks fit'. A few months back, Rajasthan governor Kalraj Mishra, too, behaved in a similar way and delayed the convening of the Assembly session as was recommended by the Ashok Gehlot government. Here, the governor doubted the 'purpose' of convening the session. The governor was strangely coming in the way of the chief minister proving his majority.

Even in the context of the state of Kerala's filing of petition challenging the constitutionality of Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019, Khan had asserted that he is not a rubber stamp and was unhappy

that he was not kept in loop before filing the case. A five-judge bench of the Supreme Court in *Nabam Rebia (2016)* had explicitly observed that the governor of Arunachal Pradesh, Rajkhowa, who had advanced the session of Assembly without the advice of chief minister, had exceeded his jurisdiction as he had no discretion in convening the Assembly session. Article 163(1) does permit governor to act 'in discretion' wherever constitution requires him to act in his discretion. According to Edward Cook, "discretion" is a science or understanding to discern between falsity and truth, between right and wrong, and not to do according to will and private affection. Justice Douglas in *United States v. Wenderlick (1951)* said that absolute discretion is a ruthless master. It is in fact constitutional blasphemy and is more destructive for freedom than any of man's inventions.

The Kerala governor is certainly aware that there are established rules for the exercise of discretion. First, discretion should always be exercised with caution and in a reasonable manner. Second, discretion cannot be exercised under dictation. Thus, in convening

Assembly sessions, the Kerala governor should have ignored it if at all any directive came from Delhi. The Kerala governor has not acted as an independent and impartial constitutional functionary. Third, discretion is to be exercised after proper application of mind. It cannot be exercised for an improper purpose or with bad faith or by taking into account irrelevant considerations. Fourth, discretion cannot be exercised in an arbitrary or whimsical manner. Any action of governor is arbitrary if he has acted on the basis of prejudice or preference rather than on reason or fact. As per the constitution bench judgment in *Nabam Rebia (2016)*, the expression "as he thinks fit" in Article 174(1) gives no "discretion" to the governor in convening the Assembly session.

The moot question is why our governors behave like this. The worst thing which happened to this office is that the governor is the only constitutional authority who has no security of tenure like the President, judges, CAG, chairman, UPSC, Election Commissioner, CIC, etc. He is worse than an IAS officer who under Article 311 is entitled to a proper inquiry and cannot be terminated without a def-

inite finding of 'misconduct'. But the governor remains in office only so long he enjoys the "pleasure of the President" which, in reality, means the pleasure of the political dispensation in Delhi and he can be removed on the whims and fancies of Prime Minister.

This is in spite of the Supreme Court's decision in *Hargovind Pant v. Raghukul Tilak(1979)* where the court held that governor is not an "employee of the central government". He is neither under its control nor accountable to it and is "an independent constitutional office".

Mr Khan is clearly aware that the Kerala Assembly resolution against the controversial farm laws would be far more serious than the resolution against CAA as unlike citizenship on which the Parliament has exclusive jurisdiction, agricultural market is state subject in respect of which Parliament lacks legislative competence. One hopes better sense will prevail and the governor would accept a fresh request for the session.

The writer is a constitutional law expert and currently vice-chancellor of NALSAR University of Law, Hyderabad

SHORT TAKES

TURKEY HIT BY
5.5 MAGNITUDE
EARTHQUAKE

Istanbul, Dec. 27: A 5.5 magnitude earthquake struck eastern Turkey on Sunday, the US Geological Survey said, with initial reports indicating no immediate casualties.

Interior Minister Suleyman Soyulu said there were no reports of material damage or casualties so far.

The USGS said the quake was registered in the Sivrice district in Elazig province at 0637 GMT and struck at a depth of 10 kilometres.

The Turkish government's disaster agency AFAD reported a lower magnitude of 5.3 for the quake.

Turkey is situated in one of the world's most active earthquake zones.

A magnitude 6.8 quake hit Elazig in January, killing more than 40 people.

EIGHT KILLED IN
AVALANCHES
NORTH OF TEHRAN

Tehran, Dec. 27: Eight climbers have died and at least seven others are missing after a blizzard and avalanches hit the mountains north of Tehran, Iranian media reported on Saturday.

"The bodies of eight missing climbers were recovered in the mountains above Tehran thanks to the efforts of Red Crescent rescue teams and operations," said Iranian Red Crescent deputy head, Mohammad Baqer Mohammadi, according to the official IRNA news agency.

A group of mountaineers had gone missing on Friday due to avalanches and a blizzard in the mountains north of Tehran, IRNA reported.

State TV reported seven climbers were missing.

It broadcast footage of a helicopter rescue operation on the Tochal and Kolakchal peaks of the Alborz mountain chain overlooking Tehran showing Red Crescent personnel carrying a body on a stretcher along a snowy mountainside.

THREE KILLED, 3
WOUNDED IN
ILLINOIS SHOOTING

Washington, Dec. 27: Three people were killed and another three wounded on Saturday in the US state of Illinois when a shooter opened fire at a bowling alley, police said.

A suspect in his 30s was in police custody.

Rockford city police urged people on Twitter to stay away from the area near the Don Carter Lanes bowling alley, as it was an "active situation" and officers were clearing the site.

The force posted on Twitter shortly after midnight: "37-year-old white male suspect is in custody. There are no others being sought at this time." "It's still an ongoing investigation. We do have three individuals that are confirmed deceased," police chief Dan O'Shea earlier told a press conference near the scene of the shooting.

He said three other people had been wounded from the gunfire and were being treated at local hospitals.

He did not specify whether the shooter had a motive.

Don Carter Lanes posted a simple message on Facebook after the shooting asking people to "pray please."

2 WOMEN, 3 GIRLS
FOUND DEAD IN
ARKANSAS HOME

Atkins (US), Dec. 27: Two women and three girls have been found dead in a home in northwest Arkansas in what authorities said are being investigated as suspected homicides.

Deputies responded to a call around 5 pm on Friday and found the five people dead in a home in Atkins, a city about 65 miles (105 kilometers) northwest of Little Rock, Pope County Sheriff Shane Jones said in a statement.

The dead were between 8 and 50 years old and are all believed to have been related, he said. Jones said during a short news conference Saturday that authorities did not immediately have a suspect and that at least some of the people were shot. He did not provide further details. "At this time, we believe this to be an isolated incident, and do not feel that there is any continued danger to the local public," he said. "We do believe that this is domestic related, possibly." Deputies are investigating the deaths with the help of the Arkansas State Police. A spokesman for the sheriff's office did not immediately respond to questions.

EU nations roll out vaccine campaign

Europeans unwilling to take vaccine, could impede its effectiveness as it takes months to vaccinate all

Paris, Dec. 27: EU countries on Sunday embarked on a vaccination campaign to defeat the "nightmare" of Covid-19, as the growing spread of a new Coronavirus variant intensified fears the pandemic could wreak further devastation.

The jab is a glimmer of hope for a continent yearning for a return to normal from a pandemic that has killed 1.76 million people worldwide since emerging in China late last year and caused at least 80 million confirmed cases, according to an AFP tally. But polls have shown many Europeans are unwilling to take the vaccine, which could impede its effectiveness in beating the virus, while it will take months for large chunks of the population to be immunised.

"It is with deep pride and a deep sense of responsibility that I got the vaccine today. A small gesture but a fundamental gesture for all of us," said Claudia Alivernini, 29, an Italian nurse who was the first in her country to receive the Pfizer-BioNTech jab Sunday morning.

EU commission chief Ursula von der Leyen hailed the campaign start as a "touching moment of unity and a European success story", even if some European states started a day early on Saturday.

Countries are also showing different strategies in their vaccination targeting, with Italy focusing on health workers, France the elderly and in the Czech Republic the prime minister himself at the front of the queue.

In a sign of impatience, some EU countries began vaccinating on Saturday, a day before the official start, with a 101-year-old woman in a care home becoming the first person in Germany to be inoculated and Hungary and Slovakia also handing out their first shots.

Araceli Rosario Hidalgo Sanchez, a 96-year-old living in a care home in central Spain became the first person in the country to be vaccinated on Sunday, in an event broadcast by national television. She said smilingly she felt "nothing" from the shot.

France began its campaign in care homes for the elderly in the Paris suburb of Seine-Saint-Denis, a low-income area hard hit by Covid-19, with a 78-year-old woman named Mauriceette the first to receive the jab to applause from staff. — AFP

LEBANON SEIZES
8 FOR BURNING
REFUGEE CAMP

Beirut, Dec. 27: Lebanon's army said Sunday it had arrested eight people after a dispute led a group of Lebanese nationals to set fire to an informal refugee settlement in the country's north.

The army said it "arrested two Lebanese nationals and six Syrians over a personal dispute... between a number of Lebanese men and Syrian workers," according to a statement.

"The Lebanese men fired bullets in the air and torched the tents of Syrian refugees," it added, without elaborating on the cause of the altercation.

The fire on Saturday night tore through the tented shelters of some 75 families near the town of Bhanine in the north Lebanon Miniyeh region, leaving only a charred wasteland.

The camp's more than 370 residents were forced to flee, according to the United Nations refugee agency, UNHCR, and at least four people were taken to hospital for injuries.

On Sunday, dozens of refugees returned to the remains of the camp to try to salvage anything that might have survived the blaze.

"I came back to check on belongings inside our small tent only to discover that we no longer own anything," said Amira Issa, a 45-year-old mother of five who fled Syria eight years ago. — AFP



84-year-old Karin Sievers becomes the first to be inoculated with a dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19, virus vaccine by Doctor Dirk Heinrich at the 'Hospital zum Heiligen Geist' retirement home in the northern German city of Hamburg, on Sunday. — AFP

CANADA DETECTS
FIRST COVID-19
VARIANT CASES

Montreal, Dec. 27: The first two cases of a particularly infectious Coronavirus variant that recently emerged in Britain have been confirmed in Canada, health authorities said on Saturday. "The cases are a couple from Durham with no known travel history, exposure or high-risk contacts," Barbara Yaffe, acting chief medical officer for Ontario, said in a statement.

The couple have been placed in isolation, according to the statement, the same day that Ontario reimposed a lockdown for several weeks due to a spike in Covid-19 cases in the province since early December. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said Wednesday his country would prolong its suspension of passenger flights from the UK until January 6 in light of the Coronavirus strain sweeping Britain.

The discovery of two cases in Ontario "further reinforces the need for Ontarians to stay home as much as possible and continue to follow all public health advice, including the province-wide shutdown measures beginning today," said Yaffe. — AFP

Investigators search home
in Nashville bomb probe

Washington, Dec. 27: Authorities searched a house in the Nashville area on Saturday as they probed the large blast that ripped through the downtown of the southern US city on Christmas morning, injuring several people and damaging dozens of buildings.

The operation in Antioch came as US media reports said a 63-year-old "person of interest" had been identified in connection with the explosion, which came from a parked motorhome that blared a warning minutes before it blew up.

Some US media outlets reported Saturday evening that the bomber may have been killed in the blast, but authorities have not officially confirmed anything.

Friday's explosion in historic downtown Nashville, the United States' country music capital, damaged about 40 buildings and injured at least three people, with the streets largely abandoned at that hour.

Authorities were examining tissue found at the blast site that they believe could be human remains.

Police say the blast was

ANCIENT TASTES

Discovery in Pompeii buried under lava when volcano erupted in 79 AD
2,000-year-old fast food shop unearthed

Rome, Dec. 27: A 2,000-year-old fast food stall unearthed from the ash of Pompeii has given researchers new clues about the snacking habits of the ancient Romans.

The ornate snack bar counter, decorated with polychrome patterns and frozen by volcanic ash, was partially exhumed last year but archaeologists extended work on the site to reveal it in its full glory.

Pompeii was buried in a sea of boiling lava when the volcano on nearby Mount Vesuvius erupted in 79 AD, killing between 2,000 and 15,000 people.

Archaeologists continue to make discoveries there. The thermopolium —

from the Greek "thermos" for hot and "poleo" to sell — at what was a busy intersection of Silver Wedding Street and Alley of Balconies, was the Roman era equivalent of a fast-food snack stall.

The team found duck bone fragments as well as the remains of pigs, goats, fish and snails in earthenware pots. Some of the ingredients had been cooked together like a Roman era paella.

Crushed fava beans, used to modify the taste of wine, were found at the bottom of one jar.

The counter appears to have been closed in a hurry and abandoned by its owners — perhaps as

the first rumblings of the eruption were felt — Massimo Osanna, director general at the Archaeological Park of Pompeii, told Ansa news agency.

Amphorae, a water tower and a fountain were found alongside human remains, including those of a man believed to have been aged around 50 and discovered near a child's bed.

"It is possible that someone, perhaps the oldest man, stayed behind and perished during the first phase of the eruption," Osanna told Ansa news agency.

In the latest stage of their work, archaeologists uncovered a number of still life scenes. — AFP



Archaeologists uncovered a number of still life scenes, including depictions of animals believed to have been on the menu, notably mallard ducks and also a rooster, for serving with wine or hot beverages. — AFP

Biden warns over
'devastating' delay
in aid package

Washington, Dec. 27: US President-elect Joe Biden warned on Saturday of "devastating consequences" if President Donald Trump continues to delay signing a Covid-19 economic relief bill passed by Congress.

Biden spoke out as millions of Americans saw their jobless benefits expire after Trump threw a long-awaited pandemic aid package into doubt -- demanding lawmakers more than triple the \$600 direct payments to US taxpayers.

"This abdication of responsibility has devastating consequences. Today, about 10 million Americans will lose unemployment insurance benefits," Biden said in a statement.

The stimulus measure is wrapped up with a \$1.4 trillion funding bill, without which the government will be forced to shut down at midnight Monday.

"In just a few days, government funding will expire, putting vital serv-

ices and paychecks for military personnel at risk," Biden added.

"In less than a week, a moratorium on evictions expires, putting millions at risk of being forced from their homes over the holidays."

In a video late Tuesday, Trump, who is due to leave office in less than a month, called the \$900 million bill "a disgrace" — despite it being passed Monday with a large bipartisan majority after months of negotiation.

The legislation was designed to throw a lifeline to businesses and people struggling to keep their heads above water. — AFP

Israel braces for
3rd virus lockdown

Jerusalem, Dec. 27: Israel was set on Sunday to begin its third Coronavirus lockdown, as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu voiced optimism that a "world record" vaccination drive will restore a degree of normality within weeks.

After a sharp rebound in detected infections, Netanyahu's government announced three days ago that it would re-impose the strict measures that had previously helped limit transmission.

From 5:00pm (1500 GMT) on Sunday, most people will be forced to stay within 1,000 metres of their home. There are a range of exceptions, including seeking medical care, attending legal proceedings or exercising.

A key difference in

Israel's third lockdown compared to previous versions relates to schools, with more students able to attend classes.

Instead of near total closures, Israel is keeping schools open for children under six, as well as grades one to four and teenagers finishing secondary school in grades 11 and 12.

Israel's National Council for the Child criticised the decision to close grades five through 10.

"The decision to ignore this age bracket means the abandonment of hundreds of thousands of children, only because in theory they can be left at home alone while (their parents) go to work," NCC head Vered Windman was quoted as saying by the Ma'ariv newspaper. — AFP

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	46,973.54	1.14
Nifty 50	13,749.25	1.09
S&P 500*	3,700.86	0.29
Dollar (₹)	73.54	0.30
Pound Sterling (₹)	100.01	-1.04
Euro (₹)	89.66	0.29
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	50,030▼119	0.24
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	51.10	-0.10
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.929	-0.003
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.936	-0.019

* As of 9:30 PM IST, Friday

No going back on privatisation of BPCL, Air India

Covid-19 carnage may have slightly pushed back timelines but there is certainly no going back on privatisation of bluechip public sector undertakings like BPCL and Air India. Government officials expressed confidence of completing BPCL and Air India sale in the next few months. The government has put the onus on the top management of CPSEs to increase the market capitalisation of state-run companies.

India's crude steel output up 3.5% in Nov.



India registered a growth of 3.5 per cent in crude steel production at 9.245 million tonne (MT) in November, according to World Steel Association. The country had produced 8.933 MT crude steel during the same month last year, the global industry body said in its latest report. According to the world-steel data, China registered eight per cent year-on-year growth in steel output at 87.660 MT during November.

L&T plans to hire 1,100 engineers across verticals

Larsen & Toubro (L&T) CEO and MD S.N. Subrahmanyam said on Sunday that the company is looking to recruit close to 1,100 graduate and post graduate engineer trainees in 2021 and deploy them across various business verticals. This acquired pool of talent will be deployed in critical roles like business development, strategy, design, contract management, project management among others, he said.

Asus bets on offline, to add 1,000 retail points

Asus is bullish on expanding its presence in offline retail, adding about 1,000 retail points over the next year as it witnesses continuous strong demand in the consumer and gaming segments, said the company's India business head of consumer and gaming PC Arnold Su. The company, which had 7.5 per cent share in the Indian PC segment, has its products available at over 6,000 retail points.

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Centre for biz-friendly laws

Directs ministries and states to reduce compliance burden on businesses

LEGAL MAZE

- Chief Secretaries of all the states have been advised to identify burdensome regulations and ways to reduce that burden for businesses.
- Central ministries and states would have to examine central laws which can be repealed or subsumed or replaced.
- Issues which are being looked into include removing licence renewals, risk-based inspection system, simplification of number of filings, etc

as two laws for Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organisation (PESO), intellectual property rights, and boilers.

cution is involved, can it be relooked. Whether it is necessary to have criminal punishments or civil punishment will also do like penalty or something else," the official added.

Ease of Doing Business rankings released by the World Bank, India stands at 63rd position, which is a great leap from 142nd rank in 2015. In 2015, the government had aimed to break into the top 50 countries in the ease of doing business index by 2020. The country, however, failed to achieve its goal because of lacklustre performance in six of the 10 indicators. According to a report, the government has decided to focus on six laggard segments such as enforcing contracts, registering property and starting a business. Chief Secretaries of all

the states have been advised to identify burdensome regulations and ways to reduce that burden for businesses. The ministries and states would have to examine central laws which can be repealed or subsumed or replaced. Issues which are being looked into for the exercise include removing licence renewals or increasing its periodicity, risk-based inspection system, simplification of number of filings, removal or rationalisation of maintaining registers or records, and minimising or eliminating number of display requirements for licences.

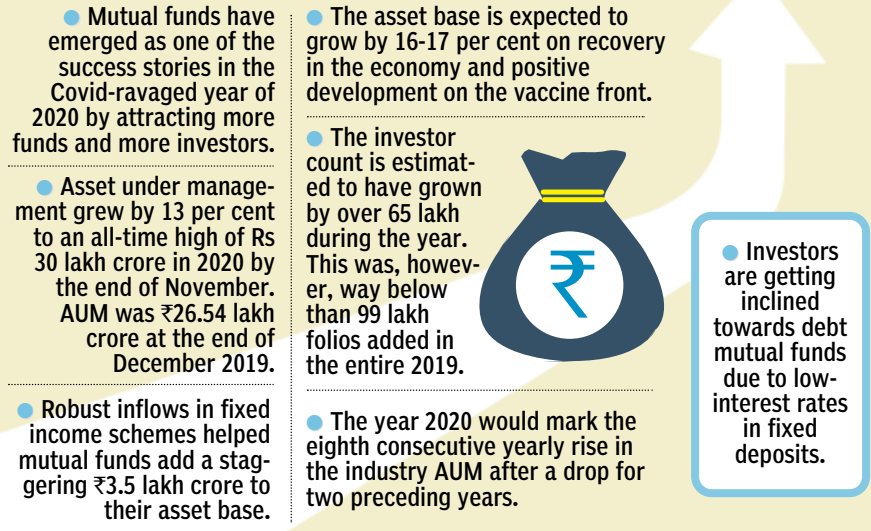
Panel cites PM to reject India's Cairn tax claim



New Delhi, Dec. 27: A three-member tribunal at the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague cited statements by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other ministers pledging not to use retrospective taxation to overturn a ₹10,247 crore tax demand on British oil and gas firm Cairn Energy Plc. The tribunal, in a 582-page judgment on December 21, ordered return of the value of shares that the income-tax department sold as also the dividend it seized and tax refunds it withheld to recover tax demand that was levied following the 2012 amendment to the Income-Tax Act that gave authorities powers to seek taxes on past deals. It ruled that the 2006 reorganisation of Cairn Energy's India business prior to listing on local bourses was not "unlawful tax avoidance" and ordered tax authorities to drop the tax demand. In the order, the tribunal, which consisted of one member appointed by the Indian government, said the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) 2014 "election manifesto criticised the preceding government for having unleashed 'tax terrorism' and 'uncertainty', which 'negatively impact(ed) the investment climate'."

On November 7, 2014, Jaitley, according to the order, insisted that his government had taken a "policy decision that as far as this government is concerned, even though there is a sovereign power of retrospective taxation, we are not going to exercise that power". On January 13, 2015, Jaitley was quoted as saying that the 2012 Amendment had "scared away investors from India" and that "the government had no intention of using the retrospective tax provision". "This view was confirmed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on February 14, 2016. The Prime Minister was quoted in the Financial Times as saying that the government "will not resort to retrospective taxation; we are making our tax regime transparent, stable and predictable", the tribunal said. The income-tax department in 2015 slapped a ₹10,247 crore tax demand on Cairn for alleged capital gains it made in the 2006 business reorganisation. Cairn denied the scheme, avoided any tax that was prevalent on that date and challenged the demand through an arbitration. During the pendency of the arbitration, the government sold the UK energy major's near five per cent holding in Vedanta Ltd, seized dividends totalling ₹1,140 crore due to it from those shareholdings and set off a ₹1,590-crore tax refund against the demand. —PTI

BLOCKBUSTER YEAR FOR MUTUAL FUNDS



Investment in safe haven doubles in pandemic year

SANGEETHA G | DC CHENNAI, DEC. 27

While household demand for gold halved in 2020, the Covid-led uncertainty in the market saw investment demand more than doubling the investment demand. Though the global demand for gold was down to 2,074 tonnes in 2020 against 2,203 tonnes in 2019, the investment demand has more than doubled. In 2020, the demand for gold ETFs, coins and bars zoomed to 1,130 tonnes against 594 tonnes in the previous year, as per the data from Gold Hub. "The Covid-led uncertainties saw investors flocking into exchange traded

funds, gold bonds and gold futures in 2020. Gold was also largely available through the digital channel due to the lock-downs in key markets. Further, surplus liquidity due to economic stimulus also found a way into gold like other asset classes," said Ajay Kedia, the managing director of Kedia Commodities. Gold ETFs saw their holdings touching all-time highs in 2020. Till October, gold ETF flows had grown 24 per cent and holdings in both tonnage and value terms continued to reach new highs. However, the household demand which is largely driven by jewellery halved in 2020 to 572 tonnes

against 1064 tonnes in 2019. This was the lowest jewellery demand in the past several years. The trend was not different in the Indian market. While jewellery demand was down 48 per cent in the September quarter against the year-ago quarter, investment demand was 51 per cent up to 33.8 tonnes. In value terms, investment demand went up by 107 per cent to ₹15,410 crore. Assets managed by Gold ETFs in the Indian market more than doubled in 2020. From ₹5,767 crore at the end of 2019, the AUMs went up to ₹13,239 crore at the end of November 2020, as per the latest data available with AMFI.

RBI paper roots for one inflation metric

Mumbai, Dec. 27: Rural-urban inflation divergence does not persist in the long run and converges over time, and both exhibit a long-term equilibrium relationship, said an RBI article. This convergence of rural-urban inflation supports the relevance of one inflation target as nominal anchor at the national level, said the article prepared by Binod B. Bhoi, Himani Shekhar and

Ipsita Padhi, Department of Economic and Policy Research, RBI. "Rural urban inflation dynamics in India reveals close comovement, with episodic divergences driven by different components food, fuel or ex-food and fuel which do not persist long," it said. Empirical estimates, it said, revealed that the differentials between rural and urban inflation are transient and both exhibit

a long-run equilibrium relationship, with a significant error correction in the short-run. At the state level, urban and rural inflation rates converge over time, the IT said, adding, "these findings support the relevance of one inflation target as the nominal anchor at the national level for both rural and urban areas as well as all states". The RBI said the views expressed in the article

are those of the authors and do not represent the views of the central bank. The article noted that headline Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation witnessed significant and sustained moderation during 2012-13 to 2018-19, before rising thereafter. Both rural and urban inflation exhibited a similar trend with the only difference that urban inflation started rising from 2018-19.

Broadband firms want fair price for spectrum

New Delhi, Dec. 27: Broadband India Forum (BIF), the industry body for broadband service providers, on Sunday said that reasonable reserve prices for spectrum allocated via auctions, rapid proliferation of public Wi-Fi hotspots through WANI framework and forward movement on 5G without any delay are sector issues that need to be prioritised for 2021. Further, rationalisation of high duties and levies will ensure viability of telecom operators and sustainability of services. These key issues along with finalisation of Spacecom and Satcom policies, need to be placed high on policy agenda for the coming year, Broadband India Forum president T.V. Ramachandran said. Earlier this month, the government approved a proposal for the auction of 2,251.25 mHz of spectrum worth ₹3.92 lakh crore at the base price. The ensuing spectrum auctions, slated to be held by March, will not include bands that support 5G services. —PTI

FUTURE | FORWARD

Morgan Stanley says 2021 likely to favour small and midcap firms

Market outlook hinges on five factors in 2021

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD | DC MUMBAI, DEC. 27



After a sharp recovery in the year 2020 from March lows, JP Morgan said five forces are likely to shape the contours of the recovery and asset returns in 2021 — the virus outlook, the policy outlook, the inflation outlook, the market outlook and the dollar outlook. "The path of the virus is unknown, and the economic healing process is likely to be staggered. This kind of uncertainty can cause anxiety around investments. In our view, monetary policy, the fundamental driver of the business cycle, will remain supportive for the foreseeable future. Interest

est rates are likely to stay low until labor markets have fully healed and inflation has at least met, or exceeded, central bank targets," said JP Morgan in its outlook for 2021. "The nascent recovery has already found some momentum, and fiscal stimulus should continue to provide further support. Failure to provide sufficient support is a key risk," JP Morgan said. Morgan Stanley, however, sees growth most likely improving in 2021, favouring smaller firms which have higher operating and financial leverage. Small and mid-cap valuations appear attrac-

tive and could outperform large caps in the next year. "Though earnings growth should be consistently elevated, valuations appear uneven, Covid-19 cases and geopolitical uncertainty appear to be muting investor sentiment. This suggests that the strong growth outlook we are forecasting is not fully priced into the equity markets," Morgan Stanley analysts said. "The bull market environment prevailing in calendar year 2021 could take Nifty-50 to 14,900 levels. However, if market bullishness reverts to average sentiment, the base case fundamental value is 13,500, which indicates flat returns for CY21. If a

risk-off environment materialises, we expect Nifty-50 to touch 11,600 on the downside," said ICICI Securities in its market outlook for 2021. In its economic outlook, ICICI Securities said, "Near-term growth impulses are currently still weak with households preferring savings over consumption, government spending constrained by weak financial resources, and corporate sector deferring capex and cutting opex." "Some of these challenges will reverse in CY21 due to aggregate demand normalising, pent-up demand, and improving resource mobilisation by the government," ICICI Securities said.



SHORT TAKES

GM Harikrishna holds Carlsen

Chennai: Indian Grandmaster P. Harikrishna held world number one and world champion Magnus Carlsen in the fourth round of the preliminary stage of the Champions Chess Tour Airthings Masters online chess championship. Both Harikrishna and Carlsen drew all their four games on the opening day of the tournament as matches ended late on Saturday. The game between Harikrishna and the Norwegian ended in 24 moves after the players repeated the moves. India number two and former world champion Viswanathan Anand had earlier drawn his games with Maxim Vachier-Lagrave, Daniil Dubov and Spaniard David Anton Guijarro. He is in eighth place with two points. Harikrishna will take on Dutch GM Anish Giri in the fifth round followed by games against Alexander Grischuk, Hikaru Nakamura, Ian Nepomniachtchi, Lev Aronian, Wesley So and Teimour Radjabov subsequently. — *PTI*

SA batsmen fight back on Day Two

Centurion, South Africa: South Africa's batsmen scored freely against a depleted Sri Lankan bowling attack as the host nation fought back on the second day of the first Test on Sunday. South Africa were 317 for four at the close in reply to Sri Lanka's first innings total of 396.

Dean Elgar (95) and Aiden Markram (68) put on 141 for the first wicket, while former captain Faf du Plessis (55 not out) and Temba Bavuma (41 not out) added an unbeaten 97 for the fifth wicket as the hosts scored at better than four runs an over. Sri Lanka went into the match without leading fast bowler Suranga Lakmal because of a hamstring strain and suffered a major blow when opening bowler Kasun Rajitha limped off the field with what appeared to be a groin injury after bowling one ball in his third over. — *AFP*

Brief scores: Sri Lanka 396 (Chandimal 85, Shanaka 66*, Sipamla 4-76) vs **South Africa 317/4** (Elgar 95, Markram 68, du Plessis 55 batting).

Man City ease past Newcastle

Manchester: Manchester City secured a routine 2-0 win over Newcastle thanks to goals from Ilkay Gundogan and Ferran Torres to climb to fifth place in the Premier League. Gundogan tucked home a cut-back from Raheem Sterling to score in consecutive home games in the league and put City ahead in the 14th minute. Torres, a winger, was playing as the lone striker in the absence of Gabriel Jesus who has contracted the coronavirus and scored for the second time in the league this season to make it 2-0. He showed a striker's instinct to hold back as Federico Fernandez blocked a cross from the right and the ball arrived at the feet of Torres, who stroked in a finish from eight meters in the 55th. Bernardo Silva struck the post as City threatened more goals in the pouring rain. — *AP*

Kerala grab first win of season

Goa: Kerala Blasters dished out a complete performance as they edged Hyderabad 2-0 to secure their first win of the Indian Super League season here on Sunday. Abdul Hakku's header (29') put Kerala ahead in the first half before Jordan Murray (88') sealed three points for Kibira Vicuna's side. Vicuna rang in five changes to the side that drew against SC East Bengal while Hyderabad made two changes with Liston Colaco returning to the starting eleven.

Live on TV

CRICKET

India vs Australia: Second Test — Day 4 from 5 am (Tuesday) on Sony Ten 1, 3, Sony Six, HD

FOOTBALL

Premier League: Crystal Palace vs Leicester City from 8.30 pm, Chelsea FC v Aston Villa from 11 pm on Star Sports Select 1, HD

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

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JINKLE BELLS!

Ajinkya punches ton, India land second blow in Boxing Day Test

Melbourne, Dec. 27: Ajinkya Rahane played a captain's knock, a workmanlike century that steered India into a dominant position and took the sting out of Australia's potent bowling attack in the second Test here on Sunday.

Trailing 0-1 in the four-match series, India ended the second day at 277 for five for a handy 82-run lead after bowling out Australia for 195.

At stumps, which was brought early owing to rain, Rahane was going strong on 104 and giving him company was Ravindra Jadeja on 40, the two having added what might prove to be a game-changing 104-run partnership for the sixth wicket.

This was Rahane's 12th Test hundred and his second at the iconic venue, after a fine 147 during the 2014 tour.

A day after earning rich praise for his tactical acumen while marshalling the bowlers, Rahane shone bright with the bat and was spot on with his reading of match situations during his stay in the middle.

Rahane got a life when Steve Smith dropped him on 73 at second slip in Australia's first over with the second new ball, the unlucky bowler being Mitchell Starc, who was taken off the attack after just two overs with the shining red cherry.

That particular phase was crucial from both the team's point of view and by not losing a wicket to the second new ball, India ensured they finished the day ahead of Australia, in terms of runs as well as psychologically.

Rahane got another reprieve when substitute fielder Travis Head put one down after diving forward from gully, but that was after he had got to the three-figure mark.

To start with, Rahane was more watchful than he had ever been but as the day progressed, he went on to play some sumptuous shots and one of his day's best was the classic off-drive against Pat Cummins.

Earlier, Rishabh Pant (29) and Hanuma Vihari (21) frittered away promising starts after doing all the hard work, but Jadeja was determined not to do anything of that sort. — *PTI*

SCORECARD

Australia 1st Innings: 195
India 1st Innings (Overtight 36/1): Mayank Agarwal lbw b Starc 0, Shubman Gill c Paine b Cummins 45, Cheteshwar Pujara c Paine b Cummins 17, Ajinkya Rahane (batting) 104, Hanuma Vihari c Smith b Lyon 21, Rishabh Pant c Paine b Starc 29, Ravindra Jadeja (batting) 40. Extras (b-12, lb-6, nb-2, wd-1) 21. **Total (for 5 wickets in 91.3 overs) 277.**
FOW: 1-0, 2-61, 3-64, 4-116, 5-173.
Bowling: Mitchell Starc 18.3-3-61-2, Pat Cummins 22-7-71-2, Josh Hazlewood 21-6-44-0, Nathan Lyon 18-2-52-1, Cameron Green 12-1-31-0.



Indian captain Ajinkya Rahane celebrates after scoring a century as teammate Ravindra Jadeja applauds during the second day of the second Test against Australia at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on Sunday.

— *AP*

Starc rues missed chances for Oz

Melbourne, Dec. 27: Australian speedster Mitchell Starc rued the chances his team squandered on the second day of the Boxing Day Test but also praised rival skipper Ajinkya Rahane for his pressure-absorbing century.

A dogged unbeaten 104 by Rahane put India in the driver's seat after the second day as they were comfortably poised at 277 for five.

The fielders spilled a few chances offered by Rahane as India took a 82-run lead by the day end.

"It (the knock by Rahane) was pretty good. He absorbed some pressure there and sort of steadied the ship for them, at (a time) when they were still behind our score," Starc said at the virtual press conference.

"He (Rahane) has battled

WARNER NOT CERTAIN TO PLAY THIRD TEST

Melbourne, Dec. 27: Star Australian opener David Warner is still struggling with his groin injury, coach Justin Langer said on Sunday, rendering him doubtful for the third Test against India starting January 7. He had missed the last ODI, three T20Is and the first two Tests against India due to the injury that he sustained during the second ODI.

Warner, whose absence was felt by Australia as they folded for 195 on the opening day of the ongoing Boxing Day Test, will hit the MCG nets on Sunday.

"We saw him bat the day before the game, he's batting again this afternoon at the MCG, so in terms of his batting he's flying, it's just trying to ... he's still having some trouble with his groin and we know how dynamic he is," Langer told Ricky Ponting during an interview on *Seven*. — *PTI*

really well there, he took his chances and we probably could have got him out three or four or maybe five times before he got a

hundred, but he's run his luck there and scored a good hundred. Well done to him, added the left-arm pacer, who had figures of

GILL CREDITS RAHANE FOR HIS KNOCK

Melbourne, Dec. 27: Young India batsman Shubman Gill says watching Ajinkya Rahane's "magnificent" hundred from the sidelines was immensely educative for him and he learnt how not to get into a shell while facing a lethal bowling attack.

Stand-in skipper Rahane scored an unbeaten 104 in tough conditions to steer India to 277 for five against Australia on the second day of the second Test here.

"This knock was all about patience, more importantly when you are playing such a high quality pace attack, sometimes you get into shell and not able to score runs, and the way Ajinkya bhai played, it was such a magnificent knock to watch from outside," Gill said during a virtual press conference.

"How to see off those tough periods, he made it sure that he put the loose balls away."

With Rahane going strong, India took a lead of 82 runs and Gill said the team will look to capitalise on it as batting will get more challenging from day three.

"On the first day, there was a bit turn for (Ravichandran Ashwin) Ash bhai and (Ravindra Jadeja) Jaddu bhai and even today we saw there was turn for Nathan (Lyon) and as the time goes on there will be more cracks and it will be more challenging for the batsmen."

Opening the innings, Gill scored a 65-ball 45 on debut before he nicked an outswinger from Pat Cummins. "When I came into bat, there was something in the pitch, it was lively but the only thing I told myself was that no matter what was in pitch, I should be able to play my game." — *PTI*

Furious Bedi attacks DDCA

■ Demands removal of his name from Kotla stand

New Delhi, Dec. 27: Spin legend Bishan Singh Bedi has threatened to take legal action against the DDCA if his name is not removed from a spectators' stand at the Feroz Shah Kotla ground with immediate effect.

On Wednesday, Bedi had shot a letter to the Delhi and District Cricket Association, lambasting it for installing a statue of its late former president Arun Jaitley at the Kotla.

In the absence of any response from DDCA, Bedi wrote another letter to the cricket body on Saturday.

"It's been a few days since I wrote to you ... While within minutes of my letter going public I had an overwhelming support of the cricket fraternity across the globe. But I'm sad there's been no reaction from you," Bedi wrote in his letter addressed to DDCA President Rohan Jaitley.

"... I hope in our country people still have a right to decide as individuals what they wish to be associated with & where their name plates can hang with dignity. Please don't push me to take a legal recourse."

Bedi had also decided to renounce his membership of the DDCA.

In his scathing letter, Bedi questioned the DDCA president's "ill advised" and "inexplicable" silence. "Your seemingly ill advised silence to my letter that has triggered a public debate about perpetuating politicians at sporting venues exposes your naivety," he wrote.

● **On Wednesday, Bishan Singh Bedi had shot a letter to the Delhi and District Cricket Association, lambasting it for installing a statue of its late former president Arun Jaitley at the Kotla.**

"Your inexplicable silence also underlines guilt of occupying a position of power solely because of your family name, which, you obviously wish to promote, come what may."

"Finally, I hope you will have the basic courtesy to reply to a former cricketer who is not asking for a favour, but wants his cricketing integrity not to be bartered away."

The statue of Jaitley will be unveiled by BCCI president Sourav Ganguly at Kotla on Monday in the presence of union home minister Amit Shah and former BCCI chief Anurag Thakur, among others.

Bedi said he did not wish to be associated with the cricket stadium which has a statue of the late politician, who was a minister in the BJP-led NDA government and died last year owing to multiple health issues.

"I've been around long to know DDCA has a tradition of ignoring cricketers' voice, hence this reminder. There's a reason for my urgent request," the 74-year-old said. — *PTI*

MSD is ODI team of decade captain

Dubai, Dec. 27: The legendary Mahendra Singh Dhoni was on Sunday named captain of ICC's ODI and T20 International teams of the decade while Virat Kohli stamped his pre-eminence in world cricket after being voted the skipper of the Test team.

Indians dominated the limited-over teams by having three and four players in the ODI and T20I respectively while England have maximum number of players — four — in the Test side.

The 39-year-old Dhoni, who retired from international cricket earlier this year, was one of the three Indians in the ODI team of the decade, the others being Rohit Sharma and skipper Virat Kohli.

Dhoni has three other compatriots in the T20I team — Rohit, Kohli and Jasprit Bumrah.

Besides being named captain of Test team, Kohli is the only player in the world to have been voted in the teams of the decade in all formats.

The teams of the decades were announced by the ICC ahead of the Awards of the Decade ceremony, to be held in virtual mode on Monday.

The top awards, includ-



Mahendra Singh Dhoni

ing ICC male cricketer as well as female cricketer of the decade, men's Test, ODI and T20I cricketers of the decade, women's ODI and T20I cricketers of the decade, will also be announced on Monday.

Kohli is also in the running for four awards — ICC male cricketer of the decade, men's Test cricketer, men's ODI cricketer and men's T20I cricketer of the decade.

In the Test team of the decade, senior spinner Ravichandran Ashwin is the other Indian while the four Englishmen are Alastair Cook, Ben Stokes, Stuart Broad and James Anderson. Australia are represented by Steve Smith and David Warner. — *PTI*

Rahane has regained his mojo after a century at MCG



Hemant Kenkre
Silly Point

When Ajinkya Rahane dabbled a ball from Mitchell Starc for a boundary through the slips, in the 66th over of their first innings, he made a statement. On a day that was peppered with dodgy weather, not too many Indian fans had expected their team to go past the Australian total. And they did thanks to a gritty performance by their batsmen who defied the relentless Australian bowling and the 'four seasons in a day' kind of climes that Melbourne is known for.

Notwithstanding the efforts by debutant Shubman Gill and Cheteshwar Pujara who weathered the Aussie attack in tough conditions with a 61-run partnership, the lead coming off skipper Rahane's blade was apt for the situation.

Coming in after a bad loss at Adelaide wasn't going to be easy. With two senior players out (including captain, and batting warlord, Virat Kohli) and two debutants (Mohammed Siraj being the second) not too many fans could put a punt on the Indians to stand up and

take the game to the hosts.

Rahane's effort of marshalling his resources to skittle out the Australians under the 200 run mark drew praises from senior cricketers who were impressed by his acumen. The smart usage leg-side attacking fielding positions — leg slip, gully and forward short leg — a rarity in modern day cricket saw the demise of the three main thorns in the Indian flesh. Marnus Labuschagne, Steve Smith and skipper Tim Paine perished to a strategy used predominantly in the pre-80s era of the game.

There have been many thoughts and opinions about Rahane's calmness as a cricketer. Comparisons with Kohli, in terms of their individual approaches towards the game, are trending on social media with fans of

both players putting forth their points of view with the kind of passion usually exhibited by armchair experts. Legend Sunil Gavaskar, after day one, said Rahane has got a great sense of where the fielders should be kept and preferred to praise India's performance as a team effort rather than only Rahane's captaincy.

Effectively he took the focus back to the DNA of Mumbai, India's premier cricket city of the recent past, where coaches and seniors always gave importance to team efforts rather than individual performances.

Having watched Rahane break through to the top from his Under-19 days, one has always wondered why his classical approach hasn't given him the dividends he deserved. His average of 42.45 has belied

his ability for reasons that don't really have an explanation.

When he cut Pat Cummins past point to record his 12th Test century, the first of the series by either teams, Rahane took us back to 2014 when he had notched three tons at Wellington, Lord's and Melbourne. No matter what the expert's say, to me this ton was very special for it singled a certain intent that Rahane (and team India) have behind the bad 36-run episode but them as they slowly try and climb their way into the Border-Gavaskar series. More importantly, Rahane has regained his mojo, which augurs well for India as they go ahead in this series without Kohli.

Ending the second day with a lead of 82 runs with five wickets in hand, India

have given their fans two days of good cricket and plenty of hope of squaring the series. The team, with cameos coming from Hanuma Vihari and Rishabh Pant and a brave unbeaten knock by Ravindra Jadeja, are looking at putting a good distance between them and the hosts as they go into the third day at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG). Adding valuable runs is going to be India's main task as they will look at chasing as less runs as possible considering they will be batting last.

There will be many opinions and arguments about Rahane's captaincy (irrespective of the result of the ongoing Test) after this game and comparisons with the leadership style of Kohli will be expected. Debates about 'calmness

vs aggression' will continue to happen as fans play their fantasy games pitting one captain against the other. For now, team India has gained brownie points in two days of play at the MCG. The bowlers are bang on target, the team is combining very well, looks balanced irrespective of the absence of key players.

As far as the question of captaincy in the immediate future of Indian Test cricket is concerned, Indian fans could do well to refrain from daydreaming and accept the reality. No matter what India does in the series going forward, Rahane is a 'stand-in' captain who will happily hand over the baton to main leader, Kohli. The best thing fans could do would be to accept this fact and leave all theories in the realm of fantasy.