



RCP SINGH IS NEW
JANATA DAL (UNITED)
PRESIDENT



CONFICT
IN KERALA



PEOPLE'S PARLIAMENT, ALWAYS IN SESSION

SINDH GOVT NOT TO
RELEASE PEARL
MURDER ACCUSED

RAHANE DEFIES
WEIGHT OF
CAPTAINCY



P6

P9

P12

WEATHER

Mainly clear sky. Shallow to moderate fog in the morning. The maximum and minimum temperatures would be around 20 and 05 degrees Celsius respectively.

RAINFALL: Nil

RELATIVE HUMIDITY

Max: 97% Min: 50%

TEMPERATURE

Max: 22.6°C (+2) Min: 6.0°C (-1)

SUN RISES SUN SETS

07:13 hrs 17:33 hrs

MOON RISES MOON SETS

16:06 hrs 06:22 hrs

THUMBNAILS



At a Trinamul Congress-organised demonstration protesting against the BJP for an alleged bid to malign Nobel laureate Amartya Sen in Kolkata on Sunday.

SNS

Cold wave: Several places in north India, including Uttar Pradesh and Punjab, recorded their minimum temperature below the five-degree Celsius mark on Sunday, with the India Meteorological Department forecasting severe cold wave in parts of the region later this week and warning of dense fog. Though the mercury rose slightly in Delhi due to a Western disturbance, the department said the relief will be short-lived and the minimum temperature could fall by a further three to five degrees.

P4

Sunil Kothari dead: Padma Shri dance historian and critic Sunil Kothari passed away Sunday morning at a Delhi hospital after he suffered a cardiac arrest a month after testing positive for coronavirus. He was 87. "He had tested positive for Covid almost a month back and was not in a good condition," Vidha Lal, a family friend and herself a dancer, said. Kothari was recovering at home in Asian Games Village but was rushed to a hospital after suffering a cardiac arrest this morning, she added.

P5

Shopian 'fake' encounter: Jammu and Kashmir police file charge sheet against Army officer, 2 other personnel

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

SRINAGAR, 27 DECEMBER

Police have filed a chargesheet against three men, including an Army officer, in the Shopian "fake" encounter case of three civilians in July, officials said on Sunday.

The 1,400-page charge sheet was filed in the court of principal district and sessions judge, Shopian on Saturday by the head of the Special Investigation Team (SIT), the officials said.

Captain Bhupinder of the Army's 62 Rashtriya Rifles, Bilal Ahmed Lone and Tabish Nazir were named as accused in the chargesheet for their role in the alleged fake encounter killing of the three men hailing from Rajouri dis-

trict, they added.

A police spokesperson said the court has issued an order, giving an option to the Army under the relevant sections of law for a trial of Captain Bhupinder in a criminal court of ordinary jurisdiction or court martial.

The spokesperson said during investigation, it came to light that a conspiracy was hatched by the accused captain and civilians Nazir and Lone to abduct the three civilians and stage the encounter.

"They deliberately and purposefully chose not to follow SOPs, planted illegally-acquired weapons and material on their (victims) bodies after stripping them of their identities and tagged them as hardcore terrorists in possession of war-



like stores, deliberately providing false information to colleagues and seniors," he said.

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

"During further investigation, all the circumstantial evidence, which includes two vehicles and the service rifle of Captain Singh of the 62

RR, were seized," he added. Lone has become an appr- over under the relevant sec- tion of law and his statement has been recorded before the chief judicial magistrate, Shopian, the spokesperson said.

During the investigation, the statements of 49 witness- es were recorded, he added. The Army on Friday said it has completed the Summary of Evidence against two of its men involved in July's Amshipura encounter in Shopian district, in which three civilians were killed.

A possible court martial could take place after the completion of the formalities, Army officials said.

The Army had ordered a Court of Inquiry (CoI) earlier this year after reports appeared

on social media that the three men, labelled as terrorists, were gunned down by its per- sonnel.

The CoI, which completed its probe in September, found "prima facie" evidence that the troops had "exceeded" the powers under the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) during the July 18 encounter. Following this, the Army had initiated disciplinary proceedings.

Officials in the know of the development said the two Army personnel may face court martial proceedings for violating the powers vested under the AFSPA, 1990 and not following the "dos and don'ts" of the Chief of Army Staff as approved by the Supreme Court. (Representational image)

SMOGGY VISTA

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

WASHINGTON, 27 DECEMBER

In another grim milestone, the overall number of global coronavirus cases has surpassed the 80 million mark, while the deaths have surged to more than 1.75 million, according to Johns Hopkins University.

In an update on Sunday morning, the University's Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) revealed that the current global caseload and death toll stood at 80,282,523 and 1,756,584, respectively.

The US is the worst-hit

five MLAs have tested coro-

navirus positive.

To assess the readiness of the mechanism laid out for the Covid-19 vaccination drive, a dry run has been planned by the Centre on December 28 and 29 in four states ~ Punjab, Assam, Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat.

India registered the lowest single-day rise in Covid-19

cases in nearly six months at 18,732, while it is set to hold a two-day dry run from Monday in four states for its proposed ambitious vaccination drive likely to be kicked off in January.

The states continued to put into place several measures including testing of people arriving from abroad in the wake of a new strain of the coronavirus detected in the UK.

The Covid-19 active case-load in the country also dipped to 2.78 lakh on Sunday, the lowest after 170 days, the Union health ministry said. But the pandemic continued to take a toll on activities as it forced the postponement of the winter session of the Madhya Pradesh Assembly, which was scheduled to begin on December 28, after a prominent speaker disclosed that 61 employees and officials of the Assembly secretariat and

FACT FILE

TOTAL CASES
1,01,87,850

ACTIVE CASES
2,78,690

NEW CASES
18,732

NEW RECOVERIES
21,430

TOTAL DEATHS
1,47,622

UNION HEALTH MINISTRY FIGURES AS OF 8.00 A.M. SUNDAY 27 DECEMBER 2020

The tests included 40,742 RTPCR/CBNAAT/TrueNat ones and 34,468 rapid antigen tests. The positivity rate stood at 1.01 per cent, the health bulletin said. The national capital reported 16 fresh Covid fatalities, which took its toll to 10,453. (SNEP2)

Covid-19: Lowest daily cases after nearly 6 months

SNS & PTI

NEW DELHI, 27 DECEMBER

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Delhi adds 757 cases, 16 deaths: Delhi today recorded 757 fresh cases of coronavirus infections (Covid-19) following 75,210 tests conducted in different parts of the city, according to the Delhi government's latest health bulletin.

Araceli Hidalgo (96), receives a dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine in Guadalajara, becoming the first person vaccinated against Covid-19 in Spain. (AFP)

terms of number of cases. Other countries with more than a million confirmed cases are Brazil (7,448,560), Russia (2,992,123), France (2,607,688), the UK (2,262,735), Turkey (2,133,373), Italy (2,038,759), Spain (1,854,951), Germany (1,578,267), Colombia (1,584,903), Argentina (1,372,243), Mexico (1,372,243), Poland (1,253,957), Iran (1,194,963), Ukraine (1,049,717) and Peru (1,005,546), the CSSE figures showed. Brazil currently accounts for the second highest number of fatalities at 1,90,795.

Global Covid tally tops 80 million

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

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SUBRATA DUTTA

(P2)

The Capital continues to reel under cold and smoggy weather conditions. On Sunday.

SUBRATA DUTTA

(P2)

'Big brother' AIADMK tells BJP to fall in line

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

CHENNAI, 27 DECEMBER



hi, senior leader and AIADMK deputy coordinator K P Palaniswami said that in the absence of such leaders, 'many' parties were now trying to make a political entry into Tamil Nadu. Some national parties, 'opportunist, betrayers and a crowd,' were blaming the Dravidian outfit, alleging they ruined Tamil Nadu by their 50-plus year rule of the state, he said.

from the rest of the country, Munusamy said.

The distinctive feature and undercurrent of the Dravidian movement has effectively blocked the entry of national parties into the state for over half a century, he said, adding it was only the offshoots of the movement ~ AIADMK and DMK ~ that have been ruling Tamil Nadu since 1967.

Munasamy made the remarks in the presence of chief minister K Palaniswami, deputy chief minister O Panneerselvam and other senior leaders.

that BJP cannot succeed independently in Tamil Nadu and was very much dependent on AIADMK.

He indicated that BJP should accept that AIADMK was the senior partner, endorse the candidature of Palaniswami or the saffron party may reconsider its electoral options for the 2021 polls.

Though Munusamy did not mention BJP by name, it was clear that the message was intended for the party that leads the Central government.

"Be it a national party or state party...the government will be led by the AIADMK. There is no necessity for a coalition government. If any political party comes forward for an alliance arrangement with an idea of a coalition government, let them please think about it," he said.

Pointing to the deaths of AIADMK's top leader Jayalalithaa and DMK's M Karunanidhi,

labourers are feeling "defrauded" due to the three "black" agriculture laws and "the worst life is inevitable". The police said they are verifying the authenticity of the suicide note, dated December 18. "We have informed the relatives of the deceased and once they reach here their statements will be recorded and further proceedings will be conducted," a police officer from Haryana's Jhajjar district said, adding that they were informed about the suicide by the hospital authorities.

Earlier, at least two suicides have been linked to the farmers' stir, underway at various border points of Delhi for over a month now. A Sikh preacher, Sant Ram Singh, allegedly committed suicide near the Singhu border protest site earlier this month claiming that he was "unable to bear the pain of the farmers". A 22-year-old farmer had allegedly committed suicide in Punjab's Bathinda after returning from a protest site near the Delhi border. A week ago, a 65-year-old farmer from Punjab had attempted suicide by consuming some poisonous substance near the Singhu border. Thousands of farmers from Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and some other states have been protesting at various border points of Delhi against the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, Farmers Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act.

Lawyer from Punjab commits suicide near farmers' protest site

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

JHAJJAR (HARYANA), 27 DECEMBER

A lawyer from Punjab allegedly committed suicide by consuming poison on Sunday a few kilometres from



... Some conspirators in Sharada case are still at large. They have managed to keep themselves away from the ambit of the case...

TRINAMUL CONGRESS SPOKESPERSON KUNAL GHOSH

SHOWING A CERTIFIED COPY OF A 21 PAGE LETTER WRITTEN BY MAIN ACCUSED SUDIPTO SEN

Capital records 757 fresh Covid cases, 16 fatalities

Delhi's active cases tally dipped further to 6,713; recovery rate climbed to 97.24 per cent

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, 27 DECEMBER

Delhi today recorded 757 fresh cases of coronavirus infections (Covid-19) following 75,210 tests conducted in different parts of the city, according to the Delhi government's latest health bulletin. The tests included 40,742 RTPCR/CBNAAT/TrueNat ones and 34,468 rapid antigen tests.

The positivity rate stood at 1.01 per cent, the health bulletin said. The national capital reported 16 fresh Covid fatalities, which took its toll to 10,453. Yesterday, the city had logged 23 coronavirus-related deaths. On 25 December, the count of those who lost their lives was 30 and on 24 December, the figure was 37 casualties. The city's death rate was 2.85 per cent, based on the last 10 days' data.

With today's reported Covid cases, Delhi's caseload mounted to 6,22,851, the bulletin stated. Those coronavirus patients who recovered and were discharged from different health care facilities during the past 24 hours numbered 939, with the city's cumulative tally of such recoveries going up to 6,05,683, the bulletin stated. The recovery rate climbed to 97.24 per cent.

There were 6,713 active cases in the city. It was 6,911



A health worker collects swab samples for Covid-19 test in the Capital on Sunday.

SNS

yesterday. The number of Covid patients under home isolation was 3,335.

The number of containment zones across the national capital stood at 4,931, the bulletin added. Delhi had yesterday recorded 655 coronavirus cases — the lowest in over four months — which were detected out of 67,115 tests. The positivity rate was 0.98 per cent and the recovery rate was 97.21 per cent.

On 17 August, Delhi had

recorded 787 Covid cases. It had reported 652 coronavirus infections on 16 August. Delhi had on 25 December recorded 758 coronavirus infections. These were detected out of 85,749 tests, with the positivity rate plunging to 0.88 per cent. This was reportedly the lowest positivity rate in over eight months. The recovery rate was 97.15 per cent.

Less than 1,000 fresh cases were identified on 23 Decem-

ber (871), 22 December (939) and on 21 December (803). The national capital had on 24 December logged 1,063 Covid cases detected out of 89,920 tests. The positivity rate was 1.18 per cent. Delhi had then recorded 37 Covid fatalities and the recovery rate had stood at 97.05 per cent. The city had on 23 December recorded 871 coronavirus cases identified from 87,861 tests. It had then logged 18 Covid deaths and the recovery rate was

97.03 per cent. On 22 December, Delhi had identified 939 coronavirus infections detected out of 82,386 tests. Its Covid positivity rate had then dipped to 1.14 per cent from 21 December's 1.29 per cent. The city had then logged 25 Covid-linked deaths. The national capital had recorded its highest single-day spike of 8,593 coronavirus cases on 11 November. It had logged 131 Covid-linked deaths on 18 November — the highest so far.

I appeal to Centre with folded hands to scrap farm laws: Kejriwal

PTI

NEW DELHI, 27 DECEMBER

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday appealed to the Centre to repeal the new farm laws and said farmers are protesting for their survival.

In his second visit to the Singhu border, where thousands of farmers have been protesting against the laws since November last week, Kejriwal said, "I challenge any Union minister to have an open debate with the farmers and it will be clear how harmful these laws are."

The chief minister had first visited Singhu on the Delhi-Haryana border on December 7.



Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal visits Guru Tegh Bahadur Memorial at Singhu, in the Capital on Sunday.

is farmers will be able to sell their produce anywhere in the country outside of man-

dis.

"If a crop is being sold at Rs 800 per quintal in Bihar where there are no mandis, and the MSP is Rs 1,850 per quintal where do our farmers from Bihar and UP sell their produce for more than Rs 1,850? They cannot even get 50 per cent of the price outside of mandis. This is not a benefit to the farmers but to the big companies," he said.

Kejriwal,

who is also the Aam Aadmi Party's national convener, claimed that through these laws, corporates will take over the country's farming sector.

"What will the farmers do if you take farming away from them? The farmers who are sitting on the borders today with their elders and children are sitting here for their survival. If the big companies take over farming, the farmers will be left with nothing," he said.

Kejriwal said ministers, big leaders and some chief ministers have been speaking in support of these laws.

"I heard all their speeches, but I have not heard even a single leader talking about how these farm laws benefit farmers," he said.

The chief minister said that these big leaders, while counting the benefits of these farm laws, first say land will not be taken away from the farmers. "Is this a benefit?" he asked.

Then they say "MSP (minimum support price) and the mandis of the farmers will not be revoked, is this a benefit? Why have you brought the laws then? Instead of telling the benefits, they are justifying that these laws are no harm to the farmers. Who will benefit then?" he asked.

Kejriwal claimed that the only benefit the Centre tells

Kejriwal was accompanied by his deputy Manish Sisodia.

"Farmers are protesting for their survival. These laws will snatch away farming from farmers. I appeal with folded hands to the Centre to please repeat the three agri laws," he said.

Sisodia told the protesting farmers, "We are closely watching all the arrangements and we are ensuring that the pain you (farmers) endure is minimum."

Kejriwal joined the 'Safar-e-Shahada' Kirtan Darbaar organised by the Delhi government at the Guru Tegh Bahadur Memorial at the Singhu border. During his first visit, Kejriwal had checked the arrangements made for farmers by the Delhi government.

Kejriwal and his party AAP have strongly come out in favour of the farmers protesting against the new agri laws.

Besides Singhu, farmers, mostly from Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, are also protesting at various other border points of Delhi against the new farm laws.

Farmers are protesting against the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020, the Farmers Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020, and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020.

The three farm laws, enacted in September, have been projected by the government as major reforms in the agriculture sector that will remove middlemen and allow farmers to sell anywhere in the country.

Delhi's minimum temperature rises slightly

NEW DELHI, 27 DECEMBER

The minimum temperature in the national capital rose slightly on Sunday under the influence of a Western Disturbance affecting the upper Himalayas, according to the India Meteorological Department.

The Safdarjung Observatory, which provides representative data for the city, recorded a minimum of 6 degrees Celsius as against 4.6 degrees Celsius on Saturday. However, Kuldeep Srivastava, the head of the regional forecasting centre of the IMD, said the relief will be short-lived. The WD will lead to

"scattered to fairly widespread" snowfall in Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand. After the wind system withdraws, cold and dry northerly/northwesterly winds from the western Himalayas will bring the minimum temperature in north India down by three to five degrees Celsius, the IMD said. "Cold wave to severe cold wave conditions are likely in isolated pockets over Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, UP and north Rajasthan from December 28-29. Ground frost and dense fog is likely in isolated pockets in the region," it said.

PTI

NEW DELHI, 27 DECEMBER

Delhi's air quality turned severe again on Sunday as high moisture content due to light rains in neighbouring areas made pollutants heavier, which do not get dispersed easily even with a moderate wind speed, he said.

The city's 24-hour average air quality index (AQI) was 396, which falls in the "very poor" category. However, it rose

to 406 by 10 pm.

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The 24-hour average AQI was 337 on Saturday, 357 on Friday, 423 on Thursday, 433 on Wednesday and 418 on Tuesday.

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

Mixing is the vertical height in which pollutants are suspended in the air. It reduces on cold days with calm wind speeds.

A ventilation index lower than 6,000 sqm/second, with the average wind speed less than 10 kmph, is unfavourable for dispersal of pollutants.

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SURPRISE XMAS PRESENT!



“ But it's Christmas! Don't I deserve a present?" screamed the spoilt child. "Well, you haven't exactly been a good boy all year!" replied his dad without taking his eyes off the newspaper. It was the same thing every year; every birthday, every Christmas, every some-special day. The child's parents were apparently responsible. Instead of teaching him a little bit of maturity, they had always resorted to giving in to his demands, just to shut him up. As a result, of late, his demands showed an alarming surge. "Why don't you make yourself useful and go unpack the rest of the boxes?" his mother said, while sipping her tea. It also did not help that they had shifted houses and had to pack probably close to 100 boxes of their belongings, most of which contained their kid's intact and not-so-intact stuff. For the time being, the majority of them were stacked on the roof as the whole shifting process itself had been so exhausting. It was Christmas Eve and while the essentials to keep the household up and running were all unpacked and put to use, the rest of the boxes could be dealt with on the Boxing Day itself. But the kid would not give himself a break. And when he found

2020 exits, New Year beckons

Delhi's winter is breaking records. A few showers earlier this month brought the temperatures down. In spite of shorter days, it isn't getting gloomy for anyone. The talk of the town is: 2020 is ending at last! The year had nothing but winter; its summer was lost in the Lockdown. The seasons came one after another, but one doesn't remember anything. All that one recalls is sirens of ambulances and police vehicles. It was as if the city was under siege. One passed the days, looking out of windows, wondering at empty streets. A few vehicles went up and down. One waited for the all-clear signals to venture out. The Lockdown's unlocking started, but there were Containment Zones. The city's life was captured in a tunnel, with few breathing points. More than the arrival of the New Year, the end of the Old Year is being celebrated. People are once again turning towards the city-centre. Historically, Christmas and New Year have drawn Delhi's towards Connaught Place and its attached shopping street Janpath. There is something in the chill that turns warm once you are in these areas. Throughout the year, one shops and walks around the whole metropolis. Come the end of the Year, one gets down to recover and inch closer to where it all began. This centre does hold despite all diversions. Once in the CP, the most popular activity is going round in circles literally. The Metro is underground here, and its over-ground entrances have sufficient open spaces around them to relax and settle



down. Forget the old tea and coffee houses, there are plenty of mobile-sellers of the hot beverages doing brisk business. Spending a few hours at the Kota stone sitting points, the young here have no time to think about price-quality issues. The Baba Kharak Singh Marg and Palika Bazaar entrance points have been their favourites. After the strict Covid restrictions of the past weeks, the arrivals are increasing here. The young have a reason to unwind, after half a year's studies on laptops and smartphones. Down the CP corridors, Wenger's remains popular with the really hungry for its pastries and patties, shakes and burgers. After every Block, there is a gap where carts offer the same stuff cheap. Their customers can be seen enjoying the snacks sitting on small parapets enclosing the parking lots. The central park too is a big draw all day and in evenings. There are plenty of

green spaces to sit. Food reaches here through vendors who walk ceaselessly around the place. For many, Janpath, once known as the Queen's Way, is still preferred for shopping in the belief of good bargains. A slow walk down the shopping row gives one the old-world experience. Stores with leather purses, jackets, woollens, fashion wear, jeans, glossy journals, jewellery, handicrafts, and Indian perfumes draw discerning buyers. The shops

have been favourite for pre-Christmas picks. One remembers a vendor selling sweet digestive powders for decades, walking his cycle in front of the Janpath shops, sounding a brass bell. The gap between the shops is occupied by sellers of Zari handicraft products which dazzle in the evening lights. These Gujarati sellers miss the foreign tourists because of flight cancellations. Janpath Bhawan could be seen drawing the faithful towards Depaul's for its hot coffee and snacks. Its neighbours get attention free of cost. The pavement sellers in the wide passageway are attracting customers and onlookers round the year. In spite of Covid-19, there are young men and women, going through tonnes of woolen clothings for their needs. The pandemic has imposed some protocols, but none that can really stop the CP from drawing its faithfuls for their last trips of the year.

TRAVEL INDUSTRY'S WOES

The travel industry is among the sectors that has been hit the hardest in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. The technological revolution that brought the world closer by making travel and tourism easy and affordable is helpless in

halting the virus that demands that people should avoid unnecessary travels and remain confined to their homes as much as possible until the war against the pandemic has been won decisively. The sharp decline in travel and tourism is the driving reason for many in the trade becoming jobless or switching to a different profession. Travel agents, who had set up swanky

offices in major trading centres in Delhi, are gradually winding up their shops. Those who have deep pockets are considering other options, given the point that the future also appears grim. If a travel agent is to be believed, many of his colleagues, who were getting huge salaries, have become unemployed and are selling "karhi-chawal", "rajma-chawal" or pickles in differ-

ent areas of Delhi to earn a livelihood. There are many who are finding it difficult to pay fees of their children studying in schools and colleges. Many wealthy travel agents had sent their children to study abroad in Canada, United Kingdom, Australia and other countries. Suddenly, they find they are unable to pay the education and hostel fees. Many have asked

TAILPIECE

"Earlier, it was just in competitive exams and for jobs that one had to figure in the top 50, now one has to do so even to get an invite to a party or wedding ceremony," states a post on social media.

Contributed by Deepak Razdan, Nakshatra Pain, Ashok Tuteja and Asha Ramachandran

India

Our govt dedicated to all sections & devp: HP CM

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
SHIMLA, 27 DECEMBER

Defence minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday appreciated the efforts of Himachal Pradesh chief minister Jai Ram Thakur for the "splendid and unprecedented achievements" of his government.

Addressing the state-level function today — organised here to mark the completion of three-year tenure of the Jai Ram-led BJP government — virtually from New Delhi, Singh said that the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) was a "great gift" of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and has proved a "boon" to the hilly states like Himachal Pradesh.

He congratulated Jai Ram for making Himachal Pradesh second best state in the country in effective implementation of the PMGSY.



Pradesh one of the most developed states of the country. He said that the coronavirus pandemic has forced the government to organise this event with simplicity by strictly following the Covid-related Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).

Thakur said that the state government was providing social security pension to 5.70 lakh eligible people. The Jan Manch and Chief Minister Sewa Sankalp Helpline-1100 were started by the government for speedy redressal of the public grievances.

He said that the HIMCARE scheme was launched to provide health care to the poor under which as many as 1.25 lakh families have been benefited by spending an amount of Rs 121 crore. He said that Sahara Yojna was launched to provide financial assistance

of Rs 3000 per month to families with chronically ill patients.

The Grehini Suvidha Yojna has been launched under which 2.90 lakh free gas connections have been provided to the eligible families and this scheme has made Himachal Pradesh first "smoke free state" of the country.

Jai Ram said that MoUs worth Rs 96,000 crore were signed during the Global Investor Meet organised last year at Dharamshala and within a month the ground breaking of projects worth Rs 13,500 crore was performed.

Out of these projects, the work on projects worth Rs 10,000 crore has already started. He said that the Prakritik Kheti Khushal Kisan Yojna has been launched to promote natural farming and as many as one lakh farming families have adopted it so far.

Similarly, the Mukhya

Noida: Active COVID-19 cases drop below 500

PTI
NOIDA (UP), 27 DECEMBER

Uttar Pradesh's Gautam Buddha Nagar recorded 19 fresh COVID-19 cases that pushed the district's infection tally to 24,818 on Sunday, official data showed.

Active cases in the district came down to 477 from 522 the previous day as the recovery rate rose to 97.71 per cent, according to the data released by the UP Health Department for a 24-hour period. The number of active cases in Gautam Buddha Nagar is the seventh highest in the state. Sixty-four more patients got discharged during the period with the overall recoveries reaching 24,252, the fifth highest in the state.

Gautam Buddha Nagar has a death toll of 89 and a mortality rate of 0.35 per cent.

Air quality dips to 'severe' in Noida, Ghaziabad, Faridabad after two days

PTI
NOIDA (UP), 27 DECEMBER

The average air quality returned to the 'severe' category in Ghaziabad, Noida, Greater Noida and Faridabad after two days and was in the 'very poor' in Gurgaon, according to data issued by a government agency on Sunday.

The presence of PM2.5 and PM10 particles also remained high in the five satellite cities neighbouring Delhi, according to the air quality index (AQI) maintained by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)'s Sameer app.

According to the CPCB, AQI in the 'very poor' category may cause respiratory illness on prolonged exposure while that in the 'severe' category affects

even healthy people and seriously impacts those with existing diseases.

The average AQI on Saturday was 367 in Ghaziabad, 355 in Greater Noida, 344 in Noida, 404 in Faridabad and 359 in Gurgaon.

On Friday, it was 391 in Ghaziabad, 376 in Greater Noida, 386 in Noida, 328 in Faridabad and 302 in Gurgaon.

On Thursday, the average AQI was 440 in Ghaziabad, 448 in Greater Noida, 441 in Noida, 408 in Faridabad and 361 in Gurgaon, according to the agency.

Many tourists flock to Atal Tunnel at Rohtang

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
SHIMLA, 27 DECEMBER

The Himachal Pradesh Police has made elaborate arrangements to ensure smooth traffic flow from Manali onwards up to Lahaul Spiti district keeping in view the large number of tourists visiting Atal Tunnel at Rohtang.

Director General of Police Sanjay Kundu informed here on Sunday that the state Police is managing the bumper traffic in an excellent manner and it is being ensured that the tourists visiting this tourist place from various parts of the country do not face any incon-



ested to see the Atal Tunnel Rohtang. He said that the

police department has made special arrangements to ensure smooth traffic flow from both sides of the tunnel.



THUMBNAILS



A health worker collects swab sample for Covid-19 testing, in the Capital on Sunday.

SNS

Sushant death row : Maharashtra home minister Anil Deshmukh on Sunday urged the CBI to reveal if Bollywood actor Sushant Singh Rajput's death was a suicide or murder. He said the CBI should bring out its probe report into the case as soon as possible. "The people of Maharashtra and the country are eagerly waiting for the CBI's report on its investigation into Rajput's death case," Deshmukh said. PTI

Municipal body elections in Haryana: Polling is underway on Sunday in elections to municipal bodies in Haryana amid tight security and adherence to coronavirus norms. Polls opened at 8 am and will continue till 5:30 pm. The results will be out on 30 December. The polls are witnessing a direct fight between the BJP-JP combine and the Congress. PTI

Abhishek Banerjee slams BJP Central leaders & Suvendu

SOMA MOOKHERJEE
DIAMOND HARBOUR,
27 DECEMBER



Trinamul Youth Congress president and MP Diamond Harbour Abhishek Banerjee today slammed the BJP's Central leaders and Suvendu Adhikari who recently defected from the Trinamul Congress and joined BJP for calling him an extortions.

In Diamond Harbour, while addressing party supporters and workers, Mr Banerjee said, "I challenge the BJP leadership to prove extortions cases against me. I challenge you, if you can prove the cases against me you don't have to send CBI, Enforcement Directorate and Income Tax but hang me publicly."

Without naming Suvendu Adhikari, Mr Banerjee said: "There is video footage showing you (read Mr Adhikari) taking hard cash wrapped in paper in the Narada sting operation and you are also named in Sharada scam and after joining BJP you are calling me extortions."

The MP said some scammed leaders who are afraid of going to jail have shifted sides after enjoying the position of cabinet minister of three departments and holding a host of other posts.

He said: "In some public meeting, the recent defector accused me of cowsmuggling and coal smuggling. I ask you who controls the border? It's BSF and it's under Amit Shah, the Union home minister. Similarly, Eastern Coal Fields are under CISF which is again under Mr Shah."

"So if BSF and CISF work at my behest then Mr Shah should resign from the post of Union home minister," Mr Banerjee said.

He dared Mr Adhikari to

TENDER

GOVERNMENT OF JAMMU AND KASHMIR
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER, JPCL ELECT. DIVISION DODA
Email : xendoda@gmail.com, Tel / Fax : 01996-233238

Ith Extension Notice
e-NIT No. 28 of 2020-21 dt. 04.12.2020

Subject : Improvement of LT Network at village Ghosti-I, II and III in Bheela Chirala Section, Hami Pura and Hanchi village in Ghat Shiva Section, by way of replacement of Rotten Wooden Poles by ST Poles and replacement of worn out/Stranded Conductor/GI Wire/Barbed Wire with ACSR Weasel Conductor under Replacement of Rotten Wooden Poles & conductor scheme.

Due to poor response, the last date for submission of e-bids, against e-NIT no. 28 of 2020-21 dt. 04.12.2020 is extended up to 30.12.2020 up to 4.00 PM.

Accordingly, Techno-Commercial bids shall be opened on 01.01.2021 at 2.00 PM.

The other Terms and Conditions of the e-NIT shall remain same.

Sd/- Executive Engineer,
JPCL, Elect. Division, Doda.

No. DIP/J-3321-P20
Dated : 26-12-2020

Hyderabad set to emerge as global hub for vaccine in '21

Besides vaccine makers, the Int'l Airport has also stepped up the cold-chain infrastructure for vaccine transportation

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
HYDERABAD, 27 DECEMBER

As the world is set to brace for a new year amid the Covid pandemic, the city is poised to emerge as a 'saviour' from the killer virus, with as many as five vaccine manufacturing firms based here racing to bring out an antidote.

The vaccine development process by Bharat Biotech, Biological E Ltd and Aurobindo Pharma are currently in various stages, while Dr Reddy's and Hetero have tie-ups for manufacturing the vaccine.

Some of these companies have also drawn up plans to scale up their vaccine manufacturing capacities.

Besides vaccine makers, the International Airport here has also stepped up the cold-chain infrastructure for vaccine transportation.

GMR Hyderabad Air Cargo (GHAC) is in talks with various stakeholders towards meeting specific requirements of export and import of Covid vaccines.

A recent visit of over 60 envoys to vaccine manufacturing facilities of Bharat Biotech and BE establishes the fact that the city will be in the forefront in making and supplying vaccines for Covid which is rocking the world with over 77 million cases and nearly two million deaths as



of now. Udaya Bhaskar, director general of Pharmexcil, a pharma exports promotion body under the department of commerce, said as there is no policy in place with regard to vaccine exports to other countries, it can be assumed that the centre may ensure that domestic requirement is fulfilled before allowing vaccine makers to export.

All these vaccine makers, except Bharat Biotech, are having development or manufacturing tie-ups with foreign companies. We do not know the agreement details as to what quantity will be exported from India. However, the Indian Government has the final say in this regard," Bhaskar said.

Telangana Director of Public Health G Srinivas Rao said though the companies are located here, the state will not

out with a vaccine that would be intranasal.

Biological ELtd has entered into an agreement with Janssen Pharmaceutical NV, part of pharma major Johnson & Johnson for creation and enhancement of production capabilities to manufacture the latter's COVID-19 vaccine candidate, currently in Phase 1/2 of clinical trials.

International Finance Corporation, a member of the World Bank Group, recently announced loan of up to USD 30 million (around Rs 220 crore) to BE to support its expansion of low-priced, generic vaccines for routine immunisation of children and boost capacity to manufacture any future COVID-19 vaccine.

Aurobindo Pharma expects to commercialise its vaccine manufacturing facility in Hyderabad by April-May next year and is investing around Rs 275 crore on the facility, which would be utilised to produce vaccines for the treatment of various viral diseases, including COVID-19.

A top official of CSIR-Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology had earlier said three CSIR labs CCMB-Hyderabad, Institute of Medical Technology, Chandigarh and Indian Institute of Chemical Biology, Kolkata, are developing vaccine candidates using dif-

ferent technology platforms.

Aurobindo will undertake clinical development and commercialization of the vaccines.

The company has also entered into an exclusive license agreement with Covaxx, a US-based company, to develop, commercialise and manufacture UB-612, the first Multitope Peptide-based vaccine to fight COVID-19, for India and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) agency.

Dr Reddy's Laboratories Ltd and Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) have already said they commenced adaptive phase 2/3 clinical trials for Sputnik V vaccine in India after receiving the necessary clearance from the Central Drugs Laboratory, Kasauli in Himachal. In September 2020, Dr Reddy's and RDIF entered into a partnership to conduct clinical trials of Sputnik V vaccine and rights for distribution of the first 100 million doses in India.

Pharma major Hetero also has a tie-up with RDIF to manufacture over 100 million doses of Sputnik V per annum. The city-based firms also played a crucial role in providing bulk drugs and formulations for some of the prescribed medicines for Covid like Remdesivir and Favipiravir.

T'gana to withdraw its farming policy

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
HYDERABAD, 27 DECEMBER

declared that all farmers in the state would be given financial assistance under its input subsidy scheme from tomorrow till January next year. A total of Rs 7515 crore will be given as financial assistance to be distributed among 61.49 lakh farmers at the rate of Rs 5000 per acre, covering almost 1.52 crore acres of cultivated land. The subsidy will be deposited directly into the bank accounts of the farmers. Earlier the state government had declared that the input subsidy will be given only to those farmers following its directive about what crops to sow.

While discussing the heavy losses incurred by the government officials pointed out the crops which were bought by the state included paddy, sorghum, maize, red gram, Bengal gram and sunflower. Though the state government had purchased these agriculture produce by paying MSP it had to sell them at lower prices since there was no demand for these crops. "The decision to give up the

Regulatory Farming policy which was launched prior to the monsoon this year might be prompted by the fiasco created after Food Corporation of India refused to allow the state government to pay even a single rupee over and above RS 1888 per quintal for the super fine variety of paddy.

According to a communiqué from the chief minister's office it was opined:

"Henceforth it is better if the state government stops advising the farmers on what crops they should cultivate and where. The government should stop issuing guidelines on the crops to be cultivated. There is no need for Regulatory Farming Policy. Farmers should decide themselves what crops they should cultivate."

During the meeting Rao

K'taka HM to look into B'luru safe city project

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
BENGALURU,
27 DECEMBER

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will flag off the country's first ever fully-automated driverless train service on the Magenta Line of the Delhi Metro on Monday that will herald a new era of enhanced mobility driven by cutting-edge technology.

With the commencement of these new-generation trains, the DMRC will enter the elite league of "seven per cent of world's Metro networks" which can operate services without drivers, the Delhi Metro said on Sunday.

After starting driverless services on the 37-km Magenta Line (Janakpuri West-Botanical Garden), another major corridor of the Delhi Metro, 57-km Pink Line (Magis ParkShiv Vihar) will also have driverless operations by mid-2021, the DMRC said in a statement.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi is going to inaugurate India's first ever driverless train operations on the Delhi Metro's Magenta Line (Jana- k puri West Botanical Garden) as well as the fully operational National Common Mobility Card services on the Airport Express Line via video conferencing tomorrow, scheduled at 11 am," it said.

will take a call on what directions and orders to be issued."

The minister was reacting to a query on the two officers crossing swords on the issue in public. Additional Commissioner of Police Hemant Nimbalkar, who is Chairman of Nirbhaya Tender Inviting Committee and tender scrutiny Committee, has alleged that someone had impersonated Home Secretary D Roopa and tried to gain access to classified information, which according to him tantamount to 'illegal interference.'

Addressing reporters here, Bommai said, "I have already spoken to the Chief Secretary T M Vijay Bhaskar and Director General of Police Praveen Sood to take note of it. They

Modi ended era of insurgency to bring flood of development in NE: Amit Shah

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
IMPHAL, 27 DECEMBER

Earlier, Manipur was known for insurgency, bandhs, and road blockades, but now most militant organisations have joined the mainstream and those left would also do so following efforts of the BJP government, he said. He attacked Congress for failing to solve the problems of Manipur when they were in power and asserted that since last three years under Chief Minister N. Biren Singh the state is moving ahead on the path of growth.

The BJP government under Modi has given a new identity to the region which is now experiencing a new thrust in development. Shah said at the inauguration and foundation laying programme of several projects at Hapta Kangjeibung here.

only paid lip service to economic prosperity of the area.

"During Congress long rule in the region they laid foundation stones of projects which the BJP government completed in the last six years under Narendra Modi," the home minister said. "Earlier Congress government used to give Rs 89,168 crore budget to North East but BJP enhanced it to Rs 3,17,375 crore now," Shah said.

The Inner Line Permit (ILP) has been the biggest gift by the Prime Minister to the people of Manipur which they got even without asking for it, the home minister said.

Rajinikanth discharged after health improves

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
HYDERABAD, 27 DECEMBER

Superstar Rajinikanth was on Sunday discharged from a hospital here, where he was treated for blood pressure fluctuation, after his condition improved, authorities said.

"His blood pressure has been stabilised and he is feeling much better."

In view of his improved medical condition, he has been discharged from the hospital today," a bulletin from Apollo Hospitals said.

The 70-year-old actor was admitted to the hospital here on December 25 with severe hypertension and exhaustion, it said.

He was kept under close medical supervision and treated by a team of doctors.

In addition to medications and diet, Rajinikanth has been advised complete bed rest for one week with regular monitoring of blood pressure, minimal physical activity and to avoid stress in view of his post-transplant status, labile hypertension and age.

The 'Kabaali' star has also been counselled to avoid any activity that increases the risk of contracting Covid.

Rajinikanth is in the Telangana capital since December 13 to shoot for his next Tamil film, 'Annaathe,' a Sun Pictures production.

He isolated himself after four of the crew members tested positive days ago.

The superstar, however, tested negative. The actor is set to launch his own political party next month ahead of the 2021 Tamil Nadu Assembly elections.

IMD forecasts cold wave & dense fog later this week

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 27 DECEMBER

Several places in north India, including Uttar Pradesh and Punjab, recorded their minimum temperature below the five-degree Celsius mark on Sunday, with the India Meteorological Department forecasting severe cold wave in parts of the region later this week and warning of dense fog.

Though the mercury rose slightly in Delhi due to a Western Disturbance, the department said the relief will be short-lived as cold and dry northerly and northwesterly winds from the western Himalayas are likely to bring the minimum temperature in north India down by three to five degrees Celsius.

"Cold wave to severe cold wave conditions are likely in isolated pockets over Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and north Rajasthan from December 28-29. Ground frost and dense fog is likely in isolated pockets in the region," the

India Meteorological Department (IMD) said.

Gurdaspur in Punjab and Churkin Uttar Pradesh recorded lows of 2 degrees Celsius and 2.6 degrees Celsius respectively, while cold wave intensified in Kashmir with minimum temperatures dropping across the region to stay several notches below the freezing point.

Gulmarg in north Kashmir recorded a low of minus 7.2 degrees Celsius, according to the meteorological (MeT)

department in Srinagar. "Fairly widespread towidespread rainfall/snowfall is very likely over Jammu, Kashmir, Ladakh; scattered rainfall/snowfall over Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and isolated rain/thunderstorms over northern parts of Punjab, Haryana and Chandigarh on 27th-28th December," the IMD said in its all-India weather bulletin.

The minimum temperature in Delhi rose slightly under the influence of the Western Dis-

turbance (WD) affecting the upper Himalayas, according to the IMD. However, Kuldeep Srivastava, the head of the regional forecasting centre of the IMD, said the relief will be short-lived.

The WD will lead to "scattered to fairly widespread" snowfall in Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

For the plains, the IMD declares a cold wave when the minimum temperature is 10

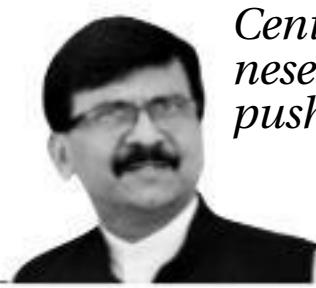


degrees Celsius or below and is 4.5 notches less than normal.

While Gurdaspur was the coldest place in Punjab, Narnaul was the coldest at 3.3 degrees Celsius in Haryana, the MeT department in Chandigarh said. In Punjab, Amritsar, Ludhiana and Patiala recorded respective minimums of 4.8 degrees Celsius, 4.2 degrees Celsius and 3.9 degrees Celsius.

Kashmir is currently under the grip of 'Chillai-Kalan', the 40-day harsh winter period when a cold wave grips the region and the temperature drops considerably leading to the freezing of water bodies, including the famous Dal Lake, as well as the water supply lines in several parts of the valley. In Uttar Pradesh, cold wave conditions prevailed at isolated places, the MeT department in Lucknow said. Mount Abu, the only hill station of Rajasthan, was recorded the coldest place in the state at 2 degrees Celsius even as several places saw an increase of two-three notches in night temperatures.

Rajinikanth is in the Telangana capital since December 13 to shoot for his next Tamil film, 'Annaathe,' a Sun Pictures production. He isolated himself after four of the crew members tested positive days ago. The superstar, however, tested negative. The actor is set to launch his own political party next month ahead of the 2021 Tamil Nadu Assembly elections.



Centre unable to push back Chinese soldiers, but pushed back Chinese investments.. Instead of shutting investments, we should have pushed back Chinese soldiers from Ladakh

SHIV SENA MP SANJAY RAUT

WRITES IN HIS WEEKLY COLUMN IN THE SENA MOUTHPIECE SAAMANA.

The Statesman

05

NEW DELHI, MONDAY 28 DECEMBER 2020

THUMBNAILS



Preparations for upcoming R-Day celebration at Vijay Chowk, in the Capital on Sunday.

SNS

Four eclipses in 2021: There will be four eclipses in 2021, including one total solar eclipse and one total lunar eclipse, but only two will be visible from India. Ujjain-based Jiwaji Observatory's Superintendent Dr Rajendraprakash Gupta said on Sunday. It will be seen in parts of Bengal, Odisha and in the north-eastern states, except Sikkim.

PTI

Dance historian Kothari dies of cardiac arrest

NEW DELHI, 27 DECEMBER

Padma Shri dance historian and critic Sunil Kothari passed away Sunday morning at a Delhi hospital after he suffered a cardiac arrest a month after testing positive for coronavirus. He was 87. "He had tested positive for Covid almost a month back and was not in a good condition," Vidha Lal, a family friend and herself a dancer, said. Kothari was recovering at home in Asian Games Village but was rushed to a hospital after suffering a cardiac arrest this morning, she added. Born on 20 December, 1933 in Mumbai, Kothari qualified as a Chartered Accountant before turning to the study of Indian dance forms. He authored more than 20 books on the subject of Indian dance forms including "Sattriya Dances of Assam", "New Directions in Indian Dance", and also on Bharatanatyam, Odissi, Chhau, Kathak, Kuchipudi, and Photo Biographies of Uday Shankar and Rukmini Devi Arundale. Dancer and long-time associate Anita Ratnam remembered the late critic for his "infectious enthusiasm". Kothari had first met her at a dance recital in 1970 in Chennai when she was just a teenager. "After the performance, he rushed backstage and looked at me and said 'apsara! apsara! (fairly) in his normal诙谐istic voice. He was not somebody who would just come for the dance, he would even come for the rehearsals, he would talk to everybody present, he wanted to know the whole process. He was part of a very important dance movement," Ratnam said.

PTI

TEMPORARY CANCELLATION AND DIVERSION OF TRAINS

In order to upgrade the infrastructure Delhi Division of Northern Railway will undertake the Non-interlocking work in connection with commissioning of Platform No. 8 at Hazrat Nizamuddin Railway station. To execute this work Delhi Division will take suitable traffic blocks of different durations from 28.12.2020 to 31.12.2020. During this period following trains will be cancelled and diverted on the dates shown against each:-

CANCELLATION OF TRAINS

Train No. & Name	Date of cancellation (from the Originating Station)
01841 Khajuraho-Kurukshetra Express	28.12.2020
01842 Kurukshetra-Khajuraho Express	28.12.2020 & 29.12.2020
02059/02060 Kota Jn.- Hazrat Nizamuddin-Kota Jn. Jan Shatabdi	28.12.2020 to 31.12.2020
02127 Jabalpur-Hazrat Nizamuddin M P Sampark Kranti	30.12.2020
02128 Hazrat Nizamuddin-Jabalpur M P Sampark Kranti	31.12.2020
02173 Hazrat Nizamuddin-Jabalpur Shridham Superfast Express	30.12.2020 & 31.12.2020
02174 Jabalpur-Hazrat Nizamuddin Shridham Superfast Express	29.12.2020 & 30.12.2020
02263 Pune Jn.-Hazrat Nizamuddin Duranto Express Special	29.12.2020
02264 Hazrat Nizamuddin-Pune Jn. Duranto Express Special	28.12.2020
02413 Madgaon-Hazrat Nizamuddin Rajdhani Special	28.12.2020
02917 Ahmedabad Jn.-Hazrat Nizamuddin Special	28.12.2020 & 30.12.2020
02918 Hazrat Nizamuddin-Ahmedabad Jn. Special	29.12.2020 & 31.12.2020
02963 Hazrat Nizamuddin-Udaipur Superfast Special	28.12.2020 to 31.12.2020
02964 Udaipur-Hazrat Nizamuddin Superfast Special	28.12.2020 to 30.12.2020

DIVERSION OF TRAIN

Train No. & Name	Diverted Route	Date (from the Originating Station)
00762 Hazrat Nizamuddin-Renigunta Jn.	Via New Delhi- Delhi Jn.-Ghaziabad-Mitawali-Agra Cantt. Instead of Hazrat Nizamuddin-Palwal	31.12.2020

Note: All norms of the State and Central Government regarding COVID-19 including Social distancing, sanitization etc., may be followed in the trains and at the Railway stations.

All other precautions associated with COVID-19 should also be ensured.

For any kind of information such as Time-Table/Diversion of trains, the passengers are requested to contact Railway Enquiry No. 139 or visit Indian Railways website <https://enquiry.indianrail.gov.in> or may refer to NTES App please.

Security Helpline No. 182 | Integrated Helpline No. 139

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Public Relations

"SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE"

Centre unable to push back Chinese soldiers, but pushed back Chinese investments.. Instead of shutting investments, we should have pushed back Chinese soldiers from Ladakh

SHIV SENA MP SANJAY RAUT

WRITES IN HIS WEEKLY COLUMN IN THE SENA MOUTHPIECE SAAMANA.

Modi bats for 'Made in India' products

In Mann ki Baat, PM called upon industrialists & manufacturers to develop world class products as part of the campaign for a self-reliant India

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 27 DECEMBER

In his monthly Mann ki Baat radio broadcast, the last one to take place in 2020, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday called upon industrialists and manufacturers to develop world class products as part of the campaign for a self-reliant India - 'Atmanirbhar Bharat'.

'At a time when people have taken resolute steps amid a nationwide 'vocal for local' mantra, I exhort our manufacturers and industry captains to ensure that India's products are of world class,' Modi said in course of his broadcast.

The Prime Minister said it was high time world class products were developed indigenously. Earlier, beginning his remarks, Modi said during the Covid 19 pandemic India developed capabilities

that helped the cause of a self-reliant India. He said as the world grappled with the aftermath of the pandemic, India learnt its lessons from the crisis.

'On account of the Covid-19 pandemic the supply chain was disrupted globally. But we learnt new lessons from each crisis. The country also developed new capabilities during the period. We can term this capability 'Atmanirbhar' or self-reliance,' PM Modi further pointed out.

Narendra Modi was all praise for the efforts of wildlife conservationists that saw not only an increase in population of tigers and lions but also the forest cover. He said apart from the government's efforts, people involved in conservation had also contributed to the conservation of forest and wildlife in the country.

India has seen a rise in the population of lions, tigers as well as significant increase



in forest cover. Main reason is that not only the government but several other people, civil societies and other organisations are contributing towards forest and wildlife conservation,' Modi said.

Modi also referred to the voluntary initiatives people in making India clean. 'We should take a vow that we will not litter. This is the first resolve of Swach Bharat Abhiyan. I want to remind you of one more thing that could not be discussed because of Coronavirus. We have to definitely rid the country of single use plastic

'We should take a vow to never indulge in littering. This is the first resolve of Swach Bharat Abhiyan. I want to remind you of one more thing that could not be discussed much because of the Corona.

We have to definitely rid the nation of single-use plastic,' Modi said. The Prime minister speaking about the supreme sacrifice of Sikh guru Guru Gobind Singh and his family said their martyrdom imparted a new lesson to the country and humanity. 'This martyrdom did a great work of protecting our civilization. We are indebted to this martyrdom,' the Prime minister further added. In his last 'Mann Ki Baat' radio broadcast of the year, he said people have supported the 'vocal for local' campaign started by his government as part of its 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' programme and asked manufacturers and industry leaders to ensure that world-class products are made in the country.

'Indeed, this is a big transformation in mindset. A huge change has begun in the minds of our countrymen, that too within a year,' he said.

The outgoing year saw the spirit of 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' echo in society, he said.

The call of 'vocal for local'

is reverberating in each and every household in such a

scenario, it is time to ensure that our products meet global standards,' he said, sharing feedback from people about the campaign.

"Let us find out their substitutes made in India and decide that henceforth we shall use products made with the hard work and sweat of the people of India. You make New Year resolutions every year. This time one has to certainly make a resolution for the country," the prime minister said. He said many shopkeepers have been selling products like toys with the emphasis that they are made in India and customers are also demanding them.

"Indeed, this is a big transformation in mindset. A huge change has begun in the minds of our countrymen, that too within a year," he said.

In this context, he also made mention of Kashmiri saffron and said that his government is working to make

it a "globally popular brand". The GI tag has given it a unique identity, he said.

Noting that the issue of single-use plastic could not be discussed much due to the COVID-19 pandemic this year, he asserted that ridding the country of single-use plastic is one of the resolves for the new year.

Speaking of the feedback he received for his 'Mann ki Baat' broadcast on multiple platforms, he said the common factor has been that people have commended the country's capabilities and the collective strength of the countrymen during the pandemic. A novel experiment like 'Janta curfew' became an 'inspiration' for the whole world, he said.

Millions of people across the country had stayed home on March 22 on the prime minister's appeal for a 'Janta curfew' to check the spread of coronavirus.

Capt, SAD attack BJP for calling farmers urban Naxals'



farmers to not damage telecom infrastructure seems to have failed to deter new attacks, with more than 176 signal transmitting sites being vandalised in the last 24 hours, sources said on Sunday.

If the BJP cannot distinguish between anguished citizens fighting for their survival and terrorists, militants and hooligans, it should give up all pretence of being a people's party, the chief minister said in a statement here. A party which treats citizens exercising their democratic right of protest as Naxals and terrorists has lost all right to rule over those citizens, he added.

The Shiromani Akali Dal too condemned the BJP for allegedly terming Punjab farmers as urban Naxals.

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

Meanwhile, Amarinder Singh's appeal to protesting

farmers to not damage telecom infrastructure seems to have failed to deter new attacks, with more than 176 signal transmitting sites being vandalised in the last 24 hours, sources said on Sunday.

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

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

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

The chief minister's appeal came in the wake of a request from the Tower and Infrastructure Providers Association, asking the state government to persuade the farmers to not resort to any unlawful activity in their fight for justice.

IAS officer-turned politician RCP Singh becomes new JD-U president

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
PATNA, 27 DECEMBER

Bureaucrat-turned politician Ram Chandra Prasad Singh, better known by his initials RCP, owes his rise to become the president of the Janata Dal (United) to Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar.

Singh, a close confidant of Kumar, was on Sunday chosen as the new president of the JD(U).

At the party's national executive meeting, Kumar proposed the name of Singh for the top post and it was then approved by other members.

The chief minister, who was re-elected as the JD(U) presi-

dent in 2010. Kumar soon made him a member of the Rajya Sabha and he continues to be part of the Upper House of Parliament.

The man who prefers to keep a low profile was so far the general secretary (organisation) of the regional party. The 1984 batch IAS officer of Uttar Pradesh cadre has been with Kumar since his stint as the Railways minister in the government led by late Atal Bihari Vajpeyi.

When Kumar returned to the Bihar politics becoming chief minister in November 2005, Singh too came to his native state and became Principal Secretary to the CM. Months before retirement from service, he quit the job and joined politics

in 2010. Kumar soon made him a member of the Rajya Sabha and he continues to be part of the Upper House of Parliament.

The saffron party kept its promise of making Kumar a chief minister irrespective of numbers scored by the partner parties, but Kumar lost the sheen which he enjoyed in the ruling coalition since the Vajpeyi-Advani era.

The exodus of six of the seven JD MLAs in Arunachal Pradesh to the BJP and the upcoming polls in neighbouring West Bengal are immediate challenges for the new JD(U) president.

only 43 seats in the Bihar polls, down from 71 in the last elections held in 2015. The BJP, on the other hand, bagged 74 seats to help the NDA retain power in the state. The saffron party kept its promise of making Kumar a chief minister irrespective of numbers scored by the partner parties, but Kumar lost the sheen which he enjoyed in the ruling coalition since the Vajpeyi-Advani era.

The exodus of six of the seven JD MLAs in Arunachal Pradesh to the BJP and the upcoming polls in neighbouring West Bengal are immediate challenges for the new JD(U) president.

With the arrest of these terrorists, the security forces have unearthed a nexus involving local terrorists which were involved in ferrying war-like stores and narcotics. Search operation is still on to recover more arms or explosive material from their hideouts.

village - from their vehicle near Basooni in Mendhat sector at around 8 pm on Saturday. He said their interrogation was conducted at the 49 Rashtriya Rifles Battalion headquarters, Basooni, and it was found that Mustafa had received a call from a Pakistani number and a few posters of hitherto unknown J&K Ghaznavi Force were recovered." He said the arrested persons were in regular contact with their handlers in Pakistan who were instructing them to carry out terror strikes. Terming the arrest of the trio as a "major success" for the security forces, Angral said a terrorist plot to incite communal violence has been averted with their arrest. "If they had succeeded in their designs, we would have faced a lot of problems because they were intending to harm the brotherhood and communal harmony in the district," Angral said.

The officer told reporters in Poonch that the ploy was revealed after Special Operations Group (SOG) of the local police along with troops of the 49 Rashtriya Rifles detained two brothers - Mustafa Iqbal Khan and Murtaza Iqbal of Galhuta

in custody and

Rise to the top

Conspiracy theorists will see in a report of a British think tank ~ that says China will emerge as the world's largest economy five years earlier than predicted because of its rapid recovery from the coronavirus epidemic ~ confirmation of their fears that the manner in which Beijing reported the outbreak and then persuaded the World Health Organisation to accept its initial prescriptions was aimed at global economic domination. In its annual report for 2020, the Centre for Economics and Business Research has concluded: "The Covid-19 pandemic and corresponding economic fallout have tipped this rivalry (between the United States and China for the top spot) in China's favour." This year's report, released on Boxing Day, says China's "skilful management of the pandemic" and the arrest of economic growth in the West, especially the US, had tipped the scales. The contrast with the same think-tank's report last year is startling. In 2019, CEBR had said the US made up nearly a quarter of the world's GDP, its largest share of the world economy since 2007. Noting that China's growth would slow, the think-tank had last year seen China's rise to the top slot delayed by three years to 2033. Thanks to the pandemic, not only has that trend been reversed, CEBR now believes China could be on top of the world as early as 2028. Certainly, the last two quarters of 2020 have seen China grow amid global gloom and its virus management techniques have seen its total case-load remain in the 80-thousands for successive months now. Amazingly, China which for several weeks in the first half of 2020 occupied the top spot in terms of virus load, has now dropped to the 80th position. It now reports fewer cases overall than Armenia, Bolivia, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman and Myanmar. Indeed, if a comparison is to be made with the country whose top spot it aims to take, China has recorded fewer cases of the virus in the past year than the United States has in a single day this week. These are startling facts and suggest a degree of calibration in Beijing's response to the virus that those searching for a conspiracy will find sinister.

China had refused to allow an international investigation into the virus for weeks, before finally agreeing to one by the WHO. Thereafter it dragged its feet for months while deciding the terms of engagement of the WHO investigation. It quibbled on the composition of the team, and the degree of access it would allow, and it was only last month that WHO was able to announce that a group of scientists would visit Wuhan in January 2021, a full year after the outbreak. Many believe that if there is a trail to follow, it would by now have turned cold and fear of China's intransigence has already made some members of the team declare it is not their intention to identify the guilty.

Conflict in Kerala

Kerala Governor Arif Mohammad Khan has once again turned down the State Cabinet's request to convene an emergency session of the Assembly on 31 December to discuss the ongoing farmers' agitation and the three controversial farm laws passed recently by the Union government and proved his loyalty to the BJP which rehabilitated him politically. He had turned down a similar request on 21 December as he felt the Assembly lacked the jurisdiction to offer a solution to farmers' problems. He also maintained the Assembly had no mandate to evaluate the constitutional validity of legislation passed by Parliament. In a letter to Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, the Governor said that when he had given his assent to convene the budget session of the Assembly on 8 January, he did not see any reason to convene an emergency session earlier. The stand of the Governor has brought the ruling CPI(M)-led Left Democratic Front and the Opposition Congress-led United Democratic Front on the same page for the first time. These parties believe Khan's position runs against the grain of parliamentary norms and practices. The lone MLA to back the Governor was the sole BJP member. The Constitution does not authorise the Governor to dictate the topics an Assembly can discuss. It is constituted by elected representatives of the people whereas the Governor is selected by the ruling party at the Centre.

Chief Minister Vijayan fears the ongoing farmers' agitation could adversely affect food security of Kerala, a predominantly consumer State. Leader of the Opposition, Ramesh Chennithala of the Congress, called the decision of the Governor "undemocratic." On being denied permission to convene the Assembly for a second time, the Chief Minister and his Cabinet colleagues gathered in front of the Assembly and expressed solidarity with agitating farmers in North India, the biggest uprising the country has seen in recent times. Vijayan said the farmers' demands are the nation's demands. The Modi government, which divides and destroys popular protests, had failed in its attempts to divide the farmers' movement, he said. Political parties barring the BJP want the State government to bring forward legislation to nullify the effects of the three controversial Central laws in the coming budget session beginning on 8 January.

According to T Asaf Ali, former director-general of prosecution, Kerala, the Governor's decision to deny permission for a special session of the Assembly, as recommended by the Cabinet, is unconstitutional, but Vijayan does not want a confrontation. He deputed Law Minister AK Balan and Agriculture Minister VS Sunil to Raj Bhavan with cakes and ale to explain the constitutional position to Governor Khan. Raj Bhavan sources pointed out that the Governor had not objected to summoning the Assembly, but only sought clarification on the exigency that prompted the calling of an emergency session. Meanwhile, time is running out.

Himalayan Coup

As the hub of global vaccine production, India can provide invaluable aid that could mitigate the memories of the condescending, parsimonious and fleeting aid provided to Nepal after the debilitating earthquake of 2015



Neal's rudimentary experience with its new and controversially conceived constitution (adopted in 2015) has again shown its inadequacies that make it vulnerable to political exploitation. It will take both time and imagined scenarios to make this constitution a comprehensive lodestar for governance in the Himalayan nation.

The fact that the current ruling composition, Nepal Communist Party, is a disharmonised, tentative and suspicious unification of the two principal leftist parties i.e., Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) and Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) – makes it susceptible to internal intrigues, conspiracies and combustive tendencies. The current Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli (from Communist Party of Nepal – UML) was the first to be inducted under this Constitution in 2015, and his first premiership had ended with the withdrawal of support from the rival Communist party i.e. 'Prachanda' Pushpa Kamal Dahal's Communist Party of Nepal (MC), which ironically is again at the centre of the current storm, as the tentative and restive partner in Oli's second term as Prime Minister.

However, this so-called 'unified' Communist formulation was always beset with irreconcilable tugs-of-war between the two rival factions, wherein, the arrangement of Chairmanship of the newly 'unified' party was given to 'Prachanda' and the Prime Ministership to KP Sharma Oli. But as the days passed, Oli became increasingly assertive and started taking unilateral decisions, to the perceived obliviousness and disconcertment of the 'Prachanda' faction.

A collateral development of the ongoing fissures within the ruling dispensation was the injection of toxic and competitive nationalism (read, 'anti-

India's sentiment) that sought to polarise popular opinions, and willy-nilly paint the rival 'Prachanda' faction as 'pro-India', and conversely, Oli as the uber-nationalist.

One key constitutional appointment that played an integral and biased role in the continuing drama was the office of the President, Bidya Devi Bhandari. The constitutional role of the President in Nepal is not even that of a nominal chief executive, as Section 75 of the Constitution explicitly states, 'The executive power of Nepal shall, pursuant to this Constitution and law, be vested in the Council of Ministers', thereby reposing extraordinary powers in the office of Prime Minister.

Yet Bidya Devi Bhandari, who is a former member of Oli's Communist Party of Nepal (UML) faction and his loyalist, has played a crucial role to legitimise Oli's decisions and to give them the veneer of constitutional correctness. Recently, she facilitated the 'constitutional coup' by accepting Oli's calculated recommendation to dismiss the House of Representatives and have fresh elections, in a bid to checkmate the 'Prachanda' faction from holding it ransom.

Legal experts are in a quandary as the Constitution is unclear, and therefore the matter will go to the Supreme Court – but for now, the President has played along with Oli's gambit. All eyes are now on the Chief Justice of Nepal, Cholendra SJB Rana (great grandson of Rana Prime Minister Bir Sumsher SJB Rana), who is known for his independent mind after nullifying many decisions of the govern-

ment and the parliament, earlier.

Irrespective of how the inevitable split in the Communist party plays out, the next few months will bear tremendous uncertainty and insecurity for a country that is already reeling under the Covid pandemic. As the earlier shadowboxing amongst competing politicos had led to the invocation of the convenient 'India' card, more of the same cannot be ruled out as each faction would want to postulate their own political muscularity and 'independence'.

Yet despite the Chinese Ambassador to Nepal's personal and frenetic backchannel efforts to keep the warring communist factions 'united', this recent crisis has exposed the limitation of ideology in the face of factional ambitions. Despite the initial brouhaha of China replacing India, which was ably supported by some shoddy diplomacy from Delhi, the popular honeymoon surrounding Beijing is also waning given China's expansionist moves in Nepal itself.

If Oli recognises the subtle shift in public mood over the last couple of months and has encouraged rapprochement and dialing down of his diatribe against India.

The political and societal situation is in a flux with contradictory passions spilling out on the streets. Some protests were reported from various parts of the country with a section of people demanding the restoration of Nepal's erstwhile monarchy and the 'Hindu State' status, signifying undercurrents of disillusionment with governance failures. However, there is no definitive trend in favour or against any

specific party, and it would be prudent for India to stay out of any perceived preference towards any specific, partisan option.

The so-called 'pro-India' Nepal Congress is seemingly leaderless with its own factionalism, and it would not shy away from assuming a stridently anti-India stand in order to appeal to the electorate, who still and essentially remain unsure and wary of the 'big brother attitude' of India.

There is one dominant strain of the unmistakable frustration with governance in recent times. KP Sharma Oli and his government are seen as the face of rampant corruption, profligacy and manipulation. While Oli has temporarily defined the forthcoming narrative in consonance with the President, he may find the ride ahead extremely rough and isolating. In many ways, this unforeseen political development along with the opportunity to support Nepal during the forthcoming Covid vaccination drive is a serendipitous opportunity for India to 'correct' its popular image. India must visibly demonstrate restraint and 'distance' from the developing political discourse, as any perceived preference would be rendered counterproductive, immediately.

Secondly, as the hub of global vaccine production, it could provide invaluable aid that could mitigate the memories of the condescending, parsimonious and fleeting aid provided to Nepal after the debilitating earthquake of 2015. Given the overall global and decreasingly warm local perception of the Chinese 'alternative option' to India – Delhi would be served best by standing by the Nepalese people, as opposed to any political party or faction. The Chinese would be ruing the implosion of Communist 'unity', but that is inevitable whenever the chimera of the Chinese 'alternative' gets exposed, be it in Hambantota (Sri Lanka) or now in Kathmandu.

A MEMBER OF THE **ANN**
ASIAN VOICES

Long-stay Thai visas proposed

Thai residency visas for foreigners who invest as little as three million baht (\$100,000) in property is among five proposals being considered by the Ministry of Finance. The proposals were put forward by Thai real estate associations in a bid to lift a property sector slumping under the impact of Covid-19. The Housing Business Association, Thai Real Estate Association and Thai Condominium Association (TCA) sent the proposals to minister Arkhom Termpittayapaisith on December 9, TCA deputy chairman Chirat Thampeera revealed on December 17.

Under current rules, foreigners must spend at least 10 million baht on property to be eligible for a residency visa. However, under the proposed three-tier visa system, foreign purchasers of condos worth three-to-five million baht would get a five-year visa. Buyers of five-to-10 million baht condos would get 10-year visas, and those who bought condos for more than 10 million baht would be granted permanent residency.

The other four proposals are targeted at Thai property buyers. The first is to cut ownership-transfer and mortgage fees to the lowest rate until December 31, 2021 to reduce the cost of buying both new homes and second-hand houses. The second is to relax government loan-to-value (LTV) mortgage enforcement to provide opportunities for people with purchasing power to invest in property. The real estate associations say home-loan providers already have strict LTV rules. The third is to extend the land-and-buildings tax cut for another two years until the end of 2022 to help relieve ownership burdens. The fourth is a cash-back campaign and credit

THE NATION
www.nationmultimedia.com
increase from 50,000 baht to 100,000 baht per person until the end of next year to encourage first-time buyers to make their purchases. Meanwhile, 30 real estate developers will offer foreign buyers five-year visas in exchange for investing at least 10 million baht in property, under the "Elite Flexible One" card scheme launched on January 1 next year. Thailand Privilege Card (TPC), which operates the scheme, said Raimon Land has already signed up three luxury condo projects, expecting sales of about 200 Elite cards.

At least 30 more real estate developers have expressed interest in joining, said TPC president Somchai Sungsawang after launching the scheme on December 21. The move is aimed at lifting a property sector slumping under the impact of Covid-19. "Most are large listed companies, with a lot of suggestions offered to increase customers and encourage more sales. The suggestions will be put to a [TPC] board meeting for further consideration," said Somchai. He said the purchasing power of foreigners is important to the tourism sector and related businesses in Thailand, which normally boasts the second-highest tourist volumes in Asia.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

editor@thestatesman.com

Farmers must be enabled

SIR, This is with reference to Devendra Saksena's article, 'Boon or Bane?' (*The Statesman*, 23 December 2020). In fact, woes of India's farmers seem to be a fallout of the Green Revolution. Participation in the capital-intensive Green Revolution did not mean the same thing to small and marginal farmers as it did to the bigger farmers. While the bigger farmers had enough surplus of their own to invest on the capital-intensive farming, for the small and marginal farmers it meant additional dependence on borrowing, generally from informal sources at exorbitant rates of interest. According to a 2013 survey, about 52 per cent of the agricultural households were caught in a debt cycle.

Policies of procurement and minimum support price (MSP) for agricultural commodities are adopted at the initial stage of the Green Revolution as market intervention by the Government for providing insurance to farmers against any sharp fall in open market prices. But awareness among farmers is pathetically poor.

As per a report of the High-Level Committee headed by Shanta Kumar, the former Himachal CM, MSP benefits only 6 per cent of farmers who are 'elite'. On the other hand, middlemen purchase food grains, mainly wheat, from small and marginal farmers of UP, Bihar and elsewhere at much lower prices than MSP and make a profit by selling the stock at MSP at pro-

curement centres. Small and marginal farmers that constitute around 86 per cent of all farmers of India are victimised by exploitative prices and the effects of other spatial and social disparities caused by the Green Revolution such as the change from traditional sustainable methods to monocropping and unsustainable practices, and loss of many small farmers' landholdings to large commercial farmers.

There is no dearth of reform proposals for ameliorating the woes of Indian farmers, but they are often hostage to vested interests. Nobel Laureate Muhammad Yunus once said: "Poor people are bonsai people. There is nothing wrong with their seeds. Our societies never gave them a base to grow on. All that is required to get

the poor people out of poverty is for us to create an enabling environment for them." Likewise, woes of our distressed farmers can be ameliorated by market-distorting MSP or subsidies. They need an enabling environment and scope to grow like tall trees.

Yours, etc. Jaydev Jana, Kolkata, 26 December.

EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE

SIR, This has reference to your editorial, 'Odisha's blueprint' (24 December). Being in power for a consecutive fifth term is illustrative of the popularity of the government headed by Naveen Patnaik. A state which was once known as poverty-stricken and backward can now boast of industry, improved agriculture, robust tourism and attractive educational institutions. All this has taken place under the stewardship of Mr. Patnaik. He can be credited with the growth in economy, poverty

alleviation and food security, women's empowerment, human development and national disaster management. Since 2012-13, Odisha's GDP has been growing at an average rate of 8.10 per cent, more than the national average. The state has had an average revenue surplus of 2.5 per cent in the last half decade. Special mention needs to be made regarding 33 per cent of tickets being given to women in the last Lok Sabha election in 2019. So far as human development is concerned, maternal and infant mortality rates have come down considerably with literacy having risen to 73.5 per cent in 2011 from 63.1 per cent in 2001. Dropouts in primary and upper primary levels have also reduced significantly.

Odisha is a cyclone-prone state. The super cyclone of 1999 devastated the state claiming 10,000 lives. But with Mr Patnaik at the helm, the state has earned the distinction of being the first to have its own disaster management authority called 'Odisha Disaster Rapid Action Force' and it has become a role model for other states. So far so good. But in matters like corruption, violence against women, unemployment and mining scams, there is still much to be desired particularly relating to crimes against women. But as is clear from the editorial, Mr. Patnaik would not allow corruption and other injustices to hinder development and has taken some harsh steps to eradicate corruption.

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Where is the guarantee that each and every student will purchase the tablet? Who can say that the transferred money will not be misused? Moreover, if manufacturers are unable to supply a large number of tablets to the government due to non-availability in the market, how will they be purchased by students? If the Chief Minister is so concerned about students, she could have taken the decision a long time ago. Why now when the election is knocking at the door?

Yours, etc., Mihir Kanungo, Burdwan, 24 December.

POLL SOP

SIR, This refers to your editorial 'Funds for tablets', published today. As the assembly election approaches, the predicament of chief minister Mamata Banerjee stands exposed. Her plan to offer tablets and laptops to Madhyamik and Higher Secondary candidates is nothing but a political sop to students before the election at the cost of public money.

Wastage of public money has become endemic. The CM has already wasted a huge amount from the state exchequer on donations to Imams, Purohits, Clubs and various Puja committees. Her decision to remit Rs 10,000 to each student's account directly for purchase of tablets is another such instance.

Where is the guarantee that each and every student will purchase the tablet? Who can say that the transferred money will not be misused? Moreover, if manufacturers are unable to supply a large number of tablets to the government due to non-availability in the market, how will they be purchased by students? If the Chief Minister is so concerned about students, she could have taken the decision a long time ago. Why now when the election is knocking at the door?

Yours, etc., Mihir Kanungo, Burdwan, 24 December.



One phase of Brexit ends, but others will come soon

ANDREW GLENROSS

To misquote Shakespeare, our Brexit negotiating revels now are ended. The tempestuous talks did not lead to a dramatic walkout, even if at times the UK government gave the impression this was a feud worthy of the Montagues against the Capulets. The negotiators ignored the background noise and succeeded in drafting a dense legal document on which the future of UK-EU relations now hangs.

The UK was adamant throughout the negotiations that it be treated as a sovereign equal of the EU and have its independence respected. This was particularly important when it came to fishing rights – one of the last issues to be resolved.

There were always two problems with this argument. Firstly, as explained by the Spanish foreign minister – a veteran trade negotiator – a trade agreement is designed to establish interdependence rather than being an exercise in asserting independence.

Secondly, the EU is simply a bigger beast economically speaking than the UK. This meant Brussels was confident it could weather the disruption of a no-deal separation better than the UK. By refusing to extend the transition period despite the pandemic, prime minister Boris Johnson ensured both parties faced the same time pressure. But they did not face the same level of risk if no agreement was reached. Hence the real ringmaster of the Brexit deal was Father Time, not Johnson or Angela Merkel, as UK newspapers often reported.

Nevertheless, it looks like the UK government will claim victory by arguing that it is now able to escape the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice while getting tariff and quota-free access for goods exported to the EU. In a statement immediately following the announcement of the deal, the UK government did just that:

"The deal ... guarantees that we are no longer in the lunar pull of the EU, we are not bound by EU rules, there is no role for the European Court of Justice and all of our key red



lines about returning sovereignty have been achieved. It means that we will have full political and economic independence on 1st January 2021."

The reality though – as with everything Brexit-related since 2016 – is far more complex.

Much less clear is the future of the UK's key export industry: financial services. Outside the single market, the City of London relies on the EU to grant permission to service EU-based clients and sell them banking, accounting, and associated legal products. This "equivalence" arrangement is reviewed on an ongoing basis, depending on the UK approach

to financial regulation and data protection. That puts the sector on a much less firm footing than, say, manufacturing.

The dance is over but now comes the hard sell. Credit claiming and blame avoidance will be the twin priorities for the UK government. Johnson is bound to play up the sovereignty angle by highlighting the ability to avoid the intrusion of EU law.

The blame game is where things are likely to get more interesting. This is because the deal requires a constant dialogue with the EU over things that can affect the terms of the

agreement, such as government subsidies. This is the position Switzerland constantly finds itself in. The Brexit deal requires both sides to submit to a general review after four years to make sure both sides are meeting the requirements. Hard eurosceptic Conservative back-benchers, who pushed for a no deal, may see this as a concession too far.

What can Boris Johnson do to overcome internal opposition? His parliamentary majority is sufficient to overcome anything short of a major revolt. But his strongest card might be to simply shift the blame to his predecessor, Theresa May, for trig-

gering Brexit without a plan.

Meanwhile, Scotland's first minister Nicola Sturgeon tweeted immediately after the deal was announced that "no deal that will ever make up for what Brexit takes away from us. It's time to chart our own future as an independent, European nation." So, while one episode in this long drama may be drawing to a close, it seems that others, relating to the very future of the UK, are far from over.

The writer is Senior Lecturer in Politics and International Relations, Aston University. This article was published on www.thecorner.com

IT CAME TO MIND | MANISH NANDY

To the Mountains

I bought a house decades ago in a small suburb at the edge of Washington. I am a city man and the only reason I bought a suburban home was that I worked in a business centre near it. I worked there briefly and soon returned to live and work in the city. Then, for a long stretch, I worked abroad in different countries, living in well-guarded houses that came with the work.

When I returned to Washington, I went back to live in the first house I had acquired. I did so without a clear plan, but I found a certain charm in living in an old home. Like an old comfortable pair of shoes, I was back after twenty years, and many things had changed in the community. Still, there were some familiar faces and known landmarks. I grew slowly accustomed to my home.

It is a modest home by local standards. By my standards, it was much more. It more than satisfied all my needs. With three floors and one occupant, it gives me enough space to spread all my worldly possessions. My possessions have actually grown because there is so much space and I would rather reduce those to trim the clutter in my life.

A female architect, Chloethiel Woodard Smith, built the house fifty years ago in a contemporary style, with simple straight lines and large windows. Because of its age, it lately needed a little more than a facelift. I resurfaced the hardwood floors, renovated the kitchen with granite counters and modern appliances, put in recessed lights and added some colour to its bland, beige look. Once I had refurbished the four bathrooms, I felt I had done enough.

A few years later, another change was forced on me. It made the biggest difference in my life. The living room had a balcony that had aged and needed to be replaced. I thought of a larger balcony, where two people could sit and talk. Then I realized that a large balcony does not cost much less than a full-size deck. So now I have a deck that gives me the strange sensation of being outdoor even when I have not stepped out.

It feels that way because it is quite a large deck. It spans the entire width of my home. It has thin, white, unobtrusive rails around that let you feel unbound when you are on the deck. Most of all, around the deck are large trees with their verdant foliage that give you the impression that you are in a garden. The solid elms, oaks and maples surround you and spur you to look around and walk around instead of just peering at your books.

I have to confess that I am often on the deck to do just that: peer at books. Reading is a pleasure for me, often enhanced by a cup of robust Colombian coffee or a glass of chilled mellow Chablis. My preferences are modest. If I make a special, venturesome cocktail, a martini with absinthe or ginger liqueur, I want to savour it under the sky while reading Ian McEwan or Haruki Murakami.

This is where the deck makes an unexpected difference. In between sips of wine or McEwan's elegant prose, I am tempted to look up or look around. To see the flecks of floating silver clouds or the massing blobs of dark clouds hinting at the torrential drama to come. To notice the sway-



Illustration: Debabrata Chakrabarty

ing branches that tell me the advent of a storm. Or simply to observe a lonely leaf, separated from its long-held anchor, undulating in the air before making a delicate landing at my feet.

My Judeo-Christian ethic of hard work, which applies even to reading, inclines me to read seriously, without distraction or a stop. The deck has begun to act as a seductive, pagan temptress. It tempts me to watch the pretty red cardinal winging across the deck confident that a rapt reader will do no more than admire its prettiness; the squirrels scampering up the tree and then scampering down with no purpose other than the apparent pleasure of scampering; a round overfed cat slowly passing under the deck and savoring its constitutional before

returning to a favorite sofa in its owner's home; the occasional whistling stroller striding through the woods behind my home; and, if I am lucky, a hungry deer emerging from the thickets to search for a morsel from somebody's garden. I am a city slicker and not an eager observer of nature at all. Yet the deck has made me aware of the spectacles hourly surfacing around me that I have been insensible so far to overlook.

Even work has started changing its meaning. When it is not a very warm day or raining hard enough to defy the large umbrella I keep on the deck, I bring my trusted Mac and work on the deck. The shade of the umbrella, the gentle breeze wafting the smell of the woods, the happy chirping of the sparrows with the

advent of dusk, all give a new meaning to my fitful labour. I can't prove it, but I think I write differently when I sit and write on the deck. Probably I think differently there.

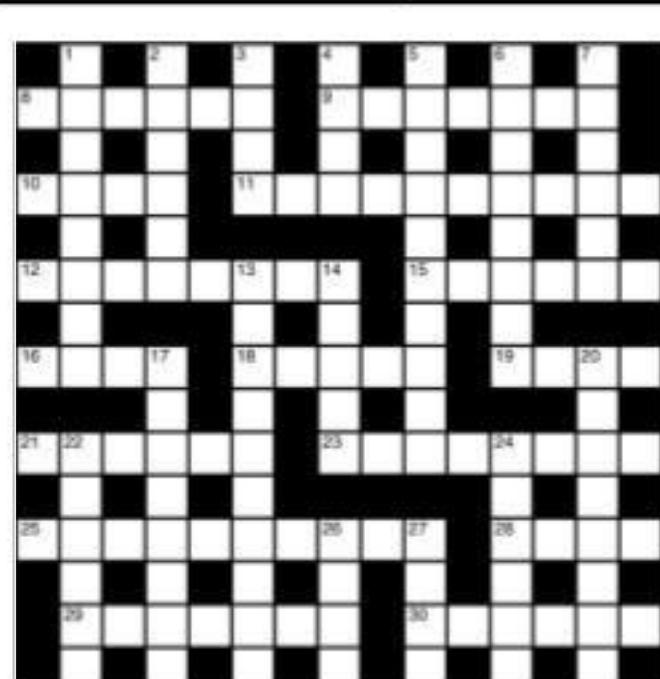
When I write, I sometimes refer to the different places I have been; it comes naturally as I have spent years in different lands. When people refer to my years of exile, I tend to minimize the experience, for instinctively feel that I have been living an ordinary life, like everybody else, in a slightly different place. The location seems unimportant to me. Yet I have come to see how my perspective changes when I move just a few feet from my living room to the deck just outside it. Realtors, in assessing the value of a home, often cite the three key things: location, location and, yet again, location. Heaven knows how critical location may be in the way we look at the world and our life in it. How different life would be if I were to look at it this moment from a wrecked home in Mosul in Iraq, Aleppo in Syria or Diyarbakir in Turkey, all famous historic cities that are now embattled and perilous. Perhaps there is value in changing locations as there inevitably is in changing perspectives.

Rabindranath bemoaned how we sometimes visit mountains and beaches but overlook the dewdrop on a blade of grass at our doorstep. Yes, we need to see the dewdrop, then pack our stuff and make a move to the mountains – or the beach.

The writer is a Washington-based international development advisor and had worked with the World Bank. He can be reached at mnandy@gmail.com

NO 28178

CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 8 UK citizen leaving centre of South Coast town (6)
- 9 Once a strange island by American continent (7)
- 10 It's State Dress? (4)
- 11 Bury extremes of naughtiness in learning situation (10)
- 12 Very small amounts of facial hair (8)
- 15 Sign by a road's contents: illiterate, perhaps (6)
- 16 Bare essentials needed for superhuman being (4)

DOWN

- 18 Belgium win – boring (5)
- 19 Eastern play about small island (4)
- 21 In essence first character goes back to the previous season (6)
- 23 Poster we knocked up to illustrate mathematical concept (5,3)
- 25 Rowdy gathering – accept danger's involved (4,6)
- 28 Mechanisms inputting computer electronics, primarily (4)
- 29 Legacies largely corrupt – sad (7)
- 30 Follow or adapt (6)
- 1 Almost destroy the right lung (8)
- 2 Raise second quote about hard philosophical investigations (6)
- 3 Opposition recruit Napoli's centre back (4)
- 4 Ideally miss the middle parts of Top Hat (2,1,1)
- 5 I wonder about including violent war film (4,6)
- 6 At home, a sight? Possibly (2,1,5)
- 7 A number in Germany supporting Mark, rejecting St Francis (6)
- 13 Even most boffins at first

DOWN

- rubbed climate representative (10)
- 14 Accidental piercing (5)
- 17 Parisian who wanders about gathers large hoard (8)
- 20 Balls bowled by doctor do too much (8)
- 22 A grade from this? (1,5)
- 24 Stay on – most important (6)
- 25 Avoid utter failure at the crease (4)
- 27 At first extreme weight held up fame (4)

NOTE: Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required. (By arrangement with The Independent, London)

100 YEARS AGO

OCCASIONAL NOTE

In opening the twelfth annual exhibition of the Indian Society of Oriental Art at Samavaya Mansions, Lord Ronaldshay was able to cite very satisfactory proofs of progress in the Society's work. The membership has been nearly doubled during the past year. The number of exhibitors has increased, and in quality the present exhibition will bear favourable comparison with any of its predecessors. As illustrations of the revival of Indian art, in which Calcutta and Bengal have taken a leading part, the Society's yearly displays are of the greatest interest. Lord Ronaldshay referred to signs of a similar revival in widely separated parts of India - in Benares and Madras, for instance - indicating that the art movement in Bengal is "by no means a local or accidental one, but is part of a real and great renaissance which is surging through the intellectual life of India at the present time." So Lord Ronaldshay expressed the hope that as time goes on we may see specimens of work from other parts of India competing at the Society's exhibition with the admirable productions of the Bengali School. It would be a worthy ambition for Calcutta and Bengal to maintain the lead in this movement and to establish a centre of Indian art, with a building of its own, which may set the highest possible standard and help the revival of all branches of art throughout the country.

NEWS ITEMS

MEDICAL SERVICES IN INDIA

Nagpur, Dec 27

The fourth session of the All-India Medical Conference was held today, with Dr. Maharaj Krishna Kapur of Lahore in the chair. Over 150 delegates, representing all grades of the medical profession attended. Dr. G.R. Tambe, Chairman of the Reception Committee, laid stress on the necessity for the reorganisation of the medical services in India, and improvement in medical education. He dwelt upon the want of medical relief in the interior of the country, and expressed a hope that sanitation and medical relief as transferred subjects will receive in the future better attention. The President, Dr. Kapur, condemned the Government policy of subordinating independent medical profession to the interests of medical service, and urged better facilities for higher training research and post graduate courses.

INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

The 35th Session of the Indian National Congress commenced this afternoon at one o'clock in the pandal erected in Craddock Town. A small marble statue of the late Mr. Tilak stood in front of the rostrum and a life size oil painting of the departed leader hung near the president's chair, both of which were garlanded. There were also portraits of Mr. Tilak and Mr. Gandhi in front of the Press gallery. Seth Jamai Lal, Chairman of the Reception Committee delivered an address in Hindi. When he mentioned the name of Sir Michael O'Dwyer a section of the audience protested against the use of the word "Sir" and wanted it to be deleted from the address. It was with great difficulty that Seth Jamai Lal proceeded to read the address and there was a disturbance amongst the audience.

BOMBAY NEW CLOTH MARKET

Bombay, Dec 27

In the plans prepared for the reconstruction of the Bombay Cloth Market, which was recently destroyed by fire, special precautions are being taken against a repetition of the disaster of a few months ago. All the blocks of buildings will be provided with water sprinklers which will act automatically as soon as there is an outbreak of fire, and it is also proposed to isolate the market from the surrounding property. In the rebuilding operations the aesthetic viewpoint will not be lost sight of, so that the new market may be a credit to the city instead of an eyesore, as formerly.

BRITISH LABOUR PARTY'S ADVICE

Madras, Dec 27

The London correspondent of the Hindu cables to say that Mr. Adamson, Chairman of the Parliamentary Labour Party, authorises him to say that his party has in no manner or measure modified its resolution dated June 30, regarding Indian non-cooperation. His party still adheres to the view expressed in that resolution that non-cooperation is to be regretted and that Indians should make the maximum use of the Reform Act. The correspondent is also authorised by Mr. Arthur Henderson to say that he adheres to the resolution of June 30, by the Parliamentary Labour Party counselling Indians to take the fullest advantage of the opportunities presented by the Reform Act and thereby help the Labour Party in its fight for India's control over her domestic affairs.





Moving on from ratings criteria for grant of loans, banks are likely to focus on cash flow-based lending in times to come

AJAY VYAS
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, UCO BANK

THUMBNAILS

SBI Life purchase: SBI Life Insurance Company said it has acquired nearly 9 per cent stake in non-banking finance company Paisalo. Digital for about Rs 186.20 crore through the open market. SBI Life has acquired a total of 38,00,000 equity shares equivalent to 8.99 per cent at Rs 489.99 per share for a cash consideration as an ordinary course of business on the stock exchange on 24 December, it said in a regulatory filing. It is not a related party transaction, the insurer added.

PTI

Snapdeal revenue: E-commerce marketplace Snapdeal said its consolidated revenue from operations has grown marginally to Rs 846.4 crore in FY20. The company had registered Rs 839.4 crore revenue from operations in FY19, the firm said in a statement. The total revenue dipped marginally from Rs 925.3 crore in FY19 to Rs 916 crore in FY20 on account of reduction in finance and other income, it added.

PTI

Vedanta stake: London-based Vedanta Resources Ltd (VRL) has raised its stake in its India listed unit, Vedanta to 55.11 per cent by buying from open market shares worth Rs 2,959 crore. VRL bought 18.5 crore shares at a price of Rs 159.94 per share, the company said in a statement on its website. It made the purchase through block deals. The purchase of shares in the open market helped the firm raise its stake in Vedanta Ltd to 55.11 per cent from the current 50.13 per cent.

PTI

RBI cancels licence: The RBI said it has cancelled the licence of Subhadra Local Area Bank, Kolhapur, as its affairs were conducted in a "manner detrimental" to the interests of its present and future depositors. The bank had breached the minimum net worth requirement for two quarters in the financial year 2019-20, the RBI said in a statement.

PTI

At \$8.1 billion, FPI inflows highest in 12 yrs: Report

In contrast, with over \$2 billion pullout, domestic funds turned negative on the market in November

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI, 27 DECEMBER

Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs), which own more than 24 per cent of the domestic market, pumped in a record \$8.1 billion last month, highest in 12 years. December also looks to get record inflows, says a foreign brokerage report.

At \$8.1 billion, India has received the highest FPI inflows among the emerging market peers in November, as Brazil got only \$6.2 billion, South Korea (\$5.2 billion), Taiwan (\$4.5 billion) and Thailand at \$1.1 billion.

This inflow had the valuation premium of India to other emerging markets in the MSCI Index shooting up by 5 percentage point to 46 per cent and is 5 per cent above the long-term average, says Bank of America Securities in a report. Meanwhile, with over \$2 billion pullout, the domestic funds turned negative on the market in November.



HIGHEST AMONG EMERGING MARKETS

► At \$8.1 billion, India has received the highest FPI inflows among the emerging market peers in November, as Brazil got only \$6.2 billion, South Korea (\$5.2 billion), Taiwan (\$4.5 billion) and Thailand at \$1.1 billion.

► Of the over \$8.1 billion FPI inflows, as much as \$8 billion came from active funds. However, in contrast to negative trend seen in the past 10 months, passive funds witnessed \$99 million inflows in the month.

At over \$8.1 billion, FPI inflows are the highest in 12 years in November, while with over \$2 billion redemptions, domestic funds were net sellers in the month. The fund inflows were driven by active funds, BofA Securities said.

Even in August, FPIs had pumped in a record \$6.3 billion into equities. FII inflows of \$5 billion in December to date is exceptionally strong, the report said.

According to BofA, FPIs parked their maximum funds

in financials at \$4 billion, followed by discretionary stocks at \$854 million and industrials at \$687 million and had the least interest in it where they picked up on stocks worth \$104 million and real estate wherein they pulled out \$58 million.

A potential return of loan growth can act as a trigger for well-run and well-capitalised private sector financial stocks like HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank and HDFC to outperform, says the report. The brokerage is also overweight on

industrials & materials sectors where it sees scope for further FII repositioning on improving traction on government's capex push. Of the over \$8.1 billion FPI flows, as much as \$8 billion came from active funds. However, in contrast to negative trend seen in the past 10 months, passive funds witnessed \$99 million inflows in the month. Another boost came from initial public offers which fetched \$0.7 billion in the month, says the report.

It can be noted FPI investments have topped the \$20 billion mark so far this year, which is highest since 2012 in dollar terms. Previously, only in 2010 and 2012, FPI inflows were over \$20 billion. Since October, the market rallied a whopping 18 per cent.

Direct selling industry grows 4.7% in H1 FY21: Report

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 27 DECEMBER

The Indian direct selling industry grew by 4.70 per cent to Rs 7,500 crore in the first half of the current fiscal despite facing Covid-19 related challenges, industry body IDSA said.

The industry also expanded its base by adding around 53 lakh new entrants (direct sellers and consumers) in comparison to the April-September period of the previous fiscal, the Indian Direct Selling Association (IDSA) said.

The "wellness" segment registered the highest year-on-year growth of 20.45 per cent during April-September FY21, as per a survey by IDSA.

"The gross direct selling

sales for the H1 of 2020-21 is estimated to have crossed the mark of Rs 7,500 crore compared to Rs 7,200 crore in the same period a year before," it said.

The strictest phases of the coronavirus lockdown during the April-June quarter had impacted the industry, it added. However, the industry logged robust growth in the second quarter during the unlock phase.

The y-o-y growth of Q1 and Q2 of FY 2020-21 stood at 9.0 per cent and 9.25 per cent respectively. During the same period, close to 53 lakh new entrants are estimated to have joined the direct selling industry as customers and direct sellers," it said.

IDSA chairperson Rini Sanyal said at a time when most business sectors have

faced a downturn, the direct selling industry has registered a healthy growth in gross sales.

"What is even more heartening is the fact that the industry has witnessed a significantly higher number of new entrants, many of whom are going to pursue direct selling as a full-time or part-time opportunity," she added.

Owing to increased awareness about the importance of immunity, health and nutrition, the wellness segment registered the highest growth of 20.45 per cent during the first half of 2020-21.

While sales of the cosmetics segment was almost flat, other segments like homecare and household goods registered a combined y-o-y growth of 15.17 per cent during the period.

VW to hike Polo, Vento prices from next month

NEW DELHI, 27 DECEMBER

German car maker Volkswagen said it will hike prices of its hatchback Polo and mid-sized sedan Vento in India by up to 2.5 per cent from next month.

The company joins other automobile manufacturers such as Maruti Suzuki India, Nissan, Renault India, Honda Cars, Mahindra & Mahindra, Ford India, Isuzu, BMW India, Audi India and Hero MotoCorp, which have already announced that they would hike prices from January due to increased input costs.

"Effective January 2021, Volkswagen India announces a price revision of up to 2.5 per cent across the Polo and Vento models in lieu of the rising input costs," a spokesperson of Volkswagen India said. The company sells Polo and Vento with price starting from Rs 5.88 lakh and Rs 8.94 lakh, respectively.

Crude oil production falls by 5% in November

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 27 DECEMBER

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

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

Crude oil production in November at 2.48 million tons was lower than 2.61 million tons produced in the same month a year back.

Rajasthan fields produced 9.6 per cent less crude oil at 476,990 tons as Mangala, Aishwarya and other



fields in the Cairn block flowed less oil for a variety of reasons, according to data released by the ministry of petroleum and natural gas.

State-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) produced 1.5 per cent less oil largely due to lesser than the anticipated output at newer fields.

Oil India Ltd produced 6.6 per cent less oil from Assam due to protests/agitation in the state following the Baghjan blowout.

During April-November, India's oil production was 6 per cent lower at 20.42 million tons. The output from Rajasthan during this period dropped 16 per cent to 3.91 million tons.

Natural gas production in the country fell by 9 per cent to 2.3 billion cubic meters in November largely due to a fall in eastern offshore field output.

ONGC produced 3.7 per cent less gas after the Hazira processing plant was shut down for maintenance.

Gas output during April-November was 18.7 bcm, down 11.8 per cent over the previous year.

Private thermal power companies get ₹40K-cr liquidity boost: Report

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI, 27 DECEMBER

Private sector thermal power plants are in for better times with a likely Rs 40,000-crore liquidity boost coming in from government initiatives along with Coal India decision to offer longer-term credit to them, says a report.

While the government has decided to liquidate the overdue receivables from state discoms under a rescue package, national miner Coal India has decided to allow private thermal power plants to get coal on 90-180 days credit.

These two measures can help them with a liquidity support of Rs 40,000 crore, improving their overall credit profiles, Crisil said in a report today.

The government support



is by way of a Rs 1.2-lakh-crore loan scheme to enable discoms to pay outstanding dues to gencos. The scheme requires the first tranche, accounting for half the package, to be disbursed immediately and the balance upon discoms committing to operational improvements.

Delayed payments by state discoms and the weakening cash flows due to the lockdowns have the overdues to private gencos to the tune of Rs 59,000 crore as of October. The overall overdues run up to Rs 90,000 crore as of March 2020. This includes overdues to Central, state and private capacities and also across coal, gas, hydro and renewables.

To reduce the overdues, discoms have already begun signing into this loan scheme.

As against cash advances for these coal purchases, Coal India has begun allowing letter of credit facility of 90-180 days.

Even with a three-month credit period, coal payments worth Rs 1,00,000 crore can be deferred by power gencos, helping better cash-flow management, according to the agency.

Together, these two measures - relief to discoms under the loan package, and credit period by Coal India can provide a Rs 40,000 crore liquidity boost to gencos, says the report. Lower working capital and easier access to coal will ensure lower interest burden and better operating efficiencies, lending stability to the credit profile of power gencos.

CII seeks higher allocation for food processing industry

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 27 DECEMBER

Industry body CII said it has demanded higher allocation of fund for food processing schemes and tax incentives for exports of agriculture and food items.

In a pre-Budget meeting with senior finance ministry officials, industry body CII highlighted the need to find ways for tapping export markets for wheat.

"For wheat, on one hand we have the surplus but on the other hand we are uncompetitive in the global market. Thus, there is a need to find ways of offsetting this comparative disadvantage to manage surplus & tap export markets," CII said in a statement.

Stating that the RoDTEP (Remission of Duties or Taxes

on Export Products) Scheme will replace MEIS (Merchandise Exports from India) Scheme with effect from 1 January 2021, the industry body said rates have to be finalised in a way to make exports competitive.

RoDTEP rates for food and agri products be benchmarked appropriately to ensure competitiveness of exports, it added.

CII demanded that the revenue expenditure incurred on notified agricultural extension projects under Section 35CCC of the Income-tax Act should allow a higher weighted deduction of 200 per cent as against existing 100 per cent.

All public warehouses in India should be registered with WDRA (Warehousing Development Regulatory Authority) in phased man-

ner. Further, mandatory issuance of electronic warehouse receipts in all registered warehouses is needed.

It proposed to establish "Citrus Board" and "Branding and Market Development Board" and said necessary allocations should be made in the Union Budget 2021-22 towards establishment of these boards.

Low interest finance and other benefits of SAMPADA scheme of food processing ministry should be made available outside mega food parks too in order to create a level-playing field for the food industry, the CII said.

As announced in the 2018-19 Union Budget, there is a need to expedite the establishment of a bank/financial institution for the food processing industry.

Trust AMC targets ₹10K cr AUM in 2 yrs

MUMBAI, 27 DECEMBER

Trust Asset Management Company, the latest to enter the already cluttered Rs 30-lakh-crore mutual fund industry with 44 payers, plans to launch its maiden fund within a couple of weeks and garner an AUM of around Rs 10,000 crore in the first two years of operations, says a top official.

The fund house, which had announced a soft launch earlier this month, is awaiting the Sebi nod for its maiden scheme from which it plans to gather at least Rs 500 crore.

"We hope to hit the market in a couple of weeks with our first scheme as we are expecting regulatory go-ahead for our first scheme anytime now. Over the next 24 months, we will be launching six to eight funds and hope to collect Rs 8,000-10,000 crore in AUM," the company said.

PTI

Corporate profits touch all-time high in Q3

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI, 27 DECEMBER

Corporate profits rose by 15 per cent to touch an all-time high in the September quarter as margins widened on softer input costs and better utilisation levels, the research arm of leading rating agency Crisil has said.

From an absolute perspective, the earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation (Ebitda) touched an all-time high Rs 1.60 lakh crore in

the September quarter, as against Rs 1.02 lakh crore in the preceding June quarter

► Crisil, which analysed a sample of 800 listed entities comprising 85 per cent of NSE's market cap, said improving utilisation levels, along with better management of power, fuel and

raw material cost by large companies contributed to the handsome profit growth.

► As against cash advances for these coal purchases, Coal India has begun allowing letter of credit facility of 90-180 days.

Aggregate operating profit margins improved by over 1 per cent despite a rise in raw material cost during the quarter, it said.

From an employee costs

perspective, which is leading to the concerns, it said 370 manufacturing firms in its sample showed a contraction of 4 per cent while the same for service sector reported a moderate growth.

The growth in profits came even as the revenues did not go up, the report said, pointing out that the topline was "stable" in Q2 as compared to the year-ago period after falling 29 per cent in the April-June quarter.

The small enterprises have taken a blunt of the hit in revenue impact as compared to the large ones, it said.

"Large players saw muted revenue growth. However, small players, which are typically low on bargaining power and cash crunch remained

in the red. The smaller the company, the more excruciating the pain," it said.

It pointed out that less than 20 per cent of the smaller 400



I reiterate to the people of the Central African Republic the continued support and solidarity of the UN as they strive to consolidate peace and democracy in their country.

CALLING FOR PEACEFUL, INCLUSIVE AND CREDIBLE GENERAL ELECTIONS IN CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

UN SECRETARY-GENERAL ANTONIO GUTERRES

The Statesman
NEW DELHI, MONDAY 28 DECEMBER 2020

09

Chinese team arrives in Nepal to take stock of political crisis

PM Oli, known for his pro-Beijing leanings, recommended dissolving 275-member House last Sunday

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

KATHMANDU, 27 DECEMBER

A high-level Chinese delegation led by a vice minister of the Chinese Communist Party arrived in Kathmandu on Sunday to "take stock" of Nepal's political situation after the dissolution of Parliament and subsequent split in the ruling Nepal Communist Party, according to a media report.

Although no specific details about the agenda of the visit are available, the four-member delegation, led by Vice Minister of the International Department of Communist Party of China (CPC) Guo Yezhou, will hold high-level talks during its stay in Kathmandu, *My Republica* newspaper reported, citing senior NCP leaders.

Quoting a diplomatic source, it said the visit is aimed at taking stock of Nepal's evolving political situation after the dissolution of the House of Representatives and subsequent split in the ruling Nepal Communist Party amid



already-deepened intra-party rift". Nepal plunged into a political crisis last Sunday after embattled Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli, known for his pro-Beijing leanings, in a surprise move, recommended dissolving the 275-member House, amidst a tussle for power with former prime minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda'.

Acting on the prime minister's recommendation, President Bidya Devi Bhandari dissolved the House the same day and announced fresh elections on April 30 and May 10, sparking protests from a large section of the NCP led by Prachanda, also a co-chair

of the ruling party. Meanwhile, the Chinese embassy in Kathmandu and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are tight-lipped about Guo's visit, the report said. Earlier this week, Chinese Ambassador to Nepal, Hou Yanqi, had communicated about the visit of Guo to Kathmandu during her meetings with senior NCP leaders of both the Prachanda and Oli-led factions.

Vice Minister Guo is scheduled to hold meetings with the leaders of both the factions.

Beijing appears concerned over the move of Oli to dissolve the House of Representatives and the evolving political situation that saw a vertical split

in the NCP. Shortly after the dissolution of the House, the Chinese ambassador expedited her meetings with top political leadership in Nepal.

Hou has already held meetings with President Bhandari, senior NCP leaders Prachanda and Madhav Kumar Nepal, former House speakers Krishna Bahadur Mahara and Barsha Man Pun, among others.

This is not the first time that China has intervened in Nepal's internal affairs at a time of crisis. In May, Hou held separate meetings with the president, the prime minister and other senior NCP leaders, including Prachanda, when Oli was facing mounting pressure to step down.

In July, she again met a number of top leaders, including the president, the prime minister, Prachanda, Madhav Kumar Nepal and Jhala Nath Khanal and Bamdev Gautam to save the Oli government. A number of political party leaders had termed the Chinese envoy's series of meetings with the ruling party

leaders as interference in Nepal's internal political affairs. Dozens of student activists carrying placards with anti-China slogans had staged a demonstration in front of the Chinese Embassy here to protest against Hou's interference in Nepal's internal affairs.

China's political profile in Nepal has been on the rise in the recent years with billions of dollars of investments under Beijing's multi-billion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), including the building of the Trans-Himalayan Multi-Dimensional Connectivity Network.

Besides the investments, China's ambassador to Nepal Hou has made open efforts to garner support for Oli.

In September last year, the NCP had even organised a symposium, inviting some CCP leaders to Kathmandu to impart training to Nepali leaders on the Xi Jinping thought ahead of the visit of the Chinese president, his first to Nepal, according to a *Kathmandu Post* report.

Polls open in Central African Republic amidst fears of unrest

BANGUI, 27 DECEMBER

Voting has begun in Central African Republic's presidential and legislative elections after a campaign period marked by violence between rebels and government forces.

Despite calls from the opposition to delay the vote amid the insecurity, the Constitutional Court rejected a postponement.

President Faustin-Archange Touadera, seeking a second term, has tried to reassure candidates and voters that the voting will be secure. This is the central African country's first election since a peace deal was signed between the government and 14 rebel groups in February 2019, although fighting continues.

Three peacekeepers from Burundi were killed and two others wounded Friday by armed combatants.

The U.N. retook the town of Bambari last week from rebels. Voters went to the polls in the capital Sunday, though others had fled the violence over the holiday weekend. Many residents of the town of Bangassou in the nation's southeast were fleeing because of the fighting. AP

Niger polls open for presidential, legislative polls

ASSOCIATED PRESS

NIAMEY, 27 DECEMBER

Niger began voting on Sunday in presidential and legislative elections that could see the West African country's first democratic transition of power since independence amid a growing threat from jihadists in the region.

Polls opened with a good turnout.

Equipment was well installed and the first voter was able to vote, just after 8 a.m. at the Diori school in Niamey, according to the head of the

polling station there, Khadija Hassan. Everything has been going normally.

Other voting centers in the capital reported successful openings as well, with Covid-19 restrictions in place.

Some 7.4 million Nigeriens are voting to elect legislators and the successor to President Mahamadou Issoufou. Issoufou, who has served two terms, is stepping down, paving the way for the first peaceful transfer of power between two elected presidents since Niger became independent from France in

1960. Niger has seen four coups since then.

A peaceful transfer would be significant not only in Niger but also in West Africa, where leaders recently have held on for disputed third terms in Guinea and Ivory Coast. Niger's next president will have to deal with major problems including extremism, poverty, displacement and corruption.

Attacks by Islamic extremists has affected local elections for weeks. In the most recent incident, the Nigeria-based Boko Haram fighters killed

more than 28 people in Toumour in the Diffa region, the day before the vote.

Niger also faces increasing attacks from fighters linked to the Islamic State group and al-Qaida. Thousands of people have been killed and thousands displaced despite the presence of thousands of regional and international troops. Former foreign affairs minister Mohamed Bazoum, the candidate of the current presidents Nigerian Party for Democracy and Socialism, is among the front runners in the election.

Sindh Govt not to release four accused in Daniel Pearl's murder case

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

ISLAMABAD, 27 DECEMBER

Pakistan's Sindh province government has decided not to release British-born al-Qaeda leader Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh and his three aides, accused of kidnapping and murdering US journalist Daniel Pearl, in view of a Supreme Court order, according to a media report.

In a surprise move, a two-judge bench of the Sindh High Court on Thursday directed security agencies not to keep Sheikh and other accused under "any sort of detention" and declared all notifications

of the Sindh government related to their detention "null and void". The court observed that the four men's detention was "illegal". The court, however, had clarified that the accused should not be released if there is a Supreme Court restraining order regarding their detention.

Citing its sources, the *Express Tribune* newspaper said that the provincial government will not release these men in view of the Supreme Court's 28 September order.

The Pakistan People's Party-led Sindh government believes that the apex court's 28 September order in the case is still

in the field, the sources told the daily.

A three-judge apex court bench headed by Justice Mushir Alam, which is hearing the appeal by the Sindh government and the family of the slain journalist against the acquittal of Sheikh by the Sindh High Court in April, on September 28 noted that till the next date of hearing, the accused shall not be released.

A senior government official said the apex court order has not been specifically recalled. The SHC in its December 24 order also clarified that accused should not be

released if there is a Supreme Court restraining order regarding their detention, he added.

The sources said the Sindh government will also challenge the SHC's December 24 order in the apex court on Monday.

High Court, which ordered their release on Thursday.

On Friday, the United States expressed "deep concern" over the order to release Sheikh and his aides and said it will continue to monitor any developments in the case.

"We are deeply concerned by the reports of the December 24 ruling of Sindh High Court to release multiple terrorists responsible for the murder of Daniel Pearl. We have been assured that the accused have not been released at this time," the US State Department said in a tweet.

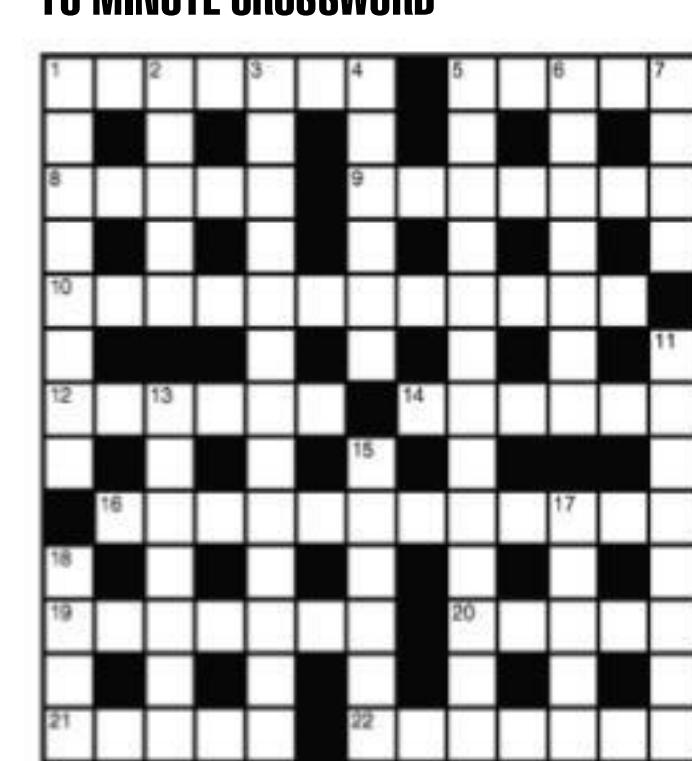
It said that the US will continue to monitor any developments in the case and will continue to support the Pearl family "through this extremely difficult process" while honouring the legacy of Pearl as a "courageous journalist".

The US has been mounting pressure on Pakistan, demanding justice for Pearl.

Ruth and Judea Pearl - the parents of Pearl - condemned the decision made by the Sindh High court and expressed full confidence in the Supreme Court of Pakistan to provide justice for their son and reinforce the paramount of the freedom of the press, the *Express Tribune* reported.

LEISURE

10 MINUTE CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1 Extended beyond a limit (7)
- 5 Uncertainty (5)
- 8 Exercise (3-2)
- 9 No longer operative (7)
- 10 A long time (informal) (7,5)
- 12 Respond (6)
- 14 Humble (6)
- 16 Establish as valid (12)
- 19 Autumn month (7)
- 20 Inclusive of everything (3-2)
- 21 Be of use (5)
- 22 Shiver (7)

DOWN

- 1 Dark volcanic rock (8)
- 2 Consumed (5)
- 3 Blameworthy (13)
- 4 Naturist (6)
- 5 Discriminate (13)
- 6 Disconcert (7)
- 7 Ballet skirt (4)
- 11 Feelers (8)
- 13 Camera part (7)
- 15 Tropical bird (6)
- 17 Extempore (2-3)
- 18 University staff (4)

SOLUTIONS TO YESTERDAY'S CROSSWORD

ACROSS

- 13 Moisturiser
- 17 Hatchet,
- 19 Sushi,
- 21 Drink,
- 22 Rolltop,
- 23 Even,
- 24 Date,
- 27 Agriculture,

DOWN

- 8 Cape,
- 14 Outside,
- 15 Insult,
- 16 Pimple,
- 17 Hedge,
- 18 Hake,
- 20 Samba,

By arrangement with The Independent. Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required

BEETLE BAILEY/Mort Walker



RED EYE/Bill Yates & Mel Casson



DADDY DAZE/John Kovaleski



NEED TO KNOW

HOSPITALS

- AIIMS 26588500, 26588900
- Moolchand Medcity (formerly Hospital) 42000000 & 24-hour Chemist Shop 42000447
- Vidyasagar Institute for Mental and Neuro-Sciences 26924300, 26924304
- Batra Hospital & Medical Research Centre 29051280, 29958747
- Deen Dayal Upadhyay 25496320, 25494403
- Guru Tegh Bahadur 23717473, 23253230

22586262, 22585007

RAILWAY INQUIRY

- General Inquiry 139
- Toll Free Nos. 1800112511
- SMIS Inquiry Nos. 57886, 54959, 5676747

23860626, 23860626

ROADWAYS INQUIRY

- AIR INDIA Flight Inquiry and Reservation 018001801407
- INDIGO AIRLINES New Delhi City Office 43513185, Call Centre 09910383838, 18001803838, Reservation 43513186; Indigo Airlines Airline 43513186; Indigo Airlines Airline 43513186

25656421/25656431 Reservation 41528181

FLIGHT INQUIRY

- AIR CANADA Flight Inquiry and Reservation 1-800-261-2818
- AIR FRANCE Flight Inquiry and Reservation 3466262 (City)
- KUWAIT AIRWAYS Flight Inquiry and Reservation 234534373

port 011-25671580; Terminal I B 25671579, Palam Road 25671579, 18001803838

RAILWAY INQUIRY

- JET AIRWAYS Flight Inquiry and Reservation 39841111
- EMIRATES Flight Inquiry and Reservation 3373377

23864470, 23868709

ROADWAYS INQUIRY

- AIR INDIA Flight Inquiry and Reservation 018001801407
- INDIGO AIRLINES New Delhi City Office 43513185, Call Centre 09910383838, 18001803838, Reservation 43513186; Indigo Airlines Airline 43513186; Indigo Airlines Airline 43513186

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- INDIGO AIRLINES New Delhi City Office 43513185, Call Centre 09910383838, 18001803838, Reservation 43513186; Indigo Airlines Airline 43513



I have decided to declare a special year dedicated to the Family #Amorislaetitia, which will be inaugurated on the next Solemnity of Saint Joseph.

POPE FRANCIS

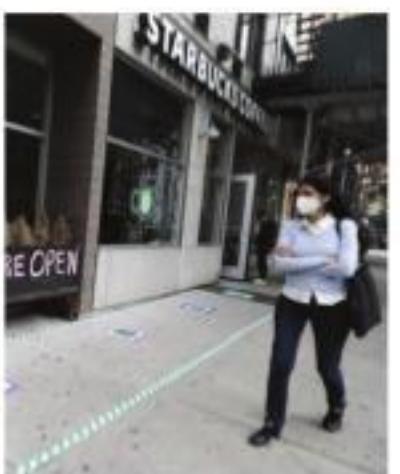
URGING RENEWED ATTENTION TO HIS CONTROVERSIAL 2016 DOCUMENT ON FAMILY LIFE

WEATHER

CITY	MAX (°C)	MIN (°C)
SINGAPORE	31	25 H
HONG KONG	23	19 S
TOKYO	10	05 CL
LONDON	04	02 R
DUBAI	26	16 S
SAN FRANCISCO	13	05 CL
NEW YORK	10	01 CL
MOSCOW	-7	-11 CL

S= sunny, CL= clear, H=hazy, R=rainy...

THUMBNAILS



A woman walks past a Starbucks cafe in New York on Sunday. IANS

Seven killed in knife attack in China: At least seven people were killed in a knife attack in China's northeast Liaoning province, officials said on Sunday. The suspect has been arrested by the police, state-run CGTN reported. The incident in Kaiyuan city also left seven people injured, including a police officer who was involved in the arrest of the suspect. AP

4 Pak Army personnel killed in chopper crash: Four Pakistan Army personnel were killed when a military helicopter crashed during a casualty evacuation due to technical reasons in Gilgit-Baltistan, the army said on Sunday. The chopper crashed in Minimarg area of Astor district on Saturday evening, the army said. It was transporting the body of a soldier to the military hospital in Skardu. PTI

Iran avalanches: A series of avalanches in Iran killed 10 people in a mountainous area north of the capital, state TV reported on Sunday. The report said rescue teams were searching for a number of missing people after the avalanches struck in four different areas. AP

Peru restricts access to beaches: Peruvian authorities have restricted access to beaches in an effort to prevent them from "becoming new sources" of fresh coronavirus cases, a top official said. The Ministry of Health warned that fresh confirmed infections in Peru would continue to rise in the coming days. IANS

Nashville blast probe prompts FBI to search home

NASHVILLE, 27 DECEMBER

Federal agents converged on Saturday on the home of a possible person of interest in the explosion that rocked downtown Nashville as investigators scoured hundreds of tips and leads in the blast that damaged dozens of buildings on Christmas morning.

More than 24 hours after the explosion, a motive remained elusive as investigators worked round-the-clock to resolve unanswered questions about a recreational vehicle that blew up on a mostly deserted street on a sleepy holiday morning and was prefaced by a recorded warning advising those nearby to evacuate.

The attack, which damaged an AT&T building, continued to wreak havoc on Saturday on cellphone service and police and hospital communications in several Southern states.

Investigators from multiple federal and local law enforcement agencies were at a home in Antioch, Nashville, after receiving information relevant to the probe, said FBI Special Agent Jason Pack. Another official said investigators regard a person associated with the property as a person of interest. AP

EU kicks off Covid vaccination campaign

Coordinated rollout for 27-nation bloc was aimed at projecting a unified message of Europe's best chance to emerge from the pandemic



ASSOCIATED PRESS
ROME, 27 DECEMBER

Doctors, nurses and the elderly rolled up their sleeves across the European Union to receive the first doses of the coronavirus vaccine today in a show of unity and moment of hope for a continent confronting its worst health care crisis in a century.

Even though a few countries started giving doses a day early, the coordinated rollout for the 27-nation bloc was aimed at projecting a unified message that the vaccine was safe and Europe's best chance to emerge from the

pandemic and the economic devastation caused by months of lockdown.

For health care workers who have been battling the virus with only masks and shields to protect themselves, the vaccines represented an emotional relief as well as a public chance to urge Europe's 450 million people to get the shots for their own health and that of others.

"Today, I'm here as a citizen, but most of all as a nurse, to represent my category and all the health workers who choose to believe in science," said Claudia Alivermini, 29, who was the first of five doctors and nurses at the Spallanzani infectious disease hospital in

Third lockdown possible if cases keep rising: France

PARIS, 27 DECEMBER

France has not ruled out imposing a third nationwide lockdown if coronavirus cases continue to rise, its health minister said on Sunday, as the country braces for a possible post-Christmas spike.

"We will never exclude measures that are necessary to protect the public," Dr Olivier Veran told the *Journal du Dimanche*.

"That is not to say we have made a decision, but that we are watching the situation hour by hour," he added.

France has been registering around 15,000 new

infections per day, and last Friday confirmed the first case of a new coronavirus variant that recently emerged in UK.

The new strain, which experts fear is more contagious, prompted more than 50 countries to impose travel restrictions on the UK.

France is to start its vaccination campaign on Sunday. The first 19,500 vaccine doses arrived early on Saturday morning, under gendarmerie escort, a military force dedicated to imposing domestic order, at the central pharmacy of Public Assistance-Paris Hospitals in the Paris suburbs, and doses for

other sites were also delivered during the day, reported local media.

A dozen residents aged over 75 as well as a caregiver over 65 years of age will be vaccinated at a hospital in north Paris on Sunday morning, to symbolically mark the start of vaccination across countries of the European Union, according to reports.

The vaccine doses will then be deployed in around 20 institutions for the elderly next week. For some 7,000 nursing homes and other establishments for the elderly, vaccination will start on the beginning of 2021. AP

containers at EU hospitals on Friday from a factory in Belgium. Each country was only getting a fraction of the doses needed - fewer than 10,000 in the first batches - with the bigger rollout expected in January when more vaccines become available. All those getting shots Sunday will need to come back for a second dose in three weeks.

Ursula von der Leyen, head of the European Union's executive Commission, said with additional vaccines in development, the EU will have more vaccines than necessary for all Europeans in 2021. She indicated the bloc could share its extra supplies with the western Balkans and countries in Africa. "Europe is well positioned," she said.

In the Los Olmos nursing home in the Spanish city of Guadalajara, northeast of Madrid, 96-year-old resident Araceli Hidalgo and a caregiver were the first Spaniards to receive the vaccine.

"Let's see if we can all behave and make this virus go away," Hidalgo said.

The Los Olmos home suffered two confirmed Covid-19 deaths and another 11 deaths among residents with symptoms who were never tested. "What we want is for as many people as possible to get vac-

cinated," said Mnica Tapias, the 48-year-old worker at the home. The Czech Republic was spared the worst of the pandemic in the spring only to see its health care system near collapse in the fall.

In Prague, Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babis received his shot at dawn Sunday and asserted: "There's nothing to worry about." Sitting next to him was World War II veteran Emile Repikova, who also received a shot.

Altogether, the EU's 27 nations have recorded at least 16 million coronavirus infections and more than 336,000 deaths. Huge numbers that experts say still underestimate the true toll of the pandemic due to missed cases and limited testing.

The vaccination campaign should ease frustrations that were building up, especially in Germany, as Britain, Canada and the United States kicked off their inoculation programs with the same vaccine weeks earlier.

As it turned out, some EU immunizations began a day early in Germany, Hungary and Slovakia.

The operator of a German nursing home where dozens were vaccinated on Saturday, including a 101-year-old woman, said "every day that we wait is one day too many."

Japan halts all foreign arrivals over UK variant

ASSOCIATED PRESS
TOKYO, 27 DECEMBER

Japan is also suspending the exemption of a 14-day quarantine for Japanese nationals and resident foreigners in a short-track programme that began in November

Agency says the additional cases took the country's total to 56,872, with 808 deaths. There were fewer tests over the weekend. Authorities are struggling to bring the latest bout under control.

Most cases have been found in the Seoul area in many places including medical facilities, churches, restaurants, gyms, army bases and a prison. The government is holding a meeting today to determine whether to elevate the distancing rules to the highest level.

Health officials in Thailand say two new clusters of coronavirus cases appear to be linked to a major outbreak discovered a week earlier among migrant workers in an industrial province near Bangkok.

The new cases were found in 19 members of a motorcycle club who held a holiday gathering on Lanta Island in the southern province of Krabi, and nine others who visited a gambling den in the eastern province of Rayong.

They're part of 110 cases reported Saturday, bringing Thailand's total to 6,020. Sixty of the new cases are linked to migrant workers. The government warned that unless social distancing and other restrictions are observed, a nationwide lockdown might have to be implemented.

South Korea will decide Sunday whether to enforce its toughest distancing rules as cases maintain an upward trend with 970 in the last 24 hours. The Korea Disease Control and Prevention

AstraZeneca vaccine should be effective against new variant: Report

LONDON, 27 DECEMBER

The coronavirus vaccine developed by Oxford University and AstraZeneca should be effective against the highly transmissible new strain of the virus, a UK media report said.

The Oxford vaccine, which also has a tie-up with the Serum Institute of India, is expected to win approval in the UK before Thursday, speeding up the provision of the jab to the most vulnerable groups.

The first priority is to vaccinate the 12 to 15 million people who would need hospitalisation if they caught Covid. Approval for the AstraZeneca vaccine would mean we are well on course to do that by the spring, a senior government official was quoted by *The Sunday Times* as saying.

The source warned that the new strain of Covid-19 had overtaken the old and was running rampant in the UK. The latest figures are not good, but the guidance is the MHRA [the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency] will give the Oxford vaccine the go-ahead by midweek, the source said.

AstraZeneca's chief executive, Pascal Soriot, said that new data will show the vaccine is as effective as the Pfizer and Moderna jabs that have already been approved, protecting 95 per cent of patients, and is 100 per cent effective in preventing severe illness requiring hospital treatment. AP

It's a chess game and we are pawns, said Lanetris Haines, a self-employed s-

The fate of the bipartisan package, that was considered a done deal before Trump's sudden objections, remained in limbo on Sunday as Trump continued to demand larger Covid relief checks and complained about pork spending

gle mother of three in South Bend, Indiana, who stood to lose her \$129 weekly jobless benefit unless Trump signed the package into law or succeeded in his improbable objections.

The fate of the bipartisan package remained in limbo on Sunday as Trump continued to demand larger Covid relief checks and complained about pork spending.

Washington has been reeling since Trump turned on the deal after it had won sweeping approval in both houses of Congress and after the White House had assured Republican leaders that Trump would support it. Instead, he assailed the bill's plan to provide \$600 Covid relief checks to most Americans insisting it should be \$2,000.

House Republicans swiftly

ly rejected that idea during a rare Christmas Eve session. But Trump has not been swayed in spite of the nation being in the grip of a pandemic.

I simply want to get our great people \$2,000, rather than the measly \$600 that is now in the bill, Trump tweeted Saturday from Palm Beach, Florida, where he is spending the holiday.

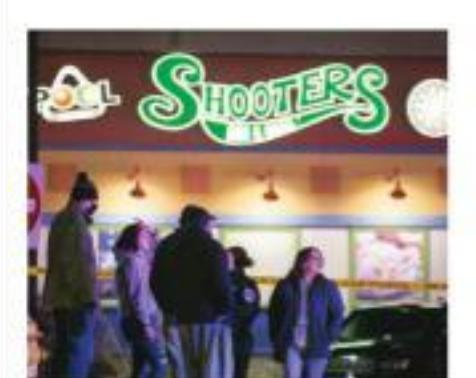
Also, stop the billions of dollars in 'pork.'

President-elect Joe Biden called on Trump to sign the bill immediately as the midnight Saturday deadline neared for two federal programs providing unemployment aid.

Rep. Debbie Dingell, a Michigan Democrat,

Lauren Bauer, a fellow in economic studies at the Brookings Institution, has calculated that 11 million people would lose aid from the programs immediately without additional relief.

Shooting at Illinois bowling alley leaves 3 dead, 3 injured



A gunman opened fire inside an Illinois bowling alley, killing three people and injuring three others in what authorities believe was a random attack.

A 37-year-old male suspect was in custody after the shooting at Don Carter Lanes Saturday night, Rockford police said in a social media post. Two of those who were shot were teenagers, police Chief Dan O'Shea said during a news conference.

O'Shea did not immediately release additional information about the victims. He described the scene as contained and said he did not think any officers fired their weapons while apprehending the suspected gunman.

The West cannot defeat Covid-19 alone.

It must be defeated by all over the world,

and that includes Africa.

Congo underscores the obstacles the campaign faces.

The country has overcome

Ebola outbreaks with vaccination campaigns.

Education programs overcame much of the resistance,

but similar suspicions are spreading about the Covid-19 vaccine.

The African Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is leading a continent-wide effort to vaccinate Africa's 1.3 billion people in 54 countries.

The agency is coordinating efforts to obtain doses and seeking World Bank help in funding estimating it will

Wars, instability pose vaccine challenges in poor nations

ASSOCIATED PRESS
DAR MANGI, 27 DECEMBER

vaccination have been killed since 2012.

The violence is an extreme example of the difficulties many poor and developing countries across Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America face as they tackle the monumental task of vaccinating their populations against Covid-19.

It's not just the problem of affording vaccines or being at the back of the line behind wealthy countries in receiving them. Poor infrastructure often means roads are treacherous and electricity is sporadic for the refrigerators vital to preserving vaccines. Wars and insurgencies endanger vaccinators.

Corruption can siphon away funds, and vaccination campaign planners must sometimes navigate through multiple armed factions.

The most challenging areas ... are conflict settings, where outbreaks of violence hinder vaccinations, and areas where misinformation is circulating, which discourages com-



munity participation, said UNICEF's deputy chief of global immunization, Benjamin Schreiber.

Many nations are relying on COVAX, an international system aimed at ensuring equitable access to vaccines, though it is already short on funding. UNICEF, which runs immunization programmes

ly rate for other vaccines, UNICEF's executive director Henrietta Fore said in a statement. The situation can vary widely from country to country. Mexico is expected to start immunizations soon. The military will handle distribution, and the government has promised free vaccines for Mexico's nearly 130 million inhabitants by the end of 2021.

Meanwhile, Haiti, the Western Hemisphere's poorest country, has yet to announce any vaccination plans. Health experts worry that widespread rumors could set back vaccinations including claims that hospitals will give fatal injections to inflate Covid-19 death figures and receive more foreign aid.

The African Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is leading a continent-wide effort to vaccinate Africa's 1.3 billion people in 54 countries. The agency is coordinating efforts to obtain doses and seeking World Bank help in funding estimating it will

North-East Manipur's super cops

YAMBEM LABA

Manipur Police is undergoing a sea change. Even as Nongpok Sekmai Police Station in Thoubal district bagged the nation's best police station award, a new breed of police officers, armed with PhD degrees and technological know-how, has come to the fore.

Manipur Police is being led by Jawaharlal Nehru University-educated LM Khaute IPS as the Director General. He had earlier served as the Superintendent of Police, Agartala in Tripura. Now under him, there are at least three female Sub-Inspectors, a few PhD degree holders with two of them at the SP level, and several others who have worked their way up from near poverty. Also, under Khaute are two Inspectors, one of whom is the most decorated police officer in the country having earned the Police Medal for Gallantry several times. They had begun their careers as Commando officers with almost 100 encounters to their names, but none has ever been charged with any human rights violation when it comes to fake encounters or the like.

Manipur, where armed militant groups were a dime a dozen with demands ranging from specified territories to be liberated to plain extortion, has seen a marked decrease in violent insurgency-related activities coinciding with peace talks between the Government of India and National Socialist Council of Nagaland. Moreover, the Suspension of Operations with the 30-odd Kuki militant groups and most of the valley-based groups now issuing threats through mobile networks without a significant physical presence, has ensured a peaceful scenario in the state today.

But the police are not being complacent as the new wave of crime seems to be in cyberspace. The cybercrime units of the state are on their toes while combating messages on social media which have the potential to foment communal disharmony. Recently, a person, masquerading as the public relation officer of the chief minister, was enticing young women with promises of landing a job upon payment of money and marriage. He was eventually trapped by a young social activist who informed the cybercrime unit.

Speaking to The Statesman, Khaute, who is a 1985 batch officer and has been in the top post since 2016 with two more years to go in office, says that on one hand his emphasis is now on the police playing a proactive role in solving cases and submitting charge sheets at the earliest. On the other, his force is trying to bridge the gap between the police and public by increasing community policing. He expressed joy that a police station under him was adjudged the best in the country as a lot of parameters were considered before conferring the honour.

With more than 100,000 people under his command including the Civil Police, armed police in the form of six Manipur Rifles battalions and nine India Reserve battalions, in addition to the Home Guards and Village Defence Force, Khaute has a lot of responsibilities. He is not worried about the present but planning for the future. He says that the crime space will look different once the Railways open in the state. The proposed Asian Highway would also usher in prosperity as well as never-seen-before crime. "We have to start mapping and preparing a blueprint now," he says.

Sitting in his office room in Thoubal district, SP Sarangthem Ibomcha IPS remembered his early days. He shot into national prominence when pictures of him carrying an injured man on his back up a ravine went viral. He recalls how he had to work as a bricklayer in the house of the elder brother of a current IGP of the state. Fired with grit and determination, Ibomcha says that he had stopped drinking tea after he could not secure the first position in his Bachelor of Science class. He had stood fourth in the University. He secured a first class first in his class during his Master's in life sciences from Manipur University and obtained a PhD in genetics thereafter.

The following year, Ibomcha missed out on a teaching job at a private school as they asked for a bribe of Rs 5,000 and nearly missed becoming a higher secondary lecturer after an examination conducted by the Manipur Public Service Commission. Then in 2007 he entered the Manipur Police Service and in 2011, was awarded the Police Medal for Gallantry by the President of India, besides winning medals for child rights and anti-drugs campaigns.

Apart from having Nongpok Sek-



Ashem Satyabati



Jogeschandra Haobijam



Police cycle patrol in Kakching district



K Ibomcha rescuing a wounded person following a vehicular accident



K Meghachandra



LM Khaute



K Meghachandra



Lunthang Vaiphei



Priyadarshini Laishram



Victoria Yengkham

mai Police Station under his jurisdiction, Ibomcha is also credited with capturing the largest haul of a psychopathic drug called WY tablets, numbering around four million valued at Rs 400 crore. He also managed cornering the international kingpin, namely one Kyaw Naing alias Abdul Rahim, a Burmese national at the gates of Imphal Airport.

Ibomcha's one major worry is the mushrooming of heroin manufacturing units in the Muslim-dominated area of Lilong in his district. He has been able to confiscate 703.54 kilograms of brown sugar worth about Rs 500 crore in the open market. But at the end of the day, this soft-spoken unsung super cop said that a holistic approach must be maintained, and the roots of a crime examined while investigating a case.

This other SP never got a chance to study formally till Class VI and had to help his father till the land on which they were tenant cultivators. K Meghachandra Singh MPS looks over the district of Imphal West where the seat of Manipuri governance is located. He has nabbed 38 insurgents from almost all the major insurgent groups of Manipur and recovered arms and ammunition from them.

A geographer by training from JNU specialising in demographic transitions, he views problems in the valley from a demographer's point of view and believes in a holistic approach also to the problems at hand. Meghachandra is, however, elated with the fact that many of his subordinate officers, beginning from the Assistant Sub-Inspector level, are tech savvy and beams with pride

when saying that Manipur Police is soon going to launch an emergency response system for distress calls like 911 in the US. In Manipur, when a person would call 112 describing a situation, the control room will immediately dispatch it to the nearest Officer-in-Charge along with a GPS location of the site of the call. He was the first police officer to find out that the People's Liberation Army of Manipur had received training in Afghanistan, thanks to the Chinese.

Meghachandra has two of the most highly decorated police officers in India working under him. Inspector Potshangbam Sanjoy Singh is the Officer-in-Charge of the once-volatile Singamei Police Station. He is an encounter specialist having survived more than 100 encounters without a single human rights violation charge against him. He is a recipient of the Police Medal for Gallantry with seven bars, the President's Medal for Distinguished Service plus others from the GOC-in-C of the Indian Army's Eastern Command. He says that his greatest joy was when he became the only Inspector to be selected on an all India basis for 45 days of training in the US on counter terrorism methods in 2015.

Sanjoy is joined by Inspector B Lungthang Vaiphei, Officer-in-Charge of Wangoi Police Station. He is also a recipient of the Police Medal for Gallantry with five bars. Vaiphei had received a commendation letter from the Director of the National Investigation Agency for his role in nabbing one of the guilty persons during the ambush in Chandel in 2015 when 18 Army men were killed by the NSCN (K) and its associates. He says that he

is happy that the latest bar to his Police Medal for Gallantry is not for killing anybody but for saving lives. Last year, he was able to rescue two contractors of the National Hydro Electric Power Corporation Limited who were held captive for Rs 30 lakh as ransom money.

In Imphal East is Jogeshchandra Haobijam, the economist-cum-policeman. Soft-spoken, he had earned the appreciation of chief minister N Biren Singh on Facebook for his achievements on the "War on Drugs". He made over 20 arrests and seizures totalling around Rs 55 lakh in the local market. On the counter-insurgency front, he has booked 52 militants besides detaining eight of them under the NSA. Haobijam has been actively involved on the Covid-19 front. He has not only been enforcing strict lockdown rules but also been busy spreading awareness and supervising sanitisation programmes and SOPs.

And now, we come to two valiant ladies who have busted male bastions to become SPs of two districts. The first is Priyadarshini Laishram, the SP of Bishenpur district. This no-nonsense cop does not feel that she receives any gender bias from her male peers or the force under her. She is also proud of the fact that the Commando Force under her recently apprehended two cadres of the NSCN(I-M) in the Ngariyan area of her jurisdiction following an encounter. "We did not kill them but just immobilised them. We transported them to Imphal to be treated at the Regional Institute of Medical Sciences", she says.

Her counterpart in Kakching district is Victoria Yengkham who has been there for almost three years now. She is credited with having initiated the first police patrol on cycles in the country in November 2018. She feels that there can be no room for gender discrimination while supervising law and order in any given geographical area and she ensures that it doesn't crop up in her district.

Last but definitely not the least, we have a female Sub-Inspector who holds a PhD degree in chemistry from the North Eastern Hill University in Shillong. Ashem Satyabati joined the Police Service in 2010 and is currently posted at Lilong Police Station in Thoubal district. She has already earned a name for herself by recovering a 9mm pistol besides convictions for people involved in four criminal cases.

All said and done, Manipur Police has got a new lease of life as people in the state don't feel nervous but rather look upon them with hope for protection, security and justice.

The writer is the Imphal-based Special Representative of The Statesman

PLUS POINTS

For girl students



Assam chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal, while recently launching the Dr Banikanta Kakaty merit award for girl students who have passed this year's higher secondary examination with first division at Amingaon in North Guwahati, ceremonially handed over scooters to five successful students.

Under the scheme, 22,034 petrol-driven scooters and 211 battery-driven two-wheelers will be provided to beneficiaries in Kamrup and Kamrup (metro) districts. Meritorious girl students of other districts would be given the awards in January next year.

Congratulating the students and their parents, Sonowal expressed hope that the red coloured scooters presented on the occasion would carry the success stories of the girls to every nook corner of the state. He also added that it would transform the lives of many girl students by boosting their self-confidence, besides inspiring many more to take up studies seriously.

Sonowal termed the 21st century as the age of women and said that large scale joining of women in the three wings of India's defence forces testifies the capabilities of women folk. Stating that the Centre and state government were taking numerous steps to uphold the dignity of women and safeguarding their pride, he cited schemes like PM Ujjala, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, and Jan-Dhan Yojana.

Sonowal also mentioned the Arundodi scheme, which benefits several thousands of Assam's women and said that the government's welfare schemes in the last four and a half years have touched the lives of seven million families including women and helped them become self-sufficient. Underlining the steps taken to ensure women safety, he claimed that the government has taken an uncompromising stand against those committing crimes on women.

State education minister Himanta Biswa Sarma informed that the government had launched the award concerned in 2017-18 and presented scooters to 1,000 girl students who secured first division. But the award could not be presented due to several reasons in 2018-19 and 2019-20. Now the government resolves to offer scooters to the deserving girl students of that period, which is expected to benefit over 15,000 girl students.

—NAVA THAKURIA

Manipuri cinema recognised

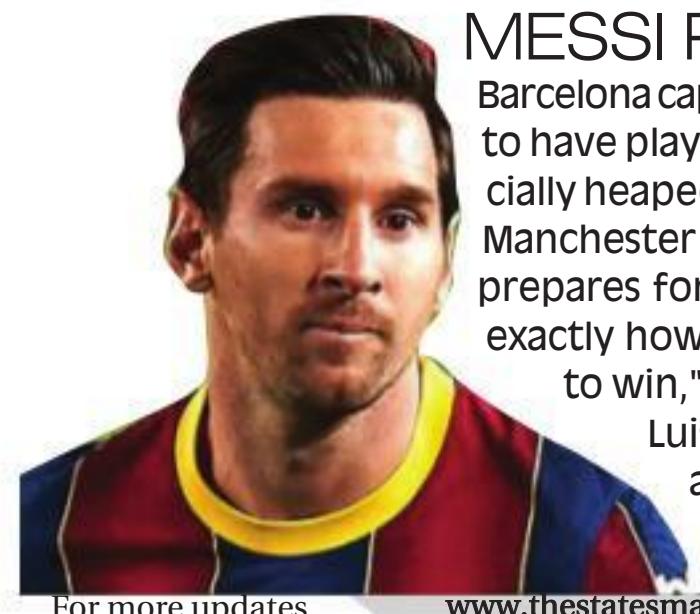


Two Manipuri films – *Eigi Kona* (Stallone My Pony) and *Highways of Life* – were selected for the Indian Panorama section of the 51st International Film Festival of India, says a report in the Guwahati-based Assam Tribune. *Eigi Kona* is a feature film while *Highways of Life* is a non-feature film.

The 90-minute *Eigi Kona* was among 20 feature films selected from a wide pool of 183 contemporary Indian films by a jury of 12 members headed by acclaimed filmmaker and screenwriter John Mathew Matthan. It is a film by "Swarna Kamal" award recipient Bobby Wahengbam and National Award-winning filmmaker Maipaksana Haorongbam, and it was produced by Dr K Sushila Devi. The film is an index of how polo players and ponies are leading pathetic lives in the birthplace of polo.

On the other hand, *Highways of Life* was among 20 non-feature films picked from a diverse pool of 143 contemporary Indian non-feature films by a jury of seven members headed by acclaimed feature and documentary filmmaker Haobam Paban Kumar. The 52-minute *Highways of Life* is a detailed look at the high octane lives of Manipur's highway truckers. The film journeys a group of truckers through unfavourable highways putting their lives on the line, ferrying essential commodities to serve the three million people of Manipur. The film is directed by young and energetic filmmaker Amar Maibam and it was produced by the Films Division.

Recently, *I Rise*, a short film on ace boxer Laishram Sarita Devi, directed by Manipur's National Award-winning filmmaker Borun Thokchom, bagged the Best Documentary Award at the 9th Mumbai Short International Film Festival.



MESSI PRAISES GUARDIOLA

Barcelona captain Lionel Messi (*in photo, left*) said that he was "lucky" to have played under Pep Guardiola and Luis Enrique. Messi especially heaped praise on Guardiola, who is currently head coach of Manchester City. "He makes you see things in one way: how he prepares for matches, defensively, how to attack... he told you exactly how the match was going to be, how you had to attack to win," Messi said. "I was lucky to train under Guardiola and Luis Enrique, the two best. Having them made me grow a lot physically and mentally, and also the tactical wisdom they've taught me."

For more updates

www.thestatesman.com

THUMBNAILS

ICC's team: The legendary Mahendra Singh Dhoni was on Sunday named captain of ICC's ODI and T20 International teams of the decade while Virat Kohli stamped his pre-eminence in world cricket after being voted the skipper of the Test team. The 39-year-old Dhoni, who retired from international cricket earlier this year, was one of the three Indians in the ODI team of the decade, the others being Rohit Sharma and skipper Virat Kohli.

Harikrishna holds Carlsen: Indian Grandmaster P Harikrishna held world number one and world champion Magnus Carlsen in the fourth round of the preliminary stage of the Champions Chess Tour Airthings Masters online chess championship. Both Harikrishna and Carlsen drew all their four games on the opening day of the tournament as matches ended late on Saturday.

MCG begins preparations: The possibility of Sydney hosting the third Test against India has now come down to 50 percent in the wake of fresh outbreak of COVID-19 cases there and a final decision will be arrived at in two days. Melbourne Cricket Club's chief executive officer Stuart Fox on Sunday said though he wants Sydney to retain the hosting rights of the third Test, the situation is "extremely complicated".

Warner doubtful: Star Australian opener David Warner is still struggling with his groin injury, coach Justin Langer said on Sunday, rendering him doubtful for the third Test against India starting January 7. "There's no one more professional and he's doing everything possible," Langer told Ricky Ponting during an interview on Seven.

Man City win: Manchester City secured a routine 2-0 win over Newcastle thanks to goals from Ilkay Gundogan and Ferran Torres to climb to fifth place in the Premier League. Gundogan tucked home a cutback from Raheem Sterling to score in consecutive home games in the league and put City ahead in the 14th minute.

Everton defeat Sheffield United: Cyleigh Sigurdson produced a Merseyside top two in the Premier League by scoring a late goal for Everton in its 1-0 win over last-place Sheffield United. The Iceland midfielder beat goalkeeper Aaron Ramsdale with a low shot from inside the area in the 80th minute following some good buildup play involving Abdoulaye Doucoure and Bernard.

Arsenal beat Chelsea: Arsenal finally lifted the gloom surrounding the club and beat Chelsea 3-1, with the Gunners winning their first Premier League match in nearly two months. A calmly taken penalty from Alexandre Lacazette, a sensational free kick from Granit Xhaka and a bizarre goal from Bukayo Saka gave Arsenal all three points at Emirates Stadium.

Namita Toppo honoured with Ekalabya Puraskar: India women's hockey team player Namita Toppo was on Sunday conferred with the prestigious 'Ekalabya Puraskar' for her contribution to the game. Toppo was honoured for her performance from April 1, 2018 to March 31, 2020 at both national and international levels.

Bengaluru FC vs Jamshedpur FC: Free-scoring Bengaluru FC will be looking to exploit the frailty Jamshedpur FC's defence has shown in the second half of matches when the two teams face each other in the Indian Super League (ISL) at the Fatorda Stadium on Monday.

Captain Rahane's fine ton puts India in driver's seat

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MELBOURNE, 27 DECEMBER

Ajinkya Rahane (*in photo, left*) played a captain's knock, a workmanlike century that steered India into a dominant position and took the sting out of Australia's potent bowling attack in the second Test here on Sunday.

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

At stumps, which was brought early owing to rain, Rahane was going strong on 104 and giving him company was Ravindra Jadeja on 40, the two having added what might prove to be a game-changing 104-run partnership for the sixth wicket. This was Rahane's 12th Test hundred and his second at the iconic venue, after a fine 147 during the 2014 tour.

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

"This knock was all about patience, more importantly when you are playing such a high-quality pace attack, sometimes you get into shell and not able to score runs, and the way Ajinkya bhai played, it was such a magnificent knock from him," Shubman Gill said during a virtual press conference. "How to see off those tough periods, he made sure that he put the loose balls away."

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

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

Rahane got another reprieve when substitute fielder Travis Head put one down after diving forward from gully, but that was after he had got to the three-figure mark. To start with, Rahane was more watchful that he had ever been but as the day progressed, he went on to play some sumptuous shots and one of his day's best was the classic off-drive against Pat Cummins. Australian speedster Mitchell Starc rued the chances his team squandered. "It (the

knock by Rahane) was pretty good. He absorbed some pressure there and sort of steadied the ship for them, at (a time) when they were still behind our score," the Australian pacer said. "He (Rahane) has batted really well there, he took his chances and we probably could have got him out three or four or maybe five times before he got a hundred, but he's run his luck there and scored a good hundred. Well done to him."

Earlier, Rishabh Pant (29) and Hanuma Vihari (21) frittered away promising starts after doing all the hard work, but Jadeja was determined not to do anything of that sort. Vihari fell to off-spinner Nathan Lyon while trying to sweep him from outside off-stump after he had added 52 runs for the fourth wicket with his captain. In came Pant and despite the

constant scrutiny around him, the wicketkeeper-batsmen showed no nerves and confidently went about playing his strokes. If Rahane managed to blunt the opposition bowlers with his defensive approach before opening up, Pant's aggression forced Australia to change their attacking tactic.

Rahane's first real authoritative shot was a cracking pull off Josh Hazlewood and there was also a sumptuous off-drive for a four. Balls directed on Rahane's pads were comfortably whacked through the mid-wicket or square-leg region and he was equally good while playing the drives and cuts.

At the other end, just when Pant was beginning to pose a treat to the hosts, Starc forced an edge to bring the match back on even keel. It was Paine's 150th dismissal and wicket number 250 for Starc.

The second session saw India score 99 runs after they managed just 54 in the first, during which they also lost two wickets as many overs to the relentless Cummins. Resuming on 36

SCOREBOARD

Australia 1st innings: 195
India 1st innings: (Overnight 36/1)
Mayank Agarwal lbw b Starc 0
S Gill c Paine b Cummins 45
C Pujara c Paine b Cummins 17
Ajinkya Rahane batting 104
Hanuma Vihari c Smith b Lyon 21
Rishabh Pant c Paine b Starc 29
Ravindra Jadeja batting 40
Extras (B-12, LB-6, NB-2, WD-1) 21
Total (For five wickets in 91.3 overs) 277
Fall of wickets: 1-0, 2-61, 3-64, 4-116, 5-173
Bowling: Mitchell Starc 18.3-3-61-5
Pat Cummins 22.7-7-71-2, Josh Hazlewood 21.6-4-4-0, Nathan Lyon 18.2-5-2, Cameron Green 12.1-31-0

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Rahane defies weight of captaincy, draws Kohli praise

AGENCIES
MELBOURNE, 27 DECEMBER

Ajinkya Rahane defied the weight of the India captaincy and scored arguably the most important century of his international career against Australia on Sunday, with his unbeaten knock of 104 drawing praise from regular skipper Virat Kohli (*in photo*).

Rahane's performance on the second day of the Boxing Day test in Melbourne was a soothng balm for the tourists, who are still smarting from their thrashing inside three days in the opener in Adelaide where they registered their lowest innings total of 36.

"Another great day for us. Proper test cricket at its best. Absolutely top knock from Jinks," tweeted Kohli.

With Kohli leaving the wreckage of the Adelaide test behind him as he returned to India for the birth of his first child, Rahane was left to pick up the pieces at the Melbourne Cricket Ground and responded in emphatic style. In addition to his cultured batting on Sunday, Rahane's deployment of the leg-slip position to dismiss three home

batsmen on Saturday impressed pundits, including former Australia captain Ricky Ponting. Looking to shake things up after Adelaide, Rahane made four changes for the second test and his picks have already made significant contributions in the first two days.

Quick Mohammed Siraj claimed two important wickets, while fellow debutant Shubman Gill scored a fluent 45 opening the innings.

Rahane helped consolidate India's position by adding 57 runs with the recalled Rishabh Pant and took India past Australia's first innings score of 195 with his burgeoning century-plus partnership with Ravindra Jadeja. Rahane was dropped twice

in his knock, which brought up his 12th test century, but it was still an education for Gill.

"This knock was all about patience," the 21-year-old said. "When you play such a high-quality bowling attack, you sometimes go into a shell and you are notable to score. The way he played, it was such a magnificent knock to watch."

Former Australia skipper Ricky Ponting feels Ajinkya Rahane has done a great job for India "to pick up the pieces" from the Adelaide debacle with a captain's knock on the second day of the Boxing Day Test here on Sunday. Rahane, who was praised for his captaincy acumen in Australia's 195 all out on the first day on Saturday, remained not out on 104 to put India in the drivers' seat. "I think he's done a great job to pick up the pieces from Adelaide with this team, lead really well in the field yesterday and you can see he's playing like a captain now as well," Ponting told cricket.com.au.

"He wants to play that captain's knock; he wants to get a hundred in Virat's (Kohli) absence and do the best thing he can to try and drag his country and his team back into this series."

Rahane's century gave India a lead of 82 runs at the end of second day's play on Sunday with the visitors on 277 for 5. He was dropped by Steve Smith at second slip when on 73 and then by Travis Head from the final ball of the day -- all off Mitchell Starc's bowling.

Those reprieves aside, the right-hander was judicious with his stroke play on a wicket that has assisted spin and seam bowling. And while he struck 12 boundaries, it's Rahane's defence that stood out to Ponting. "He's almost played a (Cheteshwar) Pujara-like innings. No thrills, he's hit very few boundaries but he's just continually backing his defence and trying to wear the Australian bowlers down," Ponting said.

"I think the Australians haven't made him cover drive enough. I think they've been a little bit short and they've plugged that cover region."

"That nick that we saw that went between Paine and Smith, I think that could have been covered with another slip in place and leave the cover area open."

Williamson century boosts New Zealand

AGENCIES
MOUNT MAUNGANUI, 27 DECEMBER

Kane Williamson's tireless quest for runs continued Sunday as he batted New Zealand into a commanding position on the second day of the second test against Pakistan.

Williamson made 129, his 23rd test hundred, and shared century partnerships with Ross Taylor and Henry Nicholls as New Zealand made 431 batting first after losing the toss.

At stumps Pakistan was 30-1 after 20 overs with Abid Ali 19 not out and nightwatchman Mohammad Abbas 0. Shan Masood was out for 10 just before stumps, caught down the leg side by wicketkeeper BJ Watling from the bowling of Kyle Jamieson. In his last 10 tests in

his innings, Williamson batted for all of the rest of the first day and was 94 not out overnight. He took 13 balls to score his first runs of the second day, then went to his century with a copybook cover drive from the bowling of Naseem Shah. When he finally was out before lunch he had batted 476 minutes or almost eight hours and again had been the firm anchor around which New Zealand built its innings. Taylor's 76 in his 10th century partnership with Williamson and Nicholls' 56 in his third provided the substance of the innings.

Brief scores: (Day 2): New Zealand 431 (K Williamson 129, BJ Watling 73, RTaylor 70, H Nicholls 56, S Afridi 4/109, Y Shah 3/113) vs Pakistan 30 for one.

Young Indian batsman Shubman Gill says watching Ajinkya Rahane's "magnificent" hundred from the sidelines was immensely educational for him and he learned how to get into a shell while facing a lethal bowling attack. "This knock was all about patience, more importantly when you play such a high-quality pace attack, sometimes you get into shell and not able to score runs, and the way Ajinkya bhai played, it was such a magnificent knock to watch from outside," Gill said during a virtual press conference. "How to see off those tough periods, he made sure that he put the loose balls away."

On the first day, there was a bit turn for (Ravichandran Ashwin) Ash bhai and (Ravindra Jadeja) Jaddu bhai and even today we saw there was turn for Nathan (Lyon) and as the time goes on there will be more cracks and it will be more challenging for the batsmen. "So it is important to capitalise on this lead that we have and get them all out as quickly as possible."

Opening the innings, Gill

South Africa 180-1 in strong response to Sri Lanka's 396

AGENCIES
CENTURION, 27 DECEMBER

South Africa's opening batsmen put on a partnership of 141 and the Proteas were 180-1 in a strong response to Sri Lanka's 396 in the first test on Sunday. Aiden Markram was out for 68 to give Sri Lanka's bowling attack a much-needed boost after it was depleted by injury and looked set to struggle at SuperSport Park in Centurion.

Dean Elgar, the other South African opener, had moved to 86 not out by tea on the second day. Rassie van der Dussen was with him on 8.

The momentum of the match had started to shift after Sri Lanka had the best of the first day-and-a-half. The tourists' 396 all out after opting to bat first was their best total in a test in South Africa.

It was built on 85 from Dinesh Chandimal, 79 from Dhananjaya de Silva and a forceful 66 not out from Dasun Shanaka at No. 7, who hammered five sixes in his first test half-century and made sure Sri Lanka's hard work with the bat on the first day wasn't wasted.

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