

SHORT TAKES

VARAVARA RAO FIT TO GO BACK TO JAIL: NIA TO HC

Mumbai, Dec. 15: Poet-activist Varavara Rao, an accused in the Elgar Parishad-Maoists links case, is fit enough to be sent back to Taloja jail in Navi Mumbai from a private hospital in Mumbai where he is currently admitted, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) told the Bombay High Court on Tuesday.

Rao, however, will continue to stay in Nanavati Hospital at least till Monday, the next date of hearing on his bail plea on the medical grounds and the plea filed by his wife Hemlatha alleging breach of Rao's fundamental rights due to "continued incarceration without adequate healthcare". The submission was made by additional solicitor-general Anil Singh, who appeared for the NIA, before a bench of Justices S.S. Shinde and M.S. Karnik.

During the day's hearing, senior counsels Indira Jaising and Anand Grover urged the high court to grant bail to Rao. Grover said the 81-year-old poet was suffering from inherent medical issues since the time of his arrest in 2018.

He said authorities at Taloja prison in Navi Mumbai, where Rao was lodged as an undertrial, did not have the expertise or medical infrastructure to treat him. Grover further said it would be most suitable for Rao's health if he was granted bail and permitted to go back to his home in Hyderabad. Rao would not flee if granted bail, Grover added.

Mamata 'dares' Modi

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Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar's bust there? The entire country cannot speak up (due to) fear. There is a bid to scare us too. What else can they do here? President's Rule? Let them impose it if they can. Let's see. It will be great (sic)! At least my workload will reduce to a great extent. I will then address rallies everywhere and take away your (BJP) votes also."

Tearing into the BJP over its frequent threats of violence, Ms Banerjee added: "I am very good and a 100 per cent peaceful person. (But) if you hit me, I will retaliate so heavily that you will not be able to tackle my retaliation even after bringing crores of goons."

On BJP MP Subramanian Swamy's call for a change in the national anthem, the TMC chief alleged: "Their object is to change Jana Gana Mana penned by Rabindranath Tagore. We also know very well how to revert a change later."

To get back the Gorkha vote bank from the BJP in North Bengal, Ms Banerjee said: "After getting Bimal Gurung (GJM top gun) on its side six years ago, they promised a 'Gorkhaland'. Whenever an election is there, they talk about it. How many Gorkhaland(s) have happened so far? They won in the 2014 polls and another later with the same promise each time. I did not win because I did not talk about it. But it does not matter to me. Only we can make a permanent political solution for Darjeeling. They (BJP) cannot do it because it is not possible for them."

Pranab's son, daughter spar

■ Continued from Page 1
@ABHIJIT_LS not to create any unnecessary hurdles in publication of the last book written by our father. He completed the manuscript before he fell sick." She added: "The final draft contains my dad's handwritten notes and comments that have been strictly adhered to. The views expressed by him are his own & no one should try to stop it from being published for any cheap publicity. That would be the greatest disservice to our departed father." Her parting shot to her brother was: "Btw bro, the title of the book is The Presidential Years, not 'The Presidential Memoirs'."

The book, which was in the news recently for Pranab Mukherjee's critical comments on the Congress, including his observation that the party lost political focus after his elevation as President, is set to be released next month by Rupa, which had published the two earlier volumes of his memoirs. The Presidential Years, which follows The Turbulent Years and The Coalition Years, gives a rare glimpse of Pranab Mukherjee's fascinating journey from a remote village in West Bengal to Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Ruckus in K'taka Legislative Council

Deputy chairman manhandled; members exchange blows, hurl abuses

VINAY MADHAV BENGALURU, DEC. 15

The Karnataka Legislative Council witnessed unprecedented, ugly scenes on Tuesday, with the Opposition Congress and ruling BJP members nearly exchanged blows during the special sitting of the session to debate over no-confidence against Chairman Pratap Chandra Shetty.

Members of the Council hurled abuses and pushed each other deputy chairman S.L. Dharm Gowda was pulled down from the Chairman's seat.

Harish, a Congress member, punched the face of a BJP member when he tried to close the Council doors. Even the Marshalls, who tried to clear the melee, were not spared.

Two Congress members — Narayanaswamy and Chandrashekhhar Patil — occupied the Chairman's seat after Mr Gowda was



Ruckus between BJP and Congress leaders over the Chairman post during the Karnataka Legislative Council session in Bengaluru on Tuesday.

— PTI

dragged away. Amid the pandemonium and chaos, it was adjourned sine-die within minutes after it met for the day.

Even before the House assembled, deputy chairman Gowda came and occupied the Chairman's seat even before Mr Shetty arrived and the quorum bell still ringing, which angered Congress MLCs who rushed to the Well,

demanding that he vacate it, as he would have allowed the no-confidence motion against Mr Shetty.

Following this, BJP and JD(S) members too rushed towards the Chair in his defence.

This resulted in a heated exchange of words and much jostling between members from both sides.

Some Congress members, including Naseer

Ahmed, were seen trying to forcefully open the door through which the Chairman enters the House, accusing the ruling side of shutting it with an intention not to allow Mr Shetty inside.

Congress members accused the government of trying to start proceedings even before the Chairman could come, with the help of Mr Gowda, with an intention to take up the no-confidence motion against Mr Shetty, which has been rejected by him.

BJP and JD(S) members argued that the Deputy Chairman has the right to conduct the proceedings as the no-confidence was against the Chairman.

Following this, some Congress MLCs, including M. Narayanaswamy and Naseer Ahmed, forcefully pulled down the deputy chairman from the seat and dragged him down the Chairman's podium.

They also broke the

transparent shield on the podium. Then they made Congress MLC Narayanaswamy to occupy the chair. Later, another Congress MLC Chandrashekhhar Patil occupied that chair. Congress and BJP members pushed each other in front of the podium in the well of the House.

At that time, Chairman Pratap Chandra Shetty came to the House and adjourned the house.

Several members and marshalls of the council were also allegedly manhandled in the melee.

The issue has been brewing since the recently concluded Legislature session. The BJP members had submitted a no-confidence motion against the Chairman, as BJP is the single largest party in the Council also. However, Mr Shetty rejected the no-confidence notice, stating that the BJP had not given 14 days advance notice.

GOVT MULLS REPRINTING OF NETAJI'S BOOKS

New Delhi, Dec. 15: The government is considering reprinting some of the books written by Subhash Chandra Bose and starting fellowships for students to commemorate his 125th birth anniversary celebrations which would begin from January 23. It is also planning to invite veterans of INA to lead the Republic Day parade.

These proposals were put forth during a meeting chaired by Culture and Tourism Minister Prahlad Patel on the preparations for the event, according to the culture ministry.

"Some of the suggestions made by the participants included reprinting of some of the books written by Netaji as well as INA members, short lectures in schools and colleges, promoting Netaji as a youth icon and champion of gender equality, it said.

The meeting was attended by Bose's family members, Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose INA Trust, educationists, historians, and representatives of various organisations associated with him.

Addressing the participants, the culture minister said that the celebrations to commemorate the 125th birth anniversary of Bose will start from January 23, 2021.

Mr Patel said a museum on Bose is proposed to be set up in Kolkata as a part of commemorations and that the current museum at Red Fort in New Delhi is also proposed to be expanded.

— PTI

UK PM invites Modi to UK-led G-7 Summit

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI NEW DELHI, DEC. 15

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has accepted India's invite to be the chief guest of Republic Day celebrations next month, visiting British foreign secretary Dominic Raab said on Tuesday.

The British PM has also invited Prime Minister Narendra Modi to "join the UK-hosted G7 next year", he added. The comments were made at a media interaction in New Delhi after four hours of discussions between Mr Raab and his Indian counterpart external affairs minister S. Jaishankar on five broad themes — connecting people, trade, defence and security, climate and health including the cooperation on the Covid vaccines while both nations "agreed on key elements of a 10-year India-UK roadmap".

Mr Jaishankar said his presence at the annual celebrations "would be in a way symbolic of a new era, and a new phase of India-UK ties". "It will also drive us to put in place a mechanism and platforms that would realise the kind of expectations that both PMs have of the relationship," he said.

Mr Raab mentioned Britain's "Indo-Pacific tilt" while Mr Jaishankar said, "It is a matter of satisfaction that there is a growing recognition and acceptance of the idea of an Indo-Pacific. We welcome greater interest and attention, which the UK is devoting to the Indo-Pacific." Both countries also focused on taking ties to a new level.

Observers look at Britain's focus on the Indo-Pacific region as significant, given the growing differences between Britain and China on the Hong Kong issue. Apart from this, the situation in Afghanistan was also discussed between the two foreign ministers. In a veiled reference to Pakistan without naming it, EAM Jaishankar said both ministers felt the challenges posed by terrorism and radicalism are a "shared concern".

Mr Raab spoke about the need to "deepen the economic relationship" and said Britain is "committed to building a stronger defence and security partnership with our Indian friends" including on shared issues like combating terrorism and maritime security, including the menace of piracy. He also said the proudest moment today is collaboration on the Covid 19 vaccine.

More set to join stir

■ Continued from Page 1
head Amit Benival were among those who attended the meeting.

With the number of protesters at Delhi's borders growing by the day, senior officers in the Haryana police said the borders cannot take more people as "the situation is increasingly turning unsustainable". The Haryana police said more than 60,000 protesters are camping at the borders while the farmers' leaders said the figure is higher. Apart from far-flung areas of Punjab, farmers have been arriving from Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, UP and other parts of the country to join the protests.

Social activist Anna Hazare has also threatened to go on a hunger-strike if the farmers' issues are not resolved quickly. He has written to agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar about the Centre's failure to accept the farmers' demands.

Calling for an early resolution of farmers' issues, the industry chamber Assocham has said the agitation was resulting in a daily loss of ₹3,500 crores. The association said the size of the com-

bined economies of Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir was about Rs 18 lakh crores. "Industries such as textiles, auto components, bicycles and sports goods, which cater significantly to the export market, will not be able to fulfil their orders ahead of Christmas, harming our goodwill among global buyers," Assocham chief Niranjan Hiranandani has said.

Claiming support of farm unions, agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar said the Acts have been welcomed in various states across the country but the Centre is willing to continue its talks with "genuine farm unions" to find a solution with an open mind. He said that the Minimum Support Price (MSP), at which the government commits to procure the produce from farmers, is an administrative decision and it "will continue as it is".

The minister's comments came after the Uttar Pradesh-based Bharatiya Kisan Union (Kisan) submitted a memorandum to him with suggestions regarding the Farm Acts and the MSP.

TMC rebel leader Suwendu likely to join BJP this week

Centre upgrades security cover of former Bengal minister

RAJIB CHOWDHURI KOLKATA, DEC. 15

Giving a call on his birthday for the restoration of democracy in West Bengal, rebel Trinamul Congress MLA of Nandigram Shubhendhu Adhikari is all set to defect to the BJP later this week as the Centre has decided to provide it's Z-plus category security cover by the central reserve police force jawans including commandos and a bullet proof car to him due to a threat on his life.

The former state minister will fly to New Delhi on December 17 and is likely to meet Union home minister Amit Shah before changing his colour from green to saffron officially. On December 19 when Mr Shah will arrive in the state on a two-day visit, Mr Adhikari is expected to be with him.

On Tuesday BJP national general secretary Kailash Vijayvargiya called up the Trinamul MLA and spoke to him for four minutes.

The Trinamul Congress has already decided that it will not take any further initiative to convince the disgruntled Adhikari to remain in the party. However, the party is open to hear him — if at all he has to say something to Banerjee.

Asked of any political discussion with Mr Adhikari, Vijayvargiya

BJP seeks deployment of central forces ahead of polls

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 15

Days after BJP president J.P. Nadda and other senior leaders' convoy in West Bengal came under attack allegedly by ruling TMC cadre, the BJP on Tuesday urged the Election Commission for early deployment of central forces and imposition of Model Code of Conduct for the coming crucial Assembly polls in the state.

Union home minister Amit Shah is also scheduled to visit the state later this week. Citing deteriorating law and order situation, political bias of the state government employees and discrepancies in the draft voters list, the party said unless the election body deploys central forces and imposes MCC early campaigning in the state will be "very difficult, resulting in widespread violence."

A BJP delegation met the EC officials and submitted a letter in this regard and said they were assured that their complaint will be looked into and that free and fair elections take place.

In the letter to the EC, the party cited the attack on the convoy of Nadda and other senior leaders, including Kailash Vijayvargiya, Mukul Roy and others while they were travelling in Diamond Harbour to attend a party event and claimed that the attack was "carried out in full glare of a big contingent of police, including RAF, who simply remained silent spectators. This was under the supervision of local AITC MLAs, who openly gave instructions from platforms erected on the road."



Shubhendhu Adhikari

ment. People won it. We have to restore the essence of our Constitution: For the people of people by the people in West Bengal. Coexistence of all parties and opinions is obvious. But why would only a system: For the Party, Of the

Party, By The Party exist? Your servant will always be with you in the battle against it."

"I do not hanker after posts. Someone alleged that people were brought to rallies showing them posts. But people come to my rallies even after my resignation from ministry," he added.

Stung by his comments, chief minister Mamata Banerjee said in Jalpaiguri, "I do not tolerate those who enjoyed power for 10 years in the government and party but connect with others ahead of election."

Mahatma Gandhi's assassination delayed Hindutva supremacy by two generations, says Vinay Sitapati

SRIRAM KARRI HYDERABAD, DEC. 15

It took the Hindutva ideology nearly a century to create the election-winning argument personified by Narendra Modi, argues political scientist and author Vinay Sitapati in this exclusive interview with this newspaper.

Analysing historical insights, debating counterfactuals, refuting possible misinterpretations, young political scientist and professor with chubby cheeks and curly hair, round spectacles and an impish smile, is bustling with energy as he discusses his work, which promises to become a watermarked in understanding Hindutva. It is a biography of a relationship, chronicling and analysing the entangled lives of BJP's founding duo, the *jugalbandi* of Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Lal Krishna Advani.

There is no definitive book on Hinduism, but hopefully this is the definitive work on Hindutva, he says teasingly. It might well be. A worthy successor to his bestselling debut, a biography on former prime minister P.V.



Vinay Sitapati

Narasimha Rao, *Half Lion*, this book too has his trademark traits, all boxes checked. It consolidates his image as a new superstar in India's non-fiction genre combining recent and contemporary history and politics — diligent and excruciating research, intrepid in making a set of speculative counterfactuals, combining a vast narrative argument befitting his academic vocation and inclination. Sitapati teaches at Ashoka University, has a PhD from Princeton University and other degrees from Harvard University and National

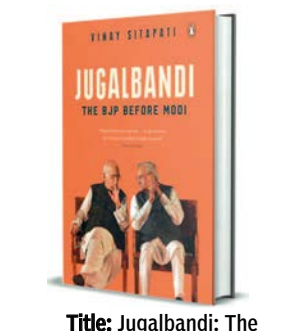
Law School, Bengaluru. He combines this with racy writing and a nearly salacious storytelling, sometimes bordering on sharing off-the-record gossip and anecdotes to match his former journalistic career.

The book though is neither a tale of a historical plot to create Modi nor a century-old history of the *Sangh Parivar*. Though both are ingredients on this structured canvas, it is focussed on something more ambitious — telling the story of two fascinating men, whose relationship shaped Hindutva, the BJP and India.

Excerpts and part 1 of a three-part story.

Q Before discussing the *jugalbandi* between Atal Bihari Vajpayee and L.K. Advani, I wish to have you throw light on another *jugalbandi* before them, between two atheists — M.A. Jinnah and Veer Damodar Savarkar. In a way, have they perhaps influenced the political outcome and future of the Indian sub-continent more successfully, with greater

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW PART - 1



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

influence and a higher impact than Gandhi, Nehru and Ambedkar? In 2047, would we end up being closer, after a century after Independence, to Jinnah and Savarkar's ideas of nationhood?

I must strongly push back on this suggestion; there was no *jugalbandi* between them. The Hindu nationalist project of Savarkar, which is now a

century old, is at its heart democratic in the sense of being founded on the acceptance of universal adult franchise and 'one person, one vote'. As the British rule in India was making way for elections in the early 20th century, Savarkar and other Hindu nationalists welcomed elections, because their Hindu community was a social majority in India... Equal voting suited them because they were a majority.

On the other hand, the Muslim leadership, represented then by the landlords in the United Province, were sensing a loss of power and privilege. They realised that elections would doom them to a perpetual 'minority'. So, their entire politics was against one-person-one-vote. By the time Jinnah joins the Muslim League, he is firmly anti-democratic, in the sense he is anti one-person-one-vote. And he also opportunistically uses Islamic metaphors of a caliphate when pushing for Pakistan.

Savarkar's Hindu rashtra, unlike Jinnah's Pakistan, was not a theo-

cracy because it was not based on religion at all. It was not about Hindu religion for him. The extremely logical Savarkar argued, in a radical breakaway from conventional political thought, that Indian nationhood was built on race, not culture or religion. This is a deeply modern idea. Savarkar was never a liberal; he was a majoritarian. But unlike Jinnah, he was always a democrat.

He was even broadly in agreement on most issues with the Congress, except for his pet grouse that Gandhi was appealing the Muslim League.

Both Savarkar and Jinnah were, however, similar in the sense that both advocated and modelled their politics based on the sole interest of their own community.

Q Why did the project of creating Narendra Modi take nearly a century to fructify? Why not earlier?

The RSS had lost two generations of a chance at power because they were operating under the shadow of suspicion for being responsible for the assassi-

nation of Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi was India's greatest Hindu leader. Even though the RSS as an institution did not play any role in Gandhi's murder, the taint has proved very costly to them.

Q Are you saying a Hindu rashtra is politically, intellectually, and even arithmetically, inevitable in future?

The mistake in this line of thinking is to somehow think that a Hindu rashtra lies ahead of us. It is actually already here. The India we live in is in many ways already the Hindu rashtra Savarkar or Golwalkar dreamt of. This is because a Hindu rashtra is not a Hindu 'state'. It is a Hindu national community or Hindu 'vote-bank' that is able to control the state through one-person-one-vote. The Hindu rashtra is not a theocracy or a dictatorship, but a unified Hindu society flexing its majority muscle within a democratic structure.

Tomorrow: Part 2
Ambedkar was opposed to both Islamic and Hindu bigotry

IN BRIEF

I-T FINDS ₹700CR TAX EVASION BY CHETTINAD GROUP

New Delhi: The Income Tax Department has detected tax evasion of more than ₹700 crore after it recently raided multiple locations of Chennai-based Chettinad Group, the CBDT and official sources said on Tuesday. "The highlight of the search includes seizure of unaccounted cash of ₹23 crore from various locations," the CBDT said in a statement. "As of now, the department has succeeded in detecting evasion of income of over ₹700 crore," it said. The statement claimed that tax sleuths also detected documents related to possession of "foreign assets to the extent of ₹110 crore in the form of fixed deposits, which were not disclosed in the return (income tax return) and will attract action under the Black Money Act". The taxman had raided 60 premises of the Tamil Nadu-based group in Chennai, Trichy (Tiruchirappalli), various locations in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Mumbai on December 9. While the CBDT said its action and further detections were made against a "leading business group operating from Chennai, based on intelligence input about tax evasion", the official sources identified it as the about 100-years-old Chettinad Group. The group is involved in business activities like cement manufacturing, logistics, construction, among others, the CBDT said. "Inflation of expenditure to take out cash and also to reduce profits, receipts not accounted fully, bogus claim of depreciation amounting to ₹435 crore were also identified."

CENTRE SEEKS DRAFT OF C'GARH AGRI SCHEME

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, DEC. 15

Amid intensifying protests by farmers on the three central farm laws, the Union government has sought a draft of Rajiv Gandhi Kisan Nyay Yojana, the flagship programme of Bhupesh Baghel government aimed at ensuring minimum income availability to the farmers in Chhattisgarh through direct bank transfer.

This was revealed by Chhattisgarh agriculture minister Ravindra Choubey in Raipur on Tuesday. The minister was highlighting the schemes launched and work done in the past two years in the state at a press conference ahead of completion of two years of the Congress-led government in Chhattisgarh on December 17. "Amid protests by farmers over Centre's three new farm laws, the Union government has sought a draft of the Nyay scheme from Chhattisgarh government. It is up to the Centre to decide if it would like to implement the scheme", Choubey said.

The Nyay scheme, launched in Chhattisgarh in May this year, has benefitted farmers during Covid-19 crisis, he said. Under the scheme, the state government has disbursed ₹4,500 crore to farmers in three installments as input support in the previous Kharif season and the last installment of ₹1,250 crore would be released to them in March, 2021, the minister said. The scheme has benefitted nearly 20 lakh farmers in Chhattisgarh. He said another welfare scheme for the farmers launched by the Bhupesh Baghel government has also not only benefitted the farmers but has also given a boost to the rural economy in Chhattisgarh.

Fun amidst chaos: Farmers play volleyball during protest

Farmers play volleyball at Ghazipur border in New Delhi on Tuesday during their protest against Centre's agri laws. Meanwhile, Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Tuesday launched a campaign to make farmers aware that the laws passed by Centre would pave way for their prosperity.

— PTI

India still susceptible to coronavirus: Govt

Situation can escalate unexpectedly, Minister cautions public

New Delhi, Dec. 15: Covid-19 cases and deaths are declining in India which is very reassuring, the Centre said on Tuesday but cautioned against any laxity saying an overwhelming proportion of the country's population is still "very very susceptible" to the virus and the situation may escalate unexpectedly.

While there is a continuous increasing trend in Covid-19 cases and deaths globally, particularly in America and Europe and the situation in the world is becoming worrisome, in contrast the scene in India is satisfying as the cases and deaths are declining, Dr V.K. Paul, member (health) at NITI Aayog, told a press conference here.

"Mortality is declining and it is well below 400 per day. Cases have come down to almost 22,000. This is the kind of number we all experienced in July. So that is very reassuring. As a nation, we seem to be now doing very well. We are saving lives. But remember, this cannot be taken for granted. An overwhelming proportion of our population is still very very susceptible to the virus. And the situation can escalate unexpectedly," Paul said while cautioning against any laxity.

He further said the reassuring thing is that people are saying the R0 has come below one which means the pandemic is shrinking.

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 15

Country's recovery rate crosses 95 per cent, which is among the highest in the world for countries with high caseloads. The daily new cases recorded on Tuesday — 22,065 — were also the lowest in over five months. Active Covid-19 caseload has fallen below 3.4 lakh, a mere 3.43 per cent of the total infections.

Union health ministry pointed out that the number of recoveries have crossed 94 lakhs (94,22,636), pushing the national recovery rate to over 95 per cent, which is one of the highest in the world for countries with the high caseload.

"With a high number of patients recovering every day and the sustained fall in the mortality rate, the country's steady trend of decline in active cases continues," said the Union health ministry.

There are 3,39,820 active cases of Covid-19 as on Tuesday. The slide in the active cases is supplemented by an exponential rise in the recoveries.

"The gap between active cases and recovered cases is continuously increasing and stands at 90,82,816. The national recovery rate has further escalated to 95.12 per cent," the ministry added.

A total 34,477 patients have recovered in a span of 24 hours, of whom

74.24 per cent are concentrated in 10 states and UTs. Maharashtra has reported the maximum number of single-day recoveries at 4,610, followed by 4,481 in Kerala and 2,980 in West Bengal.

The ministry said that 73.52 per cent of the new infections are from 10 states and UTs. Maharashtra has reported the highest daily new cases at 2,949, followed by Kerala with 2,707 new cases. A total 354 case fatalities have been reported in a span of 24 hours. Ten states and UTs account for 79.66 per cent of these. Maharashtra and Delhi reported maximum casualties with 60 new deaths each, followed by West Bengal at 43.

rate has come down to 6.37 while the average daily positivity rate during last week was 3.00 per cent.

Speaking about the preparation for the Covid-19 vaccination drive, Bhushan said guidelines for estimation of electrical and non-electrical cold chain equipment and their strengthening have been issued to states.

— PTI

36 foreigners acquitted of all charges

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 15

A Delhi court on Tuesday acquitted 36 foreigners, who were charge-sheeted for attending the Tablighi Jamaat congregation here by allegedly being negligent and disobeying the government guidelines issued in wake of the Covid-19 pandemic in the country.

Chief metropolitan magistrate Arun Kumar Garg acquitted the for-

TABLIGHI JAMAAT

eigners from 14 countries of all charges.

The court had, on August 24, framed charges against the foreigners under Sections 188 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant) and 269 (negligent act likely to spread infection of disease dangerous to life) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Section 3 (dis-

obeying regulation) of the Epidemic Act, 1897.

The charges were also framed under Section 51 (obstruction) of the Disaster Management Act, 2005.

However, they were discharged for the offences under Section 14 (1)(b) (violation of visa norms) of Foreigners Act and Sections 270 (malignant act likely to spread infection of disease dangerous to life) and 271 (disobedience to quarantine rule)

of the IPC.

The court had also discharged eight foreign nationals from six countries of all charges under which they were charge-sheeted in the absence of any record or any credible material against them.

The foreigners were charge-sheeted for attending the Tablighi Jamaat congregation here at Nizamuddin area allegedly in violation of visa norms.

While Posha is still in jail, the rest are out on bail. In the years following the massacre, Phoolan Devi went on to surrender and later become an MP. She was gunned down outside her official residence in New Delhi on July 25, 2001.

— PTI

Consider break for docs on Covid duty, SC tells Centre

New Delhi, Dec. 15: The Supreme Court asked the Centre on Tuesday to consider granting a break to doctors engaged in Covid-19 duty for the last seven-eight months.

The top court said that continuous work might be affecting mental health of doctors.

A bench of Justices Ashok Bhushan, R.S. Reddy and M.R. Shah, which is hearing a suo motu case on proper treatment of Covid-19 patients and dignified handling of dead bodies in hospitals, asked Solicitor General Tushar Mehta to consider the suggestions of giving the doctors some break.

"For the last seven-eight months doctors have not been given any break and are continuously working. You take instruction and think over giving them some break. It must be very painful and might be affecting their mental health," the bench told Mehta.

The solicitor general assured the bench that the government would consider the suggestion of the bench to grant some break to health workers engaged in Covid-19 duty.

The top court also expressed shock that the Gujarat government has levied around ₹90 crore fine for not wearing face masks, but has not been able to enforce the guidelines on

HC restrains AIIMS nurses from continuing with strike

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 15

The Delhi high court on Tuesday said that the indefinite nurses' strike at prestigious All-India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) cannot continue. The High Court said this after the hospital sought legal help to end it. The AIIMS — which earlier appealed to the nurses to end their strike in view of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic — contended that the strike was illegal and violated the Industrial Disputes Act. The hospital also asserted that the strike violated an earlier order of the court prohibiting any such action by AIIMS employees.

Noting the contentions of the hospital, a single-judge

Covid-19 appropriate behaviour.

At the outset, the bench while referring to the affidavit filed by the Centre said that it does not state which hospitals have fire No Objection Certificate(s) (NOCs) and it is citing 2016 information.

Mehta said that the picture is not as rosy as it seems from data (referred in the affidavit) but the Gujarat

Bench of Justice Navin Chawla said the hospital was considering the nurses' demands but for now, they are being restrained from continuing with the strike till further orders. They were also issued notice, asking them to respond to the hospital's appeal.

The hospital has called the nurses for talks this evening. The strike had started yesterday over a list of 23 demands which was topped by revised salary under Sixth Pay Commission.

Yesterday, AIIMS Director Professor Randeep Guleria asked the nurses to rethink their strike in view of the Covid situation, especially as AIIMS is one of the key dedicated facilities for treatment of the disease.

government has taken all necessary steps on fire safety measures.

Justice Shah said No, they have not and added that the affidavit does not show which Covid hospitals have the necessary safeguards.

The bench pointed out that 16 notices were sent to a hospital at Rajkot itself but nothing was done about it and many hospitals have no fire NOCs in Gujarat. — PTI

Mercury in Delhi dips to 4.1° Celsius

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 15

A cold wave gripped Delhi on Tuesday as icy winds blowing from the snow-covered western Himalayas brought the minimum temperature down to 4.1° Celsius, the lowest in the city this season so far, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said.

For the plains, the IMD declares a cold wave when the minimum temperature is 10° Celsius or below and is 4.5 notches less than the normal for two consecutive days.

"However, for small areas such as Delhi, a cold wave can be declared if the criteria is fulfilled even for a day," Kuldeep Srivastava, the head of the IMD's regional forecasting centre, said.

At 4.1° Celsius, the minimum temperature at Safdarjung Observatory, which provides representative data for the city, was five notches below normal on Tuesday morning.

At Jafarpur, the mercury dipped to 3.6° Celsius.

The Aya Nagar and Lodhi Road weather stations recorded a minimum of 4° Celsius and 4.2° Celsius respectively, the IMD said.

On Monday, the maximum temperature in the national capital had dropped to 19.4° Celsius, four notches below normal and the lowest so far this month, as cold winds swept the city.

The air quality has also improved to the "moderate" category due to strong winds.

The city's air quality index (AQI) was 190 at 10.00 am. The 24-hour average AQI was 160 on Monday, 305 on Sunday, and 356 on Saturday.

An AQI between zero and 50 is considered "good," 51 and 100 "satisfactory," 101 and 200 "moderate," 201 and 300 "poor," 301 and 400 "very poor," and 401 and 500 "severe."

The air quality remained "moderate" in Gurgaon and Faridabad while it was recorded "poor" in Noida, Greater Noida, and Ghaziabad, according to a government agency data on Tuesday.

'Delhi roads to be redesigned on lines of Europe cities'

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 15

The Delhi government has appointed a consultant for redesigning of the roads in the national capital on the lines of European cities and it is likely to be completed by early 2023, chief minister Arvind Kejriwal said on Tuesday.

Chairing a review meeting, the chief minister said the consultant should submit the detailed project report by February 2021 for rapid progress of the project.

"The PWD should remove all hurdles in the redesigning of the city roads along the lines of European cities to complete the project within the stipulated deadline," he said.

The consultant is responsible for preparing and submitting a detailed project report by February 2021 based on which tenders will be given.

FINAL WISH

Rajaram Singh once told a journalist that he wished to see accused hanged

Main witness of Behmai massacre dies

Kanpur (UP), Dec. 15: Rajaram Singh, the main witness of the 1981 Behmai massacre by Phoolan Devi's gang, has died at his native village, his last wish to see the accused hanged unfulfilled.

The 85-year-old, who was suffering from a prolonged illness, died at his native village in Kanpur Dehat district on Sunday.

Twenty men were gunned down on February 14, 1981 allegedly by dacoit Phoolan Devi and her gang seeking revenge for her rape by upper caste men in Behmai

village, less than 100 km from Kanpur.

Seventeen of the dead were Thakurs, the dominant caste in the village. Rajaram Singh's younger brothers Banwari Singh and Himmat Singh, cousin Naresh Singh and nephews Dev Singh, Hukum Singh and Dashrath Singh were among those allegedly killed by the Phoolan Devi gang.

Singh once told a journalist that he wished to see the accused hanged for their crime. "But God only knows whether I will be able to wit-

● **TWENTY MEN** were gunned down on February 14, 1981 allegedly by dacoit Phoolan Devi and her gang seeking revenge for her rape by upper caste men in Behmai village, less than 100 km from Kanpur.

ness it as I am suffering from chronic liver ailment. I will get peace only when the killers are punished in my lifetime," he was quoted as saying.

A Kanpur court framed charges in the case in

August 2012, three decades after the massacre.

Out of the 23 accused, 16, including Phoolan Devi, are already dead. Charges were then framed against the four surviving accused, and the court issued non-bailable warrants against the three absconders among them — Maan Singh, Ramkesh and Vishwanath Ashok.

A special court (dacoity) had initially fixed a date in January 2020 for pronouncing the verdict. But it was adjourned several times as the original case diary was

reported missing from court records, and a probe was ordered.

The court has to give its verdict on the role of the four surviving accused — Posha (75), Shyambabu (70), Bhikha (65), and Vishwanath (54).

While Posha is still in jail, the rest are out on bail. In the years following the massacre, Phoolan Devi went on to surrender and later become an MP. She was gunned down outside her official residence in New Delhi on July 25, 2001.

— PTI

NORTHERN RAILWAY**Notice inviting applications for the appointment of Halt Contractors**

Applications are invited from eligible candidates for appointment as halt contractors for sale of tickets on commission basis at following halt stations for a period of five years. Applications in sealed envelope will be accepted from date 14.12.2020 upto 11.01.2021 time 11.00 hrs and will be opened on date 11.01.2021 at 15.00 hrs.

SN.	Halt Station	Section	District
1.	Asan	Panipat-Jind	Panipat, Haryana
2.	Jasla	Rohtak-Panipat	Rohtak, Haryana
3.	Rukhi	Rohtak-Guhana-Panipat	Sonapat, Haryana
4.	Khandrai	Gohana-Jind	Sonapat, Haryana
5.	Delhi Inderpuri	Ring Railway, Delhi Area	South West, Delhi
6.	Karsinidpur	Jind-Panipat	Jind, Haryana
7.	Barka	Shahdara-Shamli	Baghpat, U P
8.	Makrauli	Panipat-Rohtak	Rohtak, Haryana
9.	Kotli Kalan	Jakhla-Bhatinda	Mansa, Punjab
10.	Israna	Panipat-Rohtak	Panipat, Haryana
11.	Baoli	Shahdara-Shamli	Baghpat, U P
12.	Barwasni	Jind-Sonipat	Sonapat, Haryana
13.	Chander Nagar	New Delhi-Ghaziabad	Ghaziabad, U P
14.	Munda	Delhi-Rohtak	West Delhi
15.	Shahbad Mohanmadpur	Delhi-Rewari	South West, Delhi
16.	Sewaha	Jind-Panipat	Panipat, Haryana
17.	Bhambawa	Jind-Sonipat	Jind, Haryana
18.	Machrauli	Rohtak-Rewari	Jhajjar, Haryana
19.	Palhawas	Rohtak-Rewari	Rewari, Haryana
20.	Mandawli Chander Vihar	New Delhi-Ghaziabad	East Delhi
21.	Nusrabad Kharkhari	Shahdara-Shamli	Ghaziabad-Uttar Pradesh
22.	Sajuma	Narwana- Kurukshetra	Kaithal, Haryana
23.	Sona Arjunpur	Shamli-Saharanpur	Saharanpur, U P
24.	Sujra	Shahdara-Shamli	Baghpat, U P
25.	Sunhera	Shahdara-Shamli	Baghpat, U P
26.	Sunderpur Barah Kalan	Panipat-Jind	Jind-Haryana
27.	Thana Bhawan Town	Shahdara-Shamli	Shamli, U P
28.	Kirti Nagar	Ring Railway, Delhi Area	West Delhi
29.	Jandheri	Delhi-Saharanpur	Saharanpur, U P
30.	Jandhera	Delhi-Saharanpur	Saharanpur, U P
31.	Usmanpur Dehat	Delhi-Saharanpur	Shamli, U P
32.	Ismaila Haryana	Delhi-Rohtak	Rohtak, Haryana
33.	Basal Dhankot	Delhi-Rewari	Gurgaon, Haryana
34.	Farukhnagar	Garhi Harsaru-Farukhnagar	Gurgaon, Haryana
35.	Khera Kalan	Delhi-Sonipat	North West Delhi
36.	Mohana Haryana	Jind-Sonipat	Sonipat, Haryana
37.	Gokulgarh	Rohtak-Rewari	Rewari, Haryana
38.	Dighal	Rohtak-Rewari	Jhajjar, Haryana

Information regarding eligibility, important dates, format of applications, Commission etc. is available at Northern Railway website www.nr.indianrailways.gov.in All corrigendum, addendums, amendments, time extensions, clarifications etc. to the Notice will be posted on the above website only.

No.631-CP-231-PT-I-Halt Tender-2020 Dated : 10.12.2020 2792/20

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	46,263.17	0.02
Nifty 50	13,567.85	0.07
S&P 500*	3,673.03	0.70
Dollar (₹)	73.64	-0.09
Pound Sterling (₹)	98.08	0.57
Euro (₹)	89.53	-0.13
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	48,847*514	1.05
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	50.69	0.40
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.941	-0.005
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.906	0.015

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Exports dip 8.7%, imports 13% in November

Exports contracted for the second consecutive month in November after recording positive growth for a month in September, as the second wave of the pandemic hit consumer demand in some of the largest markets. Exports fell 8.7 per cent while imports contracted 13.3 per cent, resulting in a trade deficit of \$9.9 billion. Exports of petroleum products were down 59.7 per cent while pharma were up 11.1 per cent.

DakPay app for India Post, payments bank



Customers of the Department of Post (India Post) and the India Post Payments Bank (IPPB) can now operate their banking service through an app DakPay, which was unveiled by communications and IT minister Ravi Shankar Prasad. DakPay will facilitate services such as sending money, scanning QR code and making payment for services and merchants digitally. It will also provide interoperable banking services.

MSN gets USFDA nod for asenapine sublingual tablets

MSN Group said its marketing partner, Breckenridge Pharmaceutical, has received final approval for its ANDA for asenapine sublingual tablets, in 2.5 mg and 10 mg strengths, a generic for Saphris, with the US FDA. Additionally, the 5mg strength received tentative approval. This product, for schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, was developed with Breckenridge Pharmaceutical for the US market.

EeVe India rolls out Atreo, Ahava e-scooters

EeVe India, the Odisha-based electric two-wheeler startup, introduced two new electric scooters called Ahava and Atreo priced at Rs 55,900 and Rs 64,900 at Delhi showroom, respectively. With this, the brand now sells six models in India. The Ahava electric scooter is claimed to have a range of 60-70km while the Atreo claims 90-100km. The two electric scooters have a running cost of 15 paise per km.

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Delinquencies spike post-moratorium Loan disbursals by MFIs up in Q2

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, DEC. 15

Though micro-loan disbursements have witnessed a five-fold growth in the September quarter over the previous quarter, delinquencies have spiked after the moratorium on loan repayments ended on August 31. Micro-loan disbursements have, after a steep fall in the June quarter, made considerable recovery in the September quarter. In the September quarter loan disbursements by micro-lenders went up to Rs 31,261 crore against Rs 6,186 crore in the June quarter—a steep five-times increase in a quarter.

However, on the flip side, the disbursements have not even recovered to half of the March quarter levels. In the March quarter, the lenders had disbursed Rs 71,090 crore. In fact, in the lockdown-hit June quarter, disbursements had fallen 91 per cent.

The number of loans disbursed had fallen from 192 lakh in the March quarter to 21 lakh in the June quarter but has recovered to 88 lakh in the September quarter. A four-fold quarterly growth in the number of loan accounts in the September quarter has only helped a 45 per cent recovery to the March quarter levels.

However, the average loan size has made a smarter recovery. It has returned to Rs 35,652 in the September quarter from Rs 29,480 and Rs



36,940 in the previous two quarters.

However, delinquencies have soared post-moratorium. Portfolio at Risk (PAR) for 30 days or the outstanding balance of loans in arrears—has shown a sharp increase once the moratorium ended. PAR-30 stood around 1.5 per cent till the June quarter but has sharply moved up to 4.39 per cent in the September quarter, as per the data from MFPI India, a micro-financiers association.

Banks have seen the highest increase in delinquencies; from a sub-1 per cent level in the June quarter, PAR-30 went up to 5.97 per cent. NBFC-MFIs saw it moving up from 1 per cent to 4.17 per cent and small finance banks witnessed a rise from near 1 per cent levels to 2.75 per cent. However, NBFCs saw the PAR-30 days' delin-

quency coming down.

According to Manoj Nambiar, chairperson of MFPI India, the livelihood of all the borrowers has not come back to normal. Some are making part payments and some full payments. "Collection efficiencies are improving month-on-month. Earlier, we had thought that efficiencies would return to pre-Covid levels by December. But, it would probably take one or two months more," he said.

The total loan outstanding of all the micro lenders recovered to Rs 2,31,778 crore—closer to the March quarter gross loan portfolio (GLP) of Rs 2,31,788 crore—after coming down to Rs 2,27,727 crore in the June quarter. However, the September quarter saw 14.89 per cent growth in GLP against the same quarter in the previous year.

Personal loan-book growth flat this year

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, DEC. 15

The pandemic has halted the growth of the personal loan-book and the delinquencies are growing. After growing 26 per cent in FY20 and 40 per cent in the previous two years, personal loan-book remained flat between April and August this year. However, delinquencies have risen in the five-month period.

As of August 2020, the personal loan-book stood at Rs 5,07,684 crore, having grown by only 0.57 per cent over Rs 5,04,792 crore in March 2020 due to Covid-19 disruptions. In the year-ended March 2020, the loan-book had grown by 26.4 per cent, but was lower than the 40 per cent rate of growth in the previous two years, as per data from CRIF High Mark, a Mumbai-based credit bureau.

As of March 2020 active loans had grown by



around 60 per cent, much faster compared to previous years. However, Covid-19 has impacted the originations in the five months of this fiscal year, with a minor de-growth of 1.5 per cent in the active loans.

The personal loan-book in metro cities felt a greater impact of the pandemic, owing to stricter lockdown rules

and near nil economic activity through most of the five-month period in FY21. Originations in metros have witnessed a 42 per cent de-growth compared to the same period in the previous year, as against 27 per cent in tier III and beyond cities.

The average ticket size has been reducing continuously over the last two years. In March 2020, it had shrunk by 18 per cent to 2,22,000. However, the average ticket size increased by 5 per cent to Rs 230,000 by August over March.

The amount of delinquencies for 31-180 days past due and 91-180 days past due have increased by 44 basis points and 26 bps, respectively. Loan delinquencies for 91-180 dpd had increased by 2X in the last two years from 0.91 per cent in March 2018 to 2.59 per cent March 2020. It further moved up to 2.64 per cent in August.

NPS, Atal Pension assets grow 35%

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, DEC.15

Asset under management (AUM) of the National Pension System and Atal Pension Yojana grew over 35 per cent year-on-year at the end of November to more than Rs 5.32 lakh crore.

The total number of subscribers grew 21.35 per cent year-on-year to over 3.88 lakh crore, said a release issued by

Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority.

As on November 30, 2020, total pension assets under management stood at Rs 5,32,378 crore showing a year-on-year growth of 35.76 per cent from Rs 3,92,467 crore in November 2019.

The number of subscribers in various schemes under the National Pension System (NPS) rose to over 3.88

crore by end-November 2020 from over 3.20 crore in November 2019, showing a year-on-year increase of 21.35 per cent.

Growing awareness about the tax saving benefits of the NPS led to maximum subscriber growth in all citizen sector by 33.38 per cent and assets under management for this category of subscribers also grew by maximum 51.11 per cent.

High inflows threaten RBI's tight grip on rupee

SUBHADIP SIRCAR & ANIRBAN NAG DEC. 15

A relentless torrent of funds rushing into India's markets may tip the central bank's delicate balancing act in 2021.

For most of this year, the Reserve Bank of India has capped currency gains as global investors poured around \$50 billion into stocks and stakes in companies. This has boosted rupee liquidity in a banking system that's already flush with cash from the RBI's stimulus measures.

There's growing consensus among traders and fund managers that the mounting pressures—particularly the liquidity glut distorting money markets—may spur the central bank to consider a range of changes, from relaxing its grip on Asia's worst-performing currency to curtailing bond purchases.

A modest gain in the rupee over the past month could mean that policy makers are already dialling intervention down a touch, or that inflows are starting to get the better of them.

"We believe that the RBI is facing a tough task of

liquidity management while juggling FX inflows, secondary bond market purchases to keep long-term borrowing costs low and ensuring money-market rates are aligned to the policy rate," said Kanika Pasricha, an economist at Standard Chartered Plc in Mumbai. Steps must be taken to realign money-market rates with policy rates, she said.

While most currencies in Asia have benefited from a weaker dollar, the rupee is down 3 per cent this year.

Traders point to how the RBI has bought \$58 billion of dollars in the first nine months of the year as signs of its intervention.

Governor Shaktikanta Das has only commented very broadly on the matter, writing in the most recent policy statement that the central bank acts to damp forex volatility and keep the rupee in sync with underlying domestic fundamentals.

Inflows into India's equity markets have grown to more than \$19 billion this

year, on course for the most on an annual basis since 2013. Foreign investors have also completed about \$30 billion of acquisitions in cash, according to data compiled by Bloomberg.

Declines in the dollar, which is forecast to keep falling in 2021, are fuelling fund flows into emerging markets globally.

In India, capital inflows may reach \$82 billion by the end of the fiscal year, then continue at much the same pace for the follow-

ing 12 months, according to estimates from Deutsche Bank AG.

"Given the multiple challenges from excess liquidity due to capital flows and inflation, the RBI may be forced to reduce the intervention and allow appreciation," said Arvind Chari, head of fixed income and alternatives at Quantum Advisors.

The median of estimates compiled by Bloomberg is for the rupee to appreciate to 72 per dollar by the end of 2021. Analysts at Goldman Sachs forecast the currency as strong as 70 by March 2022. It ended trading at 73.63 on Tuesday.

To be sure, some including B. Prasanna, ICICI Bank's head of global markets, sales, trading and research, argue that when you look at the rupee relative to a basket of its trading partners, the currency is overvalued and the RBI will have little tolerance for it to strengthen sharply.

With excess cash in the banking system estimated at Rs 7 lakh crore (\$95 bn), key overnight rates have plunged below the reverse repo rate that marks the lower bound of the central bank's policy corridor.

—Bloomberg

FPIs invest nearly ₹42K crore this month

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, DEC.15

It's another fortnight of foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) pumping money in the Indian equity market, encouraged by favourable macro economic data, sharp fall in fresh daily Covid cases and weaker dollar. Till December 15, in the first half of the month, Rs 41,898 crore have been invested in equities by the FPIs after over Rs 60,000 crore net

inflows in November, according to national depository NSDL's data.

So far in the calendar year 2020 FPIs investment in equities stands at Rs 1,50,144 crore, of which close to Rs 1 lakh crore has come after the US Presidential elections.

On Tuesday, too, FPIs were net investors in Indian equities by Rs 2,484.09 crore, as per the provisional exchange data.

"Value erosion in dollar

and excessive liquidity is driving foreign portfolio investors to load up on emerging markets equities, specially Indian equities in a big way, pushing them to a record high. We are also witnessing a strong recovery in demand in the economy, which is leading to strength in the rupee as the year draws to a close," Sugandha Sachdeva, VP-metals, energy & currency research at Religare Broking, said.

Flexible wedding jewellery purchase plan from Tanishq

Mumbai, Dec. 15: In a move to assist consumers in buying jewellery for weddings and related occasions, Titan's jewellery arm Tanishq has introduced a new purchase plan—Rivaah Aashirwaad. Through this plan, consumers can plan their wedding jewellery purchase in a structured and systematic manner and yield great discounts on the making charges towards the end of the plan.

As the name signifies, Aashirwaad is the blessing in gold that is gifted to the bride on her wedding. Towards this, customers can enrol for a monthly purchase plan.

Apart from offering better value for money com-

pared to spot purchase, Rivaah Aashirwaad gives customers the flexibility to plan their purchase in terms of the quantum, duration and benefits.

Tanishq introduced Rivaah—its dedicated wedding jewellery sub-brand—in 2017, catering to the diverse and varied jewellery needs across communities and regions.

Ajoy Chawla, chief executive officer, jewellery division, Titan Company Ltd, said: "With Rivaah Aashirwaad, we aim to offer the best opportunity to brides and their families to build their wedding trousseau with the finest Tanishq designs, assurance of purity and at competitive prices."

Business NOTE

SAVING | MOTHER EARTH

Rice cultivation uses 30-40% of the world's freshwater

Drip irrigation to make rice eco-friendly

ARI RABINOVITCH JERUSALEM, DEC. 15

An Israeli company has developed a drip irrigation system for growing rice to replace the flooded paddies that have supplied the world with rice for generations but cause a surprising level of damage to the environment.

Rice is the staple food for more than half the global population, but its cultivation uses 30-40 per cent of the world's freshwater and is responsible for 10 per cent of man-made emissions of greenhouse gas methane, according to the UN-backed Sustainable Rice Platform.

Netafim, a company that pioneered drip irri-



gation decades ago to grow produce like potatoes and melons across Israel's challenging arid landscape, has just finished a pilot scheme using its technology on 1,000 hectares (2,470 acres) of rice fields in locations from Europe to southern Asia.

At one such location, at La Fagiana farm in north-east Italy, two fields, side-

by-side, grow a high quality rice for risotto. One is flooded, covered entirely by up to 15 cm of water to maintain temperatures and keep away weeds.

The other is crisscrossed with perforated pipes delivering to the roots precise amounts of water amounting to less than half the quantity used on the flooded field.

"We want to increase

the production without increasing water use or lowering quality," said Michele Conte, whose family has managed La Fagiana for decades and who has adopted the Netafim system on some of his land.

For three years the drip irrigation has yielded rice on par and at times even better quality than the flooded paddies, he said. It also allows them to rotate crops throughout the year.

Netafim said it had to learn from scratch how to achieve the same yield as flooding and it took a decade to create a new protocol for watering, fertilizing and planting rice with drip irrigation.

The growing conditions

switch to aerobic from anaerobic, which means methane emission "goes to zero," said CEO Gaby Miodownik.

Conte said the schedule for treating the rice still needs some fine tuning but that it has become a selling point for environmentally concerned customers.

The initial investment in pipes, pumps and filters could be expensive for farmers whose profit margins are, for the most part, already thin.

But the shift away from flooding is expected to gain traction and companies like India's Jain Irrigation are developing drip irrigation packages for rice as well.

—Reuters

THE ASIAN AGE

16 DECEMBER 2020

Biden affirmation is a win for US democracy

The Electoral College's formal affirmation of Joe Biden's victory was only a ritual. If it assumes the contours of a milestone in US election history, the blame should go to the outgoing President Donald Trump's attempts to subvert the democratic process. "It is the rule of law, the Constitution and the will of the people" that prevails, as the victor, Mr Biden, put it in a gracious speech in which he said realistically, "Now it is time to turn the page."

The proof of the durability of the US political system, which is an important template for democracies, represents a significant moment for all of the free world. In the six weeks since November 3 in which Mr Trump and his supporters tried every bizarre trick in their subversive playbook to overturn a clear popular verdict in which Mr Biden not only got 306 of 538 Electoral College votes but also trounced Mr Trump — one of five Presidents to win the White House without a popular mandate — by over seven million votes.

The members of the Electoral College were only upholding the brief given to them in a democratic process but what the Supreme Court did in throwing out every challenge to the election is truly heroic. As many as 86 judges, many of them either nominees of Mr Trump or the Republican Party, displayed scorn or contempt for lawsuits that were part of legal manoeuvres backed by as many as 17 attorneys-general of states and 126 members of Congress.

The court made legal history in its unanimity after having seen through the subterfuge of trying to throw out 20 million legitimately cast ballots. This is a grand lesson in how the integrity of a justice system can be preserved only by the honesty of judges who resist the temptation to reflect any gratitude they may feel towards those who nominated them, or their own ideological leanings. Their firm rulings helped sustain the reputation of a great institution.

The catastrophic Trump presidency may not have fulfilled the worst scenarios of a crazed authoritarian let loose in the White House but the visible damage it has caused to a precious democratic process like free and fair elections will take a long time to mend. What Mr Trump did in repeatedly questioning the legitimacy of the presidential polls, considered the fairest in many quadrennials, is to corrode social trust in a vibrant democracy. In exploiting political divisions, Mr Trump had split a nation with his web of lies whose reach became phenomenal in the age of social media that can be so easily manipulated.

The strength of institutions was sorely tested in four years but so many of them came through with flying colours. Mr Trump's animus against migrants as reflected in his stopping the DACA programme was stayed by the courts, so too his manipulation of visas and green cards. The media exposed his cruel separation of children from their parents. His own administration pooh-poohed his disinformation campaign on the coronavirus which, ironically, did not spare him either. The top court ridiculed his skewed election petitions and, finally, the people rejected his presidency. His legacy, apart from damage to public trust in government, is bits and pieces of a Mexican Wall. A divided nation must pick up the pieces now.

‘Reckless’ Kamal Haasan

In the electoral marketplace, do good intentions alone sell? This is a mind boggling question that crops up when actor Kamal Haasan, launching his campaign for the Tamil Nadu state Assembly elections of 2021, reels out a list of public inconveniences that governments hardly bother to address. He also raises serious questions. Like, what's the need for a new Parliament building?

But he also seems to get carried away by the crowds that turn up for his meetings. 'Gangs come together for money but it's a revolution when people congregate for an ideal,' he exulted on Twitter presuming that the throngs at Madurai and Usilampatti were there to join him in his mission to eliminate corruption.

Of course, it is not just from Central rulers that he demands answers but also from those holding the reins in the state. Aptly underlining the hypocrisy of a ruling party top honcho's suggestion for alternating power between a man and a woman in a single term, he pointed out that the party does not have even a single woman as a district secretary. He even pledges to make ministers out of at least 20 women when the mantle falls on him. Things that sound really nice.

Haasan even boasts of growing up on the lap of M.G. Ramachandran, the former chief minister popularly known as MGR who remained invincible in politics during his time. But does that privilege make him the inheritor of MGR's political legacy or do people see in him a modern MGR?

Whatever people see in him, when Mr Haasan cocks a snook at popular sentiments, he diminishes his prospects.

By promising to hand over TASMACH shops to private retailers or plumping for the commonly contentious NEEET or openly supporting the vice-chancellor of Anna University, who is seen as most parties in the state as an intruder imposed on them, one cannot garner votes in Tamil Nadu, even if as MGR himself.

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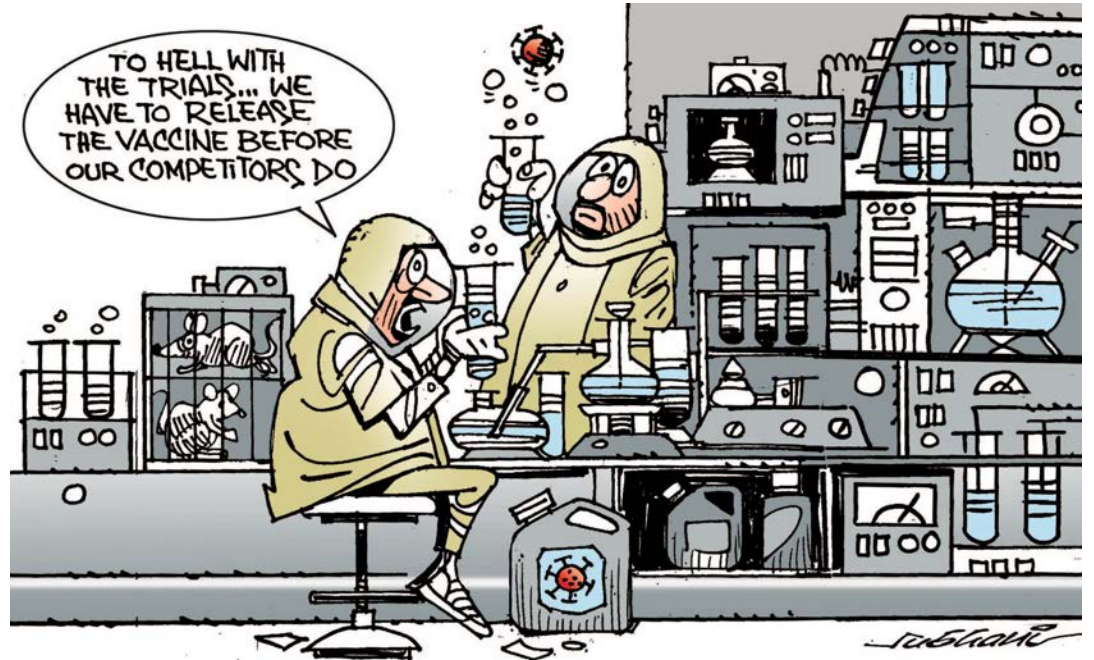
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Subhani



Language row led to a new nation 49 yrs ago



Abhijit Bhattacharyya

The world knows that Bangladesh is South Asia's youngest nation state, but few people — and particularly those born well after the cataclysmic events surrounding its birth, who are now in their 20s, 30s and 40s — are fully aware of the torturous processes over a long period of time that led to the creation of arguably one of the few linguistic nation states through blood, sweat, toil and tears? The experience of living through the tumultuous 24 years (1947-1971), between when India attained freedom from British rule and the December day 49 years ago when Dhaka (then Dacca) became "the free capital of a free country" — in Indira Gandhi's ringing phrase in the Lok Sabha — are hard to fathom for those who didn't personally experience those momentous times. East Bengal, of course, had known the agony and humiliation of separation even before 1947 when undivided Bengal was partitioned into two halves, but nothing quite prepared it for the experience of those 24 years as the eastern enclave of the nation called Pakistan — and being treated as a vassal province.

The beauty and reality of history is that it is usually written, rewritten or unwritten by the victors, or deliberately distorted for the sake of the polity. When British India was split into two with the independence of two nations in 1947, it also created a geopolitical impossibility: two wings of the new nation of Pakistan separated by the mother state with a 1,000-mile crater. It was an unbridgeable disconnect making a mockery of a unified Pakistan, ostensibly founded on a common religious identity. Its two wings were a political reality, but remained a geographical and cultural disconnect since birth.

Just ask any 74-year-old (or older) Bangladeshi (born in 1946 or earlier) about his or her life journey. One is likely to hear the agonising experience he/she underwent, changing his/her nationality. Ceasing to be Indian in August 1947. Being a Pakistani for 24 years, being treated as an inferior and a second-class citizen, discriminated against, till December 1971, and then attaining his/her present identity as a free, independent Bengali-speaking Bangladeshi.

The worst humiliation for the Bengali-speaking citizens of what became East Pakistan was the insensitive linguistic policy forcibly imposed by an insolent, dictatorial governor-general, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the country's founding father, who contemptuously treated them as inferior creatures in contrast to the full-fledged citizens of West Pakistan. Jinnah's toxic temper, mixed with arrogance, sowed the seeds of irreversible Bengali nationalism in the world's most fertile soil, and ploughing their mind with confrontational ideas. Bengalis sullenly, but silently, bore this up to a point. Till Jinnah left Dhaka, on his sole (and last) visit to East Pakistan, which helped to create a "distinct Bengali nation within an indistinct and intolerant Pakistani state".

On March 21, 1948, Jinnah met a delegation of the Scheduled Castes; and on March 22 received another delegation of upper-caste Hindu members of the East Bengal Legislative Assembly. However, what happened on March 21 at a public gathering, addressed by Jinnah, was a bombshell. "Let me make it clear to you that the state language of Pakistan is going to be Urdu and no other language," he declared. "Anyone who tries to mis-

lead you is really the enemy of Pakistan... Every Mussalman should come under the banner of the Muslim League, which is the true custodian of Pakistan". It was a warning-cum-threat to the Bengali language of "united" Pakistan. Jinnah misread the mood on the ground — and the fact that Bengali-speaking people across the world usually define themselves by their language, despite the significant role that religion may play in their lives.

Thus, while already nurturing a genuine feeling of deprivation, discrimination and humiliation, it didn't take long for East Bengalis to fall back upon their linguistic pride. Rabinranath Tagore and Nazrul Islam were always dearer to the Bengali head and heart than the divisive, hate-filled politics of violence and murder of the rest of South Asia. Little wonder Rabinranath Tagore's eternal rhythmic words and sonorous lyrics were wholeheartedly embraced and adopted as Bangladesh's national anthem in 1971. It spontaneously took to the 1905 composed lines of arguably the greatest philosopher poet to have blossomed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries east of Suez.

"Amar shonar Bangla, ami tomay bhalobashi; Chirodin tomar akash, tomar batash, amar prane bajay bashi" (My golden Bengal, I love you. Forever thy skies, thy air set my heart in tune as if it were a flute).

Jinnah was to face some of his worst moments in Dhaka before he returned to Karachi, which was then Pakistan's capital. His

What, however, remains an abiding mystery is how Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger in Washington and Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai in Beijing so misread the signs on the ground and tried their best — unsuccessfully — to abort the birth of an independent Bangladesh.

speech at Dacca University's convocation March 24, 1948 had a kinetic effect. "There can be only one state language... and that language in my opinion can only be Urdu". Dhaka was instantly rocked by student agitations: the pent-up feelings and suppressed grievances of Bengalis didn't take long to crystallise and burst. People fell back on the facts to disprove Jinnah's views as absurd and unacceptable to Bengali-speaking East Pakistanis, who were a majority of the population.

Jinnah had ignored the fact that Urdu was the mother tongue of only four per cent of Pakistanis, while 55 per cent considered Bengali their mother tongue. Only the Muslims of northern and northwestern India, from where most of the Muslim League's leadership came from, would benefit from Urdu as the state language, along with some Punjabis and Pashtuns working for the state. The choice of Urdu as state language also meant a total absence of Bengali-speaking Pakistanis from state affairs.

What happened later, in 1971, is of course part of the folklore of the proud new nation. History will surely judge Prime Minister Indira Gandhi as an outstanding leader of geopolitical vision who, ably supported by the Indian armed forces under General (later Field-Marshal) Sam Manekshaw, managed the shatter the myth of invincibility around Jinnah's creation — and ensured the surrender of Pakistan's entire military in the eastern sector to the Indian Army at Dhaka's Ramna Maidan on December 16, 1971. What, however, remains an abiding mystery is how Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger in Washington — and Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai in Beijing so misread the signs on the ground and tried their best — unsuccessfully — to abort the birth of an independent Bangladesh.

The writer is an alumnus of the National Defence College. The views expressed are personal.

LETTERS

BIGGEST CHALLENGE

After China, the farmers' strike is the second biggest challenge posed to the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party under Narendra Modi. Had the Centre taken farmer unions into confidence before passing the farm laws the current impasse might not have arisen. Support for farmers is swelling day by day causing sleepless nights for the central leadership. The government should shun its ego and act fast to find an amicable solution to the problem.

V. Nagendra Kumar
Hyderabad

ADULTS THIS TIME

AS INDIA GETS ready to vaccinate nearly 30 crore people against Covid-19, it faces diverse challenges such as vaccine shortages, multiple vaccines, shortlisting priority populations, creating a pool of vaccinators and providing proper logistics and infrastructure support. Transparency and clear communication will, however, be the key to prepare Indians for a vaccine that is being developed in record time. India has vast experience in immunisation on a large scale. But that is for children less than a year old. Here, we are targeting adults. This might just prove to be a logistical nightmare.

C.K. Subramaniam
Navi Mumbai

A RED HERRING

BJP'S RAJYA SABHA MP Subramanian Swamy's letter to PM urging the "replacement" of some words in our national anthem *Jana Gana Mana* by a few words composed and sung by the Late Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose and his INA forces is narrow, divisive and violative of the national sentiment. It also betrays the ethos of Indian nationalism that lies behind the composition of the national anthem. By the way, Bose was a known critic of Syama-prasad Mookerjee, founder of Bharatiya Jana Sangh, the precursor of BJP.

Sankar Paul
Chakdaha, West Bengal

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

SHORT TAKES

FIRE AT RUSSIAN RETIREMENT HOME KILLS 11

Moscow, Dec. 15: A fire in a retirement home in Russia's southern Urals killed 11 people while three more were hospitalised with injuries, local officials said on Tuesday.

The fire broke out in the early hours in a wooden, one-story building of a private retirement home in a village in the Bashkiria region.

A total of 16 people were in the building. It wasn't immediately clear what caused the fire. Emergency officials said seven men and four women were killed in the incident. According to Russian media reports, they were bed-ridden residents of the retirement home. A criminal probe into the incident has been launched and the head of the facility has been detained.

'TWITTER KILLER' SENTENCED TO DEATH IN JAPAN

Tokyo, Dec. 15: A Japanese court on Tuesday sentenced a man to death for killing and dismembering nine people, most of whom had posted suicidal thoughts on social media, in a case that shocked the country.

The Tachikawa branch of the Tokyo District Court found Takahiro Shiraishi, known as the "Twitter killer," guilty of killing, dismembering and storing the bodies of the victims in his apartment in Zama, near Tokyo.

Shiraishi, 30, pleaded guilty and said he would not appeal his death sentence. Police arrested Shiraishi in 2017 after finding the bodies of eight females and one male in cold-storage cases in his apartment.

Investigators said Shiraishi approached the victims via Twitter, offering to assist them with their suicidal wishes. He killed the women, including teenagers, after raping them, and also killed a boyfriend of one of the women to silence him, investigators said.

OFFICIALS: BOMBS, SHOOTING ATTACK KILLS 4 IN KABUL

Kabul, Dec. 15: A bombing and a shooting attack in Kabul killed at least three people, including a deputy provincial governor, while a deputy provincial council chief was killed in western Afghanistan on Tuesday, officials said.

The attacks are the latest in relentless violence in Afghanistan even as the Taliban and Afghan government negotiators hold talks in Qatar, trying to hammer out a peace deal that could put an end to decades of war. According to Tariq Arian, an Afghan interior ministry spokesman, a sticky bomb attached to the armored vehicle belonging to Kabul's deputy provincial governor killed two people, and wounded two others.

The deputy provincial governor and the apparent target of the attack, Mahbobullah Mohibi, was killed alongside his secretary while two of his bodyguards were wounded, Arian said.

NIGERIA: BOKO HARAM CLAIMS MASS ABDUCTION

Lagos (Nigeria), Dec. 15: Nigeria's Boko Haram jihadist rebels have claimed responsibility for the abduction of hundreds of students in an attack on a boys school in northern Katsina State, a Nigerian online newspaper says.

More than 330 students are missing from the Government Science Secondary School in Kankara after gunmen with assault rifles attacked their school on Friday night. The Daily Nigerian said it received an audio message from Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau saying that his group abducted the schoolboys because Western education is against the tenets of Islam.

"What happened in Katsina was done to promote Islam and discourage un-Islamic practices as Western education is not the type of education permitted by Allah and his Holy Prophet," the paper quoted Shekau as saying.

There has been no independent verification of the audio message but Shekau has in the past released video and audio messages on Boko Haram's behalf. Nigerian presidential spokesman Garba Shehu said in a statement on Monday that "the kidnappers had made contact and discussions were already on, pertaining to the safety and return" of the children to their homes.

'Time to turn the page', says Biden after EC confirms win

Joe lashes out at Trump saying he refused to respect the will of people

Washington, Dec. 15: US President-elect Joe Biden has told election-weary Americans that it is time to "turn the page", after the Electoral College affirmed his triumph over President Donald Trump, who has refused to concede and filed a litany of legal challenges to overturn the poll results.

The 538-member Electoral College on Monday pushed Biden past the 270-vote threshold to win the bitterly-contested race for the White House. It was one of the crucial steps required for the 78-year-old Democrat to take office on January 20 as the 46th US President.

Under the US system, voters actually cast their ballots for electors, who in turn, formally vote for candidates weeks after the presidential election. Biden won the November 3 election with 306 electoral college votes to incumbent Republican President Trump's 232.

The Electoral College votes will now be sent to Congress to be counted formally next month. Though some House Republicans have indicated they will object to the results in key states, they can do little more than delay the process during a joint session of Congress on January 6.

In a speech from his hometown of Wilmington, Delaware after the announcement of his victory in the election, Biden said the US democracy had been "pushed, tested and threatened" and "proved to be resilient, true and strong".

He criticised President Trump's attempts to overturn the result and said the "will of the people prevailed". "The rule of law, our Constitution and the will of the people prevailed" over Trump's efforts to undo the results of the election, the former US vice president said.

"The flame of democracy was lit in this nation a long time ago. And we now know nothing, not even a pandemic or an abuse of power, can extinguish that flame," Biden said.

"In this battle for the soul of America, democracy prevailed. We the people voted. Faith in our institutions held. The integrity of our elections remains intact. And so, now it is time to turn the page. To unite. To heal," he said.

Biden said the election outcome should be celebrated, not attacked, that more than 81 million votes were cast for him and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris. This too is a record



Former President Bill Clinton and other members of New York state's Electoral College help Electoral member George K. Gresham who fell while voting for President and Vice President in the Assembly Chamber at the state Capitol in Albany, New York. — AFP

GOP leader McConnell wishes Biden

Washington, Dec. 15: Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell congratulated Democrat Joe Biden as president-elect on Tuesday, saying the Electoral College "has spoken."

The Republican leader's statement, delivered in a speech on the Senate floor, ends weeks of silence over President Donald Trump's defeat. It came a day after electors met and officially affirmed Biden's election win. "I want to congratulate President-elect Joe Biden," McConnell said.

"Many of us had hoped the presidential election would yield a different

result," he said. "But our system of government has the processes to determine who will be sworn in on January 20. The Electoral College has spoken."

McConnell called Biden someone "who has devoted himself to public service for many years." He also congratulated Vice President-elect Kamala Harris, saying "all Americans can take pride that our nation has a female vice president-elect for the very first time." McConnell prefaced his remarks with sweeping praise for what he characterised as Trump's "end-

less" accomplishments during four years in office. He said Trump and Vice President Mike Pence "deserve our thanks."

For the first time, a groundswell of leading Republicans have said that Democrat Joe Biden is the winner of the presidential election, essentially abandoning President Donald Trump's assault on the outcome as the Electoral College certified the vote.

With states affirming the results, the Republicans faced a pivotal choice to declare Biden the president-elect, as the tally showed, or keep standing

silently by as Trump wages a potentially damaging campaign to overturn the election.

Number of senators said the time has come to move on. "At some point you have to face the music," said Sen. John Thune of South Dakota, the second-ranking GOP leader. "Once the Electoral College settles the issue today, it's time for everybody to move on." Sen. Roy Blunt of Missouri, the chairman of the inaugural committee, said the panel will now "deal with Vice President Biden as the president-elect." — AP

● **RUSSIAN PRESIDENT Vladimir Putin on Tuesday congratulated Joe Biden on winning the US presidential election after weeks of holding out. The Kremlin had said earlier that the Russian president would hold off on congratulating Biden until the winner was officially confirmed.**

number. More votes than any ticket has received in the history of America. It represented a winning margin of more than 7 million votes over the number of votes cast for President Trump and Vice President Mike Pence, he said. — PTI

US attorney general Barr resigns

Washington, Dec. 15: US Attorney General William Barr, who of late had publicly differed with President Donald Trump on allegations of voter fraud in the November 3 presidential elections, has resigned.

Trump has appointed his deputy Jeff Rosen as the Acting Attorney General. "Just had a very nice meeting with Attorney General Bill Barr at the White House. Our relationship has been a very good one, he has done an outstanding job! As per letter, Bill will be leaving

just before Christmas to spend the holidays with his family..." Trump announced on twitter Monday night.

"Deputy Attorney General Jeff Rosen, an outstanding person, will become Acting Attorney General. Highly respected Richard Donoghue will be taking over the duties of Deputy Attorney General. Thank you to all!" Trump said as he tweeted the two-page resignation letter of Barr. Barr, in his letter, said, "As discussed, I will spend the next week wrapping up a few remaining

matters important to the administration, and depart on December 23."

"I am greatly honored that you called on me to serve your administration and the American people once again as Attorney General. I am proud to have played a role in the many successes and unprecedented achievements you have delivered for the American people. Your record is all the more historic because you accomplished it in the face of relentless implacable resistance," he added. — PTI

PDM leaders booked as they ask PM Khan to quit

Lahore, Dec. 15: Pakistan Democratic Movement's top leaders, including PML-N vice president Maryam Nawaz, were booked on Tuesday for causing irreparable damage to a national asset after its Minar-e-Pakistan rally here, as the 11-party opposition alliance set January 31 deadline for Prime Minister Imran Khan to step down or face long march on Islamabad. The opposition alliance

held its final anti-government rally in Lahore on Sunday despite a ban on the gathering of more than 300 people owing to an increase in Covid-19 cases across the country.

The PDM has been holding massive rallies since its inception in September to seek Khan's ouster and press the powerful military to stop interfering in politics. Lahore police booked Pakistan Muslim League-

Nawaz (PML-N) vice president Maryam Nawaz, former prime minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, former National Assembly speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, former railways minister Saad Rafique and 125 others under different sections of the Pakistan Penal Code for breaking the locks of Minar-e-Pakistan gates, damaging the official property and violating the Covid-19 guidelines. — PTI

US federal agency homing in on social media firms' data collection

Washington, Dec. 15: Federal regulators are ordering Facebook, Twitter, Amazon, TikTok's parent and five other social media companies to provide detailed information on how they collect and use consumers' personal data and how their practices affect children and teens.

The Federal Trade Commission's action announced on Monday goes to the heart of the tech industry's lucrative busi-

ness model: harvesting data from platform users and making it available to advertisers so they can pinpoint specific consumers to target. The agency plans to use the information, due in 45 days, for a comprehensive study.

The other five companies are Reddit, Snap, Discord, WhatsApp, which is owned by Facebook, and Google's YouTube. Regulators and lawmakers are increasingly weaving into their inves-

tigations of market dominance by Big Tech companies concerns over data power and privacy.

The FTC wants to know how social media and video streaming services collect, use and track consumers' personal and demographic information, how they decide which ads and other content are shown to consumers, whether they apply algorithms or data analytics to personal information, how

they measure and promote user engagement and how their practices affect children and teens. "Never before has there been an industry capable of surveilling and monetising so much of our personal lives," three of the five FTC commissioners said. They said the planned study "will lift the hood on the social media and video streaming firms to carefully study their engines." — AP

LEGAL ORDER

\$100mn case was filed on September 19, 2019, challenging the Indian Parliament's decision on J&K

US Court terminates lawsuit against Modi, Shah

Washington, Dec. 15: A US court has dismissed a \$100-million lawsuit filed against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah after the litigants - a separatist Kashmiri Khalistan outfit and two associates - failed to appear before it at two scheduled hearings.

The suit was filed on September 19, 2019, days before Modi's historic "Howdy, Modi!" event in Houston, Texas. It challenged the Indian Parliament's decision on Jammu and Kashmir that

abrogated the special privileges of the state and carved out two union territories and sought a compensation of \$100 million from Modi, Shah and Lt. Gen. Kanwal Jeet Singh Dhillon.

Dhillon is currently serving as the Director-General Defence Intelligence Agency and Deputy Chief of Integrated Defence Staff under the Chief of Defence Staff.

"Other than that attempted service," Kashmiri Khalistan Referendum Front "have



Narendra Modi

done nothing to prosecute this case", and have now failed to appear at two duly set Scheduling



Amit Shah

Conferences, US District Court Southern District of Texas Judge Frances H. Stacy said in his order

dated October 6 and recommended that the case be dismissed.

The case was terminated by Judge Andrew S Hanen of the US District Court in Texas on October 22. Apart from the Kashmiri Khalistan Referendum Front, the other two complainants have not been identified, other than the acronyms "TFK" and "SMS".

The suing party was represented by separatist lawyer Gurbatwint Singh Pannun. The Indian Parliament passed legisla-

tion last year changing the status of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, modifying provisions that have been an obstacle to economic development and promoted a sense of separatism.

Prime Minister Modi, accompanied by US President Donald Trump, had addressed a crowd of over 50,000 Indian-Americans at the "Howdy, Modi!" event in Houston on September 22, 2019.

As per court records, Kashmiri Khalistan Referendum Front was

able to serve the summons to Modi, Shah and Dhillon at the Indian Consulate in Houston on February 18, 2020.

A conference was set by the court for August 2. A second conference was scheduled on October 6. Judge Stacy said that representatives of the Kashmiri Khalistan Referendum Front failed to appear for the conference as such he recommended that the lawsuit be dismissed. Two weeks later, Judge Hanen terminated the case. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

Hyderabad ride on Santana brace

Vasco: Aridane Santana struck twice in less than a minute to script Hyderabad FC's thrilling 3-2 win over SC East Bengal in an Indian Super League match here on Tuesday. Santana's twin burst came in the 56th minute after SC East Bengal scored their first ever ISL goal through Jacques Maghoma in the 26th minute. There was no looking back for Hyderabad after that as they struck a third goal in the 68th minute with Liston Colaco making a terrific run to set it up for Halicharan Narzary to find the back of the net. But there was more drama in store as Maghoma too completed a brace from Anthony Pilkington's freekick to reduce the margin in the 81st minute. East Bengal thus suffered their fourth defeat from five matches to remain at the bottom of the table with one point. Hyderabad FC, on the other hand, remained unbeaten from five matches (nine points) to be placed at fifth place in the 11-team standings. — PTI

Grealish banned from driving

London: Aston Villa captain Jack Grealish was given a nine-month driving ban on Tuesday after crashing his Range Rover during the coronavirus lockdown in March. Grealish was sentenced at Birmingham Magistrates' Court after previously pleading guilty to two charges. The 25-year-old's vehicle hit two parked vehicles in Dickens Heath, Solihull, West Midlands. As well as the driving ban, England midfielder Grealish was also fined £82,499 (\$110,271). A judge was told that a witness said Grealish smelled of "intoxicating liquor" and was slurring his words immediately after the crash on March 29. Grealish was involved in the incident less than 24 hours after issuing a Twitter video message urging people to stay at home to save lives and protect the NHS. — AFP

Celta Vigo blow away Cadiz

Vigo: Celta Vigo earned their biggest win since June when they beat Cadiz 4-0 in the Spanish League. Cadiz were coming off beating Barcelona 2-1 at home but started badly and by halftime were down 4-0. Nolito's third goal in four games put Celta on the board after only six minutes. Alvaro Negredo headed off the right post moments later, but Iago Aspas doubled the lead from the penalty spot. Santi Mina was fouled by Jeremias Ledesma and left the field soon after. Aspas got a second assist when Fran Beltran shot in the third goal just before halftime, and there was still enough time for Brais Mendez's first goal of the season with a header in injury time. The second half was messy but Celta had already secured their third straight win over Cadiz. — AP

Live on TV

CRICKET
Big Bash League: Perth Scorchers vs Melbourne Stars from 1.45 pm on Sony Six, HD
Lanka Premier League: Final from 7.30 pm on Sony Six, HD
FOOTBALL
Indian Super League: Mohun Bagan vs FC Goa from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3
English Premier League: Arsenal vs Southampton from 11.30 pm on Star Sports Select 1; Leicester vs Everton from 11.30 pm on Star Sports Select 2; Leeds United vs Newcastle from 11.30 pm; Fulham vs Brighton from 1.30 am (Thursday) on Star Sports 3; Liverpool vs Tottenham Hotspur from 1.30 am (Thursday) on Star Sports Select 1; West Ham vs Crystal Palace from 1.30 am (Thursday) on Star Sports Select 2
Italian League: Juventus vs Atalanta from 11 pm on Sony Ten 2; Genoa vs AC Milan from 1.15 am (Thursday) on Sony Ten 1; Inter Milan vs Napoli from 1.15 am (Thursday) on Sony Ten 2
WWE
NXT: Bouts from 6.30 am (Thursday) on Sony Ten 1, HD

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BATTLE READY Australia have plans in place for Kohli & Co.

Adelaide, Dec. 15: Australia coach Justin Langer on Tuesday asserted that his team will "have plans in place" for Indian talisman Virat Kohli as cricket's heavy-weights renew one of the sport's greatest rivalries with the opening day-night Test here from Thursday. The four-match series opener at Adelaide Oval will be the only time India captain Kohli will play Test cricket Down Under this summer as he will return home after the game to attend the birth of his first child. Langer, however, is determined to stop Kohli from setting the tone for the series. "He is a great player and an equally great leader. I have got so much respect for him but we are going to be really well planned for him because we know how important he is for India as a leader and as a batsman. So, we will have our plans in place. "The next trick is to execute them, hopefully, keep him out of the game with his runs. At the end of the day, that's where he is going to have the biggest impact. We've seen a lot of him now, and he has seen a lot of us too," Langer said during a virtual media interaction. Langer also made it clear that his team will focus more on the skill part and look for ways to get Kohli out instead of needlessly engaging with him. "What we talk about is how to get Virat out. He is such a great player, we don't talk about whether we taunt him or not. That's rubbish... We play on the skill, not on emotions, at least we try to." "There is obviously emotion in the game, no doubt about that, we are going to control our emotions." Australia may have played more day-night Tests compared to India's one but according to Langer, his team would have no advantage heading into the opening pink ball match. "I have always said that the best players and best teams adapt regardless of the big game or the colour of the ball, so whether it is the red ball or the white ball or the pink ball, the best players and teams adapt to it. "So, what has happened in the past, it is nice to replay. India have just come off a day-night practice game, we have done a bit of practice under lights." — PTI



India captain Virat Kohli at a training session in Adelaide on Tuesday, ahead of the first Test against Australia. — AFP

Gavaskar bats for Pant, Gill

New Delhi, Dec. 15: The legendary Sunil Gavaskar feels the Indian team management should prefer an aggressive Rishabh Pant over a technically sound Wriddhiman Saha for the wicket-keeper's role in the four-match Test series against Australia, starting Thursday. Gavaskar, the fastest to reach 10,000 Test runs, said that with a blistering 73-ball 103-run knock in the second warm-up game under his belt, Pant will give India more flexibility in the first Test, the only day-night game, to be played in Adelaide. "It is going to be a tough one for the four selection committee because Rishabh played in all the 4 Test matches four years ago. He also got a hundred and seemed he got under the skin of the Australian players with his chirping behind the stumps. "...When you just came off a hundred few days earlier, he would be the

RAHANE SPELLS VERY LITTLE AHEAD OF TEST

Adelaide, Dec. 15: India vice-captain Ajinkya Rahane on Tuesday conceded that pacer Ishant Sharma's absence is a "big miss" but side-stepped queries on his team's possible first XI combination for the opening Day/Night Test against Australia starting here on Thursday. Rahane, who is expected to lead in the last three Tests after regular skipper Virat Kohli goes on paternity leave, also spoke about how pink ball's increased pace off the pitch during the 40-

50 minutes of the twilight session, will be the biggest challenge for any batsman. "I think, we do really have a strong attack but yes we will definitely miss Ishant, being the senior fast bowler," Rahane said. Ishant is recovering from a rib injury sustained during the IPL. Rahane, however, is confident that despite Ishant's absence, the pace attack comprising Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Shami will step it up for the Australians. — PTI

ferred Pant over a more-accomplished keeper in Saha, as Australian pitches are not so demanding when it comes to keeping wickets. Both Gavaskar and Border batted for Shubman Gill over Prithvi Shaw to open along side Mayank Agarwal in the series. "...India is a little bit shaky at the top of the order. They don't know who they are going to go with. Mayank Agarwal is of course a certainty. But who's the other opener — Shubman Gill or Prithvi Shaw?" said Gavaskar. "So with uncertainty at the top, they would like to strengthen their batting and so Pant will play. I am hoping he (Rishabh) plays at 6 because then that will allow you to pick 5 bowlers to try and get 20 Australian wickets." — PTI

BUMRAH WILL BE KEY TO WIN, SAYS BORDER

New Delhi, Dec. 15: Former Australia captain Allan Border believes a fully fit Jasprit Bumrah will be the key to India's prospects of retaining the four-match Test series Down Under. Calling himself a big fan of the India pace spearhead, Border said Bumrah has the potential to make a difference between the two sides in the much-anticipated rubber, starting in Adelaide from Thursday. "Well I am a huge fan of Bumrah. If he keeps himself fit. We are talking of a guy who can win games for you fellows. I worry about him because on our pitches you get a little bit of bounce and sideways movement," said Border. "If he fires up like he did last time, get important wickets, ruffle a few feathers with the ball, I reckon he could be the real difference," he added. Bumrah accounted for 21 wickets in four matches in 2018-19, playing a key role in India's first-ever Test series win in Australia. "You always think that your batting line-up will get enough runs, you need the 20 wickets to win the Test. If he stays fit, he is the one who is going to be a key," the former Australia skipper said. — PTI

UNFIT SMITH MISSES NET SESSION

Adelaide, Dec. 15: Australia's premier batsman Steve Smith on Tuesday missed a crucial net session due to a sore back as the home team's tumultuous build-up to the four-match Test series against India experienced another major injury scare. After having warmed up for 10 minutes with his teammates by doing a few stretching exercises and running drills at the Adelaide Oval, Smith skipped the routine football session and headed straight to the dressing room in some discomfort after tweaking his back while bending down to pick up a ball. On his way to the dressing room, Smith was accompanied by team physiotherapist David Beakley. — PTI



Joe Burns

up game, forcing selectors to add Marcus Harris to the squad. "What Marcus Harris hasn't done is score (Test) hundreds — (his) highest score is 70-odd, (whereas) Joe Burns can score Test match hundreds. I'm

Green's inclusion in the playing XI. "What I am doing is moving Matthew Wade up to the top of the order to open with (Burns), (give) a left-hand, right-hand combination," Ponting said. — PTI

Virat second best in Test rankings

Dubai, Dec. 15: India captain Virat Kohli on Tuesday jumped one place to second in the ICC Test ranking for batsmen, which also features Chesteshwar Pujara and Ajinkya Rahane at the seventh and 10th positions respectively. Kohli is the leading Indian batsman in the chart with 886 rating points behind Australia's Steve Smith (911 points). New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson dropped a rung to the third spot. He is followed by young Australian batting sensation Marnus Labuschagne, Pakistan's Babar Azam and injured David Warner. Pujara is seventh in the chart with 766 points, followed by Ben Stokes (760), Joe Root (738) and India Test vice-captain Rahane (726) to complete the top-10 list. Pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah (779) and veteran off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin (756) are the two Indians to find a place in the ICC Test rankings for bowlers at eighth and 10th spots respectively. The list is being headed by Australia's Pat Cummins (904), followed by England's Stuart Broad and New Zealand's Neil Wagner. Two other Indians — Ravindra Jadeja and Ashwin — also feature in the top-10 list for ICC Test rankings for all-rounders,

● **Chesteshwar Pujara is seventh in the chart with 766 points, followed by Ben Stokes (760), Joe Root (738) and India Test vice-captain Ajinkya Rahane (726) to complete the top-10 list.**

which is being topped by Stokes. While Jadeja is placed third in the chart with 397 rating points behind West Indies' Jason Holder, Ashwin is at sixth with 281 points. In the ICC Test rankings for teams, India are currently placed third after New Zealand jumped to the second spot following their recent 2-0 series win over the West Indies. India have 114 rating points, two points behind New Zealand and table-toppers Australia, who both have 116 points but the Aussies are ahead on decimal points. England are placed fourth ahead of Sri Lanka, South Africa, Pakistan, West Indies, Bangladesh and Zimbabwe. But India have a chance to move up the ranking ladder as they take on Australia in the four-match Test series, starting Thursday in Adelaide. — PTI

SYED MUSHTAQ | ALI T20



Yuvraj Singh

Yuvraj named in Punjab probables

New Delhi, Dec. 15: World-cup winning former India all-rounder Yuvraj Singh is set to come out of retirement and play domestic cricket again after being named in Punjab's 30-strong list of probables for next month's Syed Mushtaq Ali T20 tournament. Yuvraj, the star of India's 2011 World Cup-winning campaign, had announced his retirement last June but he decided to resume playing for his home state after being approached by Punjab Cricket Association secretary Puneet Bali. The 39-year-old left-handed batsman, who has played 304 ODIs, 40 Tests and 58 T20Is for India, has been training at the PCA stadium in Mohali and also posted a video of his preparations on social media. The BCCI plans to conduct the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy, the national T20 championship, from January 10, the venues for which will be declared later. The tournament will be conducted in bio-secure and teams will have to assemble at their respective bases by January 2.

RAINA ALL SET TO PLAY FOR UTTAR PRADESH

Former India batsman Suresh Raina is all set to represent his home state of Uttar Pradesh. Raina announced his retirement from international cricket in August this year, but the World Cup-winning cricketer will continue to play domestic cricket for his native state and in the Indian Premier League. **SREESANTH IN KERALA PROBABLES LIST** Former India fast bowler S. Sreesanth on Tuesday moved closer to a return to competitive cricket after being named in a 26-strong probables list by Kerala for the upcoming T20 tournament. The 37-year-old Sreesanth, who was banned by the BCCI over his alleged involvement in spot-fixing in the IPL, features alongside Sanju Samson, Sachin Baby, Jalaj Saxena, Robin Uthappa and Basil Thampi among others. — Agencies

INDIA TO OPEN AGAINST A QUALIFIER IN WOMEN'S WC

Dubai, Dec. 15: India will open their campaign in the rescheduled Women's ODI World Cup against a qualifier on March 6, 2022 at Tauranga's Bay Oval in New Zealand, according to the 31-match schedule announced by the ICC on Tuesday. India have two more matches against qualifiers on March 12 and March 22 at Seddon park, Hamilton in the eight-team round-robin format event. Among the marquee games, Tauranga will host the rematch of the 2017

World Cup final at Lord's with India taking on England on March 16. India will then face Australia at Eden Park, Auckland on March 19, before locking horns with South Africa on March 27 at Hagley Oval, Christchurch. The event, which was postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic from its original window in February-March 2021 with the same six host cities and venues retained, will be held between March 4 and April 3, 2022. — PTI

योगस्थः कुरु कर्माणि संगं त्यक्त्वा धनंजय ।
सिद्धय-सिद्धयोः समो भूत्वा समत्वं योग उच्यते ॥



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Srimad Bhagavadgita Sadan
Kurukshetra University

International Gita Webinar
22-23 December, 10:00 AM

Complete Bhagavadgita Paath
21-25 December, 10:30 AM
Jyotisar and Sannihit Sarovar

Sant Sammelan
24 December, 02:00 PM
Srimad Bhagavadgita Sadan,
Kurukshetra University

Global Gita Chanting (Online)
25 December, 12:00 Noon
Purushottampura Bagh, Brahma Sarovar

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