

U.S. President Trump confers Legion of Merit honour on PM Modi
page 10



Four Ministers skip Cabinet meeting chaired by Mamata
page 9



Oli, Prachanda factions hold separate meetings as NCP heads for a split
page 11



Virat Kohli gives pep talk to teammates, leaves for India
page 13

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NEARBY



Ex-officials urge PM to review Central Vista plan

NEW DELHI

A group of 69 retired All-India and Central services officers, under the banner of Constitutional Conduct Group, on Tuesday wrote in an open letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi that they were dismayed at the way the Central Vista project was going ahead and urged the government to review it in its entirety.

NEWS ▶ PAGE 9

Black flags waved at Haryana CM in Ambala

CHANDIGARH

A group of farmers protesting against the Centre's farm laws on Tuesday waved black flags at Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal's convoy in Ambala in protest. Scores of protesters gathered near the Agrasen Chowk in Ambala city as the CM's convoy was crossing the street. They waved black flags and shouted slogans against the BJP.

NEWS ▶ PAGE 9

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OPPORTUNITIES ▶ PAGE 5

20 flyers from U.K. test positive

RT-PCR tests mandatory; separate isolation unit for those found with new variant

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

At least 20 passengers flying in to India from the United Kingdom tested positive for COVID-19 on Tuesday as the government issued stringent standard operating procedures (SoP), mandating RT-PCR tests at all airports for each traveller from the country and isolation at a separate institutional facility for positive cases in view of the new coronavirus strain.

Advising caution as the new strain in the U.K. had undergone 17 changes, increasing its transmissibility by 70%, NITI Aayog member V.K. Paul said the mutation had so far not affected the severity and the case fatality of the disease. Speaking a press conference, he said that as of now, the mutation had not been detected in India, and it would have no impact on the potential of the emerging vaccines being developed in India or internationally.

On direct flights

All the 20 infected passengers were on direct Air India flights from London.

Six were on a flight that landed in Delhi at 11.30 p.m. on Monday and two on a flight that arrived at Kolkata on Sunday night. Four persons, who landed in Ahmedabad, and eight persons, including a crew member, who reached Amritsar on Tuesday tested positive. All flights were direct Air India flights



Virus alert: Municipal workers waiting for passengers from the U.K., at the Mumbai airport on Tuesday. ■ EMMANUEL YOGINI

from London.

"Five passengers were found positive at the Delhi airport. One passenger who took a connecting flight to Chennai was tested there and found positive," an official in Delhi said.

All incoming passengers from U.K. were being tested, said Dr Gauri Agarwal, of the Genestrings Diagnostic Center handling coronavirus testing at Delhi airport.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

MORE REPORTS ▶ PAGES 10, 11

Delhi to trace passengers who arrived from U.K. in last 14 days

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Amid growing concerns over the new strain of COVID-19 detected in the U.K., the Delhi government has directed officials to trace and test all passengers who have travelled from that country in the last 14 days and the process has started in the city, according to authorities.

Delhi Health Minister Sa-

tyendar Jain said the reason behind the fast spread of the virus in Delhi in March-April was that lots of people travelled from abroad to the city. "Our strategy is to identify those who are based out of Delhi and have travelled from the U.K. in the past two weeks and conduct door-to-door test for them," he said.

DETAILS ON ▶ PAGE 3

'CBSE Board exams only after February'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Union Education Minister Ramesh Pokhrayal 'Nishank' said on Tuesday that the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) Class X and Class XII examinations would only be held after February next year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Usually, the practical exams are conducted in January and theory exams begin in February.

The Minister was interacting with teachers virtually when he made the announcement. He added that the schedule for the exams had not been decided yet.

In response to a question, the Minister said it was not possible to conduct online exams though classes were being held online. He said in some far-flung parts of the country, computer and Internet access were not available for all students, adding that the government would come up with a solution soon.

The CBSE had earlier announced that the Board exams in 2021 would be conducted in the written mode and not online.

Schools across the country were closed in March to contain the spread of the pandemic. They were partially reopened in some States from October 15.

Priest, nun guilty in Abhaya case: court

Nun was found dead in a well in 1992



Father Thomas Kottoor being taken to a prison in Thiruvananthapuram. ■ PTI

tendent of Police, Crime Branch, K.T. Michael, discharge from the case for want of evidence. The CBI had named Father Jose as an accomplice in the murder. It had accused Mr. Michael of destroying evidence.

The police had dismissed Abhaya's death as a suicide. A subsequent Crime Branch inquiry, led by Mr. Michael, seconded the finding. The findings caused public outrage. An action council headed by Jomon Puthenpurakal ushered in a CBI inquiry in 1995.

The case took a sensational turn in 1996 when the then Deputy Superintendent of Police, CBI, Varghese P. Thomas, opted for voluntary retirement after he allegedly came under pressure to write off the death as a suicide. The case meandered through various levels of the judiciary till trial finally commenced in August 2019.

Farmers to take a call on offer for talks today



On the road: A row of tents erected at the Delhi-Uttar Pradesh border in Ghazipur by farmers protesting against the new agriculture marketing laws. ■ SANDEEP SAXENA

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The meeting of the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) scheduled for Tuesday to discuss the response to the government's offer for fresh talks to resolve the impasse over the new farm laws was postponed to Wednesday.

The letter by Vivek Aggarwal, Agriculture Joint Secretary, seeking resumption of talks was discussed at the coordination committee of farmer unions from Punjab, but the meeting of the SKM was rescheduled due to time constraints.

Speaking at a press conference at the Singhu border, farmer leader Kulwant Singh Sandhu said a decision on the offer would be made on Wednesday.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

MORE REPORTS ON ▶ PAGE 2 & 9

Jail authorities told to ensure Ishrat's protection

Ex-Congress councillor alleged harassment by inmates, moved to another barrack

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A Delhi court on Tuesday directed the Mandoli jail authorities to "immediately" act to prevent alleged harassment of former Congress councillor Ishrat Jahan, arrested under the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act in a north-east Delhi riots case, inside the prison premises.

Additional Sessions Judge Amitabh Rawat gave the direction after Ms. Jahan alleged that she was badly beaten up by inmates at Mandoli jail and was continuously facing harassment in prison.

The court directed the prison authorities to give a detailed report on Ms. Jahan's complaint and the steps taken to address the issue.

Later in the day, Director

General (Tihar) Sandeep Goel said Ms. Jahan was shifted to another barrack after a "minor scuffle" was reported between her and another woman inmate on Tuesday morning. "Both of them have been shifted to different barracks to avoid any scuffle," said Mr. Goel.

Ms. Jahan had told the court during the videoconferencing hearing that this was the second incident of harassment and violence against her in the last one month because of which she was under high stress.

Called a terrorist? She said that on Tuesday around 6.30 a.m., some inmates beat her up badly and hurled verbal abuses. She alleged that the other inmates kept calling her a "terrorist"

During the hearing, the counsel for suspended AAP councillor Tahir Hussain, al-

and even demanded money from her in the canteen.

Ms. Jahan complained that she has been facing such harassment since the past four months. Her counsel said that two women in her prison cell attacked Ms. Jahan after objecting to her offering prayers in the morning.

Taking note of her complaint, Judge Rawat directed the prison authorities to take all necessary steps to ensure that Ms. Jahan was not further harassed by anyone inside the prison just because she complained.

The judge remarked that Ms. Jahan seemed to be in a state of "utter fear" while directing the jail authorities to talk to her and try to allay her fears.

During the hearing, the counsel for suspended AAP councillor Tahir Hussain, al-

so charged with the stringent UAPA, alleged that most of the accused in the north-east Delhi riots cases were facing discrimination in prison. The counsel said the accused are being termed "terrorists" even before a final decision of the court.

Jamia Millia Islamia student Asif Iqbal Tanha, another accused, claimed that he was not allowed to meet his family members through videoconferencing despite repeated requests by them.

Former JNU student leader Umar Khalid, also an accused in a case, complained that he had not been provided with a soft copy of the chargesheet till now. The court asked Mr. Khalid's counsel to move an application before the Tihar prison authorities in this regard.

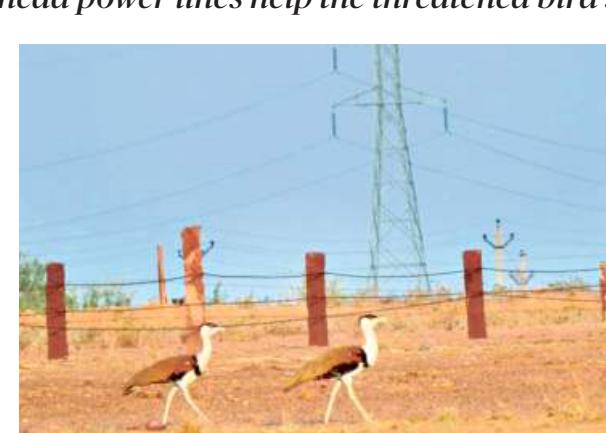
'Fireflies' to shine a light for Great Indian Bustards

Flaps placed on overhead power lines help the threatened bird species in the wild to avoid collision

SHIV SAHAY SINGH
KOLKATA

The Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change, along with the Wildlife Conservation Society, India, has come up with a unique initiative – a "firefly bird diverter" for overhead power lines in areas where Great Indian Bustard (GIB) populations are found in the wild. The GIB is one of the most critically threatened species in India, with fewer than 150 birds left in the wild.

A report by the Ministry, submitted to the National Green Tribunal in 2019, pointed out that power lines, especially high-voltage transmission lines with multiple overhead wires, are the most important current threat for GIBs in the Thar region, and are causing unsustainably high mortality in about 15% of their population.



Great Indian Bustards near power lines fitted with firefly diverters. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



body weight and other factors," Anil Kumar, team leader of the GIB project undertaken by WCS India, told *The Hindu*.

The firefly diverters have been installed along two stretches of approximately 6.5 km, selected between Chakota to Dholiya villages in the Pachora tehsil after ground surveys and due consultations with the

Rajasthan Forest Department. A total of 1,813 firefly bird diverters are being installed on this stretch – a model that has been endorsed by experts from the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Species Survival Commission's (SSC) Bustard Specialist Group.

The diverters are called fireflies because they look

like fireflies from a distance, shining on power lines in the night. The selected stretch is opposite the Pachora Field Firing Range, which offers a safe habitat to a breeding population of GIBs outside the Desert National Park Sanctuary in Jaisalmer.

Kapil Chandrwal, Deputy Conservator of Forest, Desert National Park Sanctuary, said that high-tension wires being a reason for GIB mortality had been proven by different studies. "GIBs are one of the heaviest flying birds in India. Therefore, when they encounter these wires, they are unable to change the direction of their flight. Death in most cases is due to impact with the wires and not due to electrocution," Mr. Chandrwal added. The diverter will not only save GIB but other species of large birds too.

A total of 2,178 candidates contested for 280 seats, with each of the 20 districts divided into 14 segments. As per results announced for 244 seats till late on Tuesday, the Alliance won 96 seats and the BJP 70.

NC single largest party The NC emerged as the single largest party in the Kashmir Valley and the BJP in the Jammu region. For the first

time, the BJP won three seats from the Valley's Srinagar, Pulwama and Bandipore districts.

The PDP, which saw a major split after the abrogation of J&K's special status, won 26 seats. The Congress bagged 21 seats, while the CPI(M) won five. The recently floated Apni Party won 10 seats. A significant 43 Independents registered victory.

Except for Srinagar, where Independents won seven seats and the Apni Party three, the Alliance is likely to take the post of chairpersons in nine districts of the Kashmir Valley.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

PEERZADA ASHIQ
SRINAGAR

The Gupkar Alliance, an amalgam of six regional parties, including the National Conference (NC) and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), on Tuesday emerged as the frontrunner in the maiden District Development Council (DDC) polls in Jammu and Kashmir, while the BJP was the single largest party.

A total of 2,178 candidates contested for 280 seats, with each of the 20 districts divided into 14 segments. As per results announced for 244 seats till late on Tuesday, the Alliance won 96 seats and the BJP 70.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

Victory lap: An Independent candidate celebrating his win from the Khomkh seat in Srinagar on Tuesday. ■ NISSAR AHMAD

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CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

AN-NDNE

Community kitchen to toilets, hues of hospitality seen on NH 9

A collective of 84 villages in Haryana is making bathrooms and raw vegetables available to the agitating farmers from both Punjab and their home State

JATIN ANAND
BAHADURGARH

As an eight-kilometre-long blockade of "reinforcements" ready to march to the Capital steadily grows in number on the National Highway 9, residents from villages in Haryana's Bahadurgarh and beyond are busy assisting and making thousands of farmers protesting against the farm laws feel at home.

A community kitchen is being run by a wrestling coach. A posse of around 50 of his students are serving langar round-the-clock and providing bedding and warm clothes to fight the biting cold at night. A collective of 84 Haryana villages is making toilets, bathrooms and raw vegetables available to the agitating farmers from both Punjab and their home State. The Delhi-Rohat road bears witness to several such hues of hospitality.

Sub-city springs up

For those unable to find space for their tractor trolleys on the blocked carriage-way leading to Delhi, a sub-city has sprung up at the



Virender Mandothia, a wrestling coach, distributes lassi to farmers; a facility set up by the locals of Bahadurgarh with the support from 84 villages in Haryana on Tuesday. ■ SHIVKUMARPUSHPAKAR

Shining Star Sports Club, a semi-functional mall on the stretch heading towards Sampla, which has also thrown open its toilets and bathrooms to farmers and women in their families.

"Our village witnessed the march of farmers from Punjab the night they breached the cordon of security personnel on their way to the Tikri border protest site. Many set up camp there but mostly the elderly among them were left behind and stayed here. I couldn't bear to see them

cooking and making arrangements for themselves. So I decided to set up langar," said Virender Mandothia, popularly known as Bhullar Pehalwan, a wrestling coach.

With carpets laid on the ground under two layers of cloth, in addition to two types of roti, vegetables, and mixed daal are being served at Mr. Mandothia's "Pehalwan ka Roti Sabzi ka Langar" at the Pakoda Chowk in the Naya Gaon village since November 27.

From his own resources

as well as donations from some village residents and protesters, the community kitchen also provides salted lassi, tea, and snacks, including peanuts and dry fruits, to "his guests" across the road from the local protest site, which has a stage similar to the Singhu and Tikri border protest sites.

'50 helpers'

"I have around 50 pupils who come and help out during the busy hours – morning and night – there is no count of the people who



While women, mostly senior citizens, line up outside two restrooms on the ground level, the men climb up one to three flights of stairs to utilise those on the three consecutive floors at the far end of the Shining Star Sports Club.

"This is the least we could have done," said a local resident employed as a security guard near its gates. "I am the son of a farmer and so is the owner of this property; all of them [farmers] are like our family and we are doing for them what they would have done for us if they visited," he said.

Transit camp

A few kilometres down NH-9 towards Sampla, a large banner proclaims that 84 villages belonging to the Dalal Khap or community have made arrangements for food, toilets, and bathrooms to showcase its support for the farmers' agitation.

Operated by the residents of the Luna Majra village where it is located, the transit camp, according to a local resident who only identified himself as "Mr. Dala"

functioned on resources gathered from 84 villages across Haryana.

"The Dalal Khap has mobilised everything from bedding and warm clothes to spices, fruits, and raw vegetables from the hinterland for those gathered here," he said.

Farmers from Punjab bring along raw vegetables and we provide the spices to cook for and serve as many people as possible. There is no count of the number of people we feed," he said.

What, Jagdish Lal Cheema from Moga asked, could be a better testament to the unity of farmers from both States except food cooked with different ingredients provided by each, consumed by them all.

Sonu Dalal from Rohtak's Bawani Khera village said local residents not only opened up their own bathrooms and toilets for those staying at the camp but even helped with their laundry. "We can sustain ourselves and thousands of others like us not for months but even a year; we won't move till the laws are removed," he declared.

From Ferozepur to Singhu on bicycle

Landless labourer pedals 420 km braving cold weather to reach protest site

HEMANI BHANDARI
NEW DELHI

Gurwinder Singh rode 420 km for four days on his bicycle and reached Delhi-Haryana's Singhu border on Monday night. The 29-year-old from Ferozepur said he considers this protest a place of worship.

Around 2.30 p.m. on December 18, Gurwinder, a daily wage labourer, began cycling to the Capital, covering himself in a sweater, a hoodie and a thick shawl traditionally called *loj*. "We have one bike at home but there are two others who drive it and there are also little children. For their needs, the vehicle should be there. Buses and trains would have been expensive. So, I sat on my cycle and started," he said.

Gurwinder wanted to join the protest as early as the fifth day, but was caught in other engagements like setting up tents for weddings.



Gurwinder Singh with his bicycle at the Singhu border on Tuesday. ■ HEMANI BHANDARI

He also had to convince his family.

"My wife asked me why I need to go. I told I have to go no matter what. Then finally, my father intervened and allowed me," he said.

Back home, his 11-month-old twin sons Gurnoor and Harnoor await him. But he explained the reason he set out to the protest site. "Wherever there is 'sangat' [huge groups of people], the presence of Sikh Gurus Gu-

ru Nanak Dev and Guru Gobind Singh is felt. I don't have land, I work for people who are farmers. I had to come here and mark my presence," he said.

Night halts

Every day, he rode till about 10-11 p.m. On the first day, he reached Ludhiana and spent the night at a petrol pump. "I'll never forget the night in my life. It was so cold and I only had a *loj* to

cover myself. At one point, I also thought that I should go back home," he said.

The second day, he reached a place in Ambala where *langar* was under way. He ate and slept at the same place. However, Gurwinder was spotted by a group of people travelling to the Singhu border.

Carrying flag

"They stopped me because of the flag I was carrying. They stopped, gave me a blanket and a little cash which I spent for meals at dhabas. I also bought a pair of socks," he said.

On the third day, he reached Karnal where he spent a night outside a shop and around 9 p.m. on day four [Monday], he reached the border. Gurwinder plans to head back home on Wednesday and will reach by weekend - on his bicycle, which is his companion back home as well.

Not official voice of farmers'

Trolley Times says newsletter made to clarify real news

HEMANI BHANDARI
NEW DELHI

In the second edition of Trolley Times – a four page newsletter in Punjabi started by a group of youngsters in Education but because of a fee increase in reserved category, she couldn't. She instead completed her Masters in Arts from distance learning after which she got involved in daily-wage labour work with her mother.

In a column explaining 'What is Trolley Times', they said: "Trolley Times is not the official paper of Kisan Morcha. Our intent, without malice and ulterior motive, is to simply represent peoples' voices. We are aware that partisan publishing representation can create rifts in the movement."

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Dalit representation

On page 2 of the newsletter on Tuesday is a story of a woman, authored by freelance journalist Sangeet Toor, regarding the Dalit representation at the protest.

The story is of a 23-year-old Dalit woman, Kulvir Kaur, (name changed) from Sangrur district in Punjab, who wanted to pursue Bachelors in Education but because of a fee increase in reserved category, she couldn't. She instead completed her Masters in Arts from distance learning after which she got involved in daily-wage labour work with her mother.

"Do you go for protests?" the author reportedly asked the woman. "We are the kind of the political part who can't do as they like," the woman said.

The woman is reported to have said that if she went for protests, the society will start talking about her and her marriage will become difficult.

Kulvir told the author that she wants to take part in the protest but she has seen how her mother and other women from the community are treated by the police and other authorities.

Loose translation of the story written in Punjabi quoted the woman as saying:

"To register their names in the history, to mark their presence in a historical movement and then to return home for a decent life are privileges many of our sisters simply do not have. Their desire is their participation".

Voices of unheard

Jasdeep Singh, an editor at Trolley Times, said the reason to publish the story is "to be able to give space to underrepresented voices".

A senior officer said the Delhi Police is fully prepared for any situation.

More security at borders after protest gains momentum

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

With more farmers from all over India joining the protest at Delhi borders, the police has strengthened the security at the stir sites and also at other major roads in the city. However, several borders remained closed and traffic has been diverted to other routes.

A senior officer said the Delhi Traffic Police

said Singhu, Auchandi, Piau Maniyari, and Mangesh borders are closed. The commuters have been advised to take alternative routes through the Lamphur, Safiabad Saboli and Singhu school toll tax borders. Traffic has been diverted from Mukarba and the GTK road, people are suggested to avoid Outer Ring Road, the GTK road and NH-44.

Ex-MLA who escaped custody held

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Former MLA Rambeer Shokeen, who escaped from U.P. Police custody in September 2018 while being brought to Safdarjung Hospital for treatment, was arrested, said a se-

nior police officer on Tuesday.

Shokeen is a close associate of gangster Neeraj Bawana, police said, adding that he was sent to judicial custody till January 4.

Shokeen, who was elected

Air in Delhi now 'severe'

AQI to deteriorate today, says SAFAR

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The air quality of Delhi and Noida deteriorated to the "severe" category on Tuesday and Gurugram's was in the higher end of the "very poor" category, according to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). The national capital's air quality is likely to deteriorate on Wednesday.

"AQI is forecast to further deteriorate to the 'higher end of the very poor category by Dec. 23 and Dec. 24 with quite a few regions may even experience severe AQI for a shorter time period, especially during the early morning," said government-run monitoring agency, SAFAR.

The speed of surface-level winds is "low" and westerly in direction and the winds are likely to

further slowdown, which will aid in the accumulation of pollutants. Faster surface winds help in the dispersion of pollutants. The effect of stubble burning on the city's air quality was low, but mixing height, which is the height from the ground level up to which pollutants can be dispersed, was "low". This also leads to the accumulation of pollutants near the surface. The AQI of Delhi was 418 on Tuesday, as per CPCB's 4 p.m. bulletin.

Moderate to dense fog is also predicted during the period. "Fall in minimum temperature by 1-3°C likely over some parts of plains of North West India and Central India during next three days. Cold wave to severe cold wave conditions at isolated pockets very likely over Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh and Delhi on

Capital records 5.3 degrees Celsius

Temperatures likely to fall in next few days, forecasts Met

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The minimum temperature on Tuesday was 5.3 degrees Celsius – three degrees below normal – and the maximum settled at 23.9 degrees Celsius, which is three degrees above normal.

The Meteorological Department has forecast that temperatures are likely to fall in the next few days with cold wave-like conditions continuing to persist at several places in the city.

Moderate to dense fog is also predicted during the period. "Fall in minimum temperature by 1-3°C likely over some parts of plains of North West India and Central India during next three days. Cold wave to severe cold wave conditions at isolated pockets very likely over Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh and Delhi on

December 23 and 24," the IMD said.

It added that moderate to dense fog in the morning hours at isolated pockets very likely over Punjab and Haryana, Chandigarh and Delhi on December 23 and dense to very dense fog in the morning hours at isolated pockets very likely over

same region during December 24-26. The IMD said an active Western Disturbance is likely to affect Western Himalayan Region from December 26, which could cause scattered to fairly widespread rain/snow in the Himalayas over the subsequent two days and also have an impact on temperatures in the Capital.

A woman sits on a footpath in Nizamuddin on a cold Tuesday morning. ■ V.V. KRISHNAN

OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER TEMPORARY DIV. PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT CHAKRATA					
S.N. 1458/4 EO					Dated 15/12/2020
National Competitive Bidding (e-Tendering)					
Executive Engineer Temporary Division Public Works Department, Chakrata on behalf of "Governor of Uttarakhand" invites through e-tendering (Singh Bid System) for the construction of following work. All detail information relating to tender shall be available on http://www.uktenders.gov.in from dated.....					
DIPR/UK/14434					

Office of the Executive Engineer Irrigation Division Haridwar					
E-Tender Notice No. 06/EE/2020-21					Dated 19.12.2020
The Executive Engineer, Irrigation Division Haridwar on behalf of Governor of Uttarakhand, invites the item rate bids,in two bids system through electronic tendering, for following work from the eligible contractors registered in authorized/valid category for the estimated cost of tender in any department of central/government/any state government/UT of India.					
Sl. No.					
Name of Work					

Timings

DELHI

WEDNESDAY, DEC. 23
RISE 07:11 SET 17:31
RISE 13:17 SET 00:59
THURSDAY, DEC. 24
RISE 07:12 SET 17:31
RISE 13:46 SET 01:51
FRIDAY, DEC. 25
RISE 07:12 SET 17:32
RISE 14:16 SET 02:43

Delhi Weather max min
Delhi City 24 05
Safdarjung 24 05
Palam 21 08

Delhi Palam Today
22°C Moderate to dense fog during morning and pleasant sunny day. Pollution level would remain severe.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow
21°C A cold morning with dense fog. A pleasant dry day with sunny sky likely.

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THE HINDU
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IN BRIEF

AAP holds padayatras to inform public about 'scam'

NEW DELHI
Aam Aadmi Party on Tuesday took out 'padayatras' in all 272 wards of Delhi against the alleged ₹2,500 crore 'scam' in BJP-ruled municipal corporations, the party said. AAP workers met people and informed them about the alleged scam during the rallies.

BJP launches Satyagraha movement against AAP

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The BJP on Tuesday launched a "Satyagraha movement" against the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) demanding financial dues to the tune of an estimated ₹13,000 crore owed by the AAP Delhi government to the three municipal corporations.

Delhi BJP president Adesh Gupta and Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri led party cadre and other leaders at a protest outside the AAP office.

"Today, we are doing a Satyagraha movement to fight for the rights of the Corona Warrior Corporation sanitation workers, doctors, nurses, health workers, teachers of Delhi," Mr. Gupta said.

AAP wants BJP to expel Bidhuri over remarks

MP criticised for 'abusing' farmers

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Tuesday attacked the BJP over the alleged "foul language" used by BJP MP Ramesh Bidhuri about the farmers protesting at the Delhi's borders.

"If the Prime Minister does not expel South Delhi MP Ramesh Bidhuri before sunset for using such foul language, it means [Mr.] Bhiduri has acted on the directions of the Prime Minister," AAP national spokesperson Raghav Chadha said.

Contradictory statement
He said that on one hand, the Union Agriculture Minister has said that the government was ready for talks, but on the other hand, an elected MP of the BJP was openly "abusing" the farmers.

"Please don't disrespect our farmers. The sons of the farmers are defending our

Delhi govt. begins contact tracing passengers with U.K. travel history

This comes even as five people have tested positive for the new virus strain

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi government has directed officials to trace and test all passengers who have travelled from the U.K. in the last 14 days and the process has started in the city, according to authorities.

Also, five people who have travelled from the U.K. have tested positive for the virus, said Genestrings Lab in a statement on Tuesday. The company is conducting mandatory RT-PCR tests for passengers from the U.K. arriving at the Delhi airport.

CAll the people who are travelling via the U.K. are being tested at the airport, and those travelling on international flights are required to carry a test report with them. Our strategy for this is that we will identify all those who are based out of Delhi in the past two weeks, and conduct door-to-door testing for them. I request everyone to wear a mask, because that is the only way to stay safe, no matter the strain," Mr. Jain said.



Passengers being checked for documents by officials on their arrival at IGI airport in New Delhi. ■ FILE PHOTO: SHIV KUMAR PUSHKAR

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He said that the reason behind the fast spread of virus in Delhi in March-April was that lots of people travelled from abroad to Delhi. "All the people who are

travelling via the U.K. are being tested at the airport, and those travelling on international flights are required to carry a test report with them. Our strategy for this is that we will identify all those who are based out of Delhi in the past two weeks, and conduct door-to-door testing for them. I request everyone to wear a mask, because that is the only way to stay safe, no matter the strain," Mr. Jain said.

At the airport, people are tested and once their result is out, the ones whose result is negative are asked to undergo 14 days of quarantine and the people who are positive are being moved to Lok Nayak Hospital," a Delhi government official said.

said. The people who have travelled from the U.K. in the last two weeks are being tested and asked to undergo 14 days of home quarantine.

"At the airport, people are tested and once their result is out, the ones whose result is negative are asked to undergo 14 days of quarantine and the people who are positive are being moved to Lok Nayak Hospital," a Delhi government official said.

5-year-old raped, murdered in Haryana district, accused held

Cause of death to be ascertained after post-mortem report

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GURUGRAM

A five-year-old was allegedly raped and murdered in Haryana's Jhajjar district on Sunday night. The accused, Vinod alias Monu, who is involved in eight cases of murder and theft has been arrested in this connection.

According to the police, Vinod abducted the minor girl from her house in the neighbourhood late on Sunday evening, took her to his house and raped her. Hearing the girl's screams

for help, her parents and neighbours tried to rescue her, but the accused had latched the door of his house from inside.

A police team later reached the spot to break open the door and arrested the accused. But the girl was found dead.

"The accused was arrested at the spot. He has a previous criminal record. The cause of death of the minor girl would be ascertained after the post-mortem report is received. The matter is under investigation," said DSP, Jhajjar, Rahul Dev.

Chief Minister Manohar Lal in a tweet said, it was very distressing. He added that strong action would be initiated.

Congress general secretary Randeep Singh Surjewala, said in a tweet on Tuesday that a peaceful State like Haryana had become a "crime hub because of the failure of the BJP-JJP coalition government". He alleged that rape and abduction were now "a routine".

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AAP demands package for farmers' kin

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH

The Aam Aadmi Party's Punjab unit on Tuesday demanded that Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh formulate and implement a policy regarding financial assistance, employment and debt waiver for families of those who lost their lives during the ongoing agitation against the Centre's agriculture marketing laws.

APP legislator Aman Arora said, "A large number of people were getting sick and dying because of the cold, while many were martyred on a daily basis due to road accidents while commuting to and fro from Punjab. It is the duty of Amarinder Singh government to help the families of the martyrs of the farmers' movement."

Leader of the Opposition in Assembly and AAP MLA Harpal Cheema accused the Central government of not heeding the genuine demands of the farmers.

Mixed response to PM's AMU speech

Teachers say it lacked in specifics, students feel he focussed on the university's past

ANUJ KUMAR
GAZIABAD

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speech on the occasion of the centenary celebrations of the Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) evoked a mixed response on the campus.

Mirza Asmer Baig, Professor of Political Science, AMU, said the Prime Minister talked largely in generalities and that specifics were lacking in his speech. "Muslims of India have a great affinity towards AMU. So when you are engaging with Muslim intelligentsia, they were expecting the PM to touch upon issues that concerned the community in the last couple of years, particularly the Citizenship Amendment Act and the minority character of the university. The PM did say that the government would not be found lacking in supporting AMU and appreciated the core values of the university, but a little more tangibility would have helped," said Prof. Baig.

He felt the PM probably



Narendra Modi. ■ FILE PHOTO

refrained from specifics because it could have annoyed his core constituency, which could have considered it appeasement of minorities.

'Data off the mark'

On the data Mr. Modi presented on the reduction in the school dropout rate of Muslim girls, Prof. Baig said it seemed off the mark, but this was not a time to flag minor things.

"We should take this gesture as a positive move. It was on the lines of the speech he made after getting elected for a second term, though we are still waiting

for it to be actualised on the ground," he added.

Ali Nadeem Rezavi, Professor of History, AMU, said, "Our PM said everything he had to say without acceding anything in return." He felt the subtle message was that AMU was a national institution so there was no question of its "minority character".

He held that the PM had used the occasion to forward the National Education Policy, which Prof. Rezavi thought was going to "destroy higher education in India". "The Delhi University Teachers' Association has already come up with strong counter to it," he said.

The positive, he said, was that the "riff-raff BJP leaders" would now probably abstain from criticising the AMU. "It was good that the PM was concerned about the education of minorities. It would be good if he thus implemented the Sachar Commission Report," said Prof. Rezavi.

Many students felt the PM

had indulged in what is called "dealing" in AMU parlance. "He praised us for our past, something that the AMU administration does all the time. Young students don't want to live in nostalgia. There was very little about what he could do for us today," said Talha Manan, a student in the Education Department.

Task juvenile'

Mr. Manan said students liked the way the Education Minister recited the AMU Tarana, the university song or anthem, but many felt the task that the PM gave to students – to conduct research on freedom fighters – was rather juvenile. "Anyway, hostels don't do research, departments do," he said.

Another student requesting anonymity said he liked the way Mr. Modi had praised the role of the AMU in fighting the pandemic.

"It showed that if the government backs the university, we could play a vital role in nation-building," he said.

MOHAMMED IQBAL
JAIPUR

A relatively small executive body of the Rajasthan Pradesh Congress Committee is likely to be appointed here by December-end, ahead of the expansion and reshuffle of the State Cabinet. The claimants to different positions have been making rounds of New Delhi for the last one week to meet the party leaders.

PCC president Govind Singh Dotasra, who met AICC general secretary Ajay Maken on Sunday, said here that a small number of organisational appointments would be made this month, followed by the release of a larger list next month. The latter will include appointments to the district and block-level committees.

Mr. Pilot also met Mr. Maken in New Delhi for two hours on Monday, giving rise to speculation that his opinion had been sought. The faction supporting Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot is alert on the issue of appointments, and Mr. Dotasra appointed in

his place.

With the reconstitution of the ruling party's executive, new appointments will be made to the posts of general secretaries, vice-presidents and secretaries. Mr. Dotasra, who is also the Education Minister, said senior leaders would be given important positions, while the youths may be appointed as PCC secretaries.

The AICC had dissolved all working committees, departments and cells of the PCC during the political turmoil in July this year. Mr. Pilot was sacked as the PCC president and Mr. Dotasra appointed in

the party structure. Mr. Maken is also scheduled to visit Rajasthan in the month-end.

ship faces the task of giving adequate representation to all sections.

After its formal appointment, the PCC executive may be expanded on the basis of feedback received from the State's seven divisions.

According to party sources, while Mr. Maken will try to strike a balance between the rival factions, the MLAs who worked hard in the polls for urban bodies, Zila Parishads and Panchayat Samitis would expect to get their aides and confidantes adjusted at important positions in the party structure.

Mr. Maken is also scheduled to visit Rajasthan in the month-end.

HC orders 'composite floor test' in BTC

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

The Gauhati High Court on Tuesday ordered a "composite floor test" in Assam's Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) on or before December 26. The court also barred the new executive council formed by a three-party alliance, including the BJP, from taking any major decisions till the matter is resolved.

The single-judge Bench of Justice Suman Shyam passed the order after hearing a petition by the BTC's former chief executive member Hagrama Mohilary and other leaders of his political party. The petitioners had challenged the constitutional validity of the appointment of Pramod Boro as the Council's chief executive member, Gobinda Basumatary as his deputy and three others as executive members. Mr. Boro's United People's Party, BJP and the Gana Shakti Party had formed a post-poll alliance to take control of the Council.

The court ruled that on the day of the test, to be convened by the Assam Governor, Mr. Boro and Mr. Mohilary or someone projected by his party will have to prove majority.

53% turnout in rural, civic polls in Arunachal

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

An estimated 53% voters turned out for the panchayat and municipal polls in Arunachal Pradesh on Tuesday, State Election Commission officials said. The turnout was attributed to cold conditions that kept most people indoors until around noon.

SEC Secretary Nyali Ete said polling was largely peaceful barring an incident at a booth in Kamle district where supporters of a political party poured water over the ballot boxes. Re-polling at this booth has been scheduled for December 24.

Ballot papers were used for the panchayat polls while electronic voting machines were used for the Itanagar Municipal Corporation and the Pasighat Municipal Council polls.

"We expect the voting percentage to increase as reports from polling booths in remote areas are yet to come," Mr. Ete said.

Tuesday's voting was said to be "cosmetic" as the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party has already won more than 63% of a total of 8,705 panchayat and municipal seats unopposed.

Cong. to select executive body soon

Rajasthan Cabinet expansion, reshuffle to be done later: Dotasra


Rajasthan PCC chief Govind Singh Dotasra with AICC general secretary Ajay Maken. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

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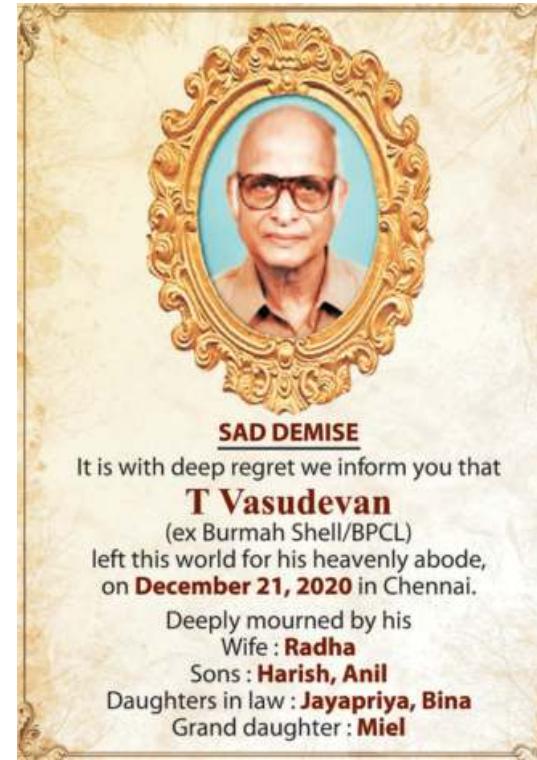
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OBITUARY & REMEMBRANCE

DEATH



It is with deep regret we inform you that

T Vasudevan

(ex Burmah Shell/BPCL)
left this world for his heavenly abode, on December 21, 2020 in Chennai.

Deeply mourned by his
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Sons : Harish, Anil
Daughters in law : Jayapriya, Bina
Grand daughter : Miel

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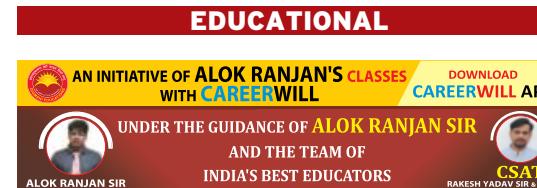
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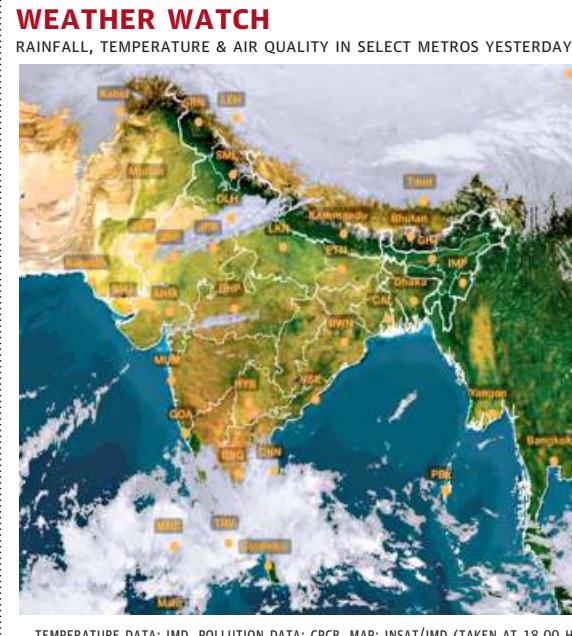
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PUBLIC NOTICE

TIRATH RAM SHAH HOSPITAL

PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to inform to general public that as per the order, we are discarding all



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD; POLLUTION DATA: CPCB; MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 18.00 HRS)

Forecast for Wednesday: Cold wave to severe cold wave conditions very likely at isolated places over Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Gangetic West Bengal and Telangana

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	26.0	10.3	Kozhikode	34.0	22.4
Ahmedabad	29.8	11.5	Kurnool	31.0	15.0
Aizawl	24.0	8.1	Lucknow	23.2	7.1
Allahabad	22.6	8.2	Madurai	29.2	22.4
Bengaluru	28.8	14.4	Mangaluru	35.0	19.2
Bhopal	27.1	8.4	Mumbai	30.2	20.0
Bhubaneswar	27.9	11.7	Mysuru	30.2	20.0
Chandigarh	33.4	7.2	Patna	23.9	5.3
Chennai	28.4	20.6	Poornima	22.2	8.4
Coimbatore	28.8	18.7	Port Blair	0.8	29.5	25.5
Dehradun	24.4	6.2	Puducherry	28.2	19.5
Gangtok	14.8	7.1	Pune	27.7	10.6
Goa	33.4	18.6	Raipur	28.0	7.0
Guwahati	26.2	10.4	Ranchi	22.4	7.1
Hubballi	28.0	15.0	Shillong	16.5	6.5
Hyderabad	27.9	11.7	Shimla	18.7	8.9
Imphal	22.3	3.9	Srinagar	10.0	4.7
Jaipur	24.4	11.0	Thiruvananthapuram	31.6	23.9
Kochi	31.4	23.6	Tiruchi	30.4	20.8
Kohima	17.5	5.8	Vijayawada	29.3	17.0
Kolkata	24.1	12.5	Visakhapatnam	28.8	18.0

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing

Yesterday

In observation made at 4.00 p.m., Bulandshahr, Uttar Pradesh recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 458 indicating an unhealthy level of pollution. In contrast, Aizawl, Mizoram recorded a healthy AQI score of 19

Air Quality Code: ■ Poor □ Moderate ■ Good (Readings indicate average AQI)
■Ox: Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.

NO_x: Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.

CO: Carbon monoxide. High concentration in air reduces oxygen supply to critical organs like the heart and brain. At very high levels, it can cause dizziness, confusion, unconsciousness and even death.

PM_{2.5} & PM₁₀: Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease

Farmers stage protest at BKC

STAFF REPORTER

MUMBAI

As farmers from across Maharashtra started travelling to Delhi to join the ongoing agitation against three new farm laws, farmer organisations on Tuesday staged a protest outside the office of Reliance Industries at Bandra Kurla Complex in Mumbai.

The demonstrators were led by farmer leader Raju Shetti of the Swabhiman Shetkari Sanghatana, Maharashtra's Minister of State and Prahar Sanghatana leader Bachchu Kadu, and Left parties.

"The three farm laws brought in by the Central government are only to help capitalists like Ambani and Adani. It has no intention to benefit farmers but to make them slaves. We will not let that happen," Mr. Shetti said. The protesters also burned Jio SIM cards as the police had barricaded the area.

A Division Bench of Justices V.M. Deshpande and A.S. Kilar passed the order on December 14 while hearing a petition filed by Shafiqullah Khan Ashfaqullah Khan seeking to quash a July 2018 case registered against him under provisions of the MAPA for alleged possession of 187 skins of cows in a van he was driving.

The FIR against Mr. Khan was registered at Shivaji Nagar police station in Buldhana district.

Mr. Khan was booked under Sections 5A (prohibition

of beef. A Division Bench of Justices V.M. Deshpande and A.S. Kilar passed the order on December 14 while hearing a petition filed by Shafiqullah Khan Ashfaqullah Khan seeking to quash a July 2018 case registered against him under provisions of the MAPA for alleged possession of 187 skins of cows in a van he was driving.

The Bench in its order said that the provisions of the Act prohibited purchase and sale of cows, bulls or bullock for slaughter and possession of flesh of any cow, bull or bullock.

"There are no allegations that the applicant was trans-

sporting or exporting cow, bull or bullock within the state for purpose of slaughter, 5B (prohibition on transportation of these animals outside the state for purpose of slaughter), and 5C (prohibition on possession of flesh of cow, bull or bullock).

The Bench in its order said that the provisions of the Act prohibited purchase and sale of cows, bulls or bullock for slaughter and possession of flesh of any cow, bull or bullock.

"There are no doubt that the skin is not covered under the provisions of the MAPA. Thus, there is no prohibition for the possession of skin of dead animals," the court said, quashing the FIR.

One-year-old from SA undergoes liver transplant

Doctors used minimally invasive laparoscopic surgery technique to treat biliary atresia

RAINA ASSAINAR

NAVI MUMBAI

For a slightly more than one-year-old Nayum from South Africa, the battle against a congenital condition called biliary atresia began soon after his birth.

A few days after he was born to Wazir Khan and Vasila Saiyed in October last year, Nayum was diagnosed with jaundice. "Since jaundice is very common in newborns, we started treating him for that. It was when he became two-month-old that doctors found out about his condition," Ms. Saiyed, who also has a seven-year-old daughter and a four-year-old son, said.

After further tests to find the reason behind the prolonged jaundice, doctors opined that he needed a Kasai surgery. "Kasai surgery usually helps one third of the children with this condition. But in Nayum's case, it didn't help him and the situation worsened with two episodes

of internal bleeding and heavy weight loss. A liver transplant was must," Dr. Ravi Mohanka, chief surgeon and HoD, liver transplant and HPB surgery, Global Hospital, Mumbai, said.

A relative of Ms. Saiyed had undergone a liver transplant in India and the family was keen on getting it done in that country as well. But what troubled Nayum's parents, other than the startling discovery about their son's health, was making travel arrangements in the middle of a pandemic.

"I do not have anyone in India while my wife has relatives in Gujarat. We spoke to multiple teams in various hospitals and finally decided on Global Hospital for the transplant. The challenge was to travel in the time of COVID-19. Besides, with my passport expired and my son not having a passport added to my problems," Mr. Khan, a banker by profession, said.

Mr. Khan said that the Indian embassy was very helpful and granted them visas in one week's time. In July 2020, Dr. Prashanth Rao, senior consultant, lead-cadaveric liver transplant, Global Hospital, told the family that the transplant needed to be done within two months.

While the family was figuring out a way to reach India, the baby had a second episode of internal bleeding on October 15. Finally, they arrived in India on October 23, and the liver transplant surgery was performed on



Hale and hearty: Post-surgery, Nayum having a gala time with his father at Global Hospital in Mumbai. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

November 25. What came as a solace to the family was that Mr. Khan could be a donor. "The patient came to us after a failed Kasai surgery for biliary atresia. After clinical tests, the father was found to be a suitable donor and he agreed to donate part of his liver to save his child," Dr. Mohanka said.

It was decided to perform hepatectomy (surgical removal of part or entire liver) using a minimally invasive laparoscopic surgery technique.

"A total laparoscopic donor hepatectomy is a safe and feasible option as it helps ease pain, reduce blood loss and morbidity, and ensures lesser complications and quicker recovery.

This procedure is cosmetically good for a young donor. All of these will encourage more donations," Dr. Mohanka said.

Nayum, who weighed seven kg before the surgery, has gained more than one kg after the procedure.

Indrani refuses to wear convict's uniform, moves CBI court

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

MUMBAI

Indrani Mukerjea, a prime accused in the Sheena Bora murder case, on Tuesday moved a special CBI court seeking exemption from wearing the convict's uniform in prison.

Ms. Mukerjea is lodged at the Byculla women's jail. The prison authorities were asking her to wear the convict's uniform of green sari even though she was only an under-trial accused, she said in her petition. The court asked the prison authorities to submit a reply on January 5.

Sheena Bora (24), Ms. Mukerjea's daughter from an earlier relationship, was allegedly strangled in a car and her body was disposed of in Raigad district in April 2012. The murder came to light in 2015.

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Priyadarshini Hills, Kottayam - 686560, Kerala
No. Ad. A II/1/5038/2017/Subfile(1)/Admin(1)/dd. 03.11.2020
No. Ad. A II/1/5038/2017



Pandemic resilience

Parliamentary panel's call for a new health law post-COVID-19 is a kernel for reform

The report of the parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs calling for a comprehensive Public Health Act, as a response to the extreme stresses caused by COVID-19, is a welcome call to reform a fragmented health system. When the pandemic arrived, National Health Profile 2019 data showed that there were an estimated 0.55 government hospital beds for 1,000 people. Prolonged underinvestment in public health infrastructure thus left millions seeking help from a highly commercialised private sector with little regulatory oversight; the situation was even worse in rural areas, where care facilities are weaker, and urban workers fled to their villages, afraid of the cost of falling sick in cities. Acknowledging these distortions, and the inadequacy of existing legal frameworks, the panel has called for an omnibus law that will curb profiteering during such crises and provide robust cashless health insurance. Its indictment of the feverish commerce surrounding health-care provision, however, can serve a larger purpose if it covers overall system reform, addressing the structural asymmetry created by misguided policies. India has committed itself to covenants such as the Sustainable Development Goals, but continues to evade making the right to health a full legal and justiciable right under the National Health Policy.

Among the committee's observations is the absence of insurance cover for many and oversight on hospitals to ensure that patients are not turned away in a crisis such as COVID-19. While the panel is right to view this as a breach of trust, one of the pandemic's impacts has been a staggering rise in premiums, especially for senior citizens, of even up to 25% of the insured value. What is more, the insurance regulator, IRDAI, set 65 as the maximum age of entry for a standard policy earlier this year, affecting older uninsured citizens. Such age limits must be fully removed. The answer to creating an equitable framework lies in a tax-funded system, with the government being the single and sole payer to care providers. This is a long-pending recommendation from the erstwhile Planning Commission, and should be part of any reform. The government, as the single-payer if not sole care provider at present, would be better able to resist commercial pressures in determining costs. This is equally applicable for central procurement of essential drugs, which can then be distributed free. Legal reform must provide for a time-bound transition to universal state-provided health services under a rights-based, non-exclusionary framework, with States implementing it. Private arrangements can be an option. COVID-19 has exposed the dangers of excessive reliance on private tertiary care. The corrective lies in raising public spending to the promised 2.5% of GDP on public facilities that are universally accessible.

Delaying the inevitable

Restructuring of bad loans will get tardier as the bankruptcy code is kept in abeyance

The government has kicked the can down the road by deciding to keep in abeyance critical provisions of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) of 2016 till March 31, 2021. To recap, because of the large-scale economic *hara-kiri* triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown, the government had raised the threshold of loan defaults that would spark off insolvency proceedings from ₹1 lakh to ₹1 crore on the day of the lockdown's announcement – March 24. It had indicated that if things did not improve by April-end, the suspensions of certain sections of the IBC for six months could be considered to prevent companies at large from being forced into the insolvency process for a *'force majeure'* default. An ordinance, in June, indefinitely barred the initiation of insolvency proceedings both, voluntarily or by creditors, for defaults arising on or after March 25, 2020, for a period of six months that could be stretched to a year. When the initial six months of forbearance under the IBC expired, it was extended till December 25. Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's pronouncement now, of a further suspension, would mean the one-year limit permitted by the law is fully used up. The government must make it clear that this is the last such window of respite, even as the necessity for a blanket suspension of IBC at this point in time is not as apparent as it was in the first or second quarter of 2020-21.

Stretching the IBC's abeyance, for one, does not square up with the government's proclamations of a firm, V-shaped economic recovery. Finance Ministry mandarins have repeatedly talked up growth prospects by flagging indicators returning to pre-COVID-19 levels, in several sectors. Surely, businesses in those sectors need no longer be sheltered from exits if they are not competitive. The government, by now, should know which sectors continue to remain in trouble. And if it is concerned about small and medium businesses, it could tweak the default threshold limit a tad higher, while letting bankruptcy processes function again for larger loan accounts. But a catch-all suspension could burden banks further and does not appear to have enthused industry either. One reason could be that the suspension also cuts off businesses' ability to voluntarily enter insolvency – for many, post-COVID-19 operations may not seem viable. Denying them an exit route so as to cut their losses, while their assets shed value is a lose-lose proposition for both borrower and lender. A more nuanced approach would have been better for banks, businesses and the economy. Delaying the inevitable would mean greater financial stress ahead, as the restructuring and recovery of bad loans shall get tardier and future growth momentum would be punctured at the cost of understating present systemic stress.

COVID-19 and limits of political accountability

With some leaders getting off lightly, the deeper challenges to democratic control of politicians need to be understood



IRFAN NOORUDDIN

The year no one saw coming – 2020 – and that few will mourn as it passes into the history books, has upended a great many truisms of political life. Writing in this daily, ("Troughs and crests in the pandemic response", April 25, 2020), I described the COVID-19 pandemic as a governance stress test that would expose how poorly prepared the world's governments were. Eight long months later, the results are indisputable: they failed the exam, and how. Not all failures were equal though. Facing the hardest test imaginable, some struggled despite sincere efforts – see Japan, Germany, Norway, for example. But less forgiveable are the failures of leaders who quit immediately, resorting to mocking the exam and pretending that it was a figment of other people's imaginations, burying their heads in the sand even as the evidence of their abdication of responsibility was witnessed by body bags stacked in freezer trucks outside hospitals whose morgues were overflowing.

Spectacular failures, response
This being 2020, though, nothing is as we might have predicted. Thus, not only did some of the world's most powerful leaders fail spectacularly to do their sworn duty to protect all their citizens, but they also paid little to no cost for abandoning us. If anything, in some instances, they appear to have been rewarded for their defiance of reality and ignorant embrace of quack science and alternative facts. The presidential elections in the United States frame a fascinating paradox: even

as much of the world stared agast at the abject failure of the world's most powerful nation to mount any resistance to the novel coronavirus, many Americans decided to vote for an incumbent under whose contemptuous watch as many lives are being lost daily as were killed in the September 11, 2001, attacks.

In other countries, too, leaders enjoy uncontested popularity even as the virus scoffs at their efforts to contain it. Across the Atlantic, Boris Johnson, whose apparent haplessness in high-stakes negotiations is exceeded only by the incoherence of his coronavirus response, swung between flirting with pursuing herd immunity in March to, now, just three days after calling just such a decision "inhuman", "cancelling Christmas" for the United Kingdom.

In Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro has elevated his attacks on science to levels defying parody. Last week, while stating irresponsibly his refusal to be vaccinated, even as his own government has launched a national vaccination campaign, Mr. Bolsonaro suggested that the vaccine might turn people into crocodiles.

In India, draconian lockdowns of limited efficacy and the sight of millions of our fellow countrymen desperately walking hundreds of miles back to their villages, the scapegoating of minority communities and the dubious distinction of having the second largest number of cases, have scarcely dented Prime Minister Modi's popularity, or, *vide* Bihar, even the power of his brand.

And, then, of course, is Vladimir Putin, who has been little seen, or heard from, even as the virus rages unchecked across Russia whose citizens are voting with their feet against a vaccine whose efficacy and safety are inadequately understood given the opacity of Russia's protocols.

Mr. Putin is a dictator, cloaked in the flimsiest veneer of legitimacy granted by a fawning media and by ritualised elections in which he faces no credible opposition. And, yes, Mr. Trump lost decisively in November, though U.S. President-elect Joe Biden must confront the reality of a nation deeply divided, with almost half the population grasping at conspiracy theories about the election and questioning the science of vaccines, with a significant minority elevating Mr. Trump to cult-leader status. But, Mr. Modi, Mr. Johnson, and Mr. Bolsonaro retain the reins of power firmly. How come? Why are citizens willing to reward populist leaders who fail their people?



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Analysis and propositions

The question requires us to confront the limits of political accountability in democracy, and to grapple with deeper, even existential, challenges to democratic control of politicians. Three propositions frame this analysis. First, while folk theories of democracy privilege retrospective accountability, that is the notion that voters use elections to render judgement about the incumbent's record, the reality is we vote prospectively, granting leaders we believe represent people like us a mandate to govern in our name. Put differently, we vote against candidates who we fear will elevate our opponents to our disadvantage.

A vote for Mr. Trump in 2020 was as much a rejection of some imagined socialist hellscape to be delivered by a Biden administration as it was an endorsement of Mr. Trump or his record in office. In Bihar, Mr. Modi campaigned

that voting for his opponents was a vote for those against people saying 'Bharat Mata ki Jai' or 'Jai Shri Ram'. Populist leaders grasp this visceral insight, offering voters stark choices between good, honest patriots battling anti-national elements, and the 'tukde tukde gang'. Nuanced, evidence-based consideration of policy alternatives might set the pulses of academics and pundits racing, but is a feeble antidote to the addictive jingoism peddled by populist demagogues.

Second, disease, unlike war, does not offer a clear enemy to target. Public health advice that emphasised the need for personal responsibility – stay home, wear a mask, wash your hands – underestimated the challenge of collective action predicted on hundreds of millions of individual responses. If each of us is responsible for our own health, then getting sick is our own fault. Why should those unafraid of a mere virus be required to sacrifice? Do not blame us for your pain, blame China, rang the coordinated messages of government-funded IT cells and bot armies, amplifying racist and xenophobic memes across social media.

Fading empathy

Third, the coronavirus pandemic reveals the poverty of our collective ability to empathise with those we do not see. Like the uncounted deaths caused by air pollution, heat waves, or malnutrition, those dying from COVID-19 do so out-of-sight, alone. Reduced to data points, their deaths affect us less each day. Innovative data visualisation efforts initiated by news and academic organisations, once bookmarked in our web browsers and religiously referenced for daily updates, are now barely read by a global public interested in more data.

Exponential growth is near impossible for the human brain to comprehend: in March, that Italy

had crested 50,000 cumulative cases was international news; today alone the U.S. will record four times as many new cases. But even as the victims of the virus die considerably out of plain view, the economic devastation wrought by lockdowns is felt by us all. Grateful though we may be for being spared illness, we attribute that good fortune to our own responsible choices. But the loss of income and livelihood must be blamed on someone, and the same leaders whose indecision and ineptitude make draconian shutdowns necessary, redirect our anger elsewhere: on foreigners, on minorities, on globalists, on science, and especially on the institutions of government. Trust no one other than me, the populist incants, for I alone can save you.

Some action

If there is a bright side, it is that the playbook of blaming economic downturns on others is limited in its efficacy. Citizens might be willing to give politicians an ATKT [Allowed To Keep Terms] for inadequate responses to a once-in-a-century pandemic that humbled even the richest, most powerful nations of the world, but prolonged economic suffering demands government remedy more immediately. Feverish efforts to squeeze all available policy levers to stimulate economies reveal the urgency politicians are feeling to deliver something, anything, to increasingly restive populations. It will be cold comfort to the dead and grieving, but perhaps the people will eventually have the last laugh over the populists. One must hope so, for without some measure of accountability, democracy loses its power, and so do the people.

Irfan Nooruddin is the Director of the South Asia Center (@ACSouthAsia) at the Atlantic Council and Professor in the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University in Washington DC

Put the farm laws on hold, uphold farmers' rights

The small and marginal farm sector, especially, faces a threat and the government needs to ensure wide consultations



GARGI PARSAI

The Supreme Court's recent suggestion to form a joint panel to look into the demands of the agitating farmers, has given a breather to the government, although such an offer, made officially at the outset, was rejected by farmer groups as a "dilly-dallying tactic".

Farmers' representatives see a moral victory in the Supreme Court's observations, in that the top court did not outright reject their demands or the right to protest.

Agriculture producers are demanding a total repeal of the new reforms-oriented laws that provide for setting up private markets outside of designated *mandis*, allow contract farming without government regulation and also lift stockholding limits for farm produce.

Although the Court did not go into the merits of the demands, its intervention paved the way for farmers to challenge the constitutional validity of the central government enacting laws on agriculture, which is a State subject. A group has been formed on how to approach the matter legally.

Be that as it may, the starting point of farmers' demands in relation to the new farm laws was for

mandatory payment of the Minimum Support Price (MSP) for notified farm produce in private markets to be set up.

Among other objections is the amendment to the Essential Commodities Act that provides for lifting of stock-holding limits on essential commodities. Under the new Act, any trader, company or agri-business, etc. will be able to store unlimited quantities of say, wheat, rice, sugar, onion and potato, for any period of time. Hoarding is normally related to speculation for profit that hits farmers and consumers alike.

The government did not concede these demands in its proposals to the agitating farmers, which escalated the problem. Together, the new farm laws enable a private entity to control and monopolise the market. They can hold sway over not only the rate a farmer will get for his/her produce but also influence the market price at which the end-product will reach retail consumers.

It's about corporatisation

But more importantly, the mechanisation and corporatisation of agriculture, that is at the centre of the reforms-oriented laws, is the threat to the survival of 56.7% of the total workforce and 86.08% of small and marginal operational landholding farmers (as per the Tenth Agriculture Census, 2015-16) engaged in farming activity in the country.

Without adequately skilling, training and empowering the small and marginal farmers to be-



come competitive on their land holding of less than two hectares, the government brought the new laws through the ordinance route, and that too when the country has been preoccupied and grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Reforms and governments

Reforms in the agriculture sector have been an on and off process with successive governments since the economic liberalisation in 1991 and more so, under the subsequent World Trade Organization (WTO) norms. And, even though the WTO seems to be collapsing under its own weight from an unequal set of rules that favour developed countries, India and the other developing countries fought for a 'peace clause' to pursue country-specific food security policies in keeping with their socio-economic responsibility. Domestically, however, parties in opposition, in their time, raise objections to reforms in the farm and retail sectors.

Having set a target of doubling farmers' income by 2022, the Modi government seems to be in a hurry

ry. Yet, it is important in the value chain to start from the backward linkage, i.e., the farmer, the last man as Gandhi would say. Will that last man benefit from these reforms? Or should there be efforts to lower input costs to make farming remunerative for producers? Instead, farmers are now faced with new amendments to the Electricity Act which propose to fully privatise distribution of power, a crucial input in farm irrigation.

At present, payment of MSP for notified commodities even inside designated *mandis* is not mandatory. As a result, a majority of farmers are short changed. Without the backing of the law, there is no guarantee against this in the new markets that are being conceived – and what is agitating farmers.

Fragmented landholdings have become a problem for big ticket farming seeking economies of scale in a competitive market. The government is banking on its reforms-oriented formation of producer companies as a panacea for all ills in the small and marginal farm sector.

It has fixed an ambitious target of setting up 10,000 Farmer-Producer Organisations (FPOs) by 2023-24 which must be registered as a company or a cooperative to run farming as a business. Dotted into this plan is the requirement for an FPO to hire the services of an experienced resource institution as promoter.

The promoter can belong to private companies or a non-governmental organisation arm of mega companies or agri-business

es which claim know-how on availing government grants, tax rebates and can leverage official schemes. Thus, an agri business can have its foot in the door even before a FPO is registered. Government guidelines facilitate this.

Even though the idea was floated almost two decades ago when company law was amended to enable this, only 881 FPOs have been registered so far.

Significantly, the Swadeshi Jagran Manch, an affiliate of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, has backed guaranteed payment of MSP to farmers so that growers are not exploited by big procurement companies.

Need for consensus

For now, it will be appropriate for the government to put on hold the implementation of contentious pieces of legislation and initiate widespread, transparent and participative consultations with all stakeholders including gram panchayats to arrive at informed decisions by consensus.

Whatever be the criticism of the National Advisory Council set up during the previous United Progressive Alliance regime, it played a significant role in making "pro-people" the rights-based National Rural Employment Guarantee Act and the National Food Security Act.

Such acknowledgement of farmers' rights is the need of the hour.

Gargi Parsai is a senior journalist based in New Delhi

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New strain

News of the new coronavirus variant brings back memories of the alarming situation that had developed in the initial stages of the pandemic. The dreadful virus shows that it continues to pose new challenges. There is now an urgent need to monitor and understand the new threat better. This development only underscores the importance of adhering to COVID-19 protocols.

VENU G.S.,
Kallivattukkal, Kollam, Kerala

■ True to its formidable attributes, the microbe has

been having a devastating run. It would be foolhardy to envisage another lockdown or to expect the government to continue imposing restrictions on various activities in the likelihood of another infection scare. It is now for the people to decide for themselves the merits of strictly adhering to the safety protocols prescribed to keep themselves out of harm's way.

PACHU MENON,
Comba, Margao, Goa

Public Health Act

A long-overdue Public Health Act, nevertheless, seems to be in the pipeline at least now (Page 1, "House panel

moots law to keep a check on private hospitals", December 22). In a nation as huge as ours, and where corporate hospitals are mushrooming everywhere, government hospitals are far and few. The abnormal costs of treatment are becoming a reality in every corner of the country. The House panel should also consider the need for more government hospitals.

J. EDEN ALEXANDER,
Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu

Still a phobia

World chess champion Viswanathan Anand's views on mathematics will find resonance (Tamil Nadu, "People need not be intimidated by mathematics

or chess", says Anand", December 22). Mathematical anxiety or math phobia has been haunting students from generation to generation, right from a young age; many shy away from the subject with unfounded fears. At least on the 133

Playing a game of brinkmanship in Nepal

K.P. Sharma Oli's decision to dissolve Parliament without any basis is likely to turn the clock back



LOK RAJ BARAL

On Nepali Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli's recommendation, President Bidhya Devi Bhandari has dissolved Parliament before completion of its five-year term. Intra-party conflict, Mr. Oli's egoistic behaviour, and lack of organisational management are the reasons for this catastrophe. Mr. Oli felt that he had no other option but to dissolve Parliament as his party detractors who outnumber him in all organisational layers – Secretariat, Standing Committee and Central Committee – had pushed him to the wall after he defied most of the directives given by the party.

Moreover, following the integration of the two communist parties – the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) led by Mr. Oli and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) led by Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' – last year, a strange leadership arrangement was made wherein both Mr. Oli and Mr. Prachanda were to serve as chairman of the new Nepal Communist Party (NCP) until the next party convention. The deal made by the two party supremos for sharing power failed to materialise when Mr. Oli didn't adhere to the agreed informal agreement. All other party dissenters led by former Prime Ministers Madhav Kumar Nepal and Jhalanath Khanal also joined the Prachanda faction believing that Mr. Oli was going too far in flouting all the decisions of the party.

Myth of stability

Mr. Oli's decision to throw the country into yet another electoral vortex has busted the myth of stability that seemed to reign in Nepal since the election three years ago. The new development has proved that a mechanical victory in an election alone does not provide stability if other factors that are essential for democratic governance are found to be lacking. Since a leader's orientation and commitment are crucial for laying the foundation of democracy, he or she is expected to adhere to the minimum standards for building the sys-



Nepalese students chant slogans against Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli in Kathmandu after Parliament was dissolved on his recommendation. ■AP

tem.

Nepal has suffered a lot due to myopic decisions of political leaders who cannot see beyond their own selfish interests and short-term gains. Disgusted with political uncertainty and with political parties wrangling with one another, all of which halted the development of the country as well as the consolidation of democratic institutions, the Nepali people provided a huge mandate in the last election, almost two-thirds, to the newly formed NCP hoping that the government would run the country for its full term. Now their hopes have been belied by Prime Minister Oli whose decision is bereft of constitutional, political and circumstantial rationale. The Constitution of Nepal (2015) has almost blocked all channels for the dissolution of Parliament. Parliament can be dissolved if all the options enshrined in the Constitution for formation of government are exhausted. Mr. Oli's failure to manage party affairs and his crisis of governance seemed to have pushed him to take this risky plunge. A small effort on his part could have averted the disaster.

Intra-party conflict

The NCP's intra-party conflict is not ideological as all factions have ac-

cepted multi-party democracy despite their banners of Marxism-Leninism and Maoism, which are used by the Left parties to maintain their political identities. 'Multi-party democracy', or the communist slogan of *Jana ko Bahudaliya Janbad*, had been adopted by the late Madan Bhandari on the eve of the parliamentary election held in May 1991. The new incarnation of the Maoist party also accepted a multi-party system but didn't embrace the Unified Marxist-Leninist's version of *Bahudaliya Janbad* preferring instead to refer to *Naulo Janbad* (new democracy). It was nothing more than a juggling of words in order to retain the respective positions of Marxist-Leninist and Maoist. Considering it as ideological, both the parties had agreed to settle this issue in the next NCP general conference.

Governance problems

The Oli government's dismal failure to deliver, stories of scandals and corruption that dominated headlines and eroding public faith in the capacity of governance also provided anti-Oli grist to critics in general. The test of any government lies in its capacity to deliver, and Mr. Oli's populist commitments and promises didn't work over a period of three

years. On the contrary, the Prime Minister himself defended the alleged corrupt elements, including his ministers, saying the allegations were yet to be proven. People wanted fair investigation into various charges of corruption and the roles of middlemen who influenced Mr. Oli's decisions for awarding project contracts, but the Prime Minister, in his characteristic manner, ridiculed genuine criticism. Although politicians are not left unscathed for their alleged indulgence in corruption, nepotism and patronial style, Mr. Oli seemed to be guided by a typical psyche of self-righteousness.

The fallout of Mr. Oli's decision is likely to turn the clock back. This means that the heydays of political instability will return along with the trend of fragmentation of political parties. This is mores so in the context of the NCP with each party/ individual being denounced as a traitor. Such a blame game is taking place after the artificial integration of the two communist parties. Their unity didn't last long due to factionalism promoted by the power seekers. Mr. Oli wanted to be the real power centre, and the other leaders of Nepal, especially Mr. Prachanda, weren't willing to accept that.

Nepal has experimented with all forms of government – majority, minority, first party led-coalition, no party government (led by Chief Justice Khil Raj Regmi), and now the first communist government with nearly a two-thirds majority. But no government since 1990 has completed its full tenure of five years. Mr. Oli, who came to power with tall talk about stability and progress, lost direction when he took the decision of putting down his detractors. And he took that decision when the country is passing through a difficult time. The Constitution, to cite a former Chief Justice of Nepal, Kalyan Shrestha, has become the victim of political tricks and conspiracy. Mr. Oli's reckless decision has not only threatened the new republic but also halted the prospect of development. With the country already grappling with the challenges of COVID-19, the new election will have multiplying effects. There seems to be no guarantee of stability and progress in Nepal.

Lok Raj Baral is Professor Political Science and former ambassador of Nepal to India

Five years since Paris, an opportunity to build back better

We owe it to the next generation who will have to bear the burden of climate change and pay off the debt of the recovery



UGO ASTUTO

December 12 marked the five-year anniversary of the Paris Agreement. The international community, including the European Union (EU) and India, gathered at the Climate Ambition Summit 2020 to celebrate and recognise our resolve in working towards a safer, more resilient world with net-zero emissions. A world we can be proud to leave to our grandchildren.

During the past five years, the determination of the global community has certainly been tested and, in the past few months, we have all been hit by a virus with a potentially long-lasting impact on our society and economies.

Green recovery

In the midst of this pandemic, is it realistic to call for stronger global action to fight climate change? We believe that the case is more valid now than ever. Faced with overwhelming scientific evidence, a more pertinent question might be: Can we afford to let things worsen?

The science is irrefutable: for future prosperity, we must invest in greening the global economy. We cannot afford not to do so. Post-COVID-19 recovery needs to be a green recovery.

Back in December 2019, the European Commission launched the European Green Deal – a new growth model and roadmap to achieve climate neutrality in the EU by 2050. Our "Next Generation EU" recovery package and our next long-term budget earmark more than half a trillion euros to address climate change.

To reach climate neutrality by 2050, on December 11, EU leaders unanimously agreed on the 2030 target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% compared to 1990 levels. This will further accelerate the fast decrease in the costs of low-carbon technologies. The cost of solar photovoltaics has already declined by 82% between 2010 and 2019. Achieving the 55% target will even help us to save €100 billion in the next decade and up to €3 trillion by 2050.

No government can tackle climate change alone. We will pursue all avenues to foster

cooperation with partners from all around the world. India is a key player in this global endeavour. The rapid development of solar and wind energy in India in the last few years is a good example of the action needed worldwide.

Working with India

The EU and India are committed to the full implementation of the Paris Agreement. India has taken a number of very significant flagship initiatives in this respect, such as the International Solar Alliance, the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure and the Leadership Group for Industry Transition. India and Team Europe are engaged to make a success of the forthcoming international gatherings: COP 26 in Glasgow on climate change and COP 15 in Kunming on biodiversity.

There is a sense of global momentum emerging towards keeping the promise of the Paris Agreement and securing our future on this planet. Five years after the signing of the Paris Agreement, it is more important than ever that the international community comes forward with clear strategies for net-zero emissions and to enhance the global level of ambition for 2030.

Together with the delivery of the \$100 billion of climate financing to countries most in need, these will be deliverables for the climate negotiations when they resume at COP 26 in Glasgow next November. Team Europe will continue to work closely with India on green investments and the sharing of best practices and technologies.

We can avoid the most dramatic impacts of climate change on our societies. Our global, regional, national, local and individual recovery plans are an opportunity to 'build back better'. We owe it to the next generation who will have to bear the burden of climate change and pay off the debt of the recovery.

Good public policies are indispensable but not sufficient. We will also need to foster small individual actions to attain a big collective impact. This is the snowball effect we need starting from the Paris Agreement. With climate neutrality as our goal, the world should mobilise its best scientists, business people, policymakers, academics, civil society actors and citizens to protect together something we all share beyond borders and species: our planet.

Ugo Astuto is Ambassador of the European Union (EU). This opinion piece is endorsed by the Ambassadors and High Commissioners of the 27 EU member states

Mayhem in Nigeria

Two decades since the return to democracy, Nigeria must do more to uphold the rule of law

GARIMELLA SUBRAMANIAM

The recent release of scores of abducted school boys is doubtless a huge relief for Nigeria, where families often have to contend with bandits holding innocent civilians hostage for a ransom. The childrens' return to freedom is but a temporary reprieve for the government of President Muhammadu Buhari, whose response to the decade-old Boko Haram jihadist insurgency has come under increasing scrutiny.

Failure to combat insurgency
A former army general and military ruler in the 1980s, Mr. Buhari, now in his second term, has repeatedly insisted that Boko Haram has been defeated. But the many splinter groups that have emerged, the deaths of about 36,000 people, and the displacement of nearly two million tell a different story. Casualties from landmine explosions, banned by the United Nations in 1997, in Nigeria are the fifth highest in the world, according to the Mines Advisory Group.

Contrast this with the assessment of the regional leaders. In 2014, the Borno State Governor was quite candid in saying that Boko Haram was better equipped than the Nigerian army. Last August, the current Governor of Borno pointed to sabotage within the military as the reason for the failure to combat the insurgency.

By November 2018, the situation had worsened for the government, with the killing of some 100 Nigerian soldiers on the country's border with Niger. A Boko Haram faction called the Islamic State in West Africa Province claimed that it had carried out the attacks, which put the government under increased spotlight. But even as Nigeria's House of Representatives and the Senate have called for the heads of the armed forces, appointees of Mr. Buhari, to step down, the latter has maintained that the decision was a presidential prerogative.

Crackdown on protests
The official stance of denial stretches beyond tackling insurgency. This was evident in the crackdown on countrywide protests in October demanding the disbanding of the infamous federal Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). The unrest, which was triggered by visuals going viral of one of the SARS officers shooting down a man in Lagos city, left at least 15 people dead, according to Amnesty International. The Special Weapons and Tactics Team that has replaced SARS is seen as a cure worse than the ailment. Regulators slapped a fine on media houses that covered the indiscriminate shootings by security forces and blocked the accounts of financiers of the protests. Last year, prominent global charities engaged in humanitarian relief were accused of collusion with the insurgents and expelled.

Abuja has sought to deflect responsibility for the sectarian campaign that has exploited religious divisions between the Muslims in the north and Christians in the south. Comparing the decade-long challenge to the 1967 Biafran civil war, former President Goodluck Jonathan in 2012 admitted to Boko Haram's infiltration into Nigeria's legislative, executive and the security services. He initially played down the 2014 Chibok abductions, whereas the country's First Lady at the time dismissed the



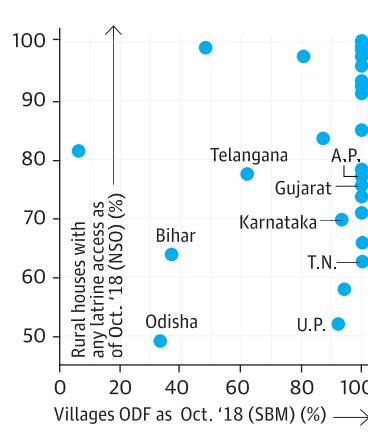
DATA POINT

An open secret

What is the share of the rural population in India that is not defecating in the open? The answer depends on which government survey is being referenced. On October 2, 2019, all the villages in the 36 States and U.T.s of India were declared open defecation-free (ODF), according to the data from The Swachh Bharat Mission: Gramin (SBM) portal. However, three government surveys/reports released since the declaration, including the latest NFHS-5, have not only disputed the ODF status of most States but also showed persisting levels of poor sanitation in many. By Vignesh Radhakrishnan, Naresh Singaravelu & Sumant Sen

1. THE NSO SURVEY

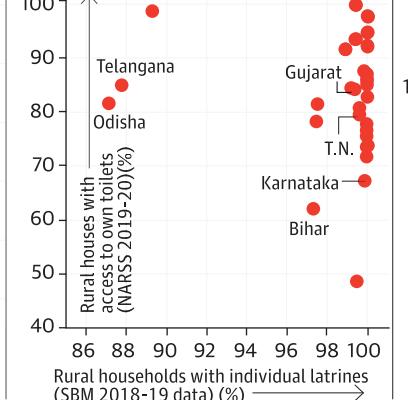
First, when the National Statistical Office (NSO) survey data from October 2018 were compared with the SBM data from the same month, there were discrepancies. For instance, in the SBM data, villages in M.P. and T.N. were declared 100% ODF by October 2018. However, according to NSO data, only 71% and 62.8% of rural households in M.P. and T.N., respectively, had access to some form of latrine (own, shared, public). Such discrepancies were found in many other States too.



Note: One of the key necessities for a State to be declared 100% ODF is 100% usage of latrines by the entire population in all the villages. Also, in the NSO data, there may be a bias in the reporting of access to latrines as the question on benefits received by the households from government schemes was asked prior to the question on household access to latrines

2. THE NARSS SURVEY

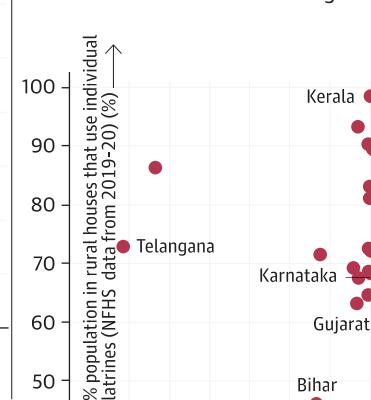
The second comparison is between the SBM data on individual household latrine (IHHL) coverage as of March 2019 and the National Annual Rural Sanitation Survey (NARSS) data on rural households with access to their own toilets between Nov. 2019 and Feb. 2020. The SBM data claimed that in 24 States/U.T.s, over 99% of rural households had IHHL, whereas the NARSS data recorded six months later showed that in 24 States/U.T.s, less than 90% of the rural households had access to their own toilets



Note: One of the key necessities for a State to be declared 100% ODF is 100% usage of latrines by the entire population in all the villages. Also, in the NSO data, there may be a bias in the reporting of access to latrines as the question on benefits received by the households from government schemes was asked prior to the question on household access to latrines

3. THE NFHS SURVEY

Discrepancies persist if the SBM data on IHHL % as of March 2019 are compared to the NFHS-5 data on the % of the population who live in rural households that used their own toilets in 2019-20. For instance, according to SBM data, in Gujarat, 99.4% of rural households had individual latrines in March 2019. However, according to the NFHS data, in the second half of 2019, only 63.3% of the population living in rural households used individual toilets. So, if both data are accurate, about 36% of people in Gujarat have individual toilets but are not using it



Note: One of the key necessities for a State to be declared 100% ODF is 100% usage of latrines by the entire population in all the villages. Also, in the NSO data, there may be a bias in the reporting of access to latrines as the question on benefits received by the households from government schemes was asked prior to the question on household access to latrines

The Hindu

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO DECEMBER 23, 1970

Spread of Bhakti through music

"The greatest quality of our music is that it is not only intended to simply please the ears but also to touch the innermost soul. In just one moment, there is the possibility of one coming into communion with God," said Mr. C.V. Narasimhan, Chef de Cabinet, United Nations, inaugurating the 28th annual music festival of the Tamil Isai Sangam at the Rajah Annamalai Hall this evening [Madras, Dec. 23]. Great composers had in mind that music was in praise of God and that it had the capacity to move people, he added. Srimati M.S. Subbulakshmi, who presided, said songs in languages other than Tamil, of great composers, born, bred up and nurtured in the traditions of the Carnatic system were entitled to receive the established recognition on the music platforms of Tamil Nadu. The Sangam should pave the way as a pioneer for developing this broad outlook, she said. She suggested that the Sangam should tape-record the nearly 700 and more of Thyagaraja's songs, with the help of musicians who could render them faithfully, as it would be a source of permanent sustenance to generations to come.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO DEC. 23, 1920

Currency operations
(From an editorial)

FROM PAGE ONE

20 passengers from U.K. test positive

The positive samples were sent to the National Centre for Disease Control for detecting the new strain, she said.

With the new guidelines, several hundred passengers were tested at various airports. The process took many hours, resulting in chaos and confusion at several airports, including Delhi, Mumbai and Kolkata.

Testing and tracing

Health secretary Rajesh Bhushan detailed the comprehensive guidelines not just for those arriving from the U.K. till the travel ban comes into force at midnight, but also for passengers who came from, or through, the U.K. from November 25 to December 23.

Mr Bhushan said passenger lists will be shared with the States and Union Territories so that their samples are collected for testing. "Contact tracing will be done in

positive cases," he said.

He added that all passengers coming from the U.K. between December 21-23 will be subjected to RT-PCR test on arrival and in case of a positive sample, it is recommended that spike gene-based RT-PCR test should also be performed by an appropriate laboratory.

Separate isolation unit

The Ministry's guidelines mandate that if the genomic sequencing of a positive patient from UK indicates the presence of new variant of SARS-CoV-2, then the patient will remain in a separate isolation unit while necessary treatment as per the existing protocol will be given.

International travellers from the U.K. who arrived in India from November 25 to December 8, will be contacted by District Surveillance Officers and advised to self-monitor their health.

(With inputs from PTI)

Farmers to take a call on govt. offer for talks today

He added that the agitation would be further intensified and the unions would write to the Members of Parliament in the United Kingdom to persuade Prime Minister Boris Johnson to not to accept the invitation for the Republic Day.

The Working Group of All-India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee, in a statement, said the Agriculture Ministry's letter showed that the government was disinterested in solving the demands of the farmers.

Flawed objectives
"The problem in the laws lies in their objectives where the corporates will have legal rights to engage farmers in contracts and to stock and black-market food...The Agriculture Minister has deliberately twisted facts on the talks and claimed modesty and open mindedness. The facts are that AIKSCC and all others have sent lakhs of representations for repeal which the government has ignored," said the statement.

All-India Kisan Sabha finance secretary and former CPI (M) MLA P. Krishna Prasad said the government, and not the farmers, was responsible for the stalemate.

He argued that Union Agriculture Minister Narendar Tomar and Union Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal had, in a meeting on December 5, assured the farmer unions to discuss their demand for withdrawal of three laws with the Cabinet and get

no role in the discussions since it was not a law and order problem. If what Mr. Shah said was the opinion of the Cabinet then why were the two ministers kept out of the meeting," asked Mr. Prasad.

He added that the government holding parallel discussions with the farmer organisations, which are not part of agitation, was "morally wrong" and a deliberate attempt to show that farmers unions were divided.

Laws are pro-farmer
Meanwhile, Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar, in an interaction with the members of the International media from the Foreign Correspondents' Club of South Asia, reiterated that agricultural reforms were in the interest of farmers and would bring about a new era in Indian agriculture.

He added that government has had many rounds of talks with farmer unions and was willing to continue the dialogue on contentious issues, clause-by-clause, with an open mind.

The Minister reiterated that the reform laws was not an overnight decision but it had gone through more than two decades of deliberations, suggested by numerous experts and recommendations by varied committees and groups.

Gupkar Alliance leads in DDC elections in J&K

In Jammu, the BJP is likely to have chairpersons in Samba, Kathua, Jammu, Udhampur and Doda districts

The Pir Panjal Valley and the Chenab Valley, comprising the districts of Doda, Bhaderwah, Kishtwar, Rajouri and Poonch, in the Jammu region saw scattered polling. Counting in two seats in Kashmir was halted after reports that two woman candidates hailed from Pakistan-occupied Kashmir but had married into families here. The regional parties described the results as a

people's verdict against the Centre's decision to scrap the special status of J&K in August last year. Reacting to the results in a series of tweets, Ms. Mufti said: "DDC results have made it clear that people of J&K voted en masse for the PAGD thus rejecting the unconstitutional decision to abrogate Article 370. They have overwhelmingly supported PAGD, which stands for restoration of J&K's special status." The BJP, however, described the results as a "victory for democracy".

'DMK's manifesto will be ready by January-end'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
TIRUNELVELI

The DMK, which has already sounded the poll bugle by launching its electioneering across Tamil Nadu under 'Vidyalai Nokki, Stalin Kural' (Stalin's voice towards the dawn), will complete the work on its election manifesto by January-end, party women's

wing leader Kanimozi said on Tuesday.

Addressing reporters after visiting the Tirunelveli junction bus stand under construction, Ms. Kanimozi said the manifesto would be prepared after soliciting views of people from various walks of life, including those in the southern districts.

CM YK

Southern States step up surveillance at airports

Wary of new UK variant of the virus, Kerala, Telangana, A.P. and Karnataka strengthen COVID-19 testing facilities

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Kerala government has decided to intensify surveillance and strengthen SARS-CoV-2 testing facilities at airports and seaports now that the new UK variant of the virus, known as B.1.1.7, which is believed to be highly transmissible, could be in circulation.

A high-level meeting convened by Health Minister K.K. Shylaja on Tuesday said that while more information on the new variant of SARS-CoV-2, which had gathered significant mutations – 23 in all – around the S spike protein, was still forthcoming, the State needed to be on a high state of alert.

This was particularly so, given the peculiarities of the State, which has a high proportion of international travellers passing through its four airports; a population with the highest proportion of elderly in the country and a significant percentage of population suffering from various co-morbidities.

The Minister expressed



Mandatory check: One of the travellers returning to Chennai from the U.K. registering her details at the Chennai International Airport on Tuesday. ■ B. VELANKANNI RAJ

concern that the circulation of the U.K. variant, which has been described as 70% more contagious, could significantly increase the threat perception for the State which has been paying a lot of attention on imposing reverse quarantine and protecting its care home inmates.

In the new situation, more

attention would be paid to improving the intensive care facilities and hospital infrastructure.

Special mechanism

The Telangana government has set up a special surveillance mechanism to tackle the spread of the more virulent virus sequenced in the U.K. A tipline 040-24651119

has been installed for travellers from the U.K., said Dr. G. Srikrishna Rao, Director of Public Health, in Hyderabad on Tuesday. "About 358 travellers have come from the U.K. and they are in the process of being identified and will be asked to quarantine and observe symptoms," said Dr. Rao. All passengers from the U.K. were being tested with

the officials to do the needful to ensure that the new strain did not impact people.

A.P. for screening

In adherence to the letter issued by the Union Health Secretary, the Andhra Pradesh government has instructed that all travellers from the U.K. should be screened and undergo RT-PCR test.

Those who test negative will be allowed to go, but they will have to observe a 14-day mandatory home quarantine. These norms apply to the passengers travelling either directly from the U.K. or travelling through connecting flights or those who entered the country from any other means of transport.

"We have issued orders to Collectors and Superintendents of Police to trace the people arriving from abroad and take these preventive measures," said Commissioner of Health and Family Welfare Bhaskar Katamneni.

In a review meeting on

Tuesday, Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy called for utmost caution and asked

Mammouth task

With 2,127 persons having arrived from the U.K. to Karnataka from December 1 till date, the State Health Department is faced with the mammoth task of monitoring their health status and tracing their contacts.

According to data from the Health Department, the samples of 233 passengers have been collected for tests so far. Of the 2,127, as many as 1,696 have landed in Bengaluru.

Meanwhile, sources said two persons – a 36-year-old mother and six-year-old daughter from Vasanthapuram ward in Bommanahalli zone – who landed in the city on December 19 and did not have a COVID-19 negative report – have tested positive through Rapid Antigen Test. Their RT-PCR reports are awaited.

(With inputs from Hyderabad, Vijayawada and Bengaluru bureaus)

IN BRIEF



Pinarayi begins State tour with Kollam session

KOLLAM

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan's much-publicised Kerala tour began on a sour note in Kollam with the Nair Service Society boycotting the public outreach

programme. The tour was to seek ideas and suggestions from various sections of society to formulate the election strategy of the LDF for the upcoming polls.

Thanka Anki procession sets off to Sabarimala

PATHANAMTHITTA

The procession carrying the Thanka Anki, golden attire, for the Mandala puja at Sabarimala set off from the Sree Parthasarathy temple in Aranmula on Tuesday. After keeping it for darsan at the temple for two hours from 5 a.m., the sacred attire was taken out in a procession on a motorised chariot.

BJP warns TTD trust board member

TIRUPATI

The Bharatiya Janata Party has taken serious exception to TTD trust board member and Penamalur MLA Kolusu Parthasarathy attending

Christmas festivities scheduled for Wednesday in Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh as the chief guest. BJP leaders demanded that Mr. Parthasarathy step down from his position in the TTD before attending events pertaining to other faiths.

Governor says no to Kerala House session

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BENGALURU

The Kerala government has not received the Governor's consent to convene the Assembly on Wednesday to "discuss and reject" the new Central farm laws.

Governor Arif Mohammad Khan has reportedly asked the government to convince him of the "emergency" that warranted an extraordinary one-day session. He had assented to the convening of the Assembly on January 8 for the Budget session.

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan termed Mr. Khan's action unconstitutional. The Governor had no discretionary power. The government enjoyed a clear majority, he said.

The court also directed the State government to notify this to the parties concerned with such transactions.

It was hearing a batch of PIL petitions questioning the constitutional validity of the ordinance.

A Division Bench comprising Chief Justice Abhay Shreenivas Oka and Justice S. Vishwajith Shetty passed

the interim order while hearing petitions filed by the Karnaataka Rajya Raitha Sangha, Hasiru Sene, the All-India Kisan Sabha, the Bharatiya Kisan Sangha, the Karnaataka Pradesh, Hind Mazdoor Kisan Panchayat, and others.

The Bench said it could not pass an interim order staying an ordinance, which has the safe force of enactment by a legislature, in view of the apex court's judgments.

The court stated that the court could not pass an order restraining the legislature from taking up a Bill placed before it and also could not direct the Governor not to take further action on the basis of a Bill passed by both Houses of legislature.

NIA probing Jund al-Aqsa case conducts searches in Kerala

Searches in 7 locations in Thrissur and Kozhikode districts

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) conducted searches at seven locations in Thrissur and Kozhikode districts in connection with the fugitive accused of belonging to the proscribed terrorist organisation Jund al-Aqsa, believed to be based in Syria.

NIA teams searched the houses of Mohammed Faaz, Mohammed Ihthisham, Abdul Sameeh, Rayees Rehman, Nabeel Mohammed, Mohamed Shaheen, and Mohammed Ameer.

According to the agency, the case was originally registered *suo motu* by the NIA in January 2019 against six persons.

Hashir Mohammed, native of Ernakulam district; Sidhikul Akbar, native of Malappuram; Muhammed Faaz, native of Kannur; Thaha

Mohammed, native of Shillong district, Karnataka; Sultan Abdulla, native of Kozhikode; and Fayed Farooq, native of Thrissur.

A communication issued by the NIA said nine mobile phones, 15 SIM cards, an iPad, six laptops, three memory cards and various documents had been seized in the search operation. Further investigation in the case is continuing, it added.

Karnataka has 1,783, Tamil Nadu 868, Kerala 650

K.S. SUDHI
KOCHI

The Western Ghats region is home to 3,387 leopards, according to the Status of Leopards in India 2018 report.

With 650 leopards, Kerala has the third highest number of big cats in the Western Ghats region. Goa has 86.

"The Western Ghats is home to 3,387 leopards, against India's population of 12,852," says the report released recently by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.

The leopard population was counted during the tiger population assessment undertaken in 2018. The leopard population was estimated to be within the

Cat count: India has an estimated population of 12,852 leopards. ■ M.A. SRIRAM

forested habitats in tiger-occupied States, the report said.

The presence of the animal was recorded in the forested areas of Western Ghats, Nilgiris, and sporadically across much of the dry forests of Central Karnataka. Leopard population of the Western Ghats landscape was reported from the four distinct blocks.

The Northern block covered the contiguous forests

of Radhanagar and Goa covering Haliyal-Kali Tiger Reserve, Karwar, Honnavar, Madikeri, Kudremukh, Shettihalli Wild Life Sanctuary (WLS), Bhadra and Chikmagalur.

The Central population

covered southern Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and northern Kerala covering the forests of Virajpet, Nagarhole, Bandipur, Madumalai, Satyamangalam, Nilgiris, Silent Valley, Wayanad, BRT Hills, and

MM Hills, Cauvery WLS, Banerghatta National Park.

A second central cluster covering central Kerala and Tamil Nadu comprising the Parambikulam-Anamalai-Eravikulam-Vazachal population.

Camera traps

The southern leopard population block in southern Kerala and Tamil Nadu comprised the forests of Periyar-Kalakad Mundanthurai-Kanyakumari.

A total of 6,758 leopard photographs were obtained from Western Ghats from camera traps. The images helped in the identification of 1,681 adults and sub-adults. While noting that the leopard population had increased in most of the tiger reserves in the Western Ghats landscape, the report cautioned that the growing human population and increasing fragmentation of landscape led to increased human-wildlife interactions in the region.



Three die, two fall ill after consuming roti

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
SANGAREDDY

Three persons died and two others fell ill seriously after consuming roti prepared at the remaining jowar on Monday.

The incident took place at Palvatla village in Vatpalay mandal of Sangareddy district in Telangana late on Monday night.

According to the police, one Shankaramma of the village died on December 13. It was suspected that she got

jowar flour from someone in the village, prepared roti, consumed it and died. Some of the family members ate roti prepared from the remaining jowar on Monday. After that three of the family members, two admitted to the Sangareddy government hospital and one at the Gandhi Hospital died while two others were admitted to a private hospital at Hyderabad and their condition is stated to be critical.

BJP upbeat about Kashmir poll results

Party leaders say it has held its ground in Jammu, apart from opening its account in Kashmir Valley

NISTULA HEBBAR
NEW DELHI

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Tuesday seemed to be upbeat after holding its ground in Jammu and opening its account in the Kashmir Valley as the results of the District Development Council elections started pouring in.

While the Congress and the National Conference (NC) also did decently well in Jammu, senior BJP leaders felt that the party had managed to hold its ground, even if its performance in areas such as the Chenab Valley was not to its satisfaction.

Party leaders were more vocal about the seats that the BJP won in the Valley, in the districts of Pulwama, Bani-dipura and Srinagar.

"Lotus blooms in Kashmir, Ajaz Hussain won from Khanmohi II, Srinagar," said a congratulatory tweet from the BJP's Jammu and Kashmir handle.

"The BJP and the National Conference, in our view, are the two gainers from the polls. Where earlier in the



Celebration time: BJP supporters bursting crackers after the victory of party candidate Ajaz Hussain in the Balahama area on the outskirts of Srinagar on Tuesday. ■ NISSAR AHMAD

valley, we wouldn't get a single person to hold the BJP flag, we managed to win three seats [at the time of writing]," said a party leader involved in the State.

'Victory for democracy'
Minister of State for Finance Anurag Thakur, in-charge of the polls on behalf of the party, and Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office Jitendra Singh, who is an MP

from Jammu, left Delhi for Jammu as soon as the results started trickling in, for post-result work.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, Mr. Thakur described the results, despite the sweep of the People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD) in the Kashmir Valley and the NC retaining some pockets of influence in Jammu, as "a victory for democracy and development".

"People have shown faith in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision for development and [said] 'no' to terrorism and separatism. We also feel that the next generation of second rung leadership that these elections have thrown up across party lines and among Independents bodes well for the development of grassroots democracy," he said.

Senior party leaders also

tried to find small slivers of a silver lining in the sweep of the Valley by the PAGD, which, not to put too fine a point on it, is a vote sentinent against Delhi.

NC's performance

"While we did see huge local-level tie-ups in the PAGD to defeat the BJP, the National Conference has far outstripped the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) within the Gupkar alliance, which will have its own repercussions for the alliance. And while the point that the failure of the new, more Delhi-friendly Apni Party shows that it is not a sentiment that favours Delhi, the National Conference's good performance is a good omen for a less hardline Valley politics, looking at the party's history," said a senior office-bearer in the BJP.

"In any case, the fact that such results have come shows that the poll process was free and fair and participation by the voters showed faith in democratic institutions," said another leader.

Politics can wait, but not development: Modi

PM says there will be no religious discrimination in India

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GHAZIABAD

"Politics can wait, but the development of the country cannot," Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Tues-

day.

Addressing the centenary celebra-



Prime Minister Narendra Modi releasing a postal stamp for the centenary celebrations of Aligarh Muslim University. ■ PI

tions of Aligarh Muslim University as chief guest, he said that just as the Independence movement was a common ground for giving up differences, "we should work together for a new India" now. "In every society, there are ideological differences but when it comes to national goals, every difference should be kept aside."

Mr. Modi is the first Prime Minister after Lal Bahadur Shastri to address the university.

Politics, he said in his online address, was an important part of society but "society is much bigger than politics and power".

"For the progress of society, there is a space above politics. It is important to keep exploring that space, and campuses such as the AMU can play a vital role in that," he said.

"When we talk of a new India, I feel that the development goals of society should not be seen from a political prism," he said. "When we work on it, the space of those who spread negativity for vested interest would automatically shrink. The underprivileged, the women, and the youth would not like to wait. We have already wasted much time on resolving the differences."

Invoking *Sabka Sath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas*, the PM said every citizen in the country should reap the benefits of development. Stressing that the government did not discriminate among citizens while formulating its policies and programmes, he said the country's resources belonged to every citizen. The country was moving on a path in which nobody was left behind because of one's religion.

Describing the AMU as "a mini-India", Mr. Modi underlined that while on the one hand, Arabic was taught on the campus, there was a century-old Sanskrit Department as well.

The Prime Minister released a special stamp. Vice-Chancellor Tariq Mansoor, welcoming the Prime Minister, said "Under your guidance, AMU needs continued support to maintain its historic, special and constitutional character for the good of the nation."

with equal care," he said. This diversity, he said, was not just the strength of the AMU but also of India. "We should not let this strength weaken. The AMU inculcates the feeling of "Ek Bharat, shresth Bharat (one India, great India)."

Empowering women

Appreciating that the first Chancellor of the AMU was a woman, he praised the university for empowering women through education, and noted that the ratio of women students in the university had risen to 35%.

The AMU, he said, had played an important role in strengthening ties with different countries. "The research that is conducted in Urdu, Arabic and Persian gives new energy to our relations with the Islamic world." He said he had been told there were 1,000 foreign students on the campus. "It is AMU's responsibility that these students carry with them the best of India because what they will hear and learn in AMU, they will associate that with the identity of India. You have to work on the soft power of the university and work on your role towards nation-building," he said.

The Prime Minister released a special stamp.

Vice-Chancellor Tariq Mansoor, welcoming the Prime Minister, said "Under your guidance, AMU needs continued support to maintain its historic, special and constitutional character for the good of the nation."

I am not a traitor, says Suvendu

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

KOLKATA

Bharatiya Janata Party leader Suvendu Adhikari said on Tuesday that he is no "Mir Jafar" (traitor) and had it not been for the BJP, the Trinamool Congress would not have survived even a few years after its formation in 1998.

"I want to ask them, after it was formed in 1998, who was with TMC in several elections, including the 1999 Lok Sabha polls... did it not happen for former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Lal Krishna Advani, the party would have ceased to exist and not been able to contest the 2001 Assembly polls," Mr. Adhikari said addressing a gathering at Purboshtali in Bardhaman.

Four skip Bengal Cabinet meeting

Ministers' absence stokes speculation amid defections from Trinamool to BJP

SHIV SAHAY SINGH

KOLKATA



Making a point: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee at a press conference in Kolkata on Tuesday. ■ PTI

Four Ministers of the West Bengal government were absent from a Cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee at the State Secretariat on Tuesday. The absence, coming days after Suvendu Adhikari, a former Cabinet Minister joined the BJP at a rally held by Union Home Minister Amit Shah, has sparked speculation about rising dissent in the Trinamool Congress.

Two of the absentees were

from north Bengal – Tourism Minister Gautam Deb and Minister for North Bengal Development Rabindranath Ghosh. However, the absence of these Ministers from north Bengal, about 600 km from Kolkata, is not unusual as they have not

been attending Cabinet meetings since the outbreak of COVID-19.

The other two Ministers who skipped the meeting were Minister for Fisheries Chandranath Sinha from Birbhum, and Minister for Forests, Rajib Banerjee from

Howrah, who has been vocal about alleged "favouritism" in the Trinamool.

Attempts have been made by the party leadership to placate Mr. Banerjee with senior leaders meeting him a few weeks ago. Incidentally, Nabanna, the State Secretary

is located in his constituency of Howrah.

The Ministers' absence has given rise to speculation given that Mr. Adhikari had stayed away from Cabinet meetings for several months before ultimately moving to the BJP.

BJP show cause

Amid the rising political temperature in the State ahead of the Assembly election, the BJP State leadership issued a show cause to Sayantan Basu, general secretary of the State unit.

The letter issued by BJP State vice-president Pratap Banerjee said Mr. Basu had, on December 18, "ventured to give bites to electronic media which constitute derogatory and anti-party statements."

The letter issued by BJP State vice-president Pratap Banerjee said Mr. Basu had, on December 18, "ventured to give bites to electronic media which constitute derogatory and anti-party statements."

In the library of the university, if there is a manuscript of the Koran, the translations of Gita and Puran have also been preserved

Cong. to meet President on farm stir

Rahul to lead delegation of MPs, submit two crore signatures against new laws

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi will lead a delegation of the party's Members of Parliament (MPs) to Rashtrapati Bhavan on December 24 and hand over around two crore signatures against the three farm laws to President Ram Nath Kovind and would request him to annul the farm laws.

In a statement, party general secretary (organisation) K.C. Venugopal said, "...the Congress party had launched a nationwide campaign for collecting memoranda of appeals addressed to the Honourable President of India signed by farmers, farm labourers and other stakeholders opposing these



legislations right from the initial stage of introduction of these Bills in the Parliament. Around 2 crore signatures, urging the intervention of Hon'ble Rashtrapati ji for withdrawal of the three legislations, have been collected till now," he said.

Mr. Venugopal also ac-

cused the Narendra Modi go-

vernment of using various tac-

tics to discredit the farmers'

movement: from tiring out the farmers to labelling Opposi-

tion leaders as

anti-national.

He also noted that the go-

vernment's "refusal" to listen

to the demands of the fam-

ers has resulted in the death

of 44 farmers.

"It has become absolutely

clear that the Modi govern-

ment is only committed to

the welfare of large corpo-

rates instead of innocent

farmers and farm labour.

The government has also

been on an overdrive using

public money to create false

propaganda and narrative in

favour of the legislation and

discrediting the protesting

farmers. It is pushing manu-

factured surveys in media

discourse to create support

in favour of these anti-farm-

er laws," Mr. Venugopal ad-

vised.

AITUC holding 'skip lunch day' today

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

CHANDIGARH

The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) on Tues-

day said it would observe "skip lunch day" on Wed-

nesday in solidarity with

farmers observing a relay

hunger strike.

AITUC general secretary Amarjeet Kaur said: "The Central government is trying to side-step the genuine demands of the farmers, the demands which are not

only in the interest of the

farmers but are in the inter-

est of public at large and of

course in the national inter-

est." She said trade unions

had been supporting the

farmers' demands for

repealing the agricultural

laws.

Scores of protesters gath-

ered near the Agrasen Chowk.

The protesters were on the

road but we cleared the road

and the convoy was let through,"

Ram Kumar, Station House Officer (SHO), Ambala city,

said *The Hindu*.

that sticks were wielded at the convoy.

Mr. Lal was in Ambala to address public gatherings for BJP candidates ahead of up-coming election to civic bodies.

Earlier, black flags were waved at Union Minister Ratan Lal Kataria in Jandli vil-

lage adjoining Ambala city, on December 1, by a group of agitated farmers protesting against the farm laws. Mr. Kataria is BJP MP from Ambala.

The police denied reports

that sticks were wielded at the

convoy.

The incident took place

near Agrasen Chowk.

The protesters were on the

road but we cleared the road

and the convoy was let through,"

Ram Kumar, Station House Officer (SHO), Ambala city,

said *The Hindu*.

IN BRIEF

**Suresh Raina regrets "unfortunate" incident**

MUMBAI
Former India cricketer Suresh Raina, who was among 34 people arrested and released on bail by Mumbai Police for violating COVID-19 norms at a club here, has regretted the "unintentional and unfortunate" incident. A statement issued by his management team said he was not aware of the local timings and protocols at the time of the incident. "Suresh was in Mumbai for a shoot which extended to late hours," said the statement.

BJP ticket aspirant forges letter of U.P. CM

NEW DELHI
A BJP ticket aspirant for the Uttar Pradesh Assembly bypoll last year has been booked by the CBI for allegedly sending a forged letter of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, recommending his name. The accused has been identified as Shivaji Yadav, a resident of Jaunpur in Uttar Pradesh. The agency is trying to determine the identity of others, if any, involved in the case.

'Sexual assault prime motive in child's case'**SATYASUNDAR BARIK**

BHUBANESWAR
The Special Investigation Team instituted to probe the death of a five-year-old girl in Odisha's Nayagarh district in July has concluded that she was murdered and subsequently sexually assaulted. The SIT has arrested the accused from Jaldupur village and secured his custody for further questioning.

The murder triggered a massive political controversy in the State after the parents tried to immolate themselves in front of the Odisha Assembly last month.

Opposition Bharatiya Janata Party and the Congress had come out with all guns blazing to corner the Naveen Patnaik government over the issue. The two parties have undertaken a month-long campaign demanding the resignation of the State Agriculture Minister Arun Kumar Sahu. Opposition leaders had accused the Minister of shielding the main culprit.

Some U.K. flights arrive early

Timings changed to comply with the tighter travel ban imposed till December 31

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI/ MUMBAI

Indian carriers Air India and Vistara rescheduled their flights from the U.K. to be able to return to India in time to comply with the ban on air travel from the island nation effective from Tuesday midnight.

Air India rescheduled its Mumbai-London-Kochi flight, but operated its flights between the U.K. capital and Ahmedabad and Delhi as per schedule, according to an airline spokesperson.

The arrival time for Vistara's U.K. 18 flight was also advanced to 11.30 p.m. on Tuesday. The government on Monday announced a ban until December 31 on all flights to and from London to curb the entry of a new strain of coronavirus found in the UK.

In response to queries on whether there would be bans on other countries where a mutant strain similar to the one in the U.K. was found, a government official said no decision has been taken on the matter.

The government has also issued a directive to suspend flights from Oman and Saudi Arabia till December 29. Air

**Warm reunion:** A passenger arriving from the United Kingdom and his father embrace at the international airport in Amritsar on Tuesday. ■ AFP

India posted on Twitter that it will offer passengers booked to travel during this period a one-time free rescheduling of their bookings till December 31, 2021. The withdrawal of flights to Saudi Arabia and Oman follow their governments' decision to restrict international flights.

Despite the night curfew

imposed in Mumbai till January 5, 2021, all operations at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport (CSMIA) will continue as scheduled, the airport operator said in a statement.

"Passengers travelling to and from the airport during the specified hours will be allowed to proceed onwards as cab services and public

transportation will remain operational at all time," it said.

While on Monday the airport received four flights – one from Amsterdam and three from London carrying over 690 passengers – on Tuesday no flights operated to and from London. Five flights had arrived from Dubai.

No appetite in rural India for paid vaccines, finds survey

Respondents want elderly parents, doctors immunised first

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Less than half (44%) the respondents in a survey of rural households were willing to pay for vaccination against COVID-19 while 36% said outright that they would not pay for it.

Conducted by Gaon Connection, a rural media platform, the 'COVID-19 Vaccine and Rural India' survey was conducted across 60 districts in 16 States and one Union Territory with a sample size of 6,040 households. The researchers conducted face-to-face interviews with the respondents on the perceptions of rural Indians around the vaccine.

Since affordability is a big issue in rural areas, respondents were asked if they hypothetically had to pay ₹1,000 for two doses of the vaccine, then who would get vaccinated first in their family. To this, more than 33% of the respondents said they would vaccinate their old parents.

Asked if the government had to prioritise vaccination, who should be given the top priority, 43.5% of those surveyed said it should be doctors and nurses.

**First step:** Free COVID-19 testing helped State governments to track cases at the street level. ■ AFP

found that half the respondents were spending more money during the pandemic on buying and consuming packaged immunity boosting products, such as chyawanprash, giloy, kaphadi, vitamin tablets, etc.

"COVID-19 has also changed the food habits of rural citizens with almost 70% respondents saying they had stopped eating outside food. Over 33% said they had started eating more vegetables, whereas 30% said they were eating more fruits," noted the survey.

Modi awarded 'Legion of Merit' by Donald Trump

Shinzo Abe, Scott Morrison also receive the honour

SRI RAM LAKSHMAN
WASHINGTON**Narendra Modi**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi was awarded the 'Legion of Merit' by U.S. President Donald Trump on Monday for his role in advancing the India-U.S. relationship. The award was also presented to former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison.

The U.S., Japan and Australia constitute the 'Quad' group of countries – seen as an alternative to Chinese dominance in the Indo-Pacific region. "President @realDonaldTrump presented the Legion of Merit to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his leadership in elevating the U.S.-India strategic partnership," U.S. National Security Adviser Robert C. O'Brien wrote on Twitter. The award was presented by Mr. O'Brien to India's U.S. Ambassador Tarun Singh Sandhu, who accepted it on Mr. Modi's behalf.

Mr. Morrison was presented the award for "addressing global challenges and promoting collective security" and Mr. Abe "for his leadership and vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific," as per the NSA.

The awards were received by the Australian and Japanese Ambassadors in Washington DC.

The Legion of Merit, instituted in 1942 by former U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, is awarded to members of the U.S. Armed Forces and also members of foreign (i.e., non-U.S.) Armed Forces and sometimes heads of state or government.

The award is presented to foreign recipients in four categories: Chief Commander, Commander, Officer and Le-gionnaire.

Other Indians who have won the award include Field Marshal K.M. Cariappa, who received the Legion of Merit (Degree: Chief Commander) in 1949 from then U.S. President Harry S. Truman.

States told to update Census register

This will help enumerators collect details during first phase of the exercise

VIJAYA SINGH
NEW DELHI**House call:** Enumerators go door to door to collect details for the National Population Register. ■ FILE PHOTO

The Registrar General of India (RGI), which conducts the decennial Census exercise, has written to all State coordinators to update names of an area, locality, colony or a building in the "charge register", an important census document that will help enumerators to collect details during the first phase of Census-House Listing and Housing Census and the National Population Register (NPR).

While the dates of the first phase of the Census, initially to be rolled out in some States on April 1, has not been finalised, the letter may be an indication to start the exercise that was postponed indefinitely due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The charge register shows the distribution of work among enumerators and marks the House Listing Blocks (HLB) to be visited by each official. Each HLB, the primary unit for collection of data, can comprise an estimated present population of only 650 to 800. The register

will also be used for the field work relating to the updating of NPR since the same functionaries would be engaged for both the exercises. Around 30 lakh enumerators – government officials and government schoolteachers – will each be assigned the responsibility to collect the details of 650 to 800 people through both online and offline mode.

The RGI's letter said that since the charge register does not have a separate column to mention the names of "place, locality, colonies" or "towns," such names could be included against

"column number 18." The letter said this was being done to avoid duplication and to ensure that none of the households was left out from the census exercise. All States were asked to complete the charge register by December 31, 2019 and the letter asks for additional details.

The other details included in charge register are name, area and estimated population of a village or a town.

31 columns
On January 9, the RGI notified the 31 columns for which the enumerators will

seek response for the House Listing and Housing Census. The questions include – whether the respondent has access to LPG/PNG connection, if the person owns a radio, transistor, television, access to Internet, whether they own a laptop, computer, telephone, mobile phone or a smartphone among other things.

The office of the RGI had in a Right To Information (RTI) reply in November said the schedule or the questionnaire of the NPR was "being finalised" and the information about the expected date of first phase of Census 2021 was "not available."

The NPR's link with the proposed National Register of Citizens and the yet to be implemented Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 has been opposed by as many as 13 States and Union Territories. According to the Citizenship Rules framed in the year 2003, NPR is the first step towards compilation of the National Register of Indian Citizens or NRC. NPR was first collected in 2010 and then updated in 2015.

Health data shows India does not need a two-child policy: PCI

Country's population is stabilising, finds analysis of NFHS-5

JAGRITI CHANDRA
NEW DELHI

The latest data from the National Family Health Survey-5 (NFHS-5) provide evidence of an uptake in the use of modern contraceptives in rural and urban areas, an improvement in these demands being met, and a decline in the average number of children borne by a woman, and prove that the country's population is stabilising and fears over a "population explosion" and calls for a "two-child policy" are misguided, experts say.

During his Independence Day Speech in 2019, Prime Minister Narendra Modi appealed to the country that population control was a form of patriotism. Months later, the NITI Aayog called various stakeholders for a national-level consultation on the issue, which was subsequently cancelled following media glare on it.

The first part of the NFHS-5 report, which was made public earlier this month, records data for 17 States and five Union Territories. The analysis of the data by the international non-profit Population Coun-

Playing it safe | Contraceptive usage improved since 2015-16 across several States, according to data from NFHS-5. The table shows the share of women respondents in select States who used any modern contraceptive method, and the corresponding change from the last NFHS round

State	Contraceptive usage (%)	Change from 2015-16
Andhra Pradesh	70.8	1.4
Karnataka	68.2	16.9
Telangana	66.7	9.7
Maharashtra	63.8	1.2
Gujarat	53.6	10.5
Kerala	52.8	2.5
Bihar	44.4	21.1

cil of India (PCI) shows that the total fertility rate (number of children born per woman) has decreased across 14 of 17 States and is at 2.1 children per woman or less.

Replacement level fertility

This also implies that most States have attained replacement level fertility – the average number of children born per woman at which a population exactly replaces itself from one generation to the next. "We need to think through and move away from the two narratives being built without any evi-

dence. The data is the response to myth and misconception around the two-child norm," Poonam Muttreja, executive director, PCI, said.

While during NFHS-3 and -4, conducted between 2005 and 2016, there was a decline in the use of modern methods of contraception (oral pills, condoms, intrauterine device) across 12 of 22 States and UTs, in NFHS-5, 11 of 12 States where there was a slump saw an increase in their use, showed the analyses by Nirajan Saggar, country director, PCI, at a web conference.

Three more held under the new U.P. ordinance

43 have been arrested since Nov. 27

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
LUCKNOW

Police in Azamgarh district in Uttar Pradesh have arrested three persons under the Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Ordinance, 2020.

The three accused, identified as Bal Chand Jaiswal, Gopal Prajapati and Neeraj Kumar, were allegedly holding a prayer meeting in the house of Tribhuvan Yadav, when a resident nearby lodged a complaint against them accusing them of trying to convert people to Christianity.

12 FIRs filed
With this, at least 12 FIRs have been registered under the Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Ordinance, 2020, and 43 persons have been arrested since November 27.

The arrests in Azamgarh were made by Didarganj police. Station House Officer Didarganj Santosh Singh, when the police had intervened, said the complaint was filed by the person who was allegedly being converted.

Earlier, 13 persons were arrested in Sitapur, 10 in

Mau, four in Gautam Buddha Nagar, six in Etah, three in Azamgarh, two in Moradabad (both are out on bail), one each in Bareilly, Shahjahanpur, Bijnor, Kannauj and Hardoi.

Two persons accused of trying to convert a Hindu woman to their religion in Muzaffarnagar got relief from the Allahabad High Court which ordered a stay on their arrest last Friday.

The ordinance lays down strict action, including cancellation of registration of social organisations conducting mass conversions. Mass conversions would invite a jail term of not less than three years and up to 10 years and a fine of ₹50,000.

The ordinance mainly envisages that no person shall convert, either directly or indirectly from one religion to another by use or practice of misrepresentation, force, undue influence, coercion, allurement or by marriage nor shall any person abet, convince or conspire such conversion. The onus to prove that the conversion has not been done forcibly will lie on the person accused of the act and the convert, it said.

I was barred from visit to U.P. school, says Sisodia

I had accepted challenge by U.P. Minister

OMAR RASHID
LUCKNOW

Aam Aadmi Party leader Manish Sisodia was on Tuesday allegedly prevented from visiting a government school in Lucknow by the Uttar Pradesh police.

The AAP leader said he had landed in Lucknow after accepting a challenge by Uttar Pradesh Education Minister Satish Dwivedi, who recently in a war of words between the two parties, had invited Mr. Sisodia to visit his State to compare the models of education in Delhi and Uttar Pradesh.

As quoted by a news agency, Mr. Dwivedi had on December 15 invited Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and his Deputy Mr. Sisodia to visit schools in Uttar Pradesh, and said it would hide the "Yogi Model".

"They don't want us to see the schools. It means BJP government, Yogi Model... is admitting that even the schools in the capital [Lucknow] are bad," Mr. Sisodia said from his car. Mr. Sisodia had come to Lucknow, accepting Mr. Dwivedi's challenge, to debate on "Kejriwal Model vs Yogi Model". He had reached Lucknow with AAP's U.P. in charge and Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh. Mr. Sisodia also showed an 18-month-old video on the condition of schools in Delhi.

**Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia.** ■ FILE PHOTO

the journalists that the police commissioner had told him he needed to seek permission if he wanted to roam freely in the Uttar Pradesh capital. Mr. Sisodia alleged that the police were preventing him from visiting the school as the government wanted to hide the "Yogi Model".

"They don't want us to see the schools. It means BJP government, Yogi Model... is admitting that even the schools in the capital [Lucknow] are bad," Mr. Sisodia said from his car. Mr. Sisodia had come to Lucknow, accepting Mr. Dwivedi's challenge, to debate on "Kejriwal Model vs Yogi Model". He had reached Lucknow with AAP's U.P. in charge and Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh

**Roll the dice, step back in time****(Bharata 600 BC)**

Caparisoned elephants, turbanned rajahs, shining swords, a quiver full of arrows, messenger pigeons and the glorious promise of war – you don't need a magic carpet to travel back in time. Bharata 600 BC, a board game, will take you back to ancient India where many a kingdom's fate was sealed by behind-the-scenes puppet masters.

Conceptualised by Cristina Maiorescu, ideated by Pallavi Nopany and illustrated by Ishan Trivedi, Bharata 600 BC takes players through a time in India where territories were enlarged via alliances, trade or battle. Played on a board that depicts the map of India in 600 BC, it shows the country at the end of the Vedic period, when 16 independent kingdoms were in power. Each player is assigned a kingdom and has to expand territory as the game progresses. Players choose their leadership persona and are then granted abilities to

complement their personality.

The initial prototype of Bharata 600 BC was also tweaked to get to its current avatar with two difficulty levels – easy and complex – both in the same package. "I wanted it to be quite illustrative in a storytelling kind of way, even though it is a game of war," says Pallavi Nopany.

Considering that 600 BC was ancient history in every sense of the word, a lot of research was required to ensure the era was portrayed right. From jewellery, motifs on clothing and the number of sails on a ship to historic architecture, fortifications and the arms used by warriors of yore, the team left no detail unattended. It took around 11 months to finalise the art work.

"I was convinced I wanted to create a board game which was 100% Indian in design and was locally produced," says Cristina. It took her almost a year to find a paper manufacturer who could not only provide quality paper, but also customise packaging.

"We also worked with Channapatna artisans for an eco-friendly product. Every single wooden component is crafted individually by hand," she adds. With over 500 pieces crafted from wood and lac, and coloured with vegetable dye, Bharata proved to be a godsend for the artisans in Channapatna whose orders had dried up during the lockdown.

Bharata 600 BC is available for ₹3,800 on online shopping platforms.

Hop a-board

From cards that call out social prejudice to Snakes and Ladders with karmic philosophy, these India-centric board games made their debut during the pandemic

RUTH DHANARAJ



No child's play, this (DIY Snakes and Ladders)

Did you know the game of Snakes and Ladders originated in India? Its original form was slightly different from the one popular today. A DIY game of Snakes and Ladders put together by Kavade and Curious Fly, launched in December, highlight this version of the game.

"Called gyan chaurap or paramapada sopanapatham, the original version of the game had 72 squares though versions with 132 and 380 squares are known to have existed. We decided to make something that would recreate the cultural elements from that time in history," says Seeranjini GS of Kavade, a store for traditional games in Bengaluru.

For Seeranjini and her team, the purpose of coming out with this form of the game was three-fold. "First, we wanted to bring about an awareness of our roots. Most of us don't know the game stems from our faith in karma – bad deeds will bring you down in life while good ones will take you higher," says Seeranjini. The second purpose was to shine a light on traditional Indian folk art. "We had a Kalamkari artist and a Gond artist design two different outlines," she says. Both versions of the board are made in a jigsaw puzzle format using eco-friendly material, and have to be assembled before they are coloured in. The DIY kit also includes dice, pawns, tiles to make your own ladders and snake templates for personalisation.

"The third aspect we have tried to bring in is to make the game a lot more engaging than five minutes. Karma or the cycle of birth and death come alive on the game board. When you have crossed over all that, you attain salvation. That is the meaning of paramapada sopanapatham (steps to salvation). It was rather intense and not really a child's game," adds Seeranjini.

This DIY version of Snakes and Ladders can be bought at www.kavade.org, Unfactory and GoNative for ₹880.

Calling all Mallus (Malayali Aano)

'Malayali aano? (Are you a Malayali?)'. Those in the know will attest to the universality of this question heard anywhere from grocery stores and gourmet tastings to airports and intimate soirées.

This rather innocuous question has the capacity to offend or welcome you, into the embrace of a clan for whom geography has no boundaries. Fit the magnitude of those emotions into a board game and you get Malayali Aano, in which players compete for the honour of being a 'Thani Malayali' or a traditional Malayali.

The lockdown creation of Rosemary Jacob and Sona Harris, Malayali Aano was born from the way Malayalis the world over communicate. "It's pure joy when you meet another Malayali anywhere, which is how we came up with the name," says Rosemary.

The game needs a minimum of four players, and has around 100 questions and 400 possible answers revolving around Malayali pop culture, movies, food, personalities and local jargon. Pick a card, answer the game master and the most 'Malayali' reply wins custody of the question card. The player at the end of the game with the biggest pile of cards wins.

"The trivia, jargon and slang that

have entered the language and become part of almost every Malayali conversation always fascinated me. A board game seemed the best platform to harness all that content," says Sona.

There is more to the game than just nostalgia and humour. Roughly based on the concept of Cards Against Humanity, which has an open creative licence, Malayali Aano broaches taboo topics making it easier to throw light on subjects that have been swept under the carpet for generations. "We have included 'judge-y dialogues' we hear from our parents, grandparents and others as well as millennial slang," says Rosemary, adding, "We have also put in the misogynistic, ageist, sexist, casteist things people have been saying without realising how offensive it is. With humour, people are able to take it lightly and have a conversation about it rather than a debate or argument."

Gender inequality, patriarchy, religious identity and political affiliations are all grist to the Malayali Aano mill.

The cards are printed in Malayalam and 'Manglish' (Malayalam written in English). Shashi Tharoor, LuLu shopping mall, parotta and beef – all make an appearance in the game that came out in October. A glossary of terms used in the cards has also been included.

Malayali Aano is available on www.malayaliaano.com for ₹1,899.

This DIY version of Snakes and Ladders can be bought at www.kavade.org, Unfactory and GoNative for ₹880.

POOCHE CAFE



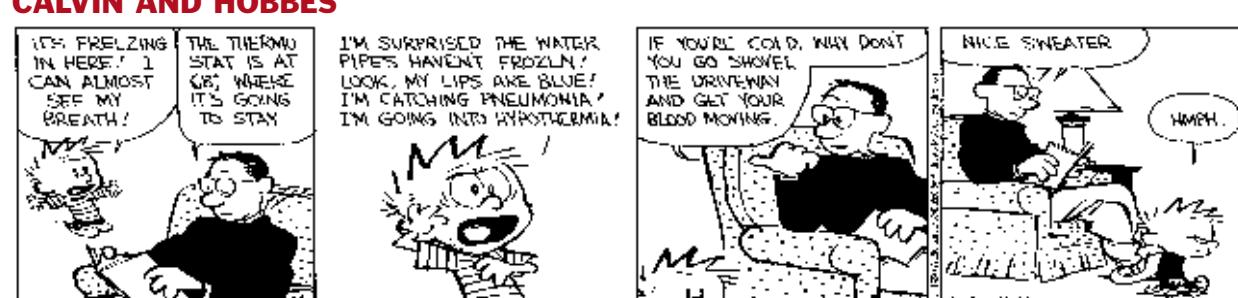
PEANUTS



HAGAR THE HORRIBLE



CALVIN AND HOBBES



TIGER



PEARLS BEFORE SWINE



Beachside puppy love

Aparna Karthikeyan, author of *Woof! Adventures by the Sea*, on being a pet parent to indie dogs

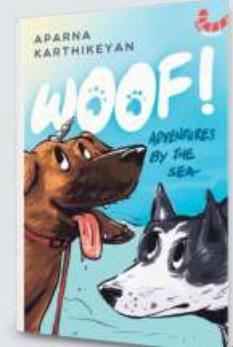
RUTH DHANARAJ

Have you always wanted a pet but never could have one? Aparna Karthikeyan didn't want to be one of those people. So, in 2017, she finally got one for herself at the age of 43. That one pup was followed by another and today, she is a dog mother to two indies, Puchi and Shingmo. "We were constantly relocating to different parts of the world and it seemed unfair to subject a poor creature to the travails of being uprooted," says Aparna, who just moved to Chennai from Mumbai in October.

"My husband was a reluctant dog father, but now he is amazing. It is proof that people can change. My teenage daughter toilet-trained Puchi; my husband and I seemed unable to make her understand," she says.

Originally from Chennai, one of the rare things Aparna enjoyed in Mumbai was the beach and the many stray dogs. It was on one of those regular walks that the family met Shingmo, who had been washed up on the beach in a box. She was accepted into the dog pack and when she fell terribly ill, Aparna took her home to care for her better. "I was a fool to think that I could actually take her back to the beach after we nursed her back to health. What should have been a two-day stay has now become two years," she laughs.

Puchi and Shingmo are the real-life stars of *Woof! Adventures by the Sea* which captures the ups and downs of life



Pause for paws Aparna; (top) the book cover
■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



New-age storytelling

The Thespoo Awards Night meant to scout new talent in theatre and storytelling took place virtually this year on December 20. These are the winning performances: *Main Beedi Pikar Jhuth Ni Bolta*, a comedy about a village simpleton desperate to get married, proved that while a physical set is a bonus, language and characterisation are powerful ways to take audiences on a journey. *Miahi-Boy Diaries*, a moderately Muslim musical, created an intimate link between the performer and the audience bringing each member closer to the story through the screen.

Nightmare, performed from a blackbox in Pune, paved the way for a new kind of storytelling – a hybrid form entrenched in live theatre, cinematography and visual art in equal parts. Finally, *The Light Catcher* defied all expectations and proved how a multitude of stories could be told from a single space by a single person. They were presented digitally and live, with no recorded material, by emerging artists under 25 years of age. These shows from Jaipur, Kolkata and Pune contributed to theatre outfit Thespoo 22's first ever digital festival, reaching over 1,000 people in five days.



WHO calls meeting on new virus variant

'There's not yet enough data to determine whether the strain could affect the efficacy of vaccine'

REUTERS
GENEVA

The World Health Organization (WHO) will convene a meeting of members to discuss strategies to counter a new, more infectious coronavirus strain that emerged in Britain, its European chief said on Tuesday. He did not give a date for the meeting.

"Limiting travel to contain spread is prudent until we have better info. Supply chains for essential goods & essential travel should remain possible," WHO Regional Director Hans Kluge said on Twitter, urging increased preventive measures.

The WHO cautioned against major alarm over the variant, saying it was a normal part of a pandemic's evolution. It also praised Britain for detecting it.



Fresh fears: People pass closed shops on Regent Street in London on Monday. • AP

In a statement on Tuesday, the Geneva-based body repeated that there was not yet enough information to determine whether the new variant could affect vaccine

efficacy, saying research was ongoing.

Meanwhile, Pfizer Inc. and Moderna Inc. said they are testing their COVID-19 vaccines against the new,

fast-spreading version of the virus, CNN reported on Tuesday.

Moderna expects immunity from its vaccine to protect against this variant, known as the B.1.1.7 lineage.

performing more tests in the coming weeks to confirm, the company said in a statement to CNN.

Pfizer said it is "generating data" on how well blood samples from people immunised with its vaccine "may be able to neutralise the new strain from the UK", according to the report.

Pfizer and Moderna did not immediately respond to Reuters' requests for comment.

The main worry is that the new variant is 40%-70% more transmissible.

Scientists have said there is no evidence that vaccines currently being deployed in the United Kingdom – made by Pfizer and BioNTech – or other COVID-19 shots in development, will not protect against this variant, known as the B.1.1.7 lineage.

Israel on the brink of fourth poll in two years

Lawmakers reject Bill on budget

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
JERUSALEM

Israel was headed on Tuesday for its fourth election in less than two years, with its Parliament set to dissolve at midnight after lawmakers rejected a last-ditch effort to salvage the fractured ruling coalition.

The government headed by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had been inching towards collapse for weeks and now the right-wing incumbent looks set to face a re-election battle as his long-awaited trial on corruption charges gets under way next year.

The coalition, led by Mr. Netanyahu's Likud and his rival Benny Gantz's centrist

Blue and White party, has until the start of Wednesday to pass a 2020 budget or Parliament will automatically dissolve. Mr. Gantz demanded the government pass a budget covering both 2020 and 2021, arguing Israel needs stability. But Mr. Netanyahu has refused to endorse a 2021 budget.

On Sunday, Blue and White said it had an agreement with Likud on a Bill to buy more time to pass both the 2020 and 2021 budget. But after yet another war of words between Mr. Netanyahu and Mr. Gantz, Parliament rejected the Bill on Tuesday, with lawmakers voting against the coalition proposal 49 to 47.

Boris Johnson

go before Britain leaves the EU single market and customs union. The two sides are haggling over the cut EU fishermen would take to their current catches in Britain's rich waters and the length of a transition period

Mr. Johnson and Ms. von der Leyen are pressing to break a logjam over fishing rights with just nine days to

Nepal's ruling party appears headed for split

Oli forms new general convention committee, Prachanda-led faction holds separate meeting

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
KATHMANDU

The ruling Nepal Communist Party on Tuesday appeared to be headed for a split after the warring factions held separate Central Committee meetings, with Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli announcing a new 1,199-member committee to organise the party's general convention in an effort to strengthen his hold on it.

Mr. Oli, who is also one of the two chairmen of the ruling party, announced the new committee during a meeting of the party's Central Committee members close to him, at Balu-



K.P. Sharma Oli

watar, the Prime Minister's official residence, the Kathmandu Post reported.

The members of the newly-formed general convention organising committee took oaths

Kushner joins flight from Israel to Morocco

Move marks normalisation push

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
RABAT

The first Israel-Morocco direct commercial flight landed in the North African kingdom on Tuesday to mark the latest U.S.-brokered diplomatic normalisation deal between the Jewish state and an Arab country.

U.S. President Donald Trump's son-in-law and White House advisor Jared Kushner was on board along with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's National Security Advisor Meir Ben Shabbat.

The U.S.-Israeli delegation was welcomed at the airport by Moroccan officials, ahead of a programme that includes a meeting with King Mohammed VI at the royal palace, and a visit to the grave of Mohammed V. The trip is aimed at showcasing the Trump administration's achievements in Middle East diplomacy, weeks before Mr. Trump is replaced at the White House by President-elect Joe Biden.

Morocco became the third Arab state this year, af-



Jared Kushner, left, and Meir Ben Shabbat arrive in Rabat on Tuesday. • AFP

ter the UAE and Bahrain to normalise ties with Israel under U.S.-brokered deals, while Sudan has pledged to follow suit.

Speaking at Israel's Ben Gurion airport, Mr. Kushner said the country's recent string of breakthrough deals marked a step towards a more normal co-existence between Jews and Muslims.

"The state we have lived in for the last 75 years, where Jews and Muslims have been separated, is not a natural state," he said before getting on the plane, which was painted with the Hebrew, Arabic and English words for "peace".

Morocco became the third Arab state this year, af-

UN rights expert urges Trump to pardon Assange

'His health has seriously deteriorated'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
GENEVA

A UN rights expert on Tuesday urged outgoing U.S. President Donald Trump to pardon Julian Assange, saying the WikiLeaks founder is not "an enemy of the American people".

WikiLeaks "fights secrecy and corruption throughout the world and therefore acts in the public interest both of the American people and humanity as a whole," Niels Melzer wrote in an open letter. "In pardoning Mr. Assange, Mr. President, you would send a clear message of justice, truth and humanity to the American people and to the world," said Mr. Melzer, the UN special rapporteur on torture.

"You would rehabilitate a courageous man who has suffered injustice, persecution and humiliation for more than a decade, simply for telling the truth," he added.

Mr. Assange, 49, is currently being held in the top-security Belmarsh jail in London awaiting a January 4

decision by a British judge on a U.S. extradition request, in a case seen by his supporters as a cause célèbre for media freedom. The Australian publisher faces 18 charges in the U.S. relating to the 2010 release by WikiLeaks of 500,000 secret files detailing aspects of military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Belmarsh conditions

Mr. Melzer has previously condemned the conditions at Belmarsh, saying the "progressively severe suffering inflicted" on Mr. Assange is tantamount to torture.

In his letter on Tuesday, Mr. Melzer wrote, "I visited Mr. Assange ... with two independent medical doctors, and I can attest to the fact that his health has seriously deteriorated, to the point where his life is now in danger."

He noted that Mr. Assange suffers from a respiratory condition that makes him more vulnerable to COVID-19, which has infected several Belmarsh inmates.

China slams U.S. over Tibet Bill, S. China Sea 'trespass'

Beijing rejects 'foreign interference' in its internal affairs

ANANTH KRISHNAN

The United States and China on Tuesday sparred over Tibet and the South China Sea, with new moves from Washington marking the start of the last month of President Donald Trump in office fueling fresh tensions in an already fraught relationship.

On Tuesday, China hit out at the U.S. for passing the Tibetan Policy and Support Act (TPSA), a landmark legislation that calls for the opening of a U.S. consulate in Lhasa and also underlines U.S. backing for the Dalai Lama to determine his successor.

The Act said such decisions "should be made by the appropriate religious authorities within the Tibetan Buddhist tradition" with the "wishes of the 14th Dalai Lama... [playing] a determinative role", and described "interference" in the succession by China as "a clear violation of the fundamental religious freedoms for Tibetan Buddhists and the Tibetan people".

With the Act, the U.S. will back the choice made by the Dalai Lama, even as China has made clear it would anoint its own successor, just as it did by naming its own 11th Panchen Lama in 1995 as Gyancain Norbu, rejecting the Dalai Lama-backed candidate, Gedhun Choekyi Nima, aged six at the time, who has not been seen in public since.

China said it "resolutely opposes" the "adoption of Bills containing such ill contents on China".

"Issues related to Tibet, Taiwan and Hong Kong concern China's sovereignty and territorial integrity. They are China's internal affairs that

Issues related to Tibet, Taiwan and Hong Kong concern China's sovereignty and territorial integrity. They are China's internal affairs...

WANG WENBIN

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson

"The U.S. has been abusing state power and national security concept to suppress and contain certain foreign companies by applying measures such as export control," Mr. Wang said, adding that the U.S. was "weaponising its visa policy to impose various visa sanctions on Chinese individuals citing so-called issues related to Hong Kong, Xinjiang, Tibet, religion and human rights".

Naval dispute

Both sides also clashed over the South China Sea, with the Chinese military on Tuesday saying it had "warned" a U.S. destroyer sailing in waters off the disputed Spratly islands (called Nansha by China).

"On December 22, the US guided missile destroyer USS John S. McCain trespassed into the waters adjacent to China's Nansha islands and reefs without Chinese government's permission, and the naval and aerial forces of the Chinese PLA Southern Theater Command conducted whole-process tracking and monitoring on the U.S. destroyer and warned it off," said Air Force Senior Colonel Tian Junli, spokesperson for the PLA Southern Theater Command, accusing the U.S. of "seriously violating China's sovereignty and security, and gravely undermining peace and stability in the South China Sea".

This was the ninth freedom of navigation operation conducted this year by the U.S., the most in the past five years, according to South China Sea Strategic Situation Probing Initiative, a Beijing-based think tank, reported the Communist Party-run Global Times.

Russia bans entry of EU officials

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
MOSCOW

The Foreign Ministry said that in response to "confrontational" EU actions, it had "decided to expand the list of representatives of EU member states and institutions who will be denied entry to the Russian Federation".

GOVERNMENT OF TAMILNADU

PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT
BUILDINGS (C&M) CIRCLE, COIMBATORE -4.
LUMPSUM CONTRACT (C&M) TWO COVER TENDER SYSTEM
TENDER NOTICE NIT:36/BC/C&MCBE/2020-2021, Dt:22.12.2020

For and on behalf of The Governor of Tamilnadu, Two cover system sealed Tenders viz., Pre Qualification Bid and Financial Bid in separate covers both inserted in single cover will be received upto 3.00 pm on 03.02.2021 from the PWD Registered Contractors by the Superintending Engineer, PWD, Buildings (Construction & Maintenance) Circle, Coimbatore – 641 001 for Construction of Open Air Stadium at Chikkanna Arts and Science College in Tirupur District at his office and Pre Qualification Tender will be opened on the same day at 3.30 PM.

All other details are available in the website www.tenders.tn.gov.in. If any changes/corrections etc. to the tender, it will be published on the above website only.

Superintending Engineer, P.W.D., (i/c)
Buildings (C&M) Circle, Coimbatore.

DIPR / 4828 / TENDER / 2020

TENDER NOTICE NIT:103/CW/T/No.107/2020-21 Dt:21.12.2020

For and on behalf of State Industries Promotion Corporation of Tamil Nadu Limited, sealed tenders are invited under "Two Cover System" for the following work from Class -I State level Civil / Electrical Contractors registered in PWD/Highways/Any Department of Government of Tamilnadu, Central Government Department, Tamilnadu State Government undertaking, having experience in similar nature of works. Tenders will be received upto 3.00 PM on 08.01.2021 and the same will be opened on the same day at 3.30 PM.

Name of Work Approx. value of work EMD
Construction of RCC side drain on both sides of Roads including Culverts in DTA at SIPCOT Industrial Park, Sriperumbudur. Rs.3457 lakhs (including GST @12%) Rs.17,40,000/-

* In the form of Demand Draft drawn in favour of SIPCOT Ltd., payable at Chennai. (In the Tenderer's Name only)
The tender Schedule can be Downloaded at free of cost from the website: www.tenders.tn.gov.in

DIPR/4875/TENDER/2020 MANAGING DIRECTOR, SIPCOT, CHENNAI-8

ODISHA POWER TRANSMISSION CORPORATION LIMITED
(A Government of Odisha Undertaking)
Regd Office: Janpath, Bhubaneswar-751022
CIN:U40102OR2004SGC007553

e-TENDER NOTICE NO:21/2020-21
Odisha Power Transmission Corporation Limited (OPTCL), Bhubaneswar invites bids (in e-Tendering mode only) under two part bidding system from the reputed EPC / Turnkey Contractors for Engineering, Supply, Erection and Commissioning of 132 KV two phase DC line from existing 132/33 KV Grid S/S, Bangaripposi to Proposed Railway traction S/S at Bhanjapur and 2 Nos.132KV bay extension at 132/33KV Grid S/S, Bangaripposi (Approx. Line Length-40KM) for power supply to proposed RTSS at Bhanjapur at an Estimated Cost of the Package for Rs.29.69 Crore in Mayurbhanji district on "Turnkey CONTRACT BASIS".

Interested Bidders are required to enrol themselves in the tender portal www.tenderwizard.com/OPTCL. Complete set of bidding documents are available on www.tenderwizard.com/OPTCL portal from Dt. 24.12.2020/ 11.00 AM up to DL.27.01.2021/12.45 PM. Interested bidders may visit OPTCL's official website www.optcl.co.in and www.tenderwizard.com/OPTCL for further detail.

Note:- Bidders are requested to regularly visit Official Website of OPTCL/Tender Portal only for amendment / errata / corrigendum (if any) and any other information regarding these tenders, as the same shall be published only on the OPTCL website/ Tender portal.

Sd/- SR.GENERAL MANAGER (CPC)
Email id:sgm.cpc@optcl.co.in

HIPR-24/2020-21 CAD-955 OPR-04011/11/0074/2021

BRUHAT BENGALURU MAHANAGARA PALIKE

Office of the Executive Engineer, Road Infrastructure - South Division, N.R. Square, Bengaluru-560002.

No.EE/RI-South/TEND/05/2020-21 Date: 22.12.2020

SHORT TERM TENDER-NOTIFICATION REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

(Through GOK e-Procurement Portal only) (Two Cover System)

The Executive Engineer, Road Infrastructure - South Division, invites tenders on behalf of the BBMP Commissioner from eligible Tenderers for the works detailed in the table below:

S.I. No.	Name of Work	Approx. length in K.M.	EMD in Lakhs
1	Annual Maintenance of Arterial and Sub Arterial Roads (excluding potholes) including desilting of drains, cleaning of roads, footpaths/shoulders & shoulder drain, repairs to drains & footpaths and maintenance of flyovers & underpasses in BTM Layout, Jayanagar, Chickpet Constituency Area of RI-South Division (Call-03)</		

MARKET WATCH

	22-12-2020	% CHANGE
Sensex	46007	0.99
US Dollar	73.84	-0.06
Gold	49653	-1.28
Brent oil	50.37	0.90

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	468.65	24.40
Asian Paints	2600.80	46.15
Axis Bank	589.75	7.25
Bajaj Auto	3265.30	27.05
Bajaj Finserv	8938.85	92.10
Bajaj Finance	5011.40	-30.45
Bharti Airtel	500.30	9.40
BPCL	372.50	5.15
Britannia Ind	3630.40	6.35
Cipla	795.00	16.50
Coal India	135.50	2.55
Divis Lab	3720.95	86.80
Dr Reddy's Lab	5161.80	93.25
Eicher Motors	2446.70	50.30
GAIL (India)	118.50	3.80
Grafix Ind	885.20	7.85
HCL Tech	913.80	43.35
HDFC	2403.65	-11.15
HDFC Bank	1373.10	0.45
HDFC Life	641.25	12.05
Hero MotoCorp	3049.10	55.00
Hindalco	231.90	-0.40
Hind Unilever	2311.00	5.05
ICICI Bank	500.30	5.80
IndusInd Bank	840.70	-2.00
Infosys	1220.50	43.20
Indian Oil Corp	87.95	0.85
ITC	203.40	0.45
JSW Steel	361.95	8.45
Kotak Bank	1902.95	-17.90
L&T	1262.70	27.85
M&M	695.05	9.10
Maruti Suzuki	7395.40	19.30
Nestle India Ltd.	18553.55	360.95
NTPC	98.90	1.40
ONGC	90.55	0.70
Power Grid Corp	190.30	4.80
Reliance Ind	1936.70	-3.00
SBI Life	853.95	13.10
State Bank	257.45	2.75
Shree Cement	23916.70	199.20
Sun Pharma	568.30	15.75
Tata Motors	164.95	0.40
Tata Steel	601.35	5.50
TCS	2872.50	52.35
Tech Mahindra	944.65	37.80
Titan	1498.80	27.15
UltraTech Cement	5021.30	13.45
UPL	444.65	7.35
Wipro	364.20	10.25

EXCHANGE RATES

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	73.64	73.96
Euro	90.04	90.43
British Pound	98.78	99.22
Japanese Yen (100)	71.22	71.53
Chinese Yuan	11.25	11.30
Swiss Franc	83.17	83.54
Singapore Dollar	55.18	55.43
Canadian Dollar	57.21	57.48
Malaysian Ringgit	18.13	18.22
Australian Dollar	55.56	55.81

Source: Indian Bank

IN BRIEF



Raw jute shortage may hit Rabi crop packaging

KOLKATA With continuous disruptions in raw jute supplies to mills, manufacturing of gunny bags has been severely hit, which may adversely impact packaging of Rabi crops. Estimates suggest that the quantity of raw jute being hoarded could be about 20 lakh bales, and supplies to mills are at about 50% as against their requirements, industry sources said. PTI

DRL arm seeks Canada nod for favipiravir

HYDERABAD Dr. Reddy's Laboratories Canada Inc., on behalf of a consortium, has filed an application with Health Canada seeking authorisation for Reponavir (favipiravir) tablets for the acute treatment of mild to moderate COVID-19 adult patients. "If approved, DRL will launch the product soon for COVID-19 patients in Canada," VP and general manager Vinod Ramachandran said.

'Crude oil production slipped 5% in Nov.'

NEW DELHI India's crude oil production fell by 5% in November primarily due to a sharp drop in output at Rajasthan oilfields operated by private sector Cairn Vedanta, government data showed on Tuesday.

India is dependent on imports for 85% cent of its needs and the government is pushing domestic explorers to raise output to help cut down imports. PTI

Bajaj Auto to set up ₹650-cr. unit in Chakan

MUMBAI Bajaj Auto on Tuesday said it had entered into an initial pact with the Maharashtra government for setting up a production plant at Chakan, entailing an estimated investment of ₹650 crore. The proposed facility will manufacture Husqvarna, Triumph and KTM brands of premium bikes, besides electric vehicles, the automaker said in a regulatory filing. The manufacturing facility is expected to begin production in 2023. PTI

'Centre to set up development finance entity in 3-4 months'

Infra needs patient capital, banks not ideal for long-term projects: DFS Secretary

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI The government plans to set up a Development Finance Institution (DFI) in the next three to four months with a view to mobilise the ₹11 lakh crore required for funding of the ambitious national infrastructure pipeline, according to Financial Services Secretary Debasish Panda.

"We need a development financial institution as infra financing needs patient capital, and banks are currently not suited for lending for long-term projects which do not generate any cash for years," he told PTI.

Even deepening the bond market with regard to infrastructure financing was a matter receiving the Centre's attention and there was a



White knight: To provide funding and to enhance the credit rating of projects, a DFI is needed, says Mr. Panda. ■REUTERS

need to do something more in order to have a robust bond market for infrastructure financing, he said.

"To provide funding, to enhance credit rating of projects, a DFI is needed, and we are actively working on it, and soon such an institution will be in place. We are

in the process of finalising details such as shareholding of the government and whether such a body will be formed through a statute.

"The DFI will be a catalyst, and would fund projects where others are not willing to enter because of the risks involved," he said.

Indices gain 1% in pullback as IT, pharma stocks lead recovery

HCL Tech rises 5% followed by TechM, Infosys, Sun Pharma

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

The equity markets on Tuesday rebounded with a 1% gain following a rise in IT and pharma stocks, a day after benchmark indices crashed 3% on fears of a new strain of the COVID-19 virus.

Buoyed by global cues, the indices opened in positive territory, slumped soon after, but bounced back in the second half. The S&P BSE Sensex rose 453 points or 0.99% to 46,007 points.

All sectoral indices that fell on Monday were back with gains. Top Sensex gainers included HCL Tech that rose 5.09%, Tech Mahindra



(4.33%), Infosys (3.78%), PowerGrid (2.67%) and Sun Pharma, which climbed 2.64%. The NSE Nifty 50 index also rose 1.03% to 13,466.30 points.

Sameet Chavan, chief analyst (Technical and Derivatives), Angel Broking said,

"The second half turned out

to be excellent for the markets; we witnessed V-shaped recovery. IT stocks were the real charioteer and once again came to the rescue."

"For the next couple of days at least, the index is likely to remain in a slightly wider range before deciding its next path. The ideal range [for the Nifty] would be 13,600 to 13,100, where the lower range should be seen as a sacrosanct support," he added. Other analysts said the volatility in the market would remain high in the near term due to strict lockdowns and with travel restrictions impacting economic recovery.

A source said lobbyists feared this would result in a major cut in take-home salaries and also place a burden on employers.

The new definition of wages is part of the Code on Wages, 2019 passed by Parliament last year.

CII, FICCI to seek a pause on wage code

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Representatives of industry bodies, including those from CII and FICCI, will hold a meeting with the Labour Ministry's top brass on Thursday to make a case for holding back implementation of new definition of wages, which would increase social security deductions and reduce the take-home pay of workers.

A source said lobbyists feared this would result in a major cut in take-home salaries and also place a burden on employers.

The new definition of wages is part of the Code on Wages, 2019 passed by Parliament last year.



The Centre holds 63.75% stake in the enterprise and the remaining 36.25% is owned by various others. ■H. VIBHU

Govt. invites EoI to divest full stake in Shipping Corp.

Feb. 13 is last date for bids; SCI saw ₹348 crore profit in FY20

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Centre on Tuesday invited expression of interest (EoI) for the disinvestment of its entire 63.75% shareholding in the Shipping Corporation India Limited (SCIL) along with the handing over of its management control.

Potential bidders have time until February 13 to submit their interest. The SCIL was incorporated in 1961 and owns a fleet of 59 vessels, including two container vessels, 13 crude oil tankers and eight offshore supply vessels. It has been a profitable commercial venture and garnered ₹347.5 crore in profit in FY20. The remaining 36.25% stake is jointly owned by mutual funds, banks, insurance companies as well as individuals.

Employees are permitted to participate in the transaction either directly and independently or by forming a

GIC, ESR form \$750-mn JV for India logistics

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

MUMBAI

Singapore sovereign wealth fund GIC on Tuesday announced a joint venture with the Hong Kong-headquartered ESR Cayman to form a \$750 million joint venture, which will develop and acquire industrial and logistics assets in India. GIC will own 80% stake in the joint venture, while ESR will own the remaining 20%, an official statement said, adding that the platform would focus on tier 1 and tier 2 cities across India. It will be 'seeded' with a 2.2 million sq. ft. build-to-core asset, the U.S. and APAC will transition from Daimler AG to Infosys.



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TV PICKS

ISL: Star Sports 2 & 3 (SD & HD), 7.30 p.m.
Series A: Sony Ten 2 (SD & HD), 11 p.m. & 1.15 a.m. (Thursday).

QUICK SINGLES



Pakistan prevents Kiwis' T20 sweep

NAPIER
Mohammad Rizwan celebrated his elevation to Pakistan Test captaincy in style on Tuesday, smashing a career-best 89 to stop New Zealand claiming a series sweep in the third T20I in Napier. The Kiwis won 2-1. **The scores:** New Zealand 173/7 in 20 overs (Tim Seifert 35, Devon Conway 63, Glenn Phillips 31; Shaheen Afridi 2/43, Haris Rauf 2/44, Faheen Ashraf 3/20) lost to Pakistan 177/6 in 19.4 overs (Mohd. Rizwan 89, Mohd. Hafeez 41).



The leader: Inspirational as ever, Virat Kohli urged his boys to give it their all in the next three Tests against Australia. ■AP



Bradman's debut 'baggy green' sold for record A\$450,000

SYDNEY
The 'baggy green' worn on Test debut in 1928 by Australia's greatest batsman Donald Bradman has sold for A\$450,000 (US\$340,000), a record for one of the cricket legend's caps. AFP

Djokovic clinches top ATP award

LONDON
Novak Djokovic, Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal and Francesca Di Stefano were among the winners of the ATP's top awards for 2020 on Monday. Djokovic was the year-end No. 1. Federer was the singles fans' favourite for a record-extending 18th straight year, and Nadal received the Stefan Edberg Sportsmanship Award. Di Stefano was given the Arthur Ashe Humanitarian Award for his social activity.

Abraham helps Chelsea sink West Ham

LONDON
Tammy Abraham hit a quickfire late double on Monday as Chelsea beat West Ham 3-0 to reignite its Premier League challenge after consecutive defeats. **The results:** Chelsea 3 (Silva 10, Abraham 78, 80) bt West Ham 0; Burnley 2 (Barnes 35, Wood 51) bt Wolves 1 (Silva 89-pen).

Four goals but no winner

BAMBOOLIM
Odisha FC and NorthEast United FC (NEUF) slugged it out in an eventful Indian Super League (ISL) contest which ended 2-2 on Tuesday. **The result:** Odisha FC 2 (Mauricio 23, Alexander 67) drew with NEUF 2 (Lambot 45+1, Appiah 65). **Wednesday's match:** Jamshedpur FC vs FC Goa, 7.30 p.m.

Nihal, Gukesh and Rakshit reach final

CHESS

RAKESH RAO
NEW DELHI

Nihal Sarin came up with twin knight-sacrifice to nail a dramatic 1.5-0.5 win over Italy's Sonis Francesco to become the third Indian, along with D. Gukesh and Rakshit Ravi, to reach the gold-medal matches of the FIDE Online World Cadet and Youth chess championship on Tuesday.

In the girls' under-16 section, Sarin drew the first game with black pieces. In the second, the talented Indian displayed his preparation in sacrificing both knights on the 14th and 17th

moves, claimed his rival's queen for a rook but then marshalled his remaining resources brilliantly to win in 47 moves.

Gukesh reached the under-14 final after beating Dennis Lazavik 2-1. Gukesh won the first but lost the second. In the deciding Armageddon game, Gukesh gained a winning position but eventually drew. Since he played with black pieces, a draw was enough for him to advance to the final.

In the girls' under-16 semifinals, sixth seed Rakshit stunned second seeded Russian Leya Garifullina 1.5-0.5 after winning the first game in 45 moves.

Aniket stars for A.B. Rising
Aniket Dhankar (63) helped A. B. Rising Academy beat Bimla Dobhal Academy by 49 runs to win the Ratan Lal Saini memorial (u-14) tournament.

The scores: A. B. Rising Academy 169/8 in 40 overs (Aniket Dhankar 63, Vivek Ruval 33, Himanshu Negi 4/35) bt Bimla Dobhal Academy 120

in 33 overs (Madhur Fulara 36, Aryan Vats 30).

Sarthak shows the way
Sarthak Ranjan's 13-ball 30 helped Rann Star Club defeat J. P. L. Academy by four wickets in the semifinals of the Chaudhary Shyam Singh tournament.

The scores: J. P. L. Academy 100 in 18.3 overs (Pawan Suyal 3/20, Pawan Negi 3/21) lost to Rann Star Club 101/6 in 12.5 overs (Sarthak Ranjan 30).

Easy for Youth

Youth XI posted a nine-wicket win over Golden Hawks in the Tripathi Premier League.

The scores: Golden Hawks 61 in 23.1 overs (Rajesh Sharma 4/15) lost to Youth XI 67/1 in four overs (Sanat Sangwan 39 n.o.).

Himanshu slams century

Himanshu Balyan (III not out)

in 33 overs (Madhur Fulara 36, Aryan Vats 30).

Sarthak shows the way

Sarthak Ranjan's 13-ball 30

helped Rann Star Club defeat J. P. L. Academy by four

wickets in the semifinals of

the Chaudhary Shyam Singh

tournament.

The scores: J. P. L. Academy

184/9 in 40 overs (Kavya Teota

48, Shubham Chaudhary 29,

Badal Biswal 3/17, Kushagra

Mishra 3/48) lost to L. B.

Shastri Club 186/2 in 24.1 overs

(Himanshu Balyan 111 n.o.,

Aryan Kumar 29).

Aryan, Aaron script thrilling

win for West Delhi

Aryan Kumar (35) and Aaron

Chandok (32) contributed to

West Delhi Academy's one-

wicket win over G. R. M.

Academy in the Airliner

Winter Cup.

The scores: G. R. M. Academy

145 in 35.3 overs (Abhishek

Singh 62, Rajiv Giri 28) lost to

West Delhi Academy 149/9 in

35.3 overs (Aryan Kumar 35,

Aaron Chandok 32, Vipin

Kumar 3/14, Dipanshu Rawat

3/15).

Gagan in top form

Deli (u-23) player Gagan Vats

slammed 115 to power Uday

Gupta Academy to a five-

wicket win over Telefunken

Club in the B. R. Sharma

memorial tournament.

The scores: Telefunken Club

276/9 in 40 overs (Abhimanyu

Singh 77, Swapnil Kaushik 54,

Parth Madan 49, Bharat

Sindhwan 41, Gaurav Kambhoj

3/47) lost to Uday Gupte

Academy 277/5 in 39.3 overs

(Gagan Vats 115, Ekansh Gulati

49, Divij Mehra 34 n.o.,

Abhishek Gusain 30).

Daksh, Dhananjay shine

Daksh Sethi (4/20) and

Dhananjay 3/11 bowled

Sarmount Club to a 67-run

victory over Ansh Academy

in the 11th Sujeti memorial

(u-17) tournament.

The scores:

Sarmount Club 199 in 39.5

overs (Raunit 45, Yuvraj Rathi

42, Tanay 40, Vineet Chikara

3/30) bt Ansh Academy 132 in

29 overs (Jatin Sharma 56,

Daksh Sethi 4/20, Dhananjay

3/11).

Dhruv turns it RRG's way

Leg-spinner Dhruv Ghai

(4/22) helped Rohtak Road

Gymkhana beat Yorks Club

by seven wickets in the

Swastik Cup.

The scores:

Yorks Club 121 in

32 overs (Sourav Kumar 53,

Akshay Kumar 27, Dhruv Ghai

4/22, Kavya Pandey 3/6, Ankit

Chauhan 3/23) lost to Rohtak

Road Gymkhana 122/3 in 23.1

overs (Shreshth Yadav 33 n.o.,

Ankush Bains 33).

Chin up, Kohli tells his boys

Skipper's parting message before leaving for India

INDIA IN AUS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
ADELAIDE

India captain Virat Kohli left Australian shores on Tuesday after a pep talk to his beleaguered teammates, handing over the mantle of leading the side to Ajinkya Rahane in the remaining three Tests.

Kohli is returning to India to attend the birth of his first child in January.

Before boarding the flight back home, Kohli encouraged his boys to give their all in the remainder of the series, which the visitors trail 0-1 after the heavy defeat in the opening Test.

Positive frame of mind

The idea behind organising the pep talk was to keep the players in a positive frame of mind heading into the crucial Boxing Day Test in Melbourne.

India lost the lung-opener here inside three days after

crumbling to their lowest Test

score of 36. The second Test is scheduled to be held at the iconic Melbourne Cricket Ground from December 26-30. Kohli, who has been leading the Test team since 2014, urged his players to show intent and express themselves on the field without any inhibitions. While Kohli has de-

parted for India, his white-ball deputy Rohit Sharma is quarantining in Sydney.

Kohli was India's best performer with the bat in the series opener, top-scoring with a sedate 74 in the first innings before being run out following a misunderstanding with Rahane.

Hope everything goes well with the baby'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
ADELAIDE

Australian batsman Steve Smith on Tuesday said Virat Kohli deserves credit for prioritising the birth of his child over cricket as "there would have been a lot of pressure" on the India skipper to stay on for the entire Test series.

"I fist-pumped him at the end (of first Test) and

said 'mate, safe travel. Hope everything goes well with the baby, and pass on my best to your wife,'" said Smith at a virtual press conference facilitated by the series' official broadcaster Sony Network.

"To stand up and want to go home for the birth of his first child, it's a credit to him," said Smith.

Narain to lead Team India

SPORTS REPORTER
CHENNAI

Narain Karthikeyan will lead an all-Indian line-up, which includes Arjun Maini and Naveen Rao, for Racing Team India's campaign in the 2021 Asian Le Mans Series in February, with an eye on competing in the prestigious 24 Hours of Le Mans in France later in the year.

The Asian Le Mans Series, to be held in Abu Dhabi on Feb. 5-6 and Feb. 19-20, comprises four races spread over two race weekends. Each race lasts four hours.

The Indian team will drive an ORECA 07 car in the LMP2 class, and have technical support from the Championship-winning Alpine Pro Racing Team.

Gautam Singhania, a member of the FIA World Motor Sport Council, will lead Team India with JK Tyre as one of the commercial partners.

NEW DELHI CRICKET ROUND-UP

in 33 overs (Madhur Fulara 36, Aryan Vats 30).

Sarthak shows the way

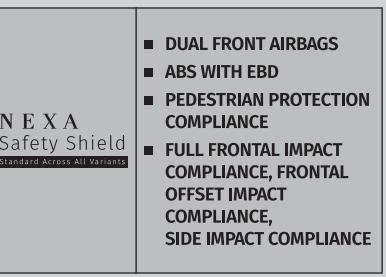
Sarthak Ranjan's 13-ball 30 helped Rann Star Club defeat J. P. L. Academy by eight

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