# THE ASIAN AGE

**NEW DELHI SATURDAY 19 DECEMBER 2020** 



WORLD 6

Ratan Tata to get 'Global Visionary of Sustainable **Business and Peace' award** 



SPORT 8

Lewandowski wins Fifa's best men's player award, beats Messi and Ronaldo

> ties arè pained today. They are asking them

**DELHI AGE** 11

Karan Johar replies to NCB, denies drugs being used in party at his house

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Aircraft perform during a military parade to mark Qatar's National Day celebration in Doha on Friday. -AFP

#### **SC** to states: Set up panel for fire audit of corona hospitals

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Friday directed all the states to constitute a committee in each district to conduct fire audit of Covid-19 hospitals at least once a month, inform the management of medical establishment about any deficiency and report to the government for taking follow up action. The SC bench said that Covid-19 hospitals, which have not obtained no objection certificate from the concerned fire department, should be asked to immediately apply for NOC. — PTI Full report on Page 3

### **Covid recoveries at**

all time high of 95L

New Delhi: India on Friday registered a landmark achievement in its fight against Covid-19 with total recoveries crossing the crucial peak of 95 lakh. With 22.890 new coronavirus cases, the total caseload rose to 99.79 lakh. The death toll reached 1,44,789 with 338 more fatalities. Full report on Page 3

#### **Mercury dips below**

3°C in parts of Delhi

New Delhi: The minimum temperature dropped below the three degrees Celsiusmark in parts of Delhi on Friday as frosty winds from snow-covered western Himalayas continue to sweep the national capital, the India Meteorological Department said. - PTI



When will we get to see 'House Full' boards again?





**Max:** 19°C Min: 7°C **RH:** 50% Rain: Nil

Forecast: Sunny

### ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Dakshinayana Tithi: Margasira Shuddha Panchami till 2.19 pm Star: Dhanistha till 7.14 pm **Variyam:** 3.20 am to 5.51 am **Durmuhurtam:** 6.44 to 8.12 am Rahukalam: 9 am to 10.30 am

**SUNSET TODAY 5.28 PM SUNRISE TOMORROW 7.08 AM MOONRISE TOMORROW 11.08 AM MOONSET TODAY 10.15 PM** 



## PM ready to discuss 'all issues' with farmers, allay their fears

NEW DELHI/BHOPAL,

Narendra attack on



the Opposition for "ped-dling lies" to mislead farmers on the new agricultural reform laws, which have triggered nationwide protests, and said he was ready "with folded hands" to "discuss every issue" with the farmers and allay their

Addressing a "kisan sammelan" (farmers' conference) at Raisen, Madhya Pradesh, via video-conferencing on Friday, the PM claimed the measures were discussed by every government over the past two

**SANJAY KAW** 

NEW DELHI, DEC. 18

With negotiations bet-

ween the farmers' unions

and the Centre locked in

an impasse, agriculture minister Narendra Singh

Tomar on Friday said the

government was hopeful

of resolving the farmers'

agitation over the three

new farm laws before the

new year and was contin-uing its informal dialogue



Farmers protest against the Centre's new farm laws at the Kundli border in Sonipat on Friday.

*UP* cracks whip, orders 6 farmers to pay ₹50K bonds; support grows nationwide

about Minimum Support Price (MSP) ending with the new laws "is the the new laws biggest lie ever".

These laws were not brought in overnight. In the past 22 years, every government, every state has discussed these in detail. Farmers' groups, agricultural experts, economists, scientists and

with various groups to

Speaking to a news agency, Mr Tomar reiter-

ated that the new laws were beneficial for farm-

ers and the government

was ready to give a writ-ten assurance that the

minimum support price

(MSP) and mandi system

will continue. He said:

"We have constantly been

holding discussions with

unions...

defuse the crisis.

called for reforms. Parties opposing these laws today promised these reforms in their manifestos," Mr Modi said.

"If anyone has any con-cerns, then with our heads bowed and our

by thousands of farmers. A number of senior ministers are part of this out-Emphasising the need for reforms, Mr Modi said

hands folded, with humility, we are willing to dis-cuss with them and assuage their fears," he

Indian farmers should not Tomar 'hopes' for solution by yearend

#### selves how Modi could achieve what they couldn't do in all this time. They are worried Modi will get credit. My reply to them is — you keep the credit. I don't want credit. I only want farmers' lives to improve. Stop mislead-Ravichandran Ashwin celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of Australia's ing the farmers." The Prime Minister has Nathan Lyon on Day 2 of the first Test at the Adelaide Oval on Friday. Ashwin produced one of his most memorable overseas performances as Indian bowlers collectively in most of his recent speeches tried to explain

terrorised Australia into submission, bowling them out for 191.  $\blacksquare$  Report on Page 8 -APthat the laws brought by his government are for More leaders quit TMC as the farmers' good. But on Friday, he addressed the farmers directly as part of Shah to begin Bengal visit his government's big outreach amid protests on the highways near Delhi

Adhikari gets 'Z' security, Speaker yet to accept letter

**RAJIB CHOWDHURI** KOLKATA, DEC. 18

Following the footsteps of Shubhendu Adhikari and Jitendra Tiwari, another heavyweight MLA Silbhadra Datta and former West Bengal textiles minister Shyamapada Mukhreriee have quit the ruling Trinamul Congress in a revolt to join the BJP.

Mr Datta is also the third legislator to have

ties snapped Mamata Banerjee's party ahead of Union home minister Amit Shah's two-day visit to the state starting Saturday.

Within a few hours of the exit of Mr Adhikari and Mr Tiwari from the TMC, Mr Datta wrote to Ms Banerjee in a letter on Thursday: "With due

### **Dissent in Bengal BJP over** induction of TMC deserters

AGE CORRESPONDENT KOLKATA, DEC. 18

sudden trend among heavyweights deserting the ruling Trinamul Congress to join the BJP ahead of the Assembly Election in West Bengal has triggered a strong dissent within the saffron party

their party without any judgement of their past.

More on Page 3 organisations with imme-

Prominent BJP leaders like Babul Supriyo,

Agnimitra Paul and

even state president Dilip Ghosh have been

up in arms against the TMC deserters'

overnight induction to

regards to you I am tendering my resignation as a member of the All India Trinamool Congress as well as from all other positions held by me in the party and its associate

diate effect. I am thankful for all the opportunities that has been afforded to me and I will always value my time spent as

Turn to Page 4

# G23 core group & others today

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 18

After a four-month wait, Congress president Sonia Gandhi will meet a core group of the 23 leaders who had written to her in August seeking drastic changes in the party's functioning at her 10 Janpath residence here on Saturday.

Besides five or six

among the 23 letter-writers, AICC general secretary (organisation) K.C. Venugopal, Rajasthan CM Ashok Gehlot and senior leader Kamal Nath, who had played the role of mediator between the leadership and this group after the passing of Ahmed Patel, are likely to be present.

It is learnt that Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra will also be at the meeting.

As he party's internal elections are approach-



demand to make Mr Rahul Gandh president again has g a i n e d momentum. AICC gener-

secretary Randeep Singh Surjewala said: "The party will soon start the procedure to elect a new president, and 99.9 per cent, including me, want Rahul Gandhi to be elected party president.'

The Congress is trying to downplay the entire exercise and calling it just a meeting with senior leaders Saturday, as there will also be those who aren't letter signatories. The demand for an active and visible leadership is likely to be raised, given the party's recent electoral debacles, not only in Assembly elec-tions and byelections but also in local body polls.

#### are still open for talks... I farmers.

reach a solution through dialogue with them. We hope through dialogue we can move towards reaching a solution.'

Overall, our effort is to

Asked about his recent remark that he would "genuine" engage with farm leaders, the minister "When I say genuine, I mean those who are really concerned about farmers. There is no point to talking with those who want to shoot from the shoulders of Despite the govern-

ment's repeated assurances that the new laws were for the benefit of farmers, thousands of farmers from Punjab and protesting at Delhi's borders for over three weeks. Several protesting leaders

### Sonia will meet Central Vista: PM residence to have 10 buildings ment project, after the

#### New Delhi, Dec. 18: The Prime Minister's new residential complex will have 10 four-storey buildings with a maximum height of 12 metres, according to the government's latest proposal for the redevelopment of Central Vista.

there is "no question of dropping" the proposed new Prime Minister's Office (PMO) from the Central Vista Redevelop-

**Hathras victim** 

raped, killed by

4 accused: CBI

New Delhi, Dec. 18:

The CBI on Friday

filed a chargesheet

against the four men

accused of the gan-

grape and murder of a

woman in a village in

UP's Hathras district.

After nearly two months of probe, the

agency concluded in

its final report that

the accused allegedly

gangraped and mur-

19-year-old

Official sources said that

the same in its new proposal before an expert panel of the ministry of environment and forest. Central Public Works Department (CPWD), which is execut-

CPWD did not mention

ing the project, has revised the estimated cost from ₹11,794 crore to ₹13,450 crore. The Prime Minister's

new residence will be built

on a 15-acre plot and it will have 10 buildings and they will have ground plus three floors, the CPWD

said in its proposal. Permissible ground coverage at the prime minister's new residence would be 30,351 square metre, it stated, adding that a building for the Special Protection Group will come up on a 2.50-acre plot.

Vista Central Redevelopment project

also includes the new Vice President's Enclave which will be built on 15-acre land and will have five-storey buildings with a maximum height of 15 metres, the CPWD said in its proposal.

The VP Enclave will

have 32 buildings. Reacting to the CPWD's

move to drop the proposed new PMO in its latest proposal, Kanchi Kohli, legal researcher, Centre for

Policy Research, said that the documents submitted to the environment ministry do not give any justification on why some plots or offices have been excluded or why the costs have increased despite such exclusions.

"But equally important is the CPWD's answer to whether any alternatives to the present proposal were considered is a no, Ms Kohli said.

**India-China** 

diplomatic

talks resume

over Ladakh

AGE CORRESPONDENT

India and China agreed,

as they resumed diplo-

matic talks on resolving the military standoff in Ladakh, to "continue to

work towards ensuring

complete disengagement

of troops in all friction

points along the LAC at

At the virtual talks, the

two sides agreed the next round of military

dialogue should be held

the earliest.

NEW DELHI, DEC. 18

#### dered the woman. US vice-president Mike Pence receives a Covid-19 vaccine to promote the safety and ■ More on Page 4 efficacy of the vaccine at the White House on Friday. Report on Page 6

### In today's wars, mobiles have bigger reach than missiles: Rajnath

Dec. 18: Chandigarh, Apparently referring to the impact of social media conflicts between nations, defence minister Rajnath Singh on Friday said the reach of the mobile phone now is bigger than that of a missile. Addressing the annual Military Literature Festival, Mr Singh warned that different kinds of security threats may emerge in the

This event is important from another point of view, he said through conference.

times change, the nature of threats and wars is also changing. In the future, other security-related issues may come before

He added that conflicts are gradually becoming comprehensive in the manner never imagined Possibly alluding to the

power of social media and mobile apps, he said, Today the range (marak kshamta) of a mobile has crossed even the reach of a missile, he said. He added that the enemy can



Defence minister Rajnath Singh speaks at the event through video conference on Friday.

now reach people even without crossing any borders, and urged everyone to play the role of a sol-'We should remain alive

to these dangers and save ourselves from wrong and misleading information and save others too, and festivals like this can play a key role in this," he said, urging literary figures to make use of their talent to the full for this.

The defence minister did not specifically refer to China.

But in recent months, since the standoff between the two sides began at the India has banned several Chinese mobile apps, citing concerns related to national security and pri-

Line of Actual Control,

These included the popular TikTok and WeChat

apps.
Mr Singh said this year's edition of the festival was special as the country is observing the 50th year of 1971 India-Pakistan War.

The minister said there are many veterans around who fought that war and urged the youth to learn

from them. He asked them

to follow in the footsteps of soldiers who are living legends.

He said the war games played on mobile phones were no match to their real-life experiences.

Mr Singh said he was scheduled to participate in last year's edition of MLF but could not come to Chandigarh due to a Parliament session.

But he had kept myself regularly updated on the festival events, including book releases and panel discussions, the defence minister said. — PTI

at an early date so they can work towards an early and complete disengagement of troops, the external affairs min-

istry said Friday. The two sides noted

that the seventh and eighth rounds of the commanders' meetings held recently "had also contributed to ensuring stability on the ground"

China also said in a statement that the two sides "had a candid and in-depth exchange of views on the situation" along the Line of Actual

Control. More on Page 3







#### **Centre interfering in** Bengal, alleges Kejri; **supports Mamata**

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 18

Delhi chief minister and AAP convener Arvind Keiriwal on Friday extended his support to the West Bengal government and alleged the Centre of blatantly interfering in the West Bengal administration, saying its move to transfer police officers in the state was an "assault" on federalism. The TMC government in Bengal led by Mamata Banerjee is strongly opposing the Centre's move to send three IPS officers, who were involved in the security of BJP chief JP Nadda during his recent visit to West Bengal, on centhe Centre's blatant interference in the Bengal administration. Encroaching on the rights of states by attempting to transfer police officers to Centre just before elections, is an assault on federalism and an attempt to destabilize," Mr Kejriwal tweeted. The three IPS officers were responsible for the security of Nadda whose convoy was attacked during his recent visit to the state scheduled for Assembly polls in 2021. The Centre wants them shifted on account of alleged dereliction of duty that led to the attack on Nadda's convoy in Diamond Harbour con-stituency of TMC MP and Banerjee's nephew Abhishek Banerjee. The West Bengal chief minister has slammed the Centre saying the move, particularly before the elections is against the basic

### Fire kills 2 minor

tenets of the federal struc-

and completely unaccept-

able, she has said. The BJP

and TMC are engaged in a war-of-words after the BJP-

ruled central government

from West Bengal to be sent

to the Centre on deputation.

asked three IPS officers

ture. It's "unconstitutional"

**brothers in Delhi** New Delhi: Two minor brothers were killed in a fire at a footwear sole storeroom in southwest Delhi's Sagarpur area on Friday, officials said. The deceased have been identified as Aayush (5) and Shriansh (6), whose father deals in footwear sole and had stored the material in a room at their rented accommodation, they said. Police suspects that an electric short-circuit triggered the fire. A call about the fire was received at 2.44 pm after which three fire tenders were rushed to the spot, a fire official said. According to the Delhi Fire Services the fire was doused by 4 pm. The brothers were rushed to a nearby hospital where doctors declared them dead on arrival, Delhi Fire Services Director Atul Garg said. A senior police officer said that as per doctors, it appears that the two children choked to death due to smoke. The bodies will be handed over to the family after post-mortem on Saturday. Local police and a team of the Forensic Science Laboratory visited the spot to ascertain the cause of the fire. According to the police, the family of the deceased moved to the ground floor house on December 1. Those living on other floors of the

#### **Noida: 9 more 'land** mafia' identified

building were rescued by the

police with the help of some locals. — PTI

Noida: The Gautam Buddh Nagar administration on Friday listed nine more people as "land mafia" and officials said action would be taken against them soon. The names were added during a review meeting chaired by District Magistrate Suhas L Y. An FIR would be lodged against these people soon so that the police can initiate action, the officials said. Those identified as "land mafia" are Pratap, Chaman Singh, Utkarsh Goyal, Rajpa Singh and his son Sooraj Singh, Dheeraj Kumar, Padam, Rajpal and Vijay, according to Additional DM Diwakar Singh. These people have either encroached government land in the district or carried out construction on illegally acquired plots, the ADM said in a report. "As per the instructions of the DM, the details of these people would be uploaded on the land mafia portal of the district and FIRs lodged against them so that police can initiate action against them," Singh said. - PTI

# ₹2.5Kcr MCD scam: Delhi House demands CBI probe

### Resolution passed, Opp. BJP terms allegation 'baseless'

**SUNIL THAPLIYAL** 

Hitting out at the BJP-led three municipal corpora-tions in the national capital over corruption, the Delhi Assembly, on Friday, passed a resolution by voice vote demanding a CBI inquiry into the alleged ₹2,500 crore scam in these three municipal corporations. AAP MLA Saurabh Bhardwaj initiated a discussion on the issue following which the resolution was passed.

'Scams come up regularly in BJP-ruled corporations. The new councillors have broken the record of their predecessors in corruption," he

"The MCD is like a daughter of Delhi which was given to the BJP that has acted as a mother-inlaw. BJP is acting the same by demanding ₹13,000 crore from the AAP. In the 2017 municipal polls, BJP changed all its sitting councillors because people were unhappy with them," Mr Bhardwaj said. The AAP MLA alleged that the scam runs into thousands of crores of

"The building department of corporations is known for corruption and for demanding bribes. A BJP councillor was caught

red-handed by the CBI for

**AAP MLA Saurabh** Bhardwaj initiated a discussion on the issue following which the resolution was passed. "Scams come up regularly in BJPruled corporations. The new councillors have broken the record of their predecessors in corruption," he claimed.

taking ₹10 lakh for construction of a building," he added. However, Leader of

Opposition in the Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri termed the allegations of misappropriation of funds worth ₹2,500 crore as "baseless."

Meanwhile, BJP MLA O.P. Sharma boycotted the House when he was not allowed to speak in the debate. The party legislators displayed placards at their seats, demanding the release of financial dues of ₹13,000 crore to the civic bodies. Earlier in the day, AAP

MLAs trooped into the well of the House raising slogans against the BJPruled MCDs as soon as the session started. Speaker Ram Niwas Goel had adjourned the House for 15 minutes as the party MLAs continued to wave placards and raise slogans despite his attempts to bring order and continue the proceedings.

# Scam in MCDs bigger than 2010 CWG fraud: Kejriwal

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 18

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Friday said the alleged scam of ₹2,500 crore in the BJP-ruled municipal corporations was even bigger than the Commonwealth Games scam.

Addressing a special session of the Delhi Assembly, he claimed that scams of ₹5,000-10,000 crore happen every year in municipal corporations while giving required per-



day as we Kejriwal t

b i g g e s t scam in MCD. ₹2,500 crore scam is bigger than the Commonwealth Games scam. Even people on the street say there is corruption in MCD and the same people say the Delhi gov-

DDMA's November 28

December 31 all social,

or other gatherings throughout the national

capital to prevent the

The court was hearing a plea by the Civil Lines

Residents Association,

represented by advocate

Rohit Bhagat, against the

ongoing protest outside

vations by the court came

spread of Covid-19.

prohibits

"₹2,500 crore could have been used to pay salaries of sanitation workers, doctors and other employees of corporations. It could have been used to make 12,500 hospital beds or 7,500 Mohalla Clinics," Kejriwal added.

The AAP national convenor asked Leader of Opposition Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri to push for a CBI probe into the alleged



SDMC deputy chairperson Maya Bisht is attended to after she fell sick during her hungerstrike outside Delhi CM's residence in New Delhi on Friday.

### If DDMA prohibits, evict protesters from outside CM's residence: HC

order

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 18

The Delhi High Court on Friday said if the state disaster management authority has prohibited political and other gatherings in the city till December 31 due to Covid-19, then the protestors outside chief Arvind Kejriwal's residence ought to be evicted.

Sanjeev Sachdeva said that the court expects the police to take appropriate steps to implement the direction of the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) and also the provisions of section 144 IPC which has been imposed in

the area where the chief minister's residence is located. The court said that if no action is taken for violation of the DDMA direction, then it will send out an "incorrect signal".
"The issue is if the

DDMA order prohibits such gathering, then you have to shift them. Rather you have to evict them. Else incorrect signal will go. The District Magistrates have to ensure compliance of the DDMA directions. Compliance of DDMA order can be ensured only by issuing appropriate directions.

the police during the hear-

the CM's residence there on grounds that it was blocking the road and Issue directions and if they causing inconvenience to do not comply, then take residents there. The directions and obseraction," the court said to

after it was told by Delhi Police that it has provided to the protestors the copies of the DDMA direction, a academic, sports, enter-tainment, cultural, reli-gious, political functions standing order issued by the agency prohibiting protests in residential areas and that section 144 IPC has been imposed in the area, but they were not

moving away from the site. Delhi government additional standing counsel Gautam Narayan, appearing for the police, said that requests were made to the protestors to shift to an alternative site, but they have not complied with it. He further said that the

persons protesting are representatives and therefore, the police

### 3 women BJP councillors fall sick during hungerstrike

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 18

Three women councillors, including a former mayor, who are on hungerstrike demanding the release of due funds to the three civic bodies, were admitted at the Hindu Rao Hospital after their health condition worsened. The indefinite hunger strike by the city's three mayors and senior BJP councillors demanding release of tunas to the three BJP run civic bodies entered the second day on Friday. North Delhi Mayor Jai

Prakash, South Delhi Anamika Mithilesh, and East Delhi mayor Nirmal Jain have been leading an indefinite sit-in protest outside chief minister Arvind Kejriwal's residence since

December 7 and on indefi-

nite hunger strike since According to Mr

Prakash, on the second day of the indefinite hunger strike, former mayor of South Delhi Sunita Kangra, chairperson of health committee in East Delhi Municipal Corporation (EDMC) Kanchan Maheshwari, and deputy chairperson of South Zone ward commit-tee in SDMC Maya Bisht had to be admitted to the Hindu Rao Hospital of North Corporation due to low blood sugar.

'We are seating on dharna for the last 12 days and on indefinite hunger strike since Thursday outside the residence of the chief minister demanding release of the outstanding dues of ₹13,000 crores of all three corporations. But the chief minister neither tried to meet us nor is he

ready to listen to us," said Mr Prakash,

Former Union minister and senior BJP leader Vijay Goel, on Friday, met the mayors and party councillors at the protest site outside the chief minister's residence to support them.

'The three mayors of Delhi have been sitting on dharna for the last 12 days and on indefinite hunger strike for two days. They are fighting for the rights of 2 lakh employees working in the municipal cor porations. Citizens are standing with the mayors in this fight," said Mr

Mr Prakash said that until Mr Kejriwal does not clear the dues of the corporations, they will continue to sit on the dharna and be on indefinite hunger strike outside his residence

A vendor selling break-

rom the fire of his stove

on a cart during a cold

The minimum tempera-

Celsius-mark in parts of

Delhi on Friday as frosty

ered Western Himalayas

winds from snow-cov-

continue to sweep the

capital, the India

Department said.

Meteorological

national

winter morning in the

old quarters of New

ture dropped below

the three degrees

Delhi on Friday.

fast warms his hands

#### **Delhi records** 1,418 Covid-19 cases, positivity **rate at 1.6%**

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 18

The Covid-19 positivity rate remained below two per cent for the fourth consecutive day in the national capital Delhi recorded 1,418 new Covid-19 cases on Friday with over 88,000 tests conducted, with a positivity rate of 1.60 per cent. With 37 new fatalities, the death count climbed to 10,2. According to Delhi health department data, these 1,418 new cases came out of 88,400 tests conducted the previous day, including 48,180 RT-PCR tests and 40,220 rapid antigen tests. Yesterday with 1,363 fresh cases the city recorded its lowest cases since August 31.

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

The city had recorded

1,358 cases on August

On December 8, however, it had risen again to 4.23 per cent, but fell to 3.42 per cent on December 9 and 2.46 per cent on December 10. It had risen to 3.33 per cent again on December 11 and fell again to 2.64 per cent on December 12, and rose marginally again to 2.74 on December 13 but fell to per cent on December 14.

On December 15 and 16, the positivity rates were 1.9 per cent and 1.96 per cent respectively. On December 17, the city reported a positivity rate of 1.51 per cent.

The active cases tally on Friday dropped to 11,419 from 12,198 on the previous day. The bulletin said that the total number of cases has

climbed to 6,14,775. Uttar Pradesh's Gautam Buddh Nagar recorded 42 new Covid-19 cases that pushed the district's infection tally to 24,424 on Friday, official data showed. Active cases in the district came down further

to 717 from 759 the previous day, while the recovery rate reached crore, the police said. 96.71 per cent, according to the data released by the UP Health Department for a 24hour period.



Delhi deputy CM Manish Sisodia offers 'Ganga Puja' in Haridwar on Friday.

### Man arrested for ₹300cr loan misappropriation

New Delhi, Dec. 18: A 31year-old man was arrested for allegedly misappropriating funds to the tune of ₹300 crore availed as loans and credit facilities from various banks and financial institutions, the police

said on Friday.
Vaibhav Sharma, the chief finance officer (CFO) of a Gurgaon-based company engaged in car dealership, was arrested on Thursday in connection with a 2018 case registered against him and the other directors of the firm for misappropriation of bank

money, it said. An action was taken by the Economic Offences Wing (EOW) of the Delhi police after an authorised representative of one of the banks alleged that the directors of the alleged company — Rashpal Singh Todd and Mandhir Singh Todd and its CFO Vaibhav Sharma — duped their bank to the tune of ₹102

In view of sufficient incriminating evidence on record, accused Rashpal Singh Todd and Mandhir Singh Todd were already arrested in this case and

Vaibhav Sharma, the chief finance officer of a Gurgaon-based company engaged in car dealership, was arrested on Thursday in connection with a 2018 case registered against him and the other directors of the

charge-sheeted, it added.

According to the complainant bank, the accused persons had approached their branch at Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg in Delhi for financial assistance in 2007. The alleged company engaged in dealership of Audi cars had been avail-ing cash credit facility, trade advances, etc. for demo cars from the bank since 2007. It had also availed term loan, cash credit facility, and bank guarantee since 2013 onwards, the police said.

Till March 2018, the alleged company had been performing as per the terms and conditions but defaulted later. In June 2018, during an inspection at the showroom of the alleged company, only 29

cars were found against

200 cars, said O.P. Mishra,

the joint commissioner of police (EOW).
"During the investigation, it further emerged that the accused persons had submitted that their company had availed the financial assistance of ₹130 crore from other financial institutions including the complainant bank. Vaibhav Sharma had submitted a forged bank statement of J-K Bank for the period between June 1, 2018, and June 19, 2018, wherein the alleged company had availed the OD of ₹11.64

crore.
"During investigation of the bank records, it was found that the alleged company had actually availed the OD of ₹49.51 crore," he

said.
The officials of the alleged company have misappropriated the amount to the tune of about ₹102 crore and accused Sharma had told the complainant bank that the company was in losses during the past four years while the balance sheet of the company showed profits, Mr Mishra said.

#### Music teacher held for harassing, molesting 23-year-old student AGE CORRESPONDENT obscene messages on NEW DELHI, DEC. 18 WhatsApp. The matter came to light A music teacher has been on December 14 when the arrested for allegedly harassing and molesting girl along with her mother approached officials of the Chanakyapuri police his 23-year-old student, station to register a compolice said on Friday. The arrest was made plaint him, police said. after the victim, who was In her complaint, the doing her Diploma victim stated that the Honour in Kathak at a accused touched her inappropriately during a

centre in Chanakyapuri, accused the 52-year-old teacher of harassing her, According to the complainant, the accused — a 'pakhawaj (rhythm instrument) teacher at the

centre - molested the vic-

tim of touching her inap-

harassed her by sending

training session and sent her obscene messages. On December 14, he again molested by putting his hands on the waist and kissing her on the forehead. He also tried to kiss on her face, Deputy commissioner of police (New Delhi) Eish

Singhal said based on the statement of the victim, a case was registered under section 354 (assault or criminal force to woman with intent to outrage her modesty), 354 A (sexual harassment and punishment for sexual harassment) and 509 (word, gesture or act intended to insult the modesty of a woman) of the Indian Penal Code and the accused has been arrest-

The accused, a resident of Dilshad Garden, is currently in judicial custody. The statements of other students are also being recorded, police said, adding that further investigation is underway.

IN BRIEF

#### **PM'S VARANASI OFFICE LISTED ON OLX FOR 'SALE'**

Varanasi (UP), Dec. 18: Four have been arrested allegedly posting online advertisement list-



ing Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Varanasi office for 'sale", police said on Friday.

The accused had taken a picture of the "Jansampark Kaaryalay (public relations office)" of Modi, who represents Varanasi in the Lok Sabha, and put it "up for sale" on OLX website, they said.

The office is located in the Jawahar Nagar locality of the city, and it falls under the Bhelupur police station limits, Varanasi senior superintendent of Police (SSP) Amit Pathak said.

"Yesterday, it came to our notice that the prime minister's office here has been put up on sale on OLX website. An ÎR was immediately lodged at the Bhelupur police station, and the matter is being investigated," Pathak said.

Four people involved in the case have been taken in custody," the SSP said, adding that the person who took the picture and put it on the website is among them.

The accused are being questioned, and further legal proceedings are being carried out, he said.

Prime Minister Modi, a four-time chief minister of Gujarat, was first elected to the Lok Sabha from Varanasi in 2014 and then re-elected from the constituency in 2019.

#### **TOP COURT NOTICE** TO KAMRA, RACHITA **IN CONTEMPT CASE**

New Delhi, Dec. 18: The Supreme Court issued showcause notices to stand-up comedian Kunal Kamra and cartoonist Rachita Taneja on Friday for their alleged scandalous tweets against the apex

A bench of Justices Ashok Bhushan, R.S. Reddy and M.R. Shah sought response from both in six weeks on the notices issued in two separate cases. It, however, exempted them from personal appearances in the cases.

Issue notice returnable within Six weeks. The contemnor respondent not to appear in person, the bench said in its order passed in a plea against Mr Kamra.

Similar order was passed by the bench in the plea against Taneja.

The top court in its two orders noted that attorney-general K.K. Venugopal has given his consent to initiate contempt proceedings against both the comic artists in sepa-

rate cases. Mr Venugopal had granted consent for initiation of criminal contempt proceedings against Mr Kamra, saying the comedian's tweets were in "bad taste" and it was time that people understand that attacking the apex court brazenly would attract punishment. The attorney-general had also given consent to initiate criminal contempt proceedings against Ms Taneja, stating that the caricatures posted by her on social media were intended to denigrate the Supreme Court and lower its authority in the eyes of the

The consent of either the attorney general or the solici-tor general is necessary under Section 15 of the Contempt of Courts Act for initiating contempt proceedings against a

Criminal contempt of the Supreme Court is punishable with a fine of up to ₹2,000 and imprisonment of up to six

### ■ Babul Supriyo, Agnimitra Paul are up in arms against the TMC deserters' overnight induction to party Dissent in Bengal BJP over TMC entrants

**RAJIB CHOWDHURI** KOLKATA, DEC. 18

The sudden trend among heavyweights deserting the ruling Trinamul Congress to join the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) ahead of the Assembly election in West Bengal has triggered

strong dissent within the saffron party in the state. Prominent BJP leaders like Babul Supriyo, Agnimitra Paul and even state president Dilip Ghosh are up in arms against the TMC desert ers' overnight induction to their party without any assessment of their past.

ing their displeasure openly after Jitendra Tiwari, Pandabeshwar MLA and former Asansol Mayor, left the TMC on Thursday.

Referring to Tiwari, Supriyo, Asansol MP and Union minister, wrote on Facebook, "What my Top Bosses decide is a different thing but I will try my very best with all my might & honesty to ensure that NO #TMC leader who tormented, tortured (both physically & mentally) my grass root level BJP colleagues in Asansol, don't get an entry in BJP!!"

Paul, the state BJP women wing chief, said, "Suddenly after nine years

BJP LEADERS started voicing their displeasure openly after Jitendra Tiwari left the Trinamul Congress on Thursday

Tiwari felt that he could not do his welfare work for Asansol as crores of money for projects were returned. Where were these thoughts in him? These came to his mind four months before the Assembly elections. He opposed Suprivo. Moreover the people of Asansol do not like him. Many told me to ensure he does not come to our party

Ghosh, the Midnapore

BJP MP, said, "There is a tiff between Supriyo and because when Tiwari was the Asansol Mayor and TMC district president, he did not allow

Supriyo to work in his Lok Sabha constituency. Bricks were hurled on Supriyo on the road. So Tiwari was his rival there. Now when he shows a prospect to join the BJP, it is natural for Supriyo to voice his complaint against him. Tiwari, however, claimed

the BJP. On Barrackpore MLA Silbhadra Datta's prospect Ghosh observed, "Quiting the TMC and joining the

that he had no plan to join

BJP are two different issues. We have seen that many leaders left the TMC earlier. That does not mean all of them came to the BJP or they were roped into our party."

In Bankura, a group of BJP workers came out on road and organised a demonstration near their party office after former state textiles minister Shyamapada Mukherjee quit the TMC on Thursday evening and hailed his excolleague Shubhendu Adhikari as his leader with a hope to join the BJP. They made it clear that Mukherjee

should not be allowed to

SHASHI BHUSHAN

NEW DELHI, DEC. 18

India on Friday registered

a landmark achievement in

its fight against the Covid-

19 when total recoveries in

the country crossed a crucial peak of 95 lakh. Union

health ministry, mean-while, said that getting vac-

cinated for Covid-19 will be

voluntary, while emphasis-

ing that the vaccine intro-

duced in India will be as

effective as any vaccine

developed by other coun-

According to the Union

health ministry, meanwhile, the ongoing trend of

India's total recoveries con-

tinues as the total recov-

recovered cases is continu-

ously widening. Recoveries

rate has also increased to

95.40 per cent. India is one

of the top countries with

the highest recovery rate globally. The total recov-

ered cases are more than 30

times the number of active

cases. India's present active

caseload of 3,13,831 con-

sists of just 3.14 per cent of

total positive cases," said

With 22.890 new Covid-19

cases, the total caseload

rose to 99.79 lakh and with

death toll reached 1,44,789.

The Union health ministry listed a series of fre-

(FAQs) on Covid-19 vaccine.

said that vaccination for

the Union health ministry.

### Amid growing rebellion in TMC, **Shah on two-day visit to Bengal**

Kolkata, Dec. 18: Home Minister Amit Shah will arrive in Kolkata on Friday night on a two-day visit to Bengal and take stock of the BJP's affairs and activities in the districts, ahead of 2021 Assembly elections.

According to a press statement issued by BJP national media in-charge, Anil Baluni, Shah will participate in various programmes and functions

Health ministry: Covid

shots will be voluntary

during the weekend.
"In the wake of ensuing

Assembly elections, Amit Shah will also hold strategic and preparatory meetings," he said. Shah will be putting up

at a hotel in Newtown after arriving in Kolkata around 11 PM, another BJP leader said. Shah will also review ele-

ction management work during a meeting with central ministers from West Bengal, organisation secretaries, zonal observers and BJP state general secretaries.

#### ■ 7th, 8th rounds of senior commanders' meet held recently

## India-China diplomatic talks resume over Ladakh dispute

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 18

A satisfactory resolution on the ground to the situation in the Ladakh sector between deployed Chinese and Indian troops still remains elusive despite several rounds of talks at the diplomatic and military level in the past several months. Nevertheless, India and China on Friday decided to "continue to work towards ensuring complete disengagement in all friction points along the LAC in the Western Sector at the earliest" and noted that senior commanders' meetings held recently "had also contributed to ensuring stability on the ground".

At the contributed to the senior of the contributed to the senior of the senior o the 7th and 8th rounds of

At the 20th meeting of the Working Mechanism Consultation & Coordination on India-China Border Affairs held Thursday between the two sides at the diplomatic level, it was "agreed to maintain close consultations at the diplomatic and military level" and also that "the next (9th) Senior Commanders meeting should be held at an early

### **India well positioned to play vital role** in Indian Ocean Region: Army Vice-Chief

New Delhi, Dec. 18: tary think-tank, he said region that is critical for India's dominant position at the geographical centre of the Indian Ocean as well as its robust economy and global standing as an upholder of law and democratic values placed it in a firm position to play a vital role in the quest for peace and stability in the region, Vice-Chief of Army Staff Lt. Gen. S.K. Saini said on Friday. In an address at a mili-

date". New Delhi said.

China also put out a statement saying that the

two sides "had a candid

and in-depth exchange of

views on the situation

along the Line of Actual Control in the China-

India border areas,

implement the five-point

between the foreign min-

isters of both countries

at the Moscow meeting,

focused on the disengage-

ment of front-line troops,and take concrete

measures to deal with the

earnestly

reached

to

agreed

consensus

India believes that adherence to rule of law, transparency, respect for all nations and peaceful non-negotiable are aspects to harness the vast potential of Indian Ocean.

Lt. Gen. S.K. Saini's comments came amid growing global concerns over China's increasing military muscle-flexing in the Indian Ocean, a

Mechanism for Consulta-

tion & Coordination on

India-China Border Affairs (WMCC) was held on 18 December 2020. The

Indian delegation was led

by Joint Secretary (East

Asia) from the Ministry

of External Affairs. The

Director General of the

existing challenges of piracy, human traffick-

India's strategic inter-

Vice-Chief of The Army staff cautioned that the increasing interest of "extra regional forces" and the ing, illegal fishing have all made the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) volatile and a potential "lobal battlefield".

-PTI

further deescalate the border situation", adding & Oceanic Affairs of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs led the that both sides "spoke Chinese delegation. highly of the outcomes of It added, "The two sides the 8th round of Senior reviewed the develop-ments along the Line of Commanders Meeting". In a statement, New Delhi said, "The 20th meeting of the Working

Actual Control (LAC) in the India-China border areas since the last round of the WMCC held on 30 September 2020." It was agreed that the efforts of the two sides would be based on the guidance provided by senior leaders and the agreements reached between the two foreign ministers and special representatives".

#### **Daggers out in Kerala BJP & Congress units**

Thiruvananthapuram: Blamegame has begun in the Kerala units of Congress-led UDF and BJP following the defeat in local body polls. The UDF  $\,$ which expected to do well riding on the antigovernment sentiments, ended up with a disappointing performance.

### **COVID WATCH** 99.79 lakh

1,44,789 DEATHS REGISTERED SO FAR

receive the complete schedule of Covid-19 vaccine for protecting one-self against this disease and also to limit the spread of this disease to the close contacts including family members, friends, relatives and coworkers.

exponential increment in Clearing doubts about the safety of vaccine, health ministry said, "Covid-19 vaccine will be introduced ered cases have crossed a crucial peak of 95 lakh (95,20,827). "The chasm between active cases and only when the safety is proven. As is true for other vaccines, the common side effects in some individuals have surpassed the active could be a mild fever, pain, cases by more than 92 lakh (92,06,996). The recovery etc. at the site of injection". On will Covid-19 vaccine

be given to everyone simultaneously, the ministry explained that based on the potential availability of vaccines; the government has selected priority groups to be vaccinated as they are at higher risk. "In the initial phase, Covid-19 vaccine will be provided to the priority group- health care and front-line workers. The 50 plus age group may also begin early based on vaccine availability," it said.

338 more fatalities, the why healthcare On providers and frontline workers are being chosen for receiving the COVID-19 quently asked questions vaccine, the union health Reply to a question is it ministry further explained mandatory to take the vac-cine, the health ministry that the government has prioritised the most at risk/high risk groups which will get the vaccine Covid-19 is voluntary, however, it is advisable to

### Recoveries at all time high of 95L; 22, 890 fresh infections SC to states: Set up panel for fire audit

of hospitals New Delhi, Dec. 18: The Supreme Court Friday directed all the states to constitute a committee in each district to conduct fire audit of Covid-19 hospitals at least once a month, inform the management of medical establishment about any deficiency and

report to the government

for taking follow up action. A bench headed by Justice Ashok Bhushan said that Covid-19 hospitals, which have not obtained no objection certificate from the concerned fire department, should be asked to immediately apply for NOC and after carrying necessary inspection, decision shall be taken in this

"Those Covid hospitals who have not renewed their NOC should immediately take steps for renewal on which appropriate inspection be taken and decision be taken. In event. Covid hospital is found not having NOC or not having obtained renewal, appropriate action be taken by the state," said the bench, also comprising Justices R.S. Reddy and M.R. Shah.

The top court directed that all states and Union Territories should appoint one nodal officer for each Covid-19 hospital, if not already appointed, who shall be made responsible for ensuring compliance of all fire safety measures.

### Guj man, 59, beats Covid after 113-day hospital stay

59-year-old man was on Friday discharged after a stay of 113 days in a city hospital for Covid-19 treatment with Gujarat deputy chief minister Nitin Patel claiming this is to be possibly the longest spell of hospitalisation for a coronavirus patient in India.

Ravindra Parmar tested positive for coronavirus on August 26 and was admitted in a private hospital in the Dholka area of Ahmedabad. However, he had to be shifted to the state-run Sola civil hospital on August 28 after his condition deteriorated.

"Ravindra Parmar's is a rare case of recovery as he was brought to Sola civil hospital in critical condition. Out of the 113 days here, he was in ICU for 90 days.

"At one point of time, he had to be given 75

# **ICMR** chief tests +ve for

issues on the ground to Department of Boundary

Council Indian Medical Research direc-Balram tor-general Bhargava is undergoing treatment for Covid-19 at the AIIMS trauma centre here, official sources said on Friday.

Dr Bhargava, who is also a cardiologist, had tested positive for coron- charged soon.

charged, said. "This is the longest hos-

pital stay for any Covid-19 patient in Gujarat, and, perhaps, even in the country. Doctors have given him the finest

New Delhi, Dec. 18: avirus infection around 7-8 days ago and was under home isolation, they said. He was admitted to the AIIMS trauma centre, which was converted into dedicated Covid-19 facility on December 15.

According to the sources, he is recovering well and likely to be dis-

litres of oxygen per minute for survival," Mr of oxygen per minute but only some amount of oxygen per minute but only some amount of his lungs were not functioning properly. But his recovery started soon after and today he has defeated the virus," said Patel, who holds the health portfolio.

### **NORTHERN RAILWAY**

**TENDER NOTICE** 

Date: 18 12 2020

No. CIID/SLR/Tender/2020 (Part IV) The Senior Divisional Commercial Manager /Freight, Northern Railway, New Delhi invites E-tender for the contract of leasing of SLR/SLRD space in the following special trains originating from various stations over Delhi Division:-Tender Opening Date: 11.01.2021

S. No.	Train No.	From	То	Comptt.	СС	Freq.	RP (in Rs.)	EMD (In Rs.)	Tender Cost (Including GST @ 18% in Rs.)	Tender No.
1	02463	DEE (Delhi Sarai Rohilla)	JU (Jodhpur)	FI	4	3	10711	100000	1180	SLR-FI-02463-Dec20
2	02463	DEE (Delhi Sarai Rohilla)	JU (Jodhpur)	FII	4	3	10711	100000	1180	SLR-FII-02463-Dec20
3	02463	DEE (Delhi Sarai Rohilla)	JU (Jodhpur)	RI	4	3	10711	100000	1180	SLR-RI-02463-Dec20
4	02618	NZM (Hazrat Nizamuddin)	ERS (Ernakulam Jn.)	FI	4	7	37665	100000	1180	SLR-FI-02618-Dec20
5	02618	NZM (Hazrat Nizamuddin)	ERS (Ernakulam Jn.)	FII	4	7	37655	100000	1180	SLR-FII-02618-Dec20
6	02284	NZM (Hazrat Nizamuddin)	ERS(Ernakulam Jn.)	FSLR	3.9	1	44491	100000	1180	SLR-FSLR-02284-Dec20
7	02414	NZM (Hazrat Nizamuddin)	MAO (Madgaon)	FSLR	3.9	2	35621	100000	1180	SLR-FSLR-02414-Dec20
8	02963	NZM (Hazrat Nizamuddin)	UDZ (Udaipur)	FI	4	7	12716	100000	1180	SLR-FI-02963-Dec20
9	02963	NZM (Hazrat Nizamuddin)	UDZ (Udaipur)	RI	4	7	12716	100000	1180	SLR-RI-02963-Dec20
10	04739	DEE (Delhi Sarai Rohilla)	BKN (Bikaner Jn.)	FI	4	3	11790	100000	1180	SLR-FI-04739-Dec20
11	04739	DEE (Delhi Sarai Rohilla)	BKN (Bikaner Jn.)	RI	4	3	11790	100000	1180	SLR-RI-04739-Dec20
12	04014	ANVT (Anand Vihar Terminal)	SLN (Sultanpur)	FI	4	2	11052	100000	1180	SLR-FI-04014-Dec20
13	14208	DLI (Delhi Jn.)	PBH (Partapgarh Jn.)	FII	4	7	11368	100000	1180	SLR-FII-14208-Dec20
14	14208	DLI (Delhi Jn.)	PBH (Partapgarh Jn.)	RI	4	7	11368	100000	1180	SLR-RI-14208-Dec20
15	14206	DLI (Delhi jn.)	FD (Faizabad Jn.)	FI	4	7	10711	100000	1180	SLR-FI-14206-Dec20
16	14206	DLI (Delhi Jn.)	FD (Faizabad Jn.)	FII	4	7	10711	100000	1180	SLR-FII-14206-Dec20

Interested bidders may please visit official website for e-tendering i.e. www.ireps.gov.in for further details and submitting tender

Important note:-Bidders, who wish to participate in the E-tendering will have to procure class-3 valid digital security certificate (DSC) as per Information Technology Act, 2000. Bidders can procure this certificate from any of the certifying authority of Controller of Certifying Authorities (CCA)

Government of India. Details of certifying authorities can be obtained from  $\underline{www.cca.gov.in}$ 2. Bidders, who want to participate in this E-tender will be required to register on Indian Railways website <a href="www.ireps.gov.in">www.ireps.gov.in</a> through a valid class-3 Digital Security Certificate (DSC), if not registered earlier, All information related to bidder registration and participation in this E-tender is available on the official website of Indian Railways www.ireps.gov.in.

3. Railway Administration reserves the full and absolute rights to short terminate these tenders/contracts at any point of time (or for taking any decision regarding the discontinuation/continuation of these tenders/contracts with modified/additional terms and conditions) depending upon the continuation/discontinuation of these special trains or commencements of correspondence regular train services

Kindly carefully read and follow the 'General Instructions, Instructions to tenderers and "Terms and Conditions" (including certain new modified instructions/ conditions) given in the Tender Document before submitting the ONLINE BID. 2823/20

**SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE** 

### Quad reviews efforts for peace Growing concern over China's expansionist behaviour in Indo-Pacific region

officials of India and three other member nations of 'Quad" grouping on Friday held talks on "practical" cooperation in areas like connectivity, infrastructure and security under a collective objective of promoting peace, stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region.

The virtual meeting took place in the midst of growing global concern over China's expansionist behaviour in the Indo-Pacific region.

The Quad or Quadrilateral coalition comprises India, Japan and Australia.

The ministry of external affairs (MEA) said the officials reaffirmed their commitment towards a free, open, prosperous and inclusive Indo-Pacific region based on shared values and principles and respect for international law especially UNCLOS

Convention on the Law of the Sea). The meeting of the senior officials came over two months after foreign ministers of the Quad countries held crucial talks in Tokyo. In November 2017, the four countries gave shape to the long-pending proposal of setting up the "Quad" to

develop a new strategy to keep the critical sea routes in the Indo-Pacific free of any influence. The MEA said the officials

exchanged views on regional and global issues of common interest.

"They also reviewed ongoing and proposed practical cooperation in the areas of connectivity and infrastructure development, and security issues, including counter-terrorism, cyber security, maritime security, humanitarian and disaster relief, with the objective of promoting peace, security, stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region," it said.

In the context of the coronavirus pandemic, the officials underscored the importance of enhancing the resilience of supply chains for an expeditious and sustainable global economic recovery.
"They also highlighted the

need to ensure safe, effective and affordable access to Covid-19 vaccines," MEA said.

It said the officials reiterated their firm support for Asean-centrality and Aseanled mechanisms, particularly the leaders-led East Asia architecture for the Indo-

SHORT TAKES

#### **Speeding Merc kills**

delivery boy, 20

Mumbai: In an accident that took place in the wee hours of Friday, a speeding Mercedes knocked down a two wheeler in Oshiwara. killing a 20-year-old Zomato delivery boy. The police later arrested the 19-year-old teenager who was behind the wheels and are probing the incident. The deceased was identified as Satish Parasnath Gupta, who was on his way to make a food delivery, when the accident took place around 2.30 am. The preliminary probe revealed that the car jumped a divider and rammed into

the bike crushing the rider to death immediately. The accused fled from the spot and was apprehended later. While the family of the deceased claimed that the teenager was drunk and

demanded justice, the officials said that the probe is underway. The police is probing the sequence of incidents to ascertain the place from where he was headed and if he was drunk.

#### **3 youths arrested**

for waving pistol

Bulandshahr, UP: Three men were arrested here on Friday after a video went viral of some youths apparently waving a pistol while riding a motorcycle, police said. One of the youths in the video — Golu alias Lalit Chaudhry — is said to be a soldier in the Army and is on leave from service. The youths were arrested with two revolvers, cartridges and a motorcycle recovered from them. It is not yet known if the revolvers belonged to the soldier or others. The arrested men were identified as Sandeep, Sachin and Akash, all residents of Janipur in Shikarpur police station area. Senior superintendent of police Santosh Kumar Singh said a video went viral on social media in which two youths are sitting on three motorcycles. One youth sitting at the back of a motorcycle is seen waving a pistol in his hands. — *PTI* 

### **FM promises 'never**

before' like Budget New Delhi: Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman promised a "never before" like Budget as the government looks to steer the pandemicbattered economy and push growth. While investment in health, medical R&D and developing greater skills to handle telemedicine is going to be critical, livelihood chal· lenges would have to be seen in a newer canvas with newer perspective on vocational training and skill development, "Send me your inputs so that we can see a Budget which is a Budget like never before, in a way. 100 years of India wouldn't have seen a Budget being made post pandemic like this. And that is not going to be possible unless I get your inputs and wish list, clear observation of what has put you through the challenge...," she said while

# CBI says Hathras girl was gangraped, killed

CBI files chargesheet against 4 men, leaves top UP officials red-faced

CBI on Friday filed a chargesheet against the four men accused of the gangrape and murder of a 19-year-old dalit woman in a village in Hathras district of Uttar Pradesh, officials said.

After nearly two months of probe, the agency concluded in its final report that the accused Sandeep, Ravi, Luv Kush and Ramu — allegedly gangraped and murdered the woman when she had gone to the fields to collect fodder on September 14 in her village Bhulgarhi, they said.

In its findings submitted before the competent court in Hathras, the agency has slapped IPC Sections pertaining to rape, murder and gangrape apart from those under the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act against the four accused men from the village, they said.

The maximum sentence

The agency has based its findings on the dying statement of the woman in which she is understood to have named the accused, besides scientific

capital punishment.

and forensic evidence col-lected by the CBI and statements of witnesses and the victim's family members recorded by it. The findings submitted by the CBI have left red faced the top officials of Uttar Pradesh Police who

had claimed that no evi-

dence of rape was found

in forensic tests. UP's additional directorgeneral (law and order) Prashant Kumar had said, 'The report of the FSL has come. It says clearly that samples did not contain semen. It makes clear that there was no rape or gangrape'

The ADG had also claimed that the woman in her statement to police "did not mention rape but talked about "maar-peet" (beating) only". An embar-

AFTER NEARLY two months of probe, the agency concluded in its final report that the accused - Sandeep, Ravi, Luv Kush and Ramu allegedly gangraped and murdered the woman when she had gone to the fields to collect fodder on September 14 in her village Bhulgarhi

rassed Uttar Pradesh government had to hand over the case to the CBI after the incident triggered massive public outrage and a political slugfest.

Coming close on the heels of Unnao rape case

in which Kuldeep Singh Sengar, a former BJP MLA, was sentenced life imprisonment for raping a minor girl in 2017, the gruesome Hathras incident snowballed into a political storm with members of the Congress, Aam Admi Party, Trinamul Congress and other Opposition leaders of the

state from SP and RLD staging massive protests.
The Allahabad high
court took suo motu cognisance of the victim's late night cremation by the state police and had some terse remarks for senior officials, warning them against character assassination of the victim and urging restraint by the

officials, political parties

and the media.

It also pulled up additional DG (law and order)

Prashant Kumar and Hathras district magistrate Praveen Laxkar for suggesting on the basis of absence of semen mentioned in the forensic report that the woman was not raped. The division bench of Justices Pankaj Mithal and Rajan Roy reminded the officials about the defi-

nition of rape, as legally

the presence of semen is

not necessarily required

to establish that the said

offence has taken place.

### 'Truth prevailed, charges raise serious questions on UP govt'

the CBI filing its chargesheet in the case of gangrape and murder of a 19-year-old dalit woman in Hathras, Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Friday said truth has prevailed and the development raises serious questions on the Yogi Adityanath government in Uttar Pradesh.

Reacting to the development, Priyanka Gandhi said the truth has pre-

vailed once again.
"The CBI charge sheet filed today against four accused in the Hathras case has stated that the 19year old victim was brutally gangraped and murdered," the Congress general secretary in-charge UP said in a statement.

This development raises

■ It will be tit for tat answer to BJP's opposition to Metro car shed in Mumbai

Sena may oppose Modi's Maha pet projects



Priyanka Gandhi Vadra

in Uttar Pradesh, UP police, ADG law and order, district magistrate of Hathras and senior functionaries of the state administration, Gandhi alleged.

"The state left no stone unturned to deny the victim dignity — in life and death. She was cremated without her family's consent in the middle of the night. Senior police offiserious questions on the Adityanath government cers and bureaucrats outrightly denied any rape,

and indulged in blatant shaming of the victim. Sections of media that dared to report the truth were manhandled," she alleged.

However, the entire might of the Uttar Pradesh government and police could not suppress the truth, Priyanka asserted. "I cannot forget the anguish of the 19-year old's mother, who couldn't even bid her daughter goodbye. All that her family sought was justice for their child," she said.

"I am heartened to see that an important step towards providing that justice has been taken by the CBI and hope that it will some comfort amidst the immense suffering that they have so courageously endured," she said. — PTI

### Failed political players misleading farmers, says Naqvi

New Delhi, Dec. 18: Slamming Opposition leaders for their stance against the farm laws, Union minister Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi has alleged that "failed political players" who have been rejected repeatedly by the people are acting under their "depression of defeat" and "misleading" farmers.

The minority affairs minister also lashed out at Rahul Gandhi and Arvind Kejriwal, alleging that the Congress leader was "posing" as a farm-ers' leader despite knowing little about farming, while the Delhi Chief Minister was "karne mein zero, dharne mein hero (zero in work, but hero in sit-ins)".

Farmers throughout the country are satisfied that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has worked for their empowerment and interests after coming to power, Mr Naqvi said.

The farmers' issue involves MSP, kisaan mandis and protection of farmers' land and the government has given a 100 per cent guarantee on the three fronts, he said.

Mr Naqvi asserted that neither the MSP will go, nor the mandis and there was no threat to farmers lands. The "Modi bashing brigade" instead of talking about issues of farmers, has started abusing Modi, he said, adding that questions arose with the entry of these "traditional Modi bashers'

On farmers' issues, the government has always believed in talks not 'takraav' (confrontation), Mr Naqvi asserted.

#### **Congress wants** laws to protect farmers in Maha

AGE CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI, DEC. 18

Congress demanded separate farm laws in Maharashtra to negate the Centre's farm laws. Senior Congress leader Ashok Chavan has written a letter to deputy chief minister and chairman of Cabinet sub-committee on farm laws Ajit Pawar, seeking a state law that will ensure minimum support price. In his letter, Mr Chavan

has urged the state government to enact farmerfriendly laws on the lines of Chhattisgarh, Punjab and Rajasthan. He said, States of Chhattisgarh, Punjab and Rajasthan have brought in very good laws to safeguard farmers from the Central laws. The Maha Vikas Aghadi government in Manarashtra should aisc bring such laws that will ensure no farm produce is purchased below the MSP, allow farmers the option to move the civil courts for any dispute."

"The government moved forward to resolve the issue through talks. When farmers were also satisfied that what the government was saving was logical and genuine, those people who were indulging in criminal conspiracy thought their game was going awry and they started misleading people," he said.

#### MUMBAI, DEC. 18 The Shiv Sena, rattled by the Bombay High Court's Metro car shed at salt pan land in Mumbai, is prepar-

**PRASAD PATIL** 

ing for direct confrontation with the Union government led by the Bharatiya Janata Party. The HC stayed the Metro

Centre's salt pan department challenged the state's decision in the

car shed work after the

Now, as part of its strate-

gy to take on its erstwhile alliance partner head-on, the Uddhav Thackeray-led party has decided to oppose the proposed port in Palghar district. The ₹65,000 crore project was approved by the Narendra

The Maharashtra government is also considering moving the Metro car shed to a site earmarked for the Mumbai-Ahmedabad bullet train project - another pet proj-

Modi government February this year.

the Vadhvan port project, which is part of Centre's Sagarmala initiative, in Palghar district.

According to reports, the chief minister Uddhav Thackeray met groups opposing the Vadhvan port as well Mumbai-Ahmedabad Bullet Train project — another pet project of PM Modi — and assured them that he will not allow any project against the wishes of

locals. Shiv Sena leader and Lok ect of PM Modi. Sabha MP Rajendra Gavit The locals are opposing confirmed that the local Sabha MP Rajendra Gavit

citizen groups have approached the CM seek-ing his intervention to have chief minister has issued scrap Vadhvan port as well as the Bullet Train projects. "Both these projects are being opposed by the locals as they are detri-mental to the local tribal population in Palghar dis-The port will adversely impact biodiversity of the coast. The government is also forcibly taking tribal lands for the Bullet Train, which must stop immediately," he said. Senor Shiv Sena minister Eknath Shinde said, "The

directives on Thursday itself to start a survey of the Bandra-Kurla-Complex plot for Metro car shed. The HC has stayed the work on salt pan land and we cannot preempt how much time the court will take. The decision to consider the BKC plot for the car shed has been taken so that the Metro project is not delayed.

BJP leader Devendra Fadnavis said that the talks of shifting the car shed to BKC are "childish and immature".

### **RJD** veteran urges Sonia to give up 'putra moh'

leader and veteran Bihar socialist Shivanand Tiwary on Friday called Rahul Gandhi a "reluctant and uninspiring" leader and urged Congress president Sonia Gandhi to overcome "putra moh" (weakness for her son) in deciding her political successor.

Tiwary made the explosive statement with the remark that he was aware that he could "irk the leadership of the very party of which I am at present a member".

"But, I have reached a stage where I do not always care about party diktats and choose to speak my mind.....Sonia Gandhi is going to hold an important meeting tomorrow. I wonder if it is going to yield any result," the former Bihar minister said in his statement.

The Congress president is scheduled to interact

Rahul has always come across as an anichhuk (reluctant) leader. He simply cannot inspire his supporters.

> - Shivanand Tiwary, RJD leader

with a host of party leaders, including the "letter writers", a term currently in vogue to describe those who had written to her recently stressing on the demand for an overhaul of the party structure.

Mr Tiwary expressed his admiration for the "spirit of sacrifice" demonstrated by Gandhi in 2004 when she chose not to become the Prime Minister despite having the mandate. "I had a chance to meet

her first when Lalu was a member of the Union cabinet. I was struck by the serenity on her face. She had revived her party

which was left by Sitaram Kesri in a bad shape. Her foreign origin had become a point of contention within her own party, what to speak of the BJP, Mr Tiwary said.

"Even a tall leader like Sharad Pawar severed his ties on the issue of foreign origin. But Sonia took it all in her stride. Today, howey er, she appears to be dragging herself....managing the party affairs despite poor health," he added.

"The choice before Sonia Gandhi today is not between her son and the party but her son and democracy itself. The Congress, which even now is more potent than any regional party, is capable of taking on a hegemonic BJP.

"But Rahul Gandhi has always come across as an anichhuk (reluctant) leader. He simply cannot inspire his supporters, Mr Tiwary said.

### Diggy's loyalists sweep Youth Cong elections

**RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY** BHOPAL, DEC. 18

Loyalists of veteran Congress leader and former chief minister Digvijay Singh have Congress elections in Madhya Pradesh, results of which were declared on Friday.

While former Union minister and sitting Congress MLA Kantilal Bhuria's son Vikrant has been elected president of state youth Congress, senior Premchand Guddu's son

Ajit Bourasi has been elected one of the 4 vicepresidents of the outfit. Both Kantilal Bhuria and Premchand Guddu are considered staunch loyalists of Mr Singh. Sanjay Singh Yadav, Pratima Mudgal and

Vipin Wankhde who have been elected vicepresidents of youth Congress are also said to be enjoying Mr Singh's confidence. Vivek Tripathy, Javed

Mohmmad Kushwaha Sidharth have been elected secretaries of state youth Congress.

vir Tripathy and Mr Mohmmad were said to have Mr Singh's bless-

Interestingly, other fac-tional leaders in Congress in MP such as Ajey Singh, Arun Yadav, Suresh Pachouri, and Sajjan Singh Verma have shown little inter-est in fielding their candidates in the youth Congress elections.

The polling for the president and other organisational posts organisational posts concluded on December

### PM ready to discuss 'all issues'

■ Continued from Pag 1

lag behind the world in facilities. "Today I want to expose those who have absolutely no care or genuine concern for you — our annadaata (farmers). I want to caution all those who are being misled, instigated in the name of these farm laws," he added.

addressing the CII Partner-

ship Summit 2020. - PTI

Mr Modi said the "three biggest lies" spread by the Opposition parties were that the new farm laws would pave way for discontinuance of the

existing system of minimum support prices; closure of "mandis" and the loss of agricultural lands due to the contract farming provision.

The PM said the MSP system would never be done away with. "Had we considered abolishing the MSP system, we would not have implemented the recommendations of the Swaminathan Commission. In fact, the MSP of different foodgrains have an undergone upward revision by 1.5 times by the present NDA government at the Centre", he said.

Regarding the fears about the contract farming provision, he said it was not new and the contract farming system has been prevalent for

long.
"The Punjab government has recently celebrated the agreements for farming conworth ₹80 crores entered by farmers in the

## More leaders quit TMC

■ Continued from Pag 1

member of the party. Thus, I request you to accept my res-

ignation and oblige. Mr Datta, who won as a TMC candidate from Barrackpore in North 24 Parganas in two consecutive terms, did not, however, resign as an MLA. He will join the BJP on Saturday, said Barrackpore MP Arjun Singh, without giving any details about the

venue of his induction. On Mr Datta's step, TMC minister Firhad Hakim said: "He was not supposed to survive. He underwent surgery with active support from Ms Banerjee. He had a rebirth with her blessings. It is really unfortunate that he later quit our party over a mere tiff, not

with her but someone who is a local."

Mr Datta, however, said: "I quit because I thought I am no more important to the party. The party supremo should know why I quit. I will remain as an MLA because people elected me. If someone wants the return of the money spent for my treatment, I can pay it back. Since I am no more in the TMC, Ms Banerjee's photo as its symbol was replaced

In Bankura, Mr Mukherjee, who was TMC vice-president in the district, left the party in the evening. Hailing Mr Adhikari as his leader, he said he wished to join the BJP.

with Swami Vivekananda's."

A tug of war has, meanwhile, begun between the

TMC and the BJP over Mr Adhikari.

As the Centre deputed a 30-member CRPF team, with 10 commandos and a bulletproof car as part of his Z-plus security cover since Friday morn-Assembly Biman Banerjee said in the afternoon that he has not "accepted" Mr Adhikari's resignation as Nandigram TMC MLA as he did not tender it in front of him accord-

ing to legislative rules. Mr Banerjee also said no date had been mentioned in Mr Adhikari's resignation letter, submitted physically by him to the Assembly secretary on December 16, in sharp contrast to the one he got in an email from him.

### Tomar 'hopes' for solution

■ Continued from Pag 1 have even threatened to step up the agitation and have said they are precelebrate Republic Day next year

with a tractor rally on

Delhi's borders. Farmers at the Singhu border have started making further arrangements to face the increasing cold conditions. "We're preparing for a longer stay as our fight against the black laws will continue. It is getting colder, so we're putting up more tents," said a pro-

tester. The protesting farmers also faced action in Uttar Pradesh. The Sambhal district administration has issued notices to six farmers' leaders asking them to submit personal bonds of ₹50,000 each, as a police report has warned of a breach of the peace during the protests. The six farmers who were served notices include Bharatiya Kisan Union (Asli) district chief Rajpal Singh Yadav Jaiveer Brahmachari Satendra Yadav, Raudas and Veer Singh. They have been organising protests in the district. The notices

were issued under Section

111 CrPC (magistrate's

order against any person

who is likely to commit breach of the peace) on the basis of a report submitted by the police.

"We'll not fill the bonds

come what may," BKU (Asli) leader Rajpal Singh Yadav said. "They can hang us or send us to jail. We're fighting for the rights of farmers." BKU Sanjeev Gandhi said none of them or their family members had signed the "We're doing bonds. peaceful protests, not any crime," he added. Earlier, the DMK-led

Opposition in Tamil Nadu started a day-long hungerstrike in support of the farmers. DMK president M.K. Stalin led the fast at Valluvar Kottam, while Puducherry CM V. Puducherry Narayanasamy led the agitation in the Union territory. Chipko movement Sundarlal Bahuguna also extended support to the farmers.

Support for the farmers has also been coming from Bollywood. Swara Bhasker on Friday joined the league of Bollywood stars and Punjabi artistes who have come out in their support. The actress shared a few pictures from the protest site on Twitter. "A humbling day,

to see the grit, resolve and

determination of protesting farmers and the elder-ly at #SinghuBorder #FarmersProtests," she tweeted alongside the pho-

Earlier, Punjabi singer and actor Diljit Dosanjh, who set the Internet on fire with his Twitter fight with Kangana Ranaut, had flown back from the US and had gone straight to the Singhu border to express solidarity with the farmers. Diljit was joined by other Punjabi singers, including Gurshabad Singh Kular and Harf Cheema, who sang songs at

the protest site. The ongoing protests has badly hit vehicular movement in the Delhi-NCR region. After it was closed for several days, the Delhi traffic police on Friday opened the Delhi-Noida carriageway on the Chilla border. Other Delhi-UP border points like Tikri and Dhansa

remain shut for traffic. Several of Delhi's borders with Haryana are also shut. "The Singhu, Auchandi, Piau Maniyari, Sabholi and Mangesh borders are closed. Please take alternate routes via Lampur, Safiabad and Singhu school toll tax borders," the traffic police

### 150 shops gutted in N. Bengal fire

Jalpaiguri (West Bengal), Dec. 18: A major fire broke out at a market in West Bengal's Jalpaiguri district in the early hours of Friday. gutting at least 150 shops, officials said.

ted around 3 am at the Dhupguri market by a shopkeeper, they said. Six fire tenders were rushed to the spot but the firefighting opera-tions could not be started for some time as

The flames were spot-

there were no water bodies nearby, officials said. Finally, water was fetched from the Kumlai nullah, while several shops were gutted in the meantime.

"It was very difficult to get water to fight the fire as there are no water bodies near the market,' district fire officer Pradip Sarkar said. Four more fire tenders were brought in from

Dinhata in Coochbehar

other areas to douse the flames, officials said. under control around 6 crisis for water. am, they said.

the incident, they said. North Bengal development

Rabindranath Ghosh visited the area and spoke to officials. Local MLA Mitali Roy of the Trinamul Congress was also at the spot. "I have come here on the instructions of chief minister Mamata Banerjee," Mr Ghosh said.

He also briefed urban development minister Firhad Hakim about the situation and urged him to take steps to hand over the market to Dhupguri Municipality. At present, it is in the jurisdiction of the zilla parishad. "Around 150 shops were gutted in the fire," the minister said.

The state government

will extend all possible

help to the shopkeepers at this time of crisis, he said, adding that the gutted shops will be reconstructed. Environmentalists district, Toofanganj and

alleged rampant filling up of water bodies in The blaze was brought the area, leading to the

sublace?

**LETTERS** 



### THE ASIAN AGE

19 DECEMBER 2020

### Kerala: Big triumph for LDF, Cong rudderless

The brilliant show put up by the Left Democratic Front (LDF) in Kerala in the elections to the local bodies is sure to offer the ruling front a solid base to prepare for the state Assembly elections hardly four months away while raising the bar higher for the Opposition, United Democratic Front (UDF), to win the race. The LDF has won 11 of the 14 district panchayat councils, 108 of the 152 block panchayats (the state has 140 assembly seats), 42 of the 86 municipalities and five of the six municipal corporations. Among the gram panchayats, the leftists won 514 of the 941, leaving 375 to the UDF and 23 to the National Democratic Alliance (BJP). That the LDF has improved its own tally of 2015 local bodies elections when

it was in the Opposition indicates that it faces little anti-incumbency threat in a state which alternates its ruling dispensation in every election without fail ever since 1977. While the Pinarayi Vijayan government's creditable performance in fighting virus attacks, first by Nipah in 2018 and by the coronavirus in 2020, its successful handling of two successive floods in 2018 and 2019, its

This image, coupled with the failure of central investigation agencies to come up with a credible case against people associated with the government vis-avis gold smuggling, has helped the LDF

focus on improving infrastructure especially in education and healthcare, its determined efforts to push through mega projects which includes the natural gas pipeline and the national highway project gave it the image of a government that works, its focus on wel-fare measures, which includes the construction of 2.5 lakh homes for the poor, the timedistribution of enhanced welfare pensions for the elderly and food kits during the pandemic, Covid-19, convinced the people that it is a government that cares.

This image, coupled with the failure of the

central investigation agencies to come up with a credible case against people associated with the government vis-a-vis gold smuggling, has helped the LDF keep its head above water. The smart political manoeuvring with which it got a section of the Kerala Congress which held sway in central Kerala to its side has paid rich dividends for the LDF while denting the prospects of the UDF of which the regional party was a major part for the last 50 years.

The Congress, which leads the UDF, has party machinery that covers the

entire spectrum, starting from the booths but a rudderless leadership squandered them all away, thinking that the relentless and one-sided media scrutiny of the government will carry the day for them. The UDF, which recorded a spectacular victory in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections on the back of the entry of then Congress president Rahul Gandhi from Wayanad constituency and the Sabarimala issue which put the LDF in a dock, was a house divided this time. It would take enormous efforts on the part of the leadership to put it in order and take on the resurgent LDF if it were to keep its hope of returning to power. As for the NDA, its hopes replacing the Congress after decimating it lie shattered with the poor showing, especially in the capital Thiruvananthapuram. The party needs to cover a lot of ground before it gains a critical mass to emerge a major force in the state politics.

### 'Punishing' a state

hile it is not yet clear what elements attacked the car convoy of BJP president J. P. Nadda at Diamond Harbour near Kolkata recently -**V** one theory points the finger at hooligans sponsored by the ruling Trinamul Congress and the other says it is an internal BJP job to discredit the Mamata Banerjee government as an excuse for punitive action — the Union government brought the hammer down on three IPS officers of the West Bengal cadre. Their services have been compulsorily requisitioned by the Union home ministry.

Chief minister Mamata Banerjee has responded with fury. She has threatened to take recourse to legal action. Ordinarily, the Centre requests a state to release a particular officer when there is special need since an officer of the IAS or the IPS is assigned to a state on being selected.

There may be scope for emergency procedures if a particular officer is badly needed with the Centre. But here the Union home ministry is forcing three IPS officers out of the state in one go. Is this dictatorial? Is it a "colourable" exercise of power, as the CM has observed? How the judiciary deals with the issue will be keenly watched if Ms Banerjee goes to court. It will be a precedent-setting order and will have a bearing on the broader question of Centre-state

Before the 2019 Lok Sabha election, there was an instance of violence at a poll rally of then BJP party chief Amit Shah in Kolkata. The police commissioner was relieved of his charge by the Election Commission and subsequently asked by the state to report to the Centre. The officer who replaced him was also changed, along with three other IPS officers. These were not decisions of the Union home ministry as in the present instance, but of the EC. And yet it is the bulk nature of transfers, which makes these cases look like punishment.

Political antagonism between the Centre and a particular state government has probably not gone in this direction before and it is not a good sign for federalism, "cooperative" or otherwise, although Prime Minister has made renewed avowals of cooperative federalism.



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"If our hands bent both ways There'd be lines marked on the back. We'd call them life, fate and fortune

Predicting ruin and rack. With our palms already foretelling

It'd be a sort of heads and tails And palmists would be confounded knowing which fortune prevails.

— **From Come, Say 'Come'** by Bachchoo

Researching Wikipedia on the origins of toxic words

dle days, my friend, idle days in terms of worldly commerce, but busy as a woodpecker tapping the imagined computer keys of a tree-trunk. And as random questions occur, sometimes pertaining to work. from questions about how one dodges British tax by registering companies in Nassau, to the origins of phrases one has used and never stopped to

etymologise.
Praise be to Ahura Mazda for inspiring the founders and conspirators of Wikipedia. And yes, I do contribute small sums to their coffers now and then. We must all will their incredibly comprehensive and by-

and-large-accurate encyclopaedia(e) as the world has never known, to con- till time and ingenuity replace the ethereal store of knowledge with some other scientifically invented miracle.

Subhani

Rukmini Banerji

y January 2021,

schools will have been clos-

300 days. Even

when school systems reopen, it will take time

for parents to feel comfort-

able in sending children daily to school. The longer

schools stay shut and the

more uncertain we are

about the next steps, concern grows about the impact and implications

of what looks like a year-

Starting 2005, every year

in mid-January India sees the release of the Annual

Status of Education Rep-

ort (ASER). From 2005 to

2014, the ASER report

tracked the status of schooling and provided estimates of basic reading

and arithmetic skills. Af-

ter 2014, the nationwide

ASER report is done

every other year and in

the gap year we look in depth at a specific age group. For example,

ASER 2017 focused on the

14-18 age group, while ASER 2019 dealt with the

2020 would have seen the

report. But given the

Covid crisis, it was appro-

priate to change the focus

and timing of ASER to explore what children

were doing while the

There are several key

features of the ASER arch-

itecture that are worth

highlighting. ASER has

always been a rural survey with information col-

lected from households.

The children's sample is

representative at the district and state levels.

During Covid-19, where

the only way to reach fam-

ilies was through phone

calls, and it was essential

to maintain the represen-

tativeness of the sample.

Luckily, as part of the

phone numbers are col-

lected from each surveyed

household. In a normal year, this information is

ASER process,

schools were closed.

country-wide

groun

for almost

used for monitoring and

ple was used as the frame.

To rely on numbers, the

sampling process must be scientific and rigorous. Despite the Covid-19 chal-

lenges, ASER even in this

difficult year remains

based on a meticulous

Timing-wise, September seemed the right time to

do the ASER 2020 survey.

Many schools have sum-

mer holidays in April-May-June-July. This year,

July and August was used

by state governments to

plan and implement their

Covid response. By

September, school systems across India had settled into providing what-

ever support they could to

ASER 2020 Wave 1 was

anchored around a set of

interconnected questions.

These included: what

resources did families

have, who in the family

was able to help children,

what inputs and learning

opportunities did chil-

were children able to do

with respect to learning.

Many of these questions

were designed not only to

explore how families dealt

with the Covid crisis on

the education front, but

also to provide inputs into

thinking about opportuni-

ties that could be lever-

aged beyond the crisis. Close to 120,000 house-

Approximately 58 per cent

households were reached,

of which 75.8 per cent

completed the survey. Thus, the ASER 2020

Wave 1 survey obtained

information for about

Here are some of the highlights. First, the availability of ASER 2018

data allowed comparisons

to be made. For example,

the proportion of house-

holds who own televisions

or motorised vehicles

remained similar from

2018 to 2020, but a sharp

60,000 children.

were sampled.

holds

en receive and

sampling process.

cross-checking. ASER 2020, the 2018 sam-

The triviality of what I resort to Wiki for will or may, gentle reader, prompt you to judge me harshly. Today it occurred to me that I had never investigated the origins of the phrase "oopsy daisy"! I am now fairly knowledgeable about the meanings of certain nursery rhymes such as Humpty Dumpty which wasn't an egg as mistakenly portrayed by cartoonists, but a cannon in the service of His Majesty's artillery. I also proudly know that ring-a-ring-a-roses is about the plague that swept Britain and nothing to do with necklace of blossoms as I had imagined when we played holding hands and forming a ring, at the age of three in the joyous hours of infant birthday parties.

And now Wikipedia corrects my lifelong notions and says the phrase is "Whoopsy Daisy". There are several notes on the origin of the phrase, and they contradict each other and still leave the attribution of alarm, at an accidental slip, or as an encouragement to a child as you fling it into the air, mysterious. The appearance of this Daisy, presumably a girl and not a flower, doesn't figure in the explanations.

And in my idle researches I find that there are places where Wikipedia doesn't fear to tread. It very bravely, if casually, tells the literal meaning of the "F" word while incorporating the various expressions which use the single syllable without in any sense invoking its literal meaning. It is, as Bagwash Shri Ragwort noted in one of his rambles, used to express dismissal, disdain, disappointment and other "d"s, not to mention the moods and utterances whose descriptions begin with other letters of the alphabet.

And so, with other words which we, in our graciously inoffensive era, shorten to their first letters. And in that context, after a few minutes of research in these idle hours, I have discovered, gentle reader, that Wikipedia gives us definitions and connotations of very many common Hindi or Urdu swear words, including those which the victims of the abuse may object to as "going on mothers/sisters".

One stereotype for us Parsis is that

lege was universally known as Adi "MC" Manekshaw. He would freely

initials).

The intriguing word, which I grew up hearing in the Parsi and wider How in such discourse has its neganonsense stimulated by his columns anyway — Ed)

needs to be tweaked as Sindh does not exist physically on the Indian map anymore, will we then discard Surva Sen and his brave Chittagong comrades who just because that area falls in present day Bangladesh? Will we Mohenjodaro and ry text books just because those ancient Indus valley sites are today located in Pakistan! How can Subramanian Swamy desire to excise Sindh from our national anthem and psyche? It is the region which

Kolkata

### As schools reopen, try **SHARED HERITAGE** to bridge digital divide If our national anthem

government school chil-

dren. State governments across India made exten-

sive efforts to deliver text-

books to children, and

this statistic is testament to these endeavours.

Asked about where chil-

dren were learning at

home during the reference week, 70 per cent

families said their chil-

dren did some learning

activities in that week.

While a majority of these activities were with tradi-

tional materials like text-

books and worksheets,

fewer children (usually below 20 per cent) accessed learning pro-

grammes on television,

radio or online. Five major takeaways

from this year's ASER

exercise: First, the situa-

tion is likely to remain fluid for some months.

With the clear inequities

in our society, it is essen-

tial to track who is getting

what opportunities and to

assess what kind of learn-

ing loss is experienced. Second, ASER 2020 gives

clear evidence of parental

engagement and willing-

ness to support children's learning. This family sup-port must be leveraged by

the school system in a sys-

tematic way. Third, tradi-

tional teaching-learning

methods should be com-bined effectively with

newer ways of reaching/learning. Fourth, in-

depth assessments of

"what works and how" is

needed to improve digital

content and delivery for

the future. Just because

families have devices and

connectivity doesn't auto-

matically mean learning

is happening effectively.

Finally, the digital divide

is layered on to existing

divisions in our society.

Mechanisms to reach and

teach children who are on

the dark side of the divide

must be worked out so

their educational disad-

vantage can be ameliorat-

ASER 2020 completed

the first wave in September. It's likely that

a follow-up wave may be planned later in the cur-

rent school year to track

how children's learning

Rukmini Banerji is the

Education Foundation

CEO of Pratham

journeys are progressing.

The digital divide

existing divisions

increase in smartphone

ownership is visible across states. Nationally,

in 2018, 29.6 per cent fami-

lies whose children went

to government schools

owned smartphones. This

number rose to 56.4 per cent by 2018. For families

who send their children to

private schools, the figure

in 2018 was 49.9 per cent, which increased to 74.2

per cent in 2020. A signifi-

cant rise in access to smartphones in rural fam-

ilies is a striking feature

reported that about 75 per

cent children get some help at home in terms of

learning support, and

despite the crisis, close to

30 per cent children con-

tinued to attend paid

tuition classes. Obviously,

in families where parents

have more education,

they are able to help chil-

dren more. However, even

in families where both

parents have less than five years of schooling,

close to 25 per cent par-

ents help children. Significant help in low

education families also

comes from siblings (in households where both

parents have not even

studied up to Class 5, 23.2

per cent children get help

from older brothers and

In the reference week

before the survey in

September, about a third

of all children reported

receiving learning mate-

rials and activities from

their school. 67 per cent

families whose children

go to government schools

and 87 per cent of those

whose children go to private schools reported

receiving materials via

WhatsApp. Interestingly,

ment school children's

families also added that materials came via visits

(either to the school by

parents or by teachers to

Interestingly, 80 per cent

of all children in the sam-

ple had textbooks of their

current grade. This num-

ber was slightly higher for

the child's home).

31.8 per cent of govern

households

of the last two years.

Overall,

is lavered on to

in our society

had sacrificed their lives for Indian Independence then discard chapters of Harappa from our histoforms the very genesis of the word, "India"!

Kajal Chatterjee

#### **CALL A SESSION**

THIS REFERS TO the editorial Covid not a good reason to scrap Winter Session" (Dec. 18). Stopping the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic is indeed a bogus reason forwarded by the government. With this, the Centre has indeed been exposed for its incompetence and presumably does not want to face tough questions. It is high time it calls a short session to discuss the farmers' stir and other burning issues. Bhagwan Thadani

#### **SAFEGUARD INTEREST**

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "Post-pandemic bonding" (Dec. 18). British foreign secretary Dominic Raab's Delhi visit was to prepare the way for Prime Minister Johnson's India visit as the chief guest on Republic Day, and to invite PM Modi to the UK to the G-7 and the Climate Change (COP26) summits next year. But a new chapter in their relationship would necessarily entail the UK being more sensitive towards India's concerns.

Sankar Paul Chakdaha, West Bengal

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

we punctuate our sentences with the MC and BC words. I sincerely protest that my family and their acquaintances never fell into the particular linguistic habit, but a friend in col-

use the expletives and was famous for his expression of surprise or disbelief, which was "Good Lord MC!" -(the mouth-filling words not just

Indian community, was "saala". The word literally means brother-in-law, and of course can mean that the speaker had carnal relations with the sister of the one to whom the word is directed. That could be provoking and insulting, but in my hearing, it was often used as an endearment. tivity turned into its opposite? (All answers to this newspaper's letters page! — fd. Sub-editors: Delete this line, we have enough unprintable

And wandering outside the possible remit of Wikipedia, I have taken to wondering whether the Parsi surname Siganporia, based on an association with place, as with Adenwalla and Billimoria, should really be "Singaporia". It is easy to see how the eastern tongue twists the sound of "x" or "ks" into "sk", as in the transformation of Alexander to Sikander, or as boys in school would say "I'll aks my bro"!

And so with the word signal, again in English two consonants "g" and "n" thrown together and rendered very often by the general Indian public as "singal". Which is why I suspect, as there is no place in Gujarat called Siganpor, that the surname derives from some ancestor who pursued the opium trade, banking or some such in the far eastern colony.

Again, in idle intellectual mode, I wonder why my grandmother demonised the vegetable which we call "brinjal" and Europeans refer to as aubergine or eggplant, by characterising anyone who fell ill with the phrase "vengna khaddha", meaning "ate brinjals". In my short and happy life, I have never known the veg-

etable to be toxic or poisonous. Where are the Parsi etymologists and phraseological historians when vou need them? Come back, all is











SHORT TAKES

#### **15 KIDS KILLED IN AFGHANISTAN BOMB BLAST**

**Ghazni, Dec. 18:** At least 15 children were killed when a motorbike laden with explosives blew up near a religious gathering in eastern Afghanistan on Friday, officials said.

The children had gathered at a home in Ghazni province to recite Quran verses, a regular activity on the Islamic holy day of Friday, when the blast happened. "Unfortunately, as a result of this incident 15 peo-ple, all children, were mar-tyred," said Wahedullah Jumazada, spokesman for the province's governor.

Ghazni police confirmed the blast and that all victims were children. Twenty other people, including some children, were

Interior ministry spokesman Tariq Arian earlier said the group had gathered in Gilan district to recite the Quran.

#### **SUPER CYCLONE YASA FLATTENS VILLAGES IN FIJI**

Fiji, Dec. 18: Super cyclone Yasa flattened entire villages as it tore through Fiji, aid agencies said on Friday, with a baby among two confirmed deaths and rescue workers racing to the worst-hit com-

Yasa made landfall at the Pacific Island nation late Thursday as a top-of-the-scale Category Five cyclone, lashing Fiji's second-largest island, Vanua Levu.

The storm triggered floods, landslides and blackouts before moving out to sea early Friday, where it rapidly weakened to a Category Three system.

Zalim Hussein of Savusavu, a small town of a few thousand people on Vanua Levu, said he feared for his life sheltering at home in the dark as screeching winds ripped apart houses

I could hear roofs of neighbouring houses flying, trees falling and branches breaking outside and big waves crushing on the shore," he said.

#### **UN SAYS 'DEEPLY** TROUBLED' OVER THAI DETENTIONS

Geneva, Dec. 18: The UN human rights body expressed Friday on detentions democracy activists, including a minor of 16 years, under roval defamation laws.

"We are deeply troubled by the move by Thai authorities to charge at least 35 protesters in recent weeks, including a 16year old student protester, under Article 112 — the lese majeste provision of Thailand's criminal code," the maieste UN Human Rights Committee

said in a statement. The activists are facing charges for headlining recent demonstrations demanding reforms to the monarchy and more scrutiny of the royal family's financial arrangements. The kingdom's lese majeste laws shield the super wealthy King Maha Vajiralongkorn and the

royal family from criticism.
"The offence carries sentences of between three and 15 years' imprisonment for defaming, insulting or threatening the country's royal family," the committee's spokeswoman, Ravina Shamdasani said.

#### **MEGHAN SETTLES CASE OVER ARCHIE PHOTOS**

The Duchess of Sussex brought privacy and data pro-

former television actress, who married Prince Harry in 2018, said Splash UK went into administration after the claim was issued and served. Judge Matthew Nicklin told the hearing: "In light of the administration, the parties have agreed to settle the claim against

"The administrators of Splash UK have undertaken that, should the entity come out of administration, Splash UK will not take any photographs of the duke and duchess or their son in the future." The photographs were taken on January 20 this year, showing Markle walking with Archie in a baby sling, and her two dogs, in Horth Hill Regional

# Pence gets Covid jab on live TV, Trump sparks confusion

Don jumps gun on FDA, says Moderna vaccine 'overwhelmingly approved'

Washington, Dec. 18: The US vice president received a Covid-19 vaccine shot live on television on Friday in a public display designed to boost national confidence in the drug even as President Donald Trump sparked confusion over approval for a second anti-Covid drug.
"Building confidence in

the vaccine is what brings us here this morning," VP Mike Pence said after being injected at the White House, quipping: "I didn't feel a thing." Pence, his wife Karen and the lead public health official in the country, Surgeon General Jerome Adams, were all given the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine in the annex to the White House.

Signalling the importance given to the event, top infectious diseases Anthony Fauci and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention director Robert Redfield were also in the room.

The notable absence was Trump himself. He has mixed messages about the seriousness of Covid-19 throughout the crisis, even as the US death toll topped 3,00,000 this month.

However, he has been keen to take credit for the historic speed of vaccine development. Early Friday he tweeted that a second drug made by Moderna had been "overwhelmingly approved" and that "distribution to start immediately." This sparked some confusion — while an advisory panel recom-mended emergency use approval for Moderna's vaccine on Thursday, the Food and Drug Administration has yet to give the final verdict allowing distribution expected later Friday.

US President-elect Joe Biden's incoming White House senior advisor, congressman Cedric Richmond, has tested positive for Covid-19 after having open-air "interactions" with Biden, the transition team said on Thursday.

Richmond traveled independently to the state of his team said. Georgia to campaign
Tuesday with Biden for a
pair of Democrats in tight
runoff elections against
The head of the World
Health Organisation said
on Friday that the UN
health agency's pro-

and distraught, and most

of them without shoes, the

tears as he was being led

into the hall for the recep-

tion by state governor



Sao Paulo Governor Joao Doria, state health secretary Jean Gorinchteyn and Butantan Institute director Dimas Covas pose for photographs holding doses of the CoronaVac vaccine against Covid-19 next to a container unloaded from a cargo plane that arrived from China at Guarulhos International Airport in Guarulhos, Sao Paulo state, Brazil, on Friday. Brazil on Thursday recorded more than 1,000 deaths from Covid-19 over a 24-hour period for the first time since September, according to a government tally.

### Macron rides out virus, fever at Versailles retreat

the days before testing

Paris, Dec. 18: As French President Emmanuel Macron rides out the Coronavirus in a presidential retreat at Versailles, French doctors are warning families who are heading for the holidays to remain cautious because of an uptick in infections — especially at the dinner table.

While Macron routinely wears a mask and adheres to social distancing rules, he hosted or took part in multiple group meals in

senators. Biden, 78, tested negative

for Covid-19 on Thursday,

Republican

incumbent

Critics say that's a bad example for compatriots advised to keep their gatherings to six people. Macron is suffering from fever, cough and fatigue,

positive on Thursday.

dency said on Friday.
They wouldn't provide details of his treatment. He is staying at the presidential residence of La Lanterne in the former royal city of Versailles. Macron's positive test

officials with the presi-

gramme to help get Covid-19 vaccines to all countries in need, whether rich or poor, has gained access to nearly 2 billion doses of

several "promising" vaccine candidates. WHO Director-General Adhanom

France's Pasteur Institute released a study on Friday suggesting that times at home and in public are a major source of contamination.

comes as French health

authorities are again see-

ing a rise in infections and

warning of more as French families prepare to

get together for Christmas

France reported another

18,254 new infections on Thursday and its death toll is just under 60,000.

and New Year festivities.

Ghebreyesus said the agreements mean that some 190 countries and economies taking part in the COVAX initiative will have access to vaccines "during the first half of next year.' -AFP/AP

### **LOCKDOWN LOOMS OVER CHRISTMAS IN BETHLEHEM**

Ramallah (West Bank), Dec. 18: The Palestinian prime minister announced a two-week lockdown in the West Bank that appears certain to curtail Christmas celebrations in the town of Jesus' birth.

Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh said that with a Coronavirus out break raging, there will be a nighttime curfew from 7 pm to 6 am throughout the

West Bank.
On Fridays and
Saturdays, the local weekend, the lockdown will be around the clock. The restrictions, which are to be in effect through January 2, will greatly restrict travel throughout the West Bank. Most businesses, with the exception of pharmacies and bakeries, will be forced to close during the curfews,

Shtayyeh said.

### Biden backs son Hunter after tax probe revealed

**Washington, Dec. 18:** US President-elect Joe Biden has expressed full confi dence in his son Hunter, a frequent target of Republican attacks, after it was revealed last week that he was under a federal tax investigation.

During his unsuccessful re-election campaign, President Donald Trump launched repeated accusations against Hunter and said the Bidens were a "corrupt" family and a "criminal enterprise." "We have great confidence in our son," Biden said, sitting next to his wife Jill, in an interview on "The Late Show with Stephen Colbert," which aired Thursday on CBS. "I am not concerned

about any accusations that have been made against him. It used to get to me. I think it's kind of foul play but... as long as he's good, we're good," he said in his first full remarks on the issue since the tax probe became public.
Trump and his allies

have regularly assailed Hunter for his business dealings in Ukraine and

From 2014 to 2019, while his father was vice president, Hunter, a lawyer and lobbyist, served on the board of Burisma, a Ukrainian gas company.

Trump has accused Biden of seeking the removal of Ukraine's top prosecutor to protect Burisma — and his son – from a corruption investigation.

Hunter, 50, now an artist based in Los Angeles, has admitted to displaying "poor judgment" in some of his business dealings, but denied any wrongdo-

### **BIDEN NAMES 1st NATIVE AMERICAN TO CABINET**

Washington, Dec. 18: US President-elect Joe Biden unveiled his environment team on Thursday, choosing congresswoman Deb Haaland to serve as the first Native American interior secretary and Jennifer Granholm, a former Michigan governor, as energy secretary.

also nominated Michael Regan, a North Carolina environmental regulator who is Black and brokered the nation's largest coal ash cleanup, to be administrator of the Environmental ction Agency.

The choices fit with Biden's much-publicised pledge to form the most diverse White House cabinet in history.
"This brilliant, tested,

trailblasing team will be ready on day one to con-front the existential threat of climate change with a unified national response rooted in science and equity," Biden said in a statement.

Colbert asked Biden if there was anything he could "sincerely" thank Trump for accomplishing during his time in the White House.

After a short pause, Biden responded: "There are some things... Getting the vaccine moving has been positive, but by and large, he has been a president who's decided that the way he succeeds is by dividing us." -AFP

### **Human error** behind oil spill in Mauritius

Tokyo, Dec. 18: The Japanese operator of a ogised for the damage bulk carrier that struck a coral reef and caused an extensive oil spill off the coast of Mauritius said Friday that the accident occurred after the ship shifted its course two miles (3.2 kilometers) closer to shore than planned so its crewmembers could get cellphone signals.

Mitsui O.S.K. Lines said its investigation showed the accident was caused by human error, including inadequate nautical charts, navigation systems and risk awareness, and a lack of supervision and safety monitoring. The company said the tanker's nautical chart provided little information about depth and other necessary information.

Crewmembers on duty also failed to conduct safety checks visually or by radar, it said. The captain and crewmembers were also using their cellphones while on duty, the company said. It said it will invest about 500 million yen (\$4.8 million) to provide electronic nautical charts, training to strengthen safety culture and other systems to

and in September million) to fund environmental projects and support the local fishing community in Mauritius.

enhance safety.

The environmental disaster began July 25 when the ship MV Wakashio strayed off course and struck a coral reef a mile (1.6 kilometers) offshore. After being pounded by heavy surf for nearly two weeks, the ship's hull cracked and on Aug. 6 began leaking fuel into a lagoon, polluting a protected wetlands area and a bird and wildlife sanctu

ary.
The company apologised for the damage and in September offered 1 billion yen (\$9 million) to fund environmental projects and support the local fishing community in Mauritius. More than 1,000 tons of oil spilled into the coastal waters.

About 3,000 tons that remained on the ship was pumped into the Wakashio before broke in two several days

#### boys were brought to the governor's office in Katsina, the capital of Katsina state in northwestern Nigeria, after being released late Thursday. One boy broke down in

**London, Dec. 18:** Meghan Markle has settled a claim against a news agency which took photographs of her and her young son Archie in a Canadian park, the High Court in London was told on Friday.

tection claims against the Splash News and Picture Agency in March over the long-lens photographs.
A lawyer for the American

Splash UK.

Park on Vancouver Island.

# US warships to be 'more assertive' against China the region including Vietnam, Malaysia, the

Katsina, Dec. 18: Exhausted and dishevelled, Bello Masari. An official took a handkerchief and several hundred Nigerian wiped the tears. "I am happy, very happy that I will see my father, schoolboys seized in a mass abduction claimed by Boko Haram experienced their first full day of mother and junior brothers," said another, 14-year-old Ibrahim Sani, smiling freedom on Friday after a nearly week-long ordeal. but looking tired.

Kidnapped boys

freed in Nigeria

But relief at their sur-Hajia Bilikis, a mother vival mingled with conwho been waiting anxcern that many others could still be captive, and the circumstances of their iously with other parents, spoke of her exultation when she caught sight of release remained unclear. her boy, Abdullahi Abdu-Looking dirty, worn-out Rasaq, 15.

"I'm so excited... I have to cry, the cry of joy when I saw him," she said.

Governor Masari said the youngsters had been traumatised by what they had been through.

"You suffered physically, mentally and psychologi-cally, but let me assure you that we suffered more and your parents suffered

**Washington, Dec.18:** The US military warned on Thursday its warships would be "more assertive" in responding to violations of international law, citing in particular Beijing, which has expansionist ambitions in the South China Sea.

In a document setting objectives for the US Navy, Marines and Coast Guard for the coming years, the Pentagon stressed that several countries, notably Russia and China, "are contesting the balance of power in key regions and seeking to undermine the existing world order."
"Our globally deployed naval forces interact with Chinese and Russian war-ships and aircraft daily," the document said, noting their "growing aggresand calling

U.S. PRESIDENT Donald Trump's administration on Friday announced it had imposed export controls on China's biggest chipmaker, SMIC, restricting its access to US technol-

ogy over its alleged ties to the Chinese military. China "the most pressing, long-term

The latest incident between the US and China naval forces took place in late August, when Beijing said it had driven an American warship from the disputed Paracel archipelago.

The Asian power claims almost all of the islands of the South China Sea, territorial claims disputed by other countries in

INNOVATION I HONOUR Virtual ceremony will be attended by senior officials from Israel, India, UAE on Dec. 21

awards — Padma Vibhushan and Padma Bhushan . The opening of the Federation of Indo-

Commerce's internation-

al chapter in Dubai is the

Chamber of

US has been sending ships to the region more frequently to carry out what it calls "freedom of navigation" operations.

Philippines and Brunei.

To counter China, the

To maintain strategic advantage over the Chinese Navy whose "battle force has more than tripled in size in only two decades," the US Navy plans to modernize with smaller, more agile and even remotely piloted

US ships will also "accept calculated tactical risks and adopt a more assertive posture in our day-to-day operations," the statement said. For Navy Rear Admiral Jay Bynum that means being "more responsive, more

Israeli peace, sustainability award for Ratan Tata

devices, cleantech, etc. In 2018, TAU and Tata Trusts announced the launching of the Indian Centre for Agri & Allied Tech (I-CAT) that would facilitate bringing Israeli know-how and innovation to the farmers of the state of Andhra Pradesh, initially, and was to be later extended to all the other parts of India.

been defined as start-up

fields like automotive,

point of care for medical

The initiative, supported by the Government of Andhra Pradesh, includes creating an advanced

agricultural experts in villages and farms — aiming to overcome various technological, agronomic and economic barriers, and promote sustainable agriculture and food secu-

During his visit to Israel in 2013, Tata had signed an agreement with Israel Aerospace Industry (IAI) to jointly develop, manufacture and support a wide range of defence and aerospace products including missiles, UAVs, radars, electronic warfare systems and homeland security systems.

industrialist will be attended by senior

Veteran industrialist Ratan Tata will be hon-oured by the Indo-Israel Chambers of Commerce for promoting innovation that supports sustainability and peace in the region, including with the Palestinians. The chairman emeritus

of the Tata group will be honoured with 'Global Visionary of Sustainable Business and Peace' award during the launch of the Federation of Indo-Israel Chamber Commerce's international chapter in Dubai on December 21.

officials from Israel, India and UAE. "Tata has done a lot for India-Israel ties. He has generously contributed towards promoting innovation that supports sustainability and has been a promoter of peace in the region, including with the Palestinians. He has visited Israel a few times which has been extremely beneficial in promoting ties between the two countries. He very well deserves this honour,' Raviv Byron, President of Israel-India Chamber of



Commerce, said. The 82-year-old industrialist and philanthropist is

the recipient of two of

first such initiative aiming at tapping business opportunities together in other countries, and developing trilateral collaborations laborations. This is expected to pave the way for several other such international chap-

ters for the bilateral Chamber in other parts of the world, Byron noted. "There is a large presence

close ties between Israel and India, we can definitely work together to develop a framework for trilateral cooperation in the Gulf", he added. The Tata Group has invested millions of dollars in Tel Aviv University's (TAU) Technology Innovation Momentum

of Indian diaspora in the UAE and Bahrain which

includes top professionals

who are well established

and respected. Given the

Fund. As the lead investor in the fund, Tatas have the right of first opportunity to negotiate licence agreement on areas that have

R&D centre, as well as

# # FINANCIAL Chronicle

SATURDAY | 19 DECEMBER 2020 | NEW DELHI

<b>INDICATOR</b>	S	%
Sensex	46,960.69	0.15
Nifty 50	13,760.55	0.14
S&P 500*	3,699.28	-0.62
Dollar (₹)	73.56	0.04
Pound Sterling (₹)	99.31	0.66
Euro (₹)	90.10	-0.13
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	49,644▲21	0.042
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	52.17	0.67
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.959	0.007
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.926	-0.004
* As of 8:30 PM IST		

### India Inc's FY21 FDI outflow at \$12.25 billion

Indian firms have committed overseas investments worth \$12.25 billion between April and November this year. Of this actual outflow would be \$6.35-2.97 bn through equity and \$3.38 bn in loan commitments. The rest, \$5.90 bn, would be in guarantees. Main investors are OVL (\$1852 million), JSW Steel (\$865 mn), Haldia Petro-chem (\$599 mn), HCL Tech (\$587 mn), M&M (\$551 mn) and Adani Properties (\$391 mn), Care Ratings said.

# No cane price cut; Goyal asks mills to be efficient



Food minister Piyush Goyal said the government cannot reduce the fair and remunerative price (FRP), the minimum price at which sugar mills buy cane from farmers, and asked the industry to be efficient, profitable and diversify product portfolio with less dependency on the central subsidy. Addressing Isma, Goyal said the central subsidy of Rs 3,500 crore for exports will help in liquidating surplus sugar stocks.

### Bank credit rises 5.73%, deposits move up 11.34%

Bank credit grew by 5.73 per cent to Rs 105.04 lakh crore while deposits increased by 11.34 per cent to Rs 145.92 lakh crore in the fortnight ended Dec. 4, RBI data showed. In the fortnight ended Dec. 6, 2019, bank credit had stood at Rs 99.35 lakh crore and deposits at Rs 131.06 lakh crore. In the previous fortnight ended Nov. 20, credit grew by 5.82 per cent to Rs 104.34 lakh crore and deposits by 10.89 per cent.

### Forex reserves down by \$778 mn to \$578.56 bn

The country's foreign exchange reserves declined by \$778 million to \$578.568 billion in the week to Dec. 11, RBI data showed. In the previous week, the reserves had touched a lifetime high of \$579.346 bn after increasing by \$4.525 bn. Foreign currency assets dropped by \$1.042 bn to \$536.344 bn. The gold reserves rose by \$284 mn to \$36.012 bn. The SDRs with IMF dipped by \$3 mn to \$1.503 bn.

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### ■ Instructed to clear goods fast, credit drawback in 3 days

# **Customs asked to behave**

SANGEETHA G

In a major relief exporters and importers, customs officials have been asked to credit duty drawback to the exporter in three days. They have also been asked to reduce unnecessary delays and arbitrary practices during the custom clearance of imported goods.

The Action Plan of CBIC 2020- 21 directs officials that at least 90 per cent of the duty drawback should be credited within three days. Further, the refund may be deposited into the customer account in T+2

government's instruction to further reduce the timeline for crediting at least 90 per cent of the duty drawback claims to the exporters from seven days to three days, will definitely help

With the supply chain inefficien-

cies remaining high, the competi-

tiveness gap of the Indian logistics

sector is expected to go up from \$180 billion to \$500 billion in 2030.

at 14 per cent of GDP, compared to

the global average of about 8 per

cent, creating a competitiveness

gap of \$180 billion and this could

The logistics cost in India stands

**SANGEETHA G** 

improve the cash flow of various industry players in exporting involved goods out of India, especially in these Covid times when a large number of businesses are still facing liquidity crunch," said Abhishek Jain, tax part-

Moreover all the remaining duty drawback claims should be positively dis-posed of by March 31, 2021 and while doing so the target of disposing of drawback in seven days should be achieved, said Central Board of Indirect Taxes

for importers has been the delay in clearances. Exports, after a positive growth in September, once again started de-growing in October and November.

and Customs (CBIC).

A major cause of worry

Delays in the clearance of goods at the customs department have been one among the various reasons for this. "Most of the

Logistics' competitiveness gap may cost \$500 bn by 2030

imports from Free Trade economies have been receiving queries and were getting delayed for days as well as months," said the Federation of Indian Exporters Association.

The customs officials have now been advised to ensure judicious application of Carotar 2020, which are rules pertaining to country of origin, without causing disruption to the supply chain. They were also advised to review the function of customs ports to ensure that unnecessary delays and arbitrary practices are not being resorted to during custom clearance of goods

The CBIC observed that importers are often asked to directly seek clarifications of the exporting country on country of ori-gin verifications. "Officers under your charge may also be sensitised to ensure that enquiry on origin of

imported goods is initiated only where there are suffi-cient grounds to suspect origin of a good, or where the same has been identified as a risk by the Risk Management System. They should be suitably supervised to ensure that unnecessary queries are not raised on account of goods origin," said CBIC.

"In order to resolve industry concerns around the Carotar 2020, CBIC has issued instructions to ensure that queries under the said rules are issued only when sufficient grounds to question the origin of goods are present. This is a smart move on the part of the government and will be much appreciated by the industry, as this, while preventing revenue leakage, will ensure that the shipments unnecessary not delayed at customs ports,

time ever on Friday in opening trade, led by gains in the IT sector stocks post-Accenture's strong first quarter performance and US Federal Reserve's decision to keep rates unchanged.

The unrelenting bull run is now seen taking the benchmark index closer to 50000 points, the target

The index opened at 47026 as against the previous close at 46,890.34. But it closed below 47000 at 0.15 per cent, as the market turned volatile post the big opening move and touched a low of 46,630.31.

at a new all-time high of

Sensex would cross 50000 by December 2021. Who knows it may come even earlier by March 2021, going by the pace of

are increasing as the foreign money pouring into the equity market is large-

# in opening trade



Sensex hits 47000

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, DEC. 18

The Sensex breached the 47000-mark for the first

set by some brokerages.

46,960.69, up 70 points or The Nifty-50 also closed

13,760.55, gaining 0.14 per cent, or 19.85 points.

Recently BNP Paribas set a target of 50500 for 2021, earlier Morgan Stanley had said that the

index movement.

At the same time risks

ly short-term funds, which could fly out on monetary policy tighten-ing by global central banks like the US Fed.

Large-scale foreign buying continued, with Rs 2.720.95 crore net purchase reported by the exchanges on Friday.

'The Fed's decision to keep rates unchanged will help FIIs to maintain a positive view on emerging markets like India, said Vinod Nair, head of research, Geojit Financial Services

Strong first quarter FY21 performance by IT major Accenture led to a rally in Indian IT stocks.

The BSE IT index gained 1.70 per cent, led by gains for Infosys (2.64 per cent), Wipro (1.89 per cent), HCL Technologies (1.32 per cent) and and TCS (0.87 per cent).

"Accenture's Q1 formance and guidance came in well ahead of expectations largely due to continued demand in outsourcing and recovery in the consulting business," said Emkay Global Financial Services. "A broad-based demand recovery and sustained healthy growth momentum in revenue/ order booking of the outsourcing business augur well for Indian IT peers.'

#### inventory mismanagement. It also increase to \$500 billion by 2030, leads to high inventory carrying costs, which include costs for holdcosts are a barrier to entry. High finds a report by global management consultancy Arthur D. Little. logistics costs will continue to ing and storing unsold goods. impede local manufacturing and reduce demand for Indian prod-India's supply chain and logistics These costs alone amount to 15-25 sector is valued at \$215 billion and per cent of inventory costs or \$120 ucts in the global markets. is growing at a CAGR of 10.5 per to \$180 billion.

Inadequate

fragmented networks and lack of

technology adoption. The pandemic further accentuated supply

Indirect logistics costs in India

are four times the average of those

in developed countries. The main

reasons are excessive layers in dis-

tribution channels and inventory

demand forecasting due to lack of

technology adoption leads to

chain weaknesses.

mismanagement.

cent. It is marred by an unbal-anced logistics modal mix, high Transportation by road is at the root of the unwarranted logistics indirect costs, poor infrastructure, costs. Transportation represents about 40 per cent of logistics costs. and heavy dependence on the road networks, combined with poor transportation infrastructure, makes transportation costs balloon. India's rail and sea network are highly under-utilised due to

lack of supporting infrastructure Failing to address India's competitiveness gap of \$180 billion could expand it to \$500 billion by 2030. Greenfield manufacturing will not be viable because high logistics

"To bridge the current competitiveness gap of \$180 billion, India needs to halve logistics cost from 14 per cent of GDP to 7 per cent,"

said Barnik Chitran Maitra, managing partner of Arthur D. Little India and South Asia.

The study finds that India will have to optimise the logistics modal mix to global benchmarks, with roads constituting 25-30 per cent, railways comprising 50-55 per cent and waterways accounting for 20-25 per cent of transportation modes. It will have to reduce indirect or "hidden" costs to 20-25 per cent through efficient inventory management and monitoring. In addition, turnaround time should be optimised to 700-800 km per day, with the target of increasing truck trips by 50 per cent. The throughput of the road network has to be raised with better quality roads and a higher proportion national

### World's richest banker Kotak made \$16 bn after a brush with death

SUVASHREE GHOSH & ANTO ANTONY

If it weren't for a cricket accident that almost killed nim, Uday probably wouldn't be the world's richest banker.

A ball that hit him in the head and led to an emergency surgery pushed a 20-year-old Kotak to abandon his dream of becoming a professional player. After a brief stint at the family's cotton-trading business, he went on to pursue his MBA at the prestigious Jamnalal Bajaj Institute of Management Studies in Mumbai before starting out in finance in 1985 at the age of 26.

Kotak, now 61, has a fortune estimated at around \$16 billion, according to Bloomberg Billionaires Index.
While India has been

grappling with a shadowlending crisis, his Kotak Mahindra Bank Ltd has been able to rise through the crowd, gaining investors' trust by starting to slow lending to riskier sectors more than two years ago and keeping good corporate gover-nance. When the coronavirus pandemic added to the industry's woes by eroding borrowers' ability to repay, the firm was one of the first to raise capital to fortify its balance sheet, helping boost investors'

The strategy paid off: Kotak Mahindra Bank shares are up 17 per cent



this year, the most among Indian peers, and Kotak just gained an extension to his chief executive officer term for another three years. A representative at the firm didn't respond to requests for comment.

"Ās far as I'm concerned, becoming the world's richest banker is only a proxy for Uday being one of the world's smartest bankers.' said Anand Mahindra, the chairman of Mahindra Group in Mumbai, whose tie-up with Kotak back in 1986 led to the firm's name. "More importantly, he's understood that what makes a bank sustainable and durable is not just smart strategies but unas-

sailable governance." Kotak's company stands out in a country where lenders have some of the worst bad-loan ratios in the world. While its badloan ratio has risen in 2020, it ranked as the second lowest among peers, with its capital-adequacy score being the highest The nation's secondlargest lender by market value reported an unexpected 27 per cent profit surge in the September

The firm got another boost last month, when the central bank proposed increasing the ownership limit for founders, effectively reducing the risk that Kotak will be forced to dilute his 26 per cent stake in the lender as previously demanded by the Reserve Bank of India.

Kotak, a native of Gujarat, set up an investment company in 1985 with a Rs 30 lakh (\$41,000) loan from family and friends and partnered with Mahindra the following year. The firm, which started off discounting bills, later expanded its loan portfolio, got into stock brokering, investment banking, insurance and mutual funds. It converted into a lender in 2003 after getting the RBI's nod.

He has been Kotak Mahindra Bank's CEO since its beginning and gained more control of it in 2006 by ending a partnership of more than a

Sachs Group Inc. Kotak rose through the ranks by keeping strong underwriting practices and avoiding lending to riskier sectors, iocusing ınstead collateralbacked loans for farm equipment, mortgages and vehicles, according to Deepak Jasani, head of retail research at HDFC

Securities Ltd.
While the RBI just approved the extension of Kotak's CEO term investors are starting to wonder what will happen after he hands over the reins

Unlike many familyowned enterprises in India, Kotak has avoided enrolling family members into the lender's board or at top executive positions. That helped maintain investors' and depositors' confidence in a country where the lack of corporate governance and transparency has already brought down three banks and pushed two shadow lenders to bankruptcy in less than two years.
"It's been all Uday," said

Ananth Narayan, a former banker and now an associate professor of finance at the S.P. Jain Institute of Management & Research in Mumbai. "There are a lot of good people under him, but frankly, they are all over-shadowed by Uday. Anybody who has to step into Uday's shoes has a tough job because he is an institution by himself."

-Bloomberg

### **Europe, US top markets** for Indian IT contractors



Mumbai. Dec. 18: The United Kingdom, Ireland. Netherlands, the United States and South Africa are among the top countries attracting and retaining high-skilled Indian workers in the contracting marketplace, says a survey.

The survey titled 'Global Demand for Indian IT Contractors' has been done by contractor hiring platform Techfynder that a majority of companies from these regions on the platform have shown an interest in hiring for core domains that include cloud, cyber and digitisa-

The findings are based on the survey of 52,000 contractors from across the country between January and December 2020, to find out the trends in the contractual job marketplace in India.

Due to the pandemic, many businesses are going online to offer their products and services, which has further increased the demand for IT contractors in roles such as software engineers, senior java developers, cyber security engineers, data scientists, web developers, and  $U\bar{I}/UX$ designers, it noted.

As per the survey, the

Ireland. Netherlands, the US, and South Africa are the top five countries attracting and retaining a highly skilled Indian workforce

Further, it said since March this year there was a staggering 610 per cent growth in job postings for IT contractors across the Philippines, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Canada, Kenya and Brazil.

The information technology sector tops the charts with 48 per cent hiring of the contractual workforce. It is followed by insurance (18 per cent), banking and finance (16 per cent), telecommunications (12 per cent) and pharmaceuticals (6 per cent), the survey said.

"The IT contractual job market has always seen good traction. However, the growth for contractors in India has only been exemplified during the pandemic, which massively impacted the global job

"Gradually, companies in India, and around the world are making a shift in talent acquisition and embracing contractual hiring. As a result, there is a rising demand for our services," Techfynder Founder and CEO Praveen Madire said.

#### **MG TO ROLL OUT 7-SEATER HECTOR PLUS IN JANUARY**

MICHAEL GONSALVES

MG Motor, the British car brand now owned by the Chinese giant SAIC Motor, plans to introduce the much-awaited MG Hector Plus 7-seater version in January to boost sales in the fiercely competitive Indian car market.

The Hector Plus range rivals the upcomnext-generation Mahindra XUV500, the Tata Gravitas, as well as the three-row version of the Hyundai Creta.

The biggest difference between this new model and the threerow, six-seat Hector Plus, launched in July this year, is that the seven-seat version will get a bench instead of captain seats in the sec-

ond row.
With the price likely to be close to the six-seat Hector Plus (Rs 13.74 lakh-Rs 19.69 lakh), expect a few cosmetic changes inside and out to differentiate between the six-seater and seven-seater versions of the Hector Plus.



### Copper tops \$8,000 as Goldman points to commodities super-cycle

Dec. 18: Copper topped \$8,000 a tonne for the first time in more than seven vears, with Goldman Sachs Group Inc and BlackRock Inc pointing to the start of a new long-term bull market as supply lags an expected demand boom.

The market is witnessing the sharpest rally in more than a decade, with China's appetite for commodities and supply snags early on in the Covid-19 pandemic

lifting copper about 80 per cent from its March lows.

Expectations for a deficit, the weaker dollar, and its role in green technology have also fuelled gains. Some banks and investors are now drawing comparisons to the spike in the early 2000s, when a jump in Chinese orders ushered in the last super-cycle for

"You have all the tell-tale signs of a super-cycle," Jeff

Currie, head of commodities research at Goldman Sachs, told Bloomberg TV. He cited metals hitting multiyear highs, the weaker dollar, crude oil reaching \$50, and rising global liquidity. Copper spiked to \$8,028 a

tonne, the highest price since 2013, on Thursday, on London Exchange. Most other metals also gained, with aluminum rising 0.5 per cent.



Singapore iron ore futures pushed above \$160 a tonne, hitting the highest level since trading began in

Goldman pointed to the start of a positive feedback loop between commodities, the dollar and emergingmarket growth that has driven past structural bull markets. At the centre is strong, synchronized, policy-driven demand focused on wealth redistribution

and renewables and, with commodity supply-side spending outside of renewables still at very low levels, this demand growth should keep markets tight for the foreseeable future, it said in a December 17 note.

BlackRock expects cop-per to hit new all-time highs in the upswing of the cycle, Evy Hambro, the firm's global head of thematic investing, said.

China's success at containing the pandemic and optimism about global economic growth next year is fuelling gains across industrial commodities from iron ore to oil. It's been a remarkable turnaround for copper, which fell more than 50 per cent from a record high in 2011, trading below \$5,000 a tonne during a slump in 2015-16 and again earlier this year.

—Bloomberg

### SHORT TAKES

#### Rooney's son Kai signs for Man U

London: Wayne Rooney's son Kai has followed in his father's footsteps by signing for Manchester United. United's record goalscorer posted a picture on social media of the 11-year-old, the oldest of Rooney's four sons, signing a contract at his father's former club. Rooney accompanied the image with the caption: "Proud

day. Kai signing for @manches-

terunited. Keep up the hard work son." Rooney, 38, now in interim charge of Championship club Derby, joined United from Everton in 2004 as a teenager. The former England striker had a glittering 13-year career at Old Trafford, scoring 253 times in 559 appearances and breaking Bobby Charlton's longstanding goals record in January 2017. — *AFP* 

### **NBA keeps coach**

challenge rule

**New York:** The NBA is keeping the replay rule allowing coach-es one challenge of certain officiating decisions per game, the league said Thursday. The coach's challenge was introduced last season on a one-year trial basis. The league said Thursday that the board of governors had approved a recommendation from the competition committee to retain the challenge

going forward. "Our coaches were receptive to the pilot version of the Coach's Challenge, increasing usage and becoming more comfortable with the concept and strategic aspects as the season progressed," Byron Spruell,

**NBA** President of League Operations, said in a statement. During the 2019-20 season, NBA head coaches challenged 633 calls in the regular season and 67 in the playoffs. — AFP

#### **Smith gears up** for Alvarez bout

Los Angeles: Britain's Callum Smith will be out to prove that size does matter on Saturday when he defends his World Boxing Association super-mid-dleweight crown against pound-for-pound king Saul 'Canelo" Alvarez in Texas. The unbeaten Smith (27-0, 19 knockouts) will take sizeable height and reach advantages into the ring at the Alamodome in San Antonio against the naturally smaller Alvarez (53-1-2, 36 KOs). Alvarez, who has not fought since he jumped up to light-heavyweight to score an 11th round knockout of Sergev Kovalev in November 2019. starts as favourite for Saturday's bout where he will

#### **Aniket scores as**

once again move up in class.

Jamshedpur win

Vasco: NorthEast United FC slumped to their first defeat in the ongoing Indian Super League as they went down 0-1 to Jamshedpur FC, here on Friday, Aniket Jadhay's strike (53rs minute) was the difference between the two sides in what was the 500th game of the ISL. T. P. Rehnesh also pulled off a terrific penalty save in the second-half to keep Jamshedpur's unbeaten streak against NorthEast intact. Both sides were unable to break the deadlock in the first half as they managed to cancel out each other's threat. As a result, no shots on target were registered. - PTI

### Live on TV

Australia vs India: First Test — Day Three from 9.30 am on Sony Ten 1, 3, Sony Six, HD

**FOOTBALL** 

English Premier League: Crystal Palace vs Liverpool from 6 pm; Southampton vs Manchester City from 8.30 pm; Everton vs Arsenal from 11 pm; Newcastle vs Fulham from 1.30 am (Sunday) on Star Sports Select 1, HD

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

Italian League: Fiorentina vs Verona from 7.30 pm; Sampdoria vs Crotone from 10.30 pm; Parma vs Sony Ten 2, HD

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# ASHWIN ON FIRE Man Utd ride on Rashford's brace

### Spinner takes four to tie Aussies in knots on Day 2

**Adelaide, Dec. 18:** Ravi Ashwin bagged four wickets as a dominant India held a 62-run lead at stumps on day two of the Adelaide day-night Test after Australian captain Tim Paine ran out of bat-

ting partners.
Paine was left stranded on 73 not out when the Australian innings ended at 191 to trail India's 244 by 53 runs.

Ashwin had figures of 4-55 while Umesh Yadav

At stumps, India in their second innings were one down for nine with Mayank Agarwal on five and nightwatchman Jasprit Bumrah yet to score. The under-pressure Prithvi Shaw, who was out for a duck in the first

innings, was bowled by Pat Cummins for four.
Fifteen wickets fell on the day which started when Cummins and Mitchell Starc took just 25 deliveries to knock off the deliveries to knock off the final four India batsmen. Australia in turn strug-

gled to make headway as Bumrah, Ashwin and Yadav worked their way through the batting order. Even with India spilling five chances, they never allowed Australia to settle apart from a determined Paine who plugged on to his eighth half century, aided in part by being dropped by Agarwal on 26.

It was Paine's only misstep and he brought up his 50 off 68 deliveries with an assured cut to the boundary.

As his confidence grew he produced a reverse sweep to move into the 60s with a four off Ashwin.

After Australia took 28 balls to get their first runs on the board, Bumrah stepped up to remove Matthew Wade and the out-of-form Joe Burns for eight each before dinner.

Ashwin's spin captured the wickets of Steve Smith, Travis Head and debutant Cameron Green between dinner and tea.



Ravichandran Ashwin (second from left) of India celebrates with teammates after dismissing Australia's Steve Smith during their second day of the first Test in Adelaide on Friday.

#### **SCORECARD**

India 1st Innings: (overnight 233 for 6): Saha c Paine b Starc 9, Ashwin c Paine b Cummins 15, Yadav c Wade b Starc 6, Bumrah not out 4, Shami c Head b Cummins 0. Extras (B-2, LB-8, NB-7, WD-1) 18. Total (all out in 93.1 overs) 244.

FoW: 1-0, 2-3, 3-100, 4-188, 5-196, 6-206, 7-233, 8-235, 9-240, 10-244. **Bowling:** Starc 21-5-53-4, Hazlewood 20-6-47-1, Cummins 21.1-7-48-3, Green 9-2-15-0, Nathan Lyon 21-2-68-1, Marnus Labuschagne 1-0-3-0.

Australia 1st Innings: Wade Ibw b Bumrah 8, Burns Ibw b Bumrah 8, Labuschagne Ibw b Yadav 47, Smith c Rahane b Ashwin 1, Head c&b Ashwin 7, Green c Kohli b Ashwin 11, Paine not out 73, Cummins c Rahane b Yadav 0, Starc run out 15, Lyon c Kohli b Ashwin 10, Hazlewood c Pujara b Yadav 8. Extras (LB-3) 3. Total (all out in 72.1 overs) 191. FoW: 1-16, 2-29, 3-45, 4-65, 5-79, 6-111, 7-111, 8-139, 9-167, 10-191. Bowling: Yadav 16.1-5-40-3, Bumrah 21-7-52-2,

Shami 17-4-41-0, Ashwin 18-3-55-4. India 2nd Innings: Prithvi b Cummins 4, Mayank not out 5, Bumrah not out 0. Total (for 1 wicket in 6 overs) 9. Bowling: Starc 3-1-3-0, Cummins 3-2-6-1.

### **NUMBERS GAME**

R. ASHWIN'S BEST BOWLING IN AUSTRALIA:

Ravichandran Ashwin recorded the best bowling performance in Australia by taking four for 55 off 18 overs. It was only second time when this off-spinner took four wickets in an innings in Australia. His previous best in Australia was four for 105 off 19 overs at Sydney in January 2015. The 34-year old's best bowling against Australia is seven for 103 at Chennai in February 2013. Ravichandran Ashwin also became the third highest wicket taker for India against Australia in Tests after Anil Kumble (111 wickets in 38 innings of 20 Tests) and Harbhajan Singh (95 wickets in 35 innings of 18 Tests). He took 81 wickets at an average of 31.00 in 29 innings of 16 Tests by end of the Australian first innings. Steven Smith made just one run off 29 balls in 45 min-utes. It was his fourth single in 132 innings of 74 Tests. His

previous slowest single was against England at Lord's in July 18,2013, off 14 balls in 19 muinutes Tim Paine's unbeaten 73 was fifth half century in 31 innings of 20 Tests as skipper. Overall, it was his eighth fifty

in 51 innings of 32 Tests.

- S. PERVEZ QAISER

### **SYDNEY TEST** STILL ON CARD, ASSEKIS CA

Melbourne, Dec. Cricket Australia Friday asserted that the third Test of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy against India is not threatened by a fresh Covid-19 outbreak in Sydney even though the situation is being

closely monitored. Australian cricket officials were put on alert after the number of cases in the northern beaches outbreak in Sydney reached 28 on Friday. The third Test between India and Australia at the SCG is scheduled to get underway on January 7.

'There's been lots of discussion and meetings of our medical experts, but this is the reason why throughout the summer we've had our players in bubbles in the hub," CA's interim chief executive Nick Hockley said.

'We're monitoring the situation; we're not panicking at all, staying calm. It's really watch, wait and see and I think the governments around the country have handled the pandemic so well, so we'll watch, learn and stay in touch," he added. -PTI

## **Duffy, Seifert down Pak** in one-sided T20 opener

**Auckland, Dec. 18:** New Zealand cruised to a fivewicket win over Pakistan in the first Twenty20 international Auckland's Eden Park on

Friday. The Black Caps ended on 156 for five with seven balls to spare after losing the toss and being set a target of 154.

Tim Seifert top-scored for the hosts with 57. while debutant paceman Jacob Duffy took four for

Pakistan never recovered from a slow start, despite a fighting 42 from stand-in captain Shadab Khan.

Haris Rauf was the tourists' best bowler, taking three for 29.

Pakistan had a rocky preparation for the match when 10 of their touring party tested positive for Covid-19 during quarantine after arriving in New Zealand.

contrast. Zealand were coming off a 2-0 series win over the West Indies and playing in home conditions. Man of the match Duffy

made a sensational start,



New Zealand's Tim Seifert plays a shot against Pakistan during their first T20 match at Eden Park in Auckland on Friday.

dismissing opener Abdullah Shafique for a duck in his first over.

He then claimed the scalps of Mohammad Rizwan and Mohammad Hafeez in his second over. Khan tried to rescue his side's innings, smashing Haris Rauf 3/29).

opener 42 from 32 balls before Duffy coaxed a top edge to Sodhi.

> **Brief scores: Pakistan 153/9** in 20 overs (Shadab Khan 42; Jacob Duffy 4/33) lost to New Zealand 156/5 in 18.5 overs (Tim Seifert 57;

### **BIG SQUADS TO** FIGHT BUBBLE **FAIIGUE: IAN**

London, Dec. 18: Former Australia captain Ian Chappell believes teams such as India will need increasingly large squads to help them combat "bubble fatigue" as they press ahead with extensive touring schedules amid the Coronavirus pandemic.

Leading Indian players have been in a series of bio-secure bubbles since September, initially while taking part in an Indian Premier League moved to the United Arab Emirates on health grounds.

Travelling to Australia, they again underwent quarantine ahead of the ongoing Test series.

"I have never experienced anything like this, and I am not surprised some players have started to talk about bubble fatigue," Chappell said.

'We had a couple of England players who have already pulled out of the BBL for that reason.

'If you look at what India have got coming up, they are going to need a huge squad of players,' the cricket great further

Sheffield Kingdom), **Kingdom), Dec. 18:**Manchester United mounted yet another rescue mission on Thursday, beating Sheffield United 3-2 to maintain their perfect away record in the Premier

League this season. Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's Jekyll-and-Hyde team now have 18 points from six matches on the road coming from behind to win each one of them. Two goals from Marcus

Rashford and an Anthony Martial strike lifted United to sixth in the table, five points behind leaders Liverpool with a game in

But Sheffield United are staring into the abyss with just one point to their name, Chris Wilder's side have fewer points after their first 13 games of a league season than any other team in English topflight history.

The visitors outclassed Sheffield United for long periods at Bramall Lane but faced a nervy final few minutes before celebrating their 10th consecutive away victory in the league. Sheffield United started

brightly as Manchester United struggled to find their rhythm and it was no surprise when they scored just their sixth league goal of the season in the fifth minute.

United appeared to be in cruise control but McGoldrick headed home from a corner in the 87th minute to make life uncomfortable and Henderson

#### THE RESULTS

Manchester United (Rashford 26, 51, Martial 33)
Sheffield United (McGoldrick 5, 87)

Aston Villa

had to dive to his right to keep out a powerful shot by substitute Lys Mousset. But the visitors clung on for the win.

#### **VILLA HELD BY BURNLEY**

Aston Villa squandered multiple chances as they were held to a frustrating 0-0 draw by battling Burnley on Thursday.

The hosts dominated without being at their best but were thwarted by the Clarets, who climbed out of the Premier League relega-

tion zone. Anwar El Ghazi and Kortney Hause hit the woodwork while Matt Lowton cleared a deflected strike from Ahmed Elmohamady off the line.

Burnley's threat was limited — Chris Wood had their best chance saved but Sean Dyche's side are now unbeaten in three games after a tricky run against Everton, Arsenal and Villa

Burnley rode their luck as Villa missed the chance to make serious ground on the Premier League's pacesetters. They remain 11th, four points adrift of fifth.



Players of Manchester United and Sheffield United eye the ball during their English Premier League match at the Bramall Lane Stadium in Sheffield, England, on Thursday. Manchester United won 3-2.

### Roma rout Torino in Italian league

Milan, Dec. 18: Roma moved level on points with champions Juventus in third place in Italian League on Thursday with a 3-1 win over 10-man Torino.

Torino had a mountain to climb after Wilfried Singo was sent off after 14 minutes in Rome following two yellow cards in seven min-

Roma followed on from their 5-1 win over Bologna last weekend and are level on 24 points with Juventus four points adrift of leaders AC Milan.

After Singo's dismissal the hosts piled on the pressure and it paid off with Mkhitaryan opening the scoring after 27 minutes in the Stadio Olimpico.

Torino goalkeeper Vanja Milinkovic-Savic had pushed out a Gianluca Mancini long-range effort, but Leonardo Spinazzola sent the ball back with Mkhitaryan's follow-up hitting the post and bouncing into the net.

Jordan Veretout converted a penalty before the break after a foul on Edin Dzeko.

Simone Edera rattled the woodwork for Torino after an hour but the visitors hones diminished when Lorenzo Pellegrini added a third after 68 minutes.

Torino captain Andrea Belotti pulled a goal back after 73 minutes with substitute Federico Bonazzoli sending the ball wide minutes later.

Torino fell to their eighth defeat this season, as they sit second bottom of the table with 30 goals conceded in 12 games.

## Russia hails CAS no ban on athletes

The court decided not to

Moscow, Dec. 18: Russia's Olympic Committee on Thursday expressed its satisfaction with the Court of Arbitration for Sport's decision not to ban the country's athletes from participating in the Olympics.

Sport's highest court on Thursday barred Russia from the international stage for two years including the rearranged Tokyo Olympics and Beijing Winter Games, but halved a four-year ban for systemic doping imposed by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA).

The country will also miss out on the 2022 World Cup in Qatar.

Speaking to reporters on Thursday, the Russian Olympic Committee's Stanislav Pozdnyakov expressed satisfaction that CAS had not "collectively" banned Russia's athletes, who will still be able to participate under a neutral flag if they prove no connection to doping.

accept the theses that WADA demanded. Of course, this is a significant precedent," he added. However Pozdnyakov blasted as "unacceptable" Pozdnyakov

CAS's decision to ban high-ranking Russia's officials, including the country's president Vladimir Putin, from attending the Games. Russia has been roiled by the doping saga for the

past four years, after the

former head of Moscow's

anti-doping laboratory Grigory Rodchenkov blew

the whistle over state-

backed doping at the coun-2014Olympics in Sochi. Russia considers the resulting ban to be legally

indefensible and Putin has slammed the decision as "politically motivated". On Thursday Russian news agency *RIA Novosti* cited Sports Minister Oleg Matytsin as saying that he "regretted" the ban on Russian officials at the

The President of the Swimming Russian Federation, Vladimir Salnikov, said he expected "an even worse scenario".

Games.

The United States Anti-Doping Agency con-demned the Court of Arbitration for Sport's decision to halve Russia's doping ban on Thursday as a "tragedy" for the global fight against drug cheats, slamming the ruling as a "weak and loophole-riddled out-come.' USADA chief executive

Travis Tygart said the CAS decision — which cut Russia's proposed fourvear ban to two years represented a "significant loss" for the WADA and clean athletes.

### **POLISH LEWANDOWSKI BEST MEN'S PLAYER**

Geneva, Dec. 18: Robert Lewandowski won his biggest personal prize, showing that a forward not named Messi or Ronaldo can be voted the world's best football

The Poland captain was named the FIFA Best Men's Player for 2020 after his 55-goal season lifted Bayern Munich to a sweep of international and domestic trophies. Lewandowski topped a three-player shortlist that included Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo. Voting was by a global jury of national team captains

and coaches, plus selected journalists and fans. Lewandowski joined Luka Modric, the Croatia and Real Madrid midfielder who won in 2018, as the only players in the past 13 years to deny both Messi and Ronaldo the victory.

Lucy Bronze was voted the best women's player to give England its first individual victory at the FIFA awards. A Champions League winner with Lyon, she has since joined Manchester City.



Mikhail Bukhanov, act-

ing head of the country's

anti-doping agency RUSA-

DA, said: "Today's results

are a victory for Russia."

