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THE EDITORIAL PAGE

MY RIGHT TO BREATHE

By ASHOK GULATI
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IDEA EXCHANGE

“Intimacy between the two countries such... whatever India will ask will be positively looked at”

NAOR GILON
ISRAELI AMBASSADOR TO INDIA
PAGE 9

ANGUISHED OVER UNFORTUNATE INCIDENT, SAYS HOME MINISTER SHAH

Nagaland: 14 civilians killed by forces; soldier dies of injuries as violence erupts

Govt names SIT; mistaken identity probable cause, say officials

TORA AGARWALA
GUWAHATI, DECEMBER 5

SIX CIVILIANS, said to be workers in a coal mine, were killed in an ambush by security forces in an area between Tiru and Oting village in Nagaland's Mon district while returning home in a vehicle Saturday evening. The incident triggered violence in the area Saturday night and late Sunday afternoon, in which eight more civilians (seven on Saturday, and one Sunday) were killed after security forces allegedly opened fire.

A soldier succumbed to injuries in the violence Saturday night, and several others were severely injured, said the Indian Army's Dimapur-based 3rd Corps in a statement.

In what may shatter the relative calm in Nagaland, the intense violence puts a question mark on peace talks. The killing of civilians has been condemned by local civil society organisations, Naga outfits, national political parties, and the state government itself.

The Konyak Union Kohima and the Eastern Nagaland People's Organisation (which includes six tribes from the region) said they would abstain from further participation at the ongoing Hornbill Festival. The government said two minutes of silence and prayer will be

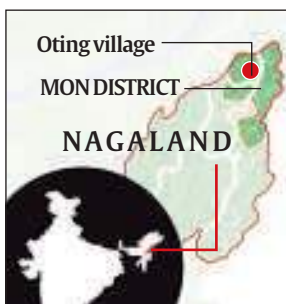


Bodies of the 14 who were killed, in Mon district Sunday. Six of the dead were coal mine workers.. PTI

observed at Kisama, all locations of the Naga Heritage Village, and all events of the Hornbill Festival in “remembrance and solidarity of the dead in Mon”.

The situation continued to be tense in Mon district on Sunday. Authorities said large crowds of angry villagers gathered in Mon town late afternoon and marched to the Assam Rifles camp. “They engaged in vandalism, destruction, and set fire to some buildings. The security forces opened fire, which led to the death of one civilian. One more was injured,” Abhijit Sinha, Principal Secretary (Home), Nagaland, told *The Indian Express*.

Things were calmer now, and



curfew has been imposed in Mon town, Sinha said. Internet services remain suspended in the district since Saturday.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah expressed his condolences to the victims' families. “Anguished over an unfortunate

incident in Nagaland's Oting, Mon, I express my deepest condolences to the families of those who have lost their lives. A high-level SIT constituted by the State govt will thoroughly probe this incident to ensure justice to the bereaved families,” he said in a tweet.

Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio said the unfortunate incident leading to killing of civilians at Oting, Mon was “highly condemnable”. “Condolences to the bereaved families & speedy recovery of those injured. High level SIT will investigate & justice delivered as per the law of the land. Appeal for peace from all sections,” he said in a tweet.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Deep regret, says Army, announces probe, action

KRISHN KAUSHIK
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 5

THE KILLING of six civilians travelling in a vehicle in Nagaland's Mon district Saturday is being investigated “at the highest level”, the Army said, while expressing regret and ordering a Court of Inquiry into the incident.

Officials in the security establishment said the incident was the result of an Army operation in which the victims may have been mistaken for insurgents from the Yung Aung faction of the banned National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Khaplang).

Assam Rifles and the Army's Dimapur-based 3rd Corps said in identical statements Sunday that “based on credible intelligence of likely movement of insurgents, a specific operation was planned to be conducted in the area of Tiru, Mon District, Nagaland”.

Without providing details, the statement said that “the incident and its aftermath is deeply regretted”. “The cause of the unfortunate loss of lives is being investigated by a Court of Inquiry at the highest level and appropriate action will be taken as per the course of law,” it said.

The statement noted that the “security forces have suffered severe injuries in the operation,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

State polls round the corner, new idea on the table: bad bank for farm loans

Bankers' body worried states may announce waiver, spoil credit culture

SUNNY VERMA
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 5

TO IMPROVE recovery of bad loans in the agriculture sector, leading banks have made a pitch for setting up an Asset Reconstruction Company specifically to deal with collections and recovery of farm loans.

At present, there is neither a unified mechanism to tackle Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) in the farm sector nor a single law that deals with enforcement of mortgages created on agricultural land. Agriculture being a state subject, the recovery laws – wherever agricultural land is offered as collateral – varies from state to state.

According to a senior banker, the idea of an ARC for farm loans was discussed in a meeting of the Indian Banks' Association in September. The IBA committee on agriculture and allied activities discussed that “as agricul-

EXPLAINED

ARC better than waiver?

GIVEN how farm loan waivers have become a preferred political tool over the years to alleviate farmer distress, bankers are now pushing for an Asset Reconstruction Company (ARC) to specifically deal with bad loans in the agriculture sector. While a bad bank does raise questions of a moral hazard, it attempts to recover some parts of the loan; waivers just end up spoiling the credit culture.

ture market is scattered in India, different banks have to make efforts to capture and connect to these markets”. It was felt if there was a single institution/ ARC, the cost of recovery can be optimised, a source present in the meeting said.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



At LNJP Hospital in Delhi on Sunday. Amit Mehra

More cases of Omicron from Jaipur, Pune and Delhi; 21 detected so far

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
JAIPUR, MUMBAI, NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 5

MAHARASHTRA, RAJASTHAN and Delhi reported cases of the Omicron variant of the novel coronavirus on Sunday, taking the total number of confirmed cases in the county to 21.

The first two cases were reported in Karnataka, followed by one in Jamnagar (Gujarat) and another in Maharashtra.

In Jaipur, nine persons who took part in a wedding on November 28 have tested positive for the Omicron variant, health officials said. Medical Education Secretary Vaibhav Galiya said that of the nine, four had arrived from South Africa a few days ago.

At least 100 people had turned up for the November 28 wedding; health officials have so far collected samples of 34 people. “Of these, Omicron has been confirmed in nine cases through genome sequencing while 25

others tested negative for Covid,” said Galiya.

While the four who flew in from South Africa are admitted at the Rajasthan University of Health Sciences (RUHS), the others are in home isolation. RUHS superintendent Dr Ajeet Singh said the four admitted there are “asymptomatic” and the five in home isolation too “are doing fine”.

In Pune, six people from a family in the Pimpri-Chinchwad municipal area – including a 44-year-old woman who landed in Maharashtra on November 24 from Lagos, Nigeria, with her two daughters, aged 12 and 18 – were detected with the Omicron variant of the coronavirus.

Her 45-year-old brother and two of his daughters, aged 7 and 18 months old, have also tested positive for the Omicron variant after a genome sequencing conducted at the National Institute of Virology, Pune. All the three infected adults in the family are fully vaccinated – two of them with Covishield and one with Covaxin.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Michel signed ‘sham contracts’ to hide kickbacks trail: ED

RITUSARIN
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 5

SEVERAL “SERVICE contracts” signed between British middleman Christian Michel and his main client AgustaWestland were “sham contracts” to camouflage alleged kickbacks from the Rs 3,600-crore helicopter deal in India, according to documents submitted in court by the Enforcement Directorate (ED).

In its prosecution complaint, the agency said that these were meant to “create a legal facade and to route the kickbacks” un-

der these agreements. And “create a smokescreen” between these contracts and the chopper purchase making it hard to track the payoff trail.

Michel's interrogation report, accessed by *The Indian Express*, details his version of these deals, and his turbulent career graph in India – from his father Wolfgang Michel's support to start in 1985 to how he nearly shut shop after the Pokhran tests of 1998; from signing up for the VIP helicopter deal in 2006 to finally clinching it in 2010.

The report reveals the mistrust between Michel and Guido



Haschke, the other alleged middleman for AgustaWestland, and the admission that his deals with the Italian company made up 80 per cent of his Dubai firm's revenue. Michel told investigators that the AgustaWestland contro-



Christian Michel

versy grounded several of his plans in India, including a proposed joint venture with the Tatas.

December 4, 2021, marked three years since Michel was extradited from Dubai. Other key findings from the interrogation

report were reported by *The Indian Express* over the past two days: Michel's claims about how he lobbied with the then UPA Government to salvage the chopper deal that was sealed in 2010 and about an intervention by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

The report also shows that on December 26, 2018, Michel told investigators that he was introduced to Haschke in the AgustaWestland boardroom in Italy. “I had heard that Haschke was claiming that he managed the reduction in the height (which was one of the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Shah to Gehlot: Who is toppling your govt, BJP will get majority in 2023

HAMZA KHAN
JAIPUR, DECEMBER 5

UNION HOME Minister Amit Shah on Sunday attacked the Ashok Gehlot-led Rajasthan government as “nikammi and bhrashtachari (useless and corrupt)” and said that the BJP will never try to topple the Congress government but form a government with two-thirds majority in 2023.

“He has a constant fear that



‘Gehlot govt useless and corrupt’

his government will fall. Who is toppling your government? No one is toppling your government...BJP will never topple your government. BJP will come back to power with a majority

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

In Madhya Pradesh, experts meet today on surge in cases of human-elephant conflict

IRAM SIDDIQUE
BHOPAL, DECEMBER 5

JUST 11 years after the first elephant sighting was recorded in Madhya Pradesh, a seven-member committee of wildlife experts will hold a two-day meeting in Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve starting Monday to look for ways to address what officials say is a growing problem of human-elephant conflict. The state recorded a new high of nearly 110 elephants this year.

After Chhattisgarh was

carved out over two decades ago, Madhya Pradesh had only seven elephants by 2017, according to official estimates.

In 2018, the state became home to a herd of 40 elephants that settled in the tiger reserve – the herd's count today is 42. This year, another herd of 40 elephants was sighted in Anuppur, apart from 14 elephants in Mandla and 12 in Sidhi.

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, Alok Kumar, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF), said: “In Madhya Pradesh, records of the first

sighting of elephants began in 2010. Back then, hardly one or two elephants were spotted. But over the years, especially since 2017, their numbers have gone up significantly.”

According to Kumar, the rise in elephant numbers has led to the need to find ways to avoid human-elephant conflict, leading to the formation of the committee. Known as a tiger state, the increasing number of elephants has also led to the first census of the animal being conducted in the state.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

WORLD



MORE OMICRON CASES DETECTED IN U.S.

FIVE DEAD AFTER MYANMAR SECURITY FORCES RAM CAR INTO YANGON PROTEST: REPORTS
PAGE 10



Madhya Pradesh recorded nearly 110 elephants this year, and a rise in human-elephant conflicts. *Express*

PAGE 1 ANCHOR

RAVIK BHATTACHARYA
DEOCHA PACHAMI (BIRBHUM), DECEMBER 5

AS THE West Bengal government reaches out with a rehabilitation and compensation package to the 16 villages situated on what is estimated to be the second largest coal block in the world, there is a mix of expectation and apprehension in the region that is home to 3,010 families, including 1,013 from tribal communities – and several questions about livelihood and new homes.

The Indian Express criss-crossed the region to track the

first key steps in the land acquisition process for the Deocha Pachami project that Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has estimated will supply coal for the next 100 years.

It found that while there is support for the project, there are some concerns as well. It also found an undercurrent of state politics with the BJP and CP(M) raising questions even as a key group of local protesters from the tribal community joined the ruling TMC last month.

“I have six bighas of land and a home. I work in a stone quarry and earn Rs 600 daily. What will happen if I lose my job? The offi-

cials should come to each village and answer our questions,” said Buddhinath Hembram, who lives with his wife, mother and two children in Harinsingha village.

On November 20, the state government organised a “direct meeting” between the local administration, led by District Magistrate Bidhan Ray, and a range of stakeholders, including the chiefs of panchayats, villages and tribal bodies, members of local clubs, and representatives of the 20 stone quarries and 300 crusher units in the area.

“We have given them hard copies of the compensation and relocation package in Bengali and



Robin Soren, secretary of Birbhum Adivasi Gaonta, says while people are for the project, they have questions. Partha Paul

Santhali. We have stressed that the package also has a provision for a government job (as a junior constable) for those who lose their land. The police and gram panchayat officials are conducting awareness camps,” Ray said.

According to officials, the proposed project area covers around 3,400 acres, with an estimated yield of 2,102 million tonnes of coal. And according to the Rs 10,000-crore compensation and rehabilitation package announced by the Chief Minister in the state assembly on November 9, Rs 10 lakh-13 lakh will be paid for every bigha acquired apart from homes in resettlement colonies.

Apart from the police job for each family that loses land, it will get a 600 sq ft home and Rs 1.2 Lakh for relocation. Workers in stone crusher units will get one-time compensation of Rs 50,000 and Rs 10,000 every month for a year. Agricultural workers will get Rs 50,000 in a one-time payment and 500 days work under NREGS.

The owners of stone quarries and crushing units will get the price of land and compensation for homes. Besides, the stone crushing units will be relocated to the Basalt Industrial Park near the project area and get 10 trucks of stones every day for free for six months.

At the villages inside the project zone, however, questions persist.

“Many of the people don't have proper land records, how will they get compensation? And in our families, if one brother gets that police job, what about the others? We have cultural and religious links with our villages. It is difficult to move to some colony overnight. But I am happy that the government has started a dialogue. The people are for the project,” said Robin Soren, who is the secretary of Birbhum Adivasi Gaonta, a collective representing tribal communities.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Kolkata



How the prime accused in the lynching of a student leader died in Assam, the significance of Mamata Banerjee saying that “there is no UPA now”, and the government’s strategy to tackle Omicron

Kolkata

EXPRESS NETWORK

Body of woman found in Dum Dum, kept in house for 4 days

Kolkata: Police on Sunday recovered the decomposed body of a 56-year-old woman from her house in Dum Dum in North 24 Parganas.

Deceased Supriya Ghosh's brother Bhaskar and sister Rakhi had been living with the body for four days, said police. The siblings have been living in the house following their mother's death.

Neighbours claimed that the family was reclusive and was suspected to suffer from mental illness.

Baguiati police reached the house after being alerted by neighbours about a foul smell. A police officer said the body was wrapped in a blanket.

"The cause of the death is not yet clear. We have sent the body for post-mortem," said a police officer. **ENS**

JAWAD TURNS INTO DEEP DEPRESSION

Heavy rainfall forecast in next 24 hrs

Ferry services between Hooghly-N 24 Parganas suspended; tourists asked to not visit coastal towns

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, DECEMBER 5

WITH CYCLONE Jawad weakening into a deep depression, Kolkata and south Bengal districts continued to receive moderate to heavy rainfall on Sunday. The Met Office has, however, forecast heavy to very heavy rainfall over south Bengal districts and Kolkata in the next 24 hours.

According to the Meteorological Department, the cyclonic storm will move north-northeastwards towards the West Bengal coast before weakening into a deep depression during the day.

"With the system likely to move north-northeastwards along the Odisha coast towards

West Bengal and develop into a well-marked low-pressure area, light to moderate rainfall has begun in Kolkata, Howrah, North and South 24 Parganas, and Purba and Paschim Medinipur districts," an official said.

"Heavy rain will occur in some isolated parts of south Bengal, including coastal areas of South 24 Parganas and Purba Medinipur districts, and parts of Purba Bardhaman," the official said.

As per the Met Office, the wind speed will reach a maximum 60 km per hour. "Over the districts of Purba Medinipur, Paschim Medinipur, South 24 Parganas and North 24 Parganas, the wind speed will remain 30 km per hour with gusting of 50 km per hour. The rain will continue over south Bengal districts



The depression over Bengal

and Kolkata till December 6. The weather condition will improve from December 7," said a senior Met department official.

Since Saturday, Kolkata and its adjoining districts in south Bengal are witnessing moderate to heavy rainfall.

Meanwhile, the state government suspended regular ferry

services on Hooghly connecting North 24 Parganas and Hooghly districts and urged people to not visit seaside resort towns of Digha, Mandarmani, Bakdhal, Frazerganj and other coastal areas.

According to a senior government official, the administration has evacuated around 17,900 people from the coastal areas of South 24 Parganas and Purba Medinipur districts and opened 48 relief centres there.

The government has also opened 115 multipurpose cyclone shelters and 135 additional temporary relief shelters.

Nineteen National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) teams have been deployed in West Bengal and quick response teams of the state power and public works departments and West

Bengal State Electricity Distribution Company (WBSEDCL) have been posted at crucial points, an official said.

While almost all fishermen have returned to Kakdwip, Digha and other coastal areas, the authorities are coordinating with fishermen associations to find out if anyone is still in the deep sea.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is constantly monitoring the situation and officials of the municipal bodies are on guard, state minister Firhad Hakim said.

In the last two years, West Bengal has witnessed three devastating cyclones — Bulbul in November 2019, Amphan in May 2020 and Yaas in May 2021 -- that left behind a trail of death and destruction. **WITH PTI**

NIA files charges against 3 for hurling bombs at MLA office

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 5

THE NIA has filed a chargesheet against three people for allegedly hurling bombs at the office premises of a West Bengal MLA, an official said on Sunday.

Sonu Jaiswal, Arif Akhtar and Rahul Kumar have been booked under sections of the IPC and the Explosive Substances Act before the NIA Special Court in Kolkata, the official of the premier investigation agency said.

The case pertains to hurling of several bombs adjacent to the office gate of MLA Pawan Kumar Singh in September, targeting him and his family members, the NIA official said.

A case was registered at North 24 Parganas district of

The case pertains to hurling of several bombs adjacent to the office gate of MLA Pawan Kumar Singh in September, targeting him and his family, an NIA official said

West Bengal and it was re-registered by the NIA in September, the official said.

Investigation has revealed that all three accused had conspired to commit the crime by using explosives with an intent to destroy the property, the NIA said, adding that further probe is continuing.

Dengue cases on the rise, residents and civic officials blame each other

Every second house in Kolkata's Baguiati afflicted with vector-borne disease, residents claim

SWEETY KUMARI
KOLKATA, DECEMBER 5

RESIDENTS OF Sachindra Lal Sarani and Baguipara in North Kolkata's Baguiati area keep their doors and windows shut and spend hours inside mosquito nets during the daytime. Such is the menace of mosquitoes in the area that locals have been forced to fix their mosquito nets on their windows.

Over the last one month, two people have died of dengue in the area, and every second house has at least one person afflicted with the vector-borne ailment. Residents blamed the prevailing situation on the failure of the civic authorities to trace the breeding hotspots.

Baguiati falls within the ambit of the Bidhanagar Municipal Corporation.

Sanjay Saha who lost his wife Shatabdi Saha to dengue on November 8, blamed the death on heavy rainfall and the carelessness of the civic body.

"We had a record rainfall this year. There is a vacant piece of land near my house, which has turned into a garbage dump. Dengue cases are common here every year. In 2019, my wife had dengue and she survived. This year, however, she caught the fever again and died after a few days at a hospital," Sanjay, who has an 11-year-old son, told *The Indian Express*.

"A timely dengue prevention drive by the civic authorities in the area could have saved the lives lost to the disease..." he added.



A civic worker fumigates in an area in Kolkata. Partha Paul

Sudip Banerjee, who lives about half a kilometre away from Saha's residence, was critical after contracting dengue and was admitted to a private hospital for almost five days. Back home now, Sudip spends most of his time at home inside his mosquito net. He is the third person in his family to have tested positive for dengue.

Sudip accused the civic authorities of failing to clean pockets of Baguiati where stagnant water had accumulated and turned into veritable breeding grounds for the mosquitoes.

Dengue cases have been reported from several districts, including the North 24 Parganas, South 24 Parganas, apart from Kolkata. In the last one month, many areas under the Bidhanagar and Dum Dum municipalities have reported a surge in dengue cases.

Several areas in an around Lake Town, Bangur and Baguiati have turned dengue hotspots.

On Tuesday, the second dengue death was reported in the Baguiati area. The victim was identified as 57-year-old Swapan Mistri.

Over the last few years, Kestopur, Prafulla Kanan, Raghunathpur, Tegharia and Kaikhali have seen dengue deaths.

When *The Indian Express* visited the area to check the extent to which the disease had spread, it found that at least one member in every second household was having dengue-like symptoms.

Pranay Kumar Ray, a member of the Board of Administrators of the Bidhanagar Municipal Corporation, said, "Dengue cases are being reported regularly. On average, four to five cases are being reported daily. Members of our Rapid Action Team for vector control have spread out to all the six boroughs of the corporation area to check for vector breeding sites. The exercise is carried out vigorously throughout the year.

Out of every 10 houses that they visit, at least 7 have stagnant water inside the premises. We continue to organise awareness programmes to ensure people keep their premises clean and free from vector breeding."

According to sources in the BMC, more than 300 cases of dengue have been reported from different wards. As has been the trend over the last few years, the cases tend to go up from September-end.

As per data provided by a senior health official at the Kolkata Municipal Corporation, the city has reported 1,366 dengue cases this year, down from 3,682 cases last year. The cases were reported between January and November 14.

"In 2020, our entire focus was on Covid-19. Hence, we consider it as a blind year. Data shows that there has been a sharp decline in Covid cases from 2019 to 2021," a senior KMC doctor said.

Civic officials said that they are carrying out mosquito larvicide spray in all the wards and are urging residents to ensure there is no stagnant water accumulated anywhere inside their homes.

Speaking at an event on November 8, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had acknowledged that there were dengue cases in the state but said they weren't in big numbers.

While holding an administrative meeting in the North 24 Parganas, she had expressed hope that the number of malaria and dengue cases would recede once winter sets in. Health Secretary Swarup Nigam, who

was present at the meeting, said, "There is a surge in dengue cases in some areas. We are conducting tests. The situation is under control at the moment."

Doctors are of opinion that persistent and heavy rainfalls is one of the reasons for the spike in dengue cases. According to a section of medical practitioners, lack of sterilisation and cleanliness in some areas is driving dengue and malaria cases.

"Most of our civil administration staff are involved in Covid-19 duties and vaccination which is why we have been seeing a rise in dengue and malaria cases," said a doctor of a government hospital, who asked not to be named.

Many claimed that that situation is far grimmer than what is being reported. Speaking to *The Indian Express*, Dr Manas Gumta of Sagore Dutta Medical College and Hospital in Barrackpore said, "Actual numbers are higher than what is being reported. About 6-7 dengue patients are admitted to our hospital on a daily basis."

However, the state administration that civic bodies conduct vector-control campaigns with the same intensity round the year.

"Our homogeneous approach has reaped dividends. The results reflect in the data. This year, the KMC has recorded 68 per cent fewer dengue cases compared to 2019. However, there's been a spike in malaria cases. But with the winter setting in, malaria would cease to be a problem soon," Subrata Roy Chowdhury, chief medical officer of health, KMC, said.

Focus is free education for poor: Pitrashish Foundation

Kolkata: Pitrashish Foundation, a government registered NGO, has said that it is fighting a dedicated battle against poverty, illiteracy and child abuse. The organisation said it wants to take the "responsibility of the needy, helpless and exploited senior population of our society".



A health camp by NGO

"Our vision is to give every child the best childhood which

he or she deserves. For that the most important thing which they require is education... Our focus is to take the responsibility of those children and to provide them completely free education by helping them with all types of study materials," said the foundation in a statement. **ENS**

Survey ship unveiled to boost maritime research, mapping

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, DECEMBER 5

TO BOOST India's maritime capabilities in mapping and research, the first in the series of four survey vessel was launched in Kolkata on Sunday.

Named *Sandhayak*, the vessel is was built under the Survey Vessel (Large) project for the Navy by Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers Ltd (GRSE).

Ministry of State for Defence Ajay Bhatt said, "Launch of Survey Vessel (Large) 'Sandhayak' today reinforces our commitment for indigenous shipbuilding as part of our Prime Minister's vision of 'Make in India', and thrust to the vision of 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' (self-reliant India). The vessel will have over 80% indigenous content by cost and this will also ensure that large scale defence production is executed by Indian manufacturing units, thereby generating employment and expertise within our country."

He congratulated GRSE for achieving "a historic milestone for delivering the 100th warship".

The vessel was launched by Ajay Bhatt's wife, Pushpa, who was



Sandhayak at the GRSE dock in Kolkata Sunday. Partha Paul

the chief guest at the ceremony.

The vessel is capable of a full scale coastal and deep-water hydrographic survey of port and harbor approaches, and navigational channels and routes. It can also undertake the survey of maritime limits and collect of oceanographic and geographical data for defence applications.

It is propelled by two marine diesel engines combined with fixed pitch propellers, and fitted with bow and stern thrusters enabling it to manoeuvre at a low speed during surveys.

<p>बैंक ऑफ बड़ोदा Bank of Baroda</p>	<p>CANNING BRANCH</p> <p>Ma Anandamoyee Bhaban, Canning Road, Dighir Par, Canning Town, Pin - 743329</p>
<p>Letter No: BOB/CANNING/21-22 Date: 22.11.2021</p> <p>1. i) MRS. CHAMPA RAUT (Borrower) and ii) MR. PROVA PAUL (Borrower), Address: MITHAKHALI MATLA PO CANNING TOWN, SOUTH 24 PARAGANAS 743329.</p> <p>2. i) MR. RAM KUMAR MONDAL (Guarantor), Address: S/O SASHADHAR MONDAL, MONDAL AND GIRLS' SCHOOL PARA, DIGHIRPAR, CANNING TOWN, PS: CANNING, DIST: SOUTH 24 PARGANAS, PIN: 743329</p> <p>Madam,</p> <p>Re: Declaration of your account Mrs. Champa Rout and its Directors/ Partners/ Proprietor/ Guarantors as Wilful Defaulters and Opportunity for Representation there against.</p> <p>"We refer to our show cause notice no. BOB/KZ/RECY/20-21/7a dated 1st September 2020 for declaring Mrs. Champa Rout and its directors/partners/proprietor/guarantors as wilful defaulters on the following grounds:</p> <p>Asset was not created out of bank finance. Loan was availed for construction of house. Borrower diverted loan amount to other purpose and now not willing to repay the dues.</p> <p>As you are aware that our branch had sent the show cause notice referred above by registered post/speed post/courier on 01/09/2020, you have represented on 25/09/2020 against show cause notice, which has been properly replied by Bank.</p> <p>In the light of the aforesaid facts and circumstances and perusing the documents on record the Committee of Executives on Wilful Defaulters (COE) of bank has decided to declare the Company/firm/borrower and its Directors / partners / proprietor / Guarantors as 'Wilful Defaulters' on the grounds mentioned in the show cause notice, after concluding that Asset was not created out of bank finance. Loan was availed for construction of house. Borrower diverted loan amount to other purpose and now not willing to repay the dues.</p> <p>In terms of RBI guidelines and to comply principles of natural justice, if you, desire, you may send your further submission/representation, if any, for consideration by the Review Committee on Wilful Defaulters within -15- days from the date of receipt of this letter as to why your account and you be not classified by Bank as a Wilful Defaulter.</p> <p>Please note that, incase your further submission/representation against the intention of Bank to declare you as a Wilful Defaulter is not received within -15- days from the date of receipt of this letter, it will be deemed that you have nothing to submit and the Bank will proceed further and classify your account as wilful defaulter. Bank reserves the Right to publish the name and photograph of Wilful Defaulter in News Paper and will initiate the necessary recovery action as per extant guidelines issued by Reserve Bank of India.</p> <p>This communication is issued as per the directions of the Committee of Executives on Wilful Defaulters (COE)</p> <p>This is for your information.</p> <p>Yours faithfully, Sr. Branch Manager</p>	

<p>बैंक ऑफ बड़ोदा Bank of Baroda</p>	<p>ZONAL STRESSED ASSET RECOVERY BRANCH, KOLKATA</p> <p>21A, Sadananda Road, 2nd Floor, Kolkata - 700 026</p> <p>Tel. No. 033-2419 6434/ 6224 / E-mail: ARMCAL@bankofbaroda.com</p>
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<p>Letter No. BOB/ZOSARB/2021-22/866 Date: 25.11.2021</p> <p>1. M/s Little Heart Childrens Hospital Pvt Ltd (Borrower), Holding No 271/7/1, T. G. Samanta Road, J. L. No. 213, Ward No. 22, Mouza - Kenduadihi PS - Bankura, Dist - Bankura, West Bengal, Pin - 722102.</p> <p>2. Mr. Gopal Hazra (Director - M/s Little Heart Childrens Hospital Pvt Ltd), Vill and PO Bara Gadra Sarenga, Sub Division Katra, Dist Bankura, West Bengal, Pin - 722150.</p> <p>3. Mr. Kousik Roy (Director - M/s Little Heart Childrens Hospital Pvt Ltd), Mauja Jharbani (Paschim), J L No 489, Amlagore Garbeta, Paschim Medinipur, Medinipur, West Bengal, Pin - 722121.</p> <p>4. Mr. Pinku Kumar Das (Director - M/s Little Heart Childrens Hospital Pvt Ltd), Palashpa (J L No 143), Palash Pai - 1, Khanakul, Hooghly, West Bengal, Pin - 711401.</p> <p>5. M/s New Land Agro Industries Ltd (Guarantor), Bankadah, PS Bishnupur, West Bengal, Pin - 722164.</p> <p>6. Mr. Dipankar De (Director - M/s Little Heart Childrens Hospital Pvt Ltd), Vill and PO Bankadah, Dist Bankura, West Bengal, Pin - 722164.</p> <p>7. Mr. Abhik Hazra (Director - M/s Little Heart Childrens Hospital Pvt Ltd), Banshi Sarenga, Sarenga, Dist Bankura, West Bengal, Pin - 722150.</p> <p>8. Mr. Kartik Charan (Director - M/s Little Heart Childrens Hospital Pvt Ltd), Mauja Chihotabokadaha, J L No 148 (Part), Bankadah, Bishnupur, Bankura, West Bengal, Pin - 722164.</p> <p>9. M/s Rahul Health Care Pvt. Ltd. (Guarantor), College Road (Rash Tala), Bishnupur, PO and PS Bishnupur, Dist Bankura, West Bengal, Pin - 722122</p> <p>Dear Sir,</p> <p>Re: Declaration of your account M/s. Little Heart Childrens Hospital Pvt Ltd and its Directors/ Guarantors as Wilful Defaulters and Opportunity for Representation there against.</p> <p>"We refer to our show cause notice no. BOB/ZOSARB/2021-22698/ dated 01.06.2021 for declaring M/s. Little Heart Childrens Hospital Pvt Ltd and its directors/guarantors as wilful defaulters on the following grounds:</p> <p>1. You did not deposit any amount from sale proceeds of stock/realization of book debts in the account, thereby diverting the funds. They have closed their business and no trace of the borrower/guarantor.</p> <p>Thus the firm has defaulted in meeting its payment/repayment obligations to the lender and has not utilised the finance from the lender for the specific purpose for which finance was availed of but has diverted the funds for other purposes.</p> <p>As you are aware that our branch had sent the show cause notice referred above by registered post/speed post/courier on 01.06.2021. Even after receipt of the above referred show cause notices, we have not received any representation or response from you.</p> <p>In the light of the aforesaid facts and circumstances and perusing the documents on record the Committee of Executives on Wilful Defaulters (COE) of bank has decided to declare the Company/firm/borrower and its Directors/partners/proprietor/Guarantors as 'Wilful Defaulters' on the grounds mentioned in the show cause notice, after concluding that the firm has defaulted in meeting its payment/repayment obligations to the lender and has not utilised the finance from the lender for the specific purpose for which finance was availed of but has diverted the funds for other purposes.</p> <p>In terms of RBI guidelines and to comply principles of natural justice, if you, desire, you may send your further submission/representation, if any, for consideration by the Review Committee on Wilful Defaulters within -15- days from the date of receipt of this letter as to why your account and you be not classified by Bank as a Wilful Defaulter.</p> <p>Please note that, incase your further submission/representation against the intention of Bank to declare you as a Wilful Defaulter is not received within -15- days from the date of receipt of this letter, it will be deemed that you have nothing to submit and the Bank will proceed further and classify your account as wilful defaulter. Bank reserves the Right to publish the name and photograph of Wilful Defaulter in News Paper and will initiate the necessary recovery action as per extant guidelines issued by Reserve Bank of India.</p> <p>This communication is issued as per the directions of the Committee of Executives on Wilful Defaulters (COE).</p> <p>This is for your information.</p> <p>Yours faithfully, Chief Manager</p>	<p>TENDER NOTICE</p> <p>Bank of Baroda, Regional Office, Bhubaneswar-II invites sealed tender in two bid system for INTERIOR FURNISHING, ELECTRICAL, DATA CABLEING & AIR CONDITIONING WORK for its "Regional Office, at 2nd floor, Chalachitra Bhawan, Buxi Bazar, Cuttack-753001, Odisha".</p> <p>Tenders in sealed envelope should be addressed and submitted to "The Regional Manager, Regional Office, Bhubaneswar-II, 1st floor, Bivab Gulmohar, Behera Sahi, Nayapalli, Bhubaneswar-751012, Odisha" on or before 27.12.2021 upto 3.00 P.M. For details please log on tender section of our website www.bankofbaroda.in to download the tender documents. Corrigendum, if any, will be published in Bank's Website only. The Bank reserves its right to accept or reject any or all tenders without assigning reason thereof.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">REGIONAL MANAGER</p>
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Babri demolition anniversary: Security beefed up in Mathura

AMIL BHATNAGAR
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 5

THE MATHURA administration has scaled up security, with 3,000 personnel deployed in the district ahead of the anniversary of the Babri Masjid demolition on Monday and a now-revoked call to perform a Hindu ritual inside a mosque there.

Last month, some right-wing groups called on people to perform a Hindu ceremony inside the Shahi Idgah in Mathura on Monday.

They said this was to reclaim the original "birthplace" of Hindu deity, Lord Krishna.

Officials and the groups later said the appeal was withdrawn, but police are preparing for any potential law and order situation.

"We have beefed up security to nearly 3,000 security personnel which includes several divisions. We are carrying out flag marches, drills to ensure we are prepared for all outcomes. In our conversations with outfits that had called for the ceremony, we have been ensured there will be no protest. But we will be securing the area to be ready for any eventuality," said Gaurav Grover, SSP, Mathura.

According to officials, local police, Rapid Action Force and Provincial Armed Constabulary have been deployed in heavy numbers. It is three-times the normal level of deployment of police officials, they said.

Bail plea of man 'smuggling drugs rejected

Mumbai: A sepcial ourt has rejected the anticipatory bail application of a 34-year-old man allegedly involved in sending a Mumbai-based couple to Qatar in 2019 with narcotics which led them to spend nearly two years in a jail there. The court said evidence shows the man is part of a ring that uses innocent persons to send narcotics abroad.

In 2019, Mohammed Sharqi and Oniba Qureshi had left for Qatar after the former's aunt, Tabassum, insisted on sending them for a holiday. Tabassum had given a bag to the couple to be given to a friend in Doha. When they reached Doha, the couple was arrested after 4.1 kg of hashish was found concealed in the bag.

Nagaland killing puts question mark on peace talks

Insurgent groups condemn action, call it 'black day' for Nagas

DEEPTIMAN TIWARY & ESHA ROY
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 5

THE INCIDENT at Oting village in Nagaland's Mon district may have an impact on the Naga peace talks, with sources saying that the groups negotiating with the Centre may be under pressure to hold back to reflect public anger over the killing.

"This is not a Nagaland Police operation, where the state government elected by the people can be held responsible and where local police personnel would be involved. This is an Indian Army operation gone horribly wrong. It will give credence to the longstanding narrative of India versus Naga people. It goes on to strengthen the hands of insurgent groups, even if temporarily. It will require rather deft handling from the Centre, beginning with quick and visible action against those responsible," a senior security establishment officer told *The Indian Express*.

While the Centre has been wooing various factions of the NSCN for long, over the past couple of years the government has managed to bring quite a few groups opposed to talks to the negotiating table. These include groups led by Khango Konyak and Niki Sumi, which were both once part of the anti-talks faction of NSCN, the NSCN-K. Sumi was in fact the military commander of NSCN-K, which is said to have considerable influence in the districts of Nagaland bordering Myanmar.

Sources said the incident will force even pro-India groups to articulate public sentiments over the issue. "Until now, only the NSCN-IM has been the stumbling block to the Naga Peace Accord from being finalised. All other

Naga groups, part of Naga National Political Groups (NNPG) or otherwise, want the deal to happen as quickly as possible. However, the incident now not only gives NSCN-IM a handle to push back against India in the negotiations but also puts pressure on other groups to raise their voice," a source from the Nagaland administration said.

A central government source said, "If deftly handled, it won't have much of an impact. In conflict zones, such violence, even though it has not happened for many years in Nagaland, is not a matter of great shock. Yes, some noises will be made. But most groups know what they want and negotiations will happen on that."

To add, sources said, the incident is likely to be a reminder of times people have tried to forget. In a statement, the NSCN-IM called it a "black day" for all Nagas and termed the incident "unprecedented in recent history".

"The Indian security forces will never be able to wash its hands off... Notwithstanding the ongoing Indo-Naga political dialogue that has seen much fruition during the period... the violence against the Nagas continues unabated," it said.

In a strong statement, the NNPG, which comprises seven Nagaland-based insurgent groups who has so far supported the peace talks process, rescinding many of its earlier demands such as separate flag, blamed the continued implementation of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1956 for such incidents.

"The Indo-Naga peace talks are over. Now the Indian government needs to push through the peace process... If the peace process was in place, the Centre would have to repeal AFSPA from Nagaland..." said NNPG working committee member G Zhimomi.



Assam Rifles personnel at a camp of the force on Sunday which was set on fire in the violence over Saturday's killings. PTI

Move beyond rhetoric, ensure fair probe to fix accountability, says Opp to Centre

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 5

THE OPPOSITION on Sunday hit out at the central government after 13 civilians and a soldier were killed in a botched Army operation in Nagaland's Mon district near the India-Myanmar border. It asked the government to ensure "an honest and open" probe into the incident to bring out the truth and ensure accountability.

With Parliament in session, the Opposition asked the government to make a statement in the House on what went wrong.

Tinamool Congress chief and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said the government must "ensure a thorough probe into the incident and ensure that all victims get justice".

"Worrisome news from #Nagaland. Heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families. I pray for the speedy recovery of those who were injured. We must ensure a thorough probe into the incident and ensure that all victims get justice!" Banerjee said in a tweet.

"This is heart wrenching. GOI must give a real reply. What exactly is the home ministry doing



Nagaland minister P Puiwang Konyak with administration and security officials at the site of the violence. ANI

when neither civilians nor security personnel are safe in our own land?" senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said.

Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge said Home Minister Amit Shah "can't get away by just expressing anguish".

"Under Modi Government's rule, the North-East has witnessed an increase in turmoil. Government must ensure the victims get justice," he said.

Calling for an honest and open

inquiry, Congress deputy leader in Rajya Sabha Anand Sharma said the government must make a statement in Parliament.

"It is most tragic and deeply regrettable. It should have never happened. It is unacceptable in a rule governed democracy. With much difficulty we have had peace restored in the region. I hope the high-level probe as assured by the Army brings the truth out and ensures accountability," Sharma told *The Indian Express*.

Strongly condemning the cold blooded killing of 13 civilians, the CPI(M) demanded compensation and justice for the victims.

The CPI said Home Minister Amit Shah owes an answer to the nation.

"It is very painful to see that our civilians are being killed. One security personnel was also killed. What is the intelligence agencies doing? What was the intelligence input? Nobody knows. The Home Minister doesn't speak on such issues. And Home Minister Amit Shah makes tall claims about security," CPI general secretary D Raja said. "Even in Jammu and Kashmir we saw civilians being killed in encounters. In Nagaland now civilians are killed. What is happening to our security assessment... what are the security forces doing to protect the lives of our civilians. The Home Minister owes an answer to the nation." While arguing that the incident was highly condemnable, senior RJD leader Manoj Kumar Jha told *The Indian Express*, "We cannot ignore the fact that things are really not in good shape in the Northeastern part of our country."

Konyak tribe numbers make them crucial to peace talks

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 5

AT THE centre of the violence which followed the killing of six civilians in Oting village of Mon district in Nagaland on Saturday evening, and which led to the killing of eight more civilians, are the Konyaks – among the largest tribes in the state.

With a population of roughly 3 lakh, the area inhabited by the Konyaks extends into Arunachal Pradesh, with a sizeable population in Myanmar as well.

Known to be one of the fiercest warrior tribes in Nagaland, the Konyaks were the last to give up the practice of head-hunting – severing heads of enemies after attacking rival tribes – as late as the 1980s.



Mon is the only district in Nagaland where separatist group NSCN (IM) has not been able to set up base camps, largely due to resistance from the Konyaks.

Due to their numbers and the tribe's anti-NSCN (IM) position, the Konyaks forms the backbone of the NNPG – 7 Naga insurgent groups indigenous to Nagaland – unlike the IM, which is dominated by the Manipur-origin Tangkhul tribe.

The Konyaks therefore, are imperative for a smooth resolution of the peace talks, as well as the post-talk peace process in the state.

Senior leaders in the Nagaland government fear that unless the Konyak people are mollified, this incident could disrupt the peace process.

Over the years, eastern districts in Nagaland, including Mon, have been demanding a separate Frontier Nagaland state largely because of the "biased" developmental expenditure, with little development work carried out in these remote districts.

SALUTE THE SOLDIER

HAVILDAR SREEKUMAR M, SM
9 MADRAS (TRAVANCORE)



All ranks of TRAVANCORE TERRORS pay homage to Havildar Sreekumar M, SM who made the supreme sacrifice of his life on this day while fighting terrorists in J&K in 1997. Commanding Officer and all ranks cherish the memories of his brave deeds on the 24th Anniversary of his martyrdom. Brave soldiers like him will always be source of inspiration for all of us.

Commanding Officer & All Ranks
9 MADRAS (TRAVANCORE)

NAIK YAMA SIVA SANKARA REDDY, SC
9 MADRAS (TRAVANCORE)



All ranks of TRAVANCORE TERRORS pay homage to Naik YSS Reddy, SC who made the supreme sacrifice of his life on this day while fighting terrorists in J&K in 1997. Commanding Officer and all ranks cherish the memories of his brave deeds on the 24th Anniversary of his martyrdom. Brave soldiers like him will always be source of inspiration for all of us.

Commanding Officer & All Ranks
9 MADRAS (TRAVANCORE)

Colonel Hoshier Singh, Param Vir Chakra
01 May 1936-06 Dec 1998



On this day, we salute and pay homage to a gallant officer who displayed exceptional courage, determination, conspicuous gallantry and motivated his men by his inspiring leadership and true devotion to duty to rise to the occasion despite being seriously wounded. For his grit, determination, raw courage and unparalleled leadership he was awarded the Nation's highest gallantry award - 'PARAM VIR CHAKRA', in the epic Battle of Basantar during the Indo-Pak War of 1971. We pray to the almighty on his 23rd death anniversary to bless the departed soul with everlasting peace.

Lt Gen Rajeev Sirohi, UYSM, AVSM, VSM
and All Ranks of The GRENADIERS Regiment

Case against Deshmukh: ED records Param Bir's statement

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, DECEMBER 5

THE ENFORCEMENT Directorate (ED) has recorded the statement of now suspended Mumbai Police Commissioner Param Bir Singh in connection with its money laundering case against former Maharashtra Home Minister Anil Deshmukh.

Singh was questioned for over five hours under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act at the ED office in South Mumbai on December 3 by an official of the deputy director rank of the agency. Singh's statement forms the core of the case against Deshmukh.

e-Tender Notice

The Proadhan Mahisasthali Gram Panchayat invites e-Tender through e-Procurement System from the bonafied and resourceful Contractors for NIEt No:- i) 11/MGP/2021-22, ii)12/MGP/2021-22 Both Dated: 21/11/2021. Last date of Bid submission: 11/12/2021 upto 2.00 PM. Work type: Solar Street Light. For details visit <http://wbftenders.gov.in>

Sd/-
Proadhan Mahisasthali G.P.
Bhagwagola-I Block, Murshidabad

CHITTARANJAN LOCOMOTIVE WORKS

E-tenders are invited for and on behalf of the President of India for the following work: SLNo.: [01], Tender No.Engg.22/2021-22. Name of the work: Dismantling of condemned Railway Quarters / Buildings (Barrack Type Qrs., Cement Godown, Tin Shed etc.) and disposal & clearing of site after taken away of released dismantled materials. Advertised value (Rupees): 2,78,594.64. Period of completion (in months): 04 months. Date of closing: 07/01/2022 at 12.00 hrs. Note: (i) Complete details can be seen in the following website www.reps.gov.in & www.clw.indianrailways.gov.in (ii) Contact Number: 9136640202. PRS-281 Divisional Engineer/CLW/ CRJ Like us on: www.facebook.com/clwrailways

RUSSIAN PRESIDENT ARRIVES TODAY

Modi, Putin to focus on terror as common threat

SHUBHAJIT ROY
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 5

WITH THE security situation emanating out of Taliban-ruled Afghanistan a "shared concern", Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Russian President Vladimir Putin on Monday will focus on terrorism as a common threat to both countries and the region.

Putin will arrive in New Delhi on Monday, while Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Defence Minister Sergey Shoigu were scheduled to arrive on Sunday night.

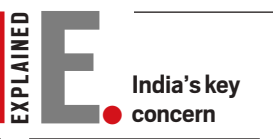
Top government sources told *The Indian Express* on Sunday that the two sides have worked "very closely" on the issue of threats of terrorism, terrorist financing and the flow of arms, and the drugs trade, and that these issues are expected to be reflected in the joint statement after Putin meets Modi.

The government source pointed out that New Delhi and Moscow have worked together on at least three major multilateral groupings – Russia-India-China (RIC), BRICS and SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation) – and the conversation will be carried forward at the bilateral meetings as well. In fact, to strengthen the bilateral mechanism – a new format, the 2+2 ministerial meeting between the Foreign and Defence ministers of both sides will also take place on Monday, ahead of the Putin-Modi bilateral summit in the evening. So far, India has 2+2 ministerial formats with only the Quad countries – US, Japan and Australia.

Officials said that at the recent RIC meeting, India had negotiated hard on including references to the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). While there is no mention of any terrorist entities



Vladimir Putin



FROM THE RIC to bilateral conversations, India has pushed for references to concerns on terrorism to be reflected in the joint documents. In fact, after the fall of Kabul, Putin and Modi spoke and Russian NSA Nikolai Patrushev was sent to New Delhi to carry forward the conversation. While both sides have shared concerns and objectives, their ways to achieve those goals are somewhat different. That is reflected in their engagements with the Taliban and Pakistan.

— from India-focused groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba or the Jaish-e-Mohammed, or any other group, including the ETIM (East Turkestan Islamic Movement) – a top government source told *The Indian Express*, "In the last 10-15 years of RIC statements, terrorist entities have not been mentioned in the RIC joint document."

Ahead of Putin's visit, India has cleared the long-pending AK-203 Kalashnikov rifles deal worth nearly Rs 5,000 crore for

the production of over 5 lakh rifles at Korwa in Amethi by an Indo-Russian joint venture. The two sides are also negotiating to wrap up the final phase of negotiations for a logistics support agreement, which is likely to be signed either during the 2+2 talks or at the summit.

India and Russia are also set to renew for the next decade a framework for military-technical cooperation, besides announcing a joint commission on technology and science. The two sides are also likely to finalise a number of defence procurement proposals, besides deliberating on the long-pending project for joint production of 200 twin-engine Kamov-226T light helicopters for the Indian armed forces.

On cooperation in areas of defence, sources said the two sides are set to focus on co-production and co-development of military equipment and platforms. Referring to investment ties, they said the target of \$30 billion has already been met in 2018 and now the focus is on raising it to \$50 billion by 2025. Sources said India is also keen on boosting trade relations with the Russian Far East and 11 governors from the region have been invited for the upcoming Vibrant Gujarat conclave.

The day will begin with Defence Minister Rajnath Singh's talks with his Russian counterpart Shoigu under the framework of the India-Russia Inter-Governmental Commission on Military-Technical Cooperation. Separately, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will hold talks with his Russian counterpart Lavrov. Then the ministers will hold the 2+2 dialogue at 11:30 am.

PM Modi and President Putin will hold a one-on-one meeting at 5:30 pm, and a dinner will be hosted for the President.

BULANDSHAHR

Convoy of BSP ex-leader fired upon, one killed

AMIL BHATNAGAR & MANISH SAHU
NEW DELHI, LUCKNOW, DEC 5

THE CONVOY of former BSP leader Haji Yunus was attacked in Bulandshahr on Sunday, a day after he joined the Rashtriya Lok Dal. One person was killed in the attack while four others have been hospitalised, police said.

According to police, Yunus's convoy had left a wedding function for Mirzapur village when multiple gunmen opened fire at an Audi SUV in which his associates were seated. Yunus escaped the attack unscathed but five others received bullet wounds and were rushed to hospital, where one of the injured, identified as Khalid, succumbed.

Bulandshahr SSP Santosh Kumar Singh said, "As their vehicles were crossing a bridge, unidentified assailants began shooting at the row of vehicles... The victims' side believe that

their nephew had a role to play in the incident. Further investigation is pending."

Confirming the death, Additional Superintendent of Police (City) S K Tiwari said police are yet to receive a complaint to get an FIR lodged.

Yunus, the former block pramukh from Sadar, is the brother of former BSP MLA Haji Alim, who was murdered in 2018. Alim's son Anas Alim is currently in jail in connection with his father's murder. Police said Yunus has accused his nephew Anas Alim of being behind the attack on him.

Meanwhile, Yunus alleged that he had warned the administration about a possible attack on him but no action was taken.

Following Alim's death, Yunus had contested the Nov 2020 bypoll for the Bulandshahr seat on a BSP ticket but had lost to BJP's Usha Sirohi. On Saturday, he was officially inducted into the RLD by Jayant Chaudhary in Lucknow.

Kerala: Parties trade blame over CPM leader's murder

Thiruvananthapuram: The CPI(M) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Sunday traded barbs over political links of a five-member gang that allegedly stabbed to death a local leader of the CPI(M) in Pathanamthitta district of Kerala last Thursday.

Leaders of both the CPI(M) and the BJP blamed each other for alleged links with the gang, and said the killing was over political rivalry.

P B Sandeep Kumar, CPI(M) local secretary at Peringara in the district, was allegedly killed by the gang while he was returning home. Police arrested the five suspects overnight.

Police initially said it appeared

to be a case of personal rivalry. Later on Friday night, police, while submitting the remand report of the accused in court, expanded the motive to say it was a case of "personal and political rivalry".

On Sunday, CPI(M) state secretary Kodiyeri Balakrishnan visited the family of the victim. "This murder was executed under the leadership of a BJP worker, who brought together the accomplices. There is a high-level conspiracy behind it," he said.

BJP state president K Surendran hit back at the CPI(M) on Sunday and demanded a high-level probe into the murder. "Of the five accused, four have CPI(M) relation...", he said.

ENS

ADVERTORIAL



Jamnalal Bajaj
(1889 - 1942)

As a young man, he renounced his claim to the family wealth. He was among the very few businessmen who incurred British wrath for supporting the freedom movement; the only one who renounced the titles of 'Honorary Magistrate' and 'Rai Bahadur'; the social reformer who walked his talk - abolishing the purdah system in his own home, opening the doors of his family-owned temple to 'Dalits' - the first temple in India to be so opened; the freedom fighter who suffered protracted jail terms, the 'Merchant Prince' who lived a lower middle class life, the humble spirit who gave himself completely to the freedom movement - mind, body and soul. He was adopted by Gandhiji as his 'fifth son'.



Jankidevi Bajaj
(1893 - 1979)

She followed her husband Jamnalalji's footsteps. She discarded orthodox customs like 'purdah' and untouchability and worked all her life for promoting Gandhian values. She participated in the freedom movement and suffered imprisonment. She actively participated in the Bhoo dan Movement and enunciated the 'Koopdan'. Government of India honoured her with Padma Vibhushan in 1956. Jamnalal Bajaj Foundation instituted, in 1980, a special award in her memory for women workers for Outstanding Contribution to the Development & Welfare of Women and Children.

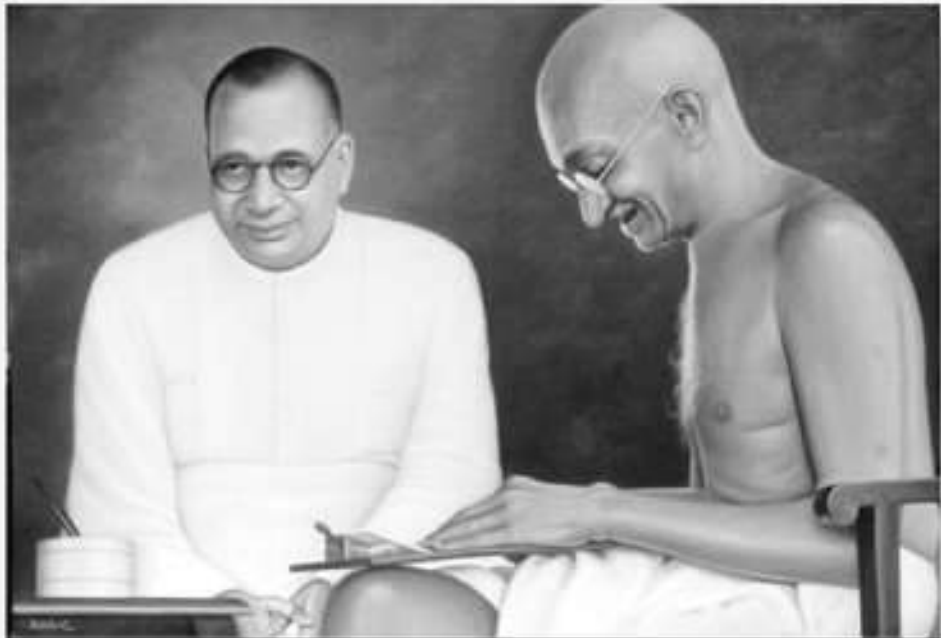


Rahul Bajaj
Chairman, Jamnalal Bajaj Foundation

Capitalism has its flaws, Communism is virtually discredited and democracy is yielding inadequate outcomes. We can see a decline in civility and the rise of crass behaviour, a self-centred "me-myself" society. Minds, as much as economies, seem to be closing. At such times, I derive hope and strength from three quarters. First, from the sagacity of our civilisation. We have many ideas, especially "dharma" that can guide us. Second, the spirit of ordinary people. Their aspiration and drive to improve their lot. Third, from exemplars who pursue the common good, "sarvodaya". Jamnalal Bajaj Foundation is essentially looking for such exemplars, and it is very heartening to find so many of them.



JAMNALAL BAJAJ FOUNDATION
Honours the Gandhian 'Warriors'



"Whenever I wrote of wealthy men becoming trustees of their wealth for the common good, I always had this merchant prince principally in mind."

- Mahatma Gandhi in Harijan, 14-3-1942



Inauguration of the Foundation (4 November, 1977):
(l-r) Justice M. Hidayatullah, Ramkrishna Bajaj, Morari Desai, Acharya Kripalani & Dr. Srimannarayan

CHIEF GUEST



Nobel Peace Laureate
Shri Kailash Satyarthi
Founder, Kailash Satyarthi Children's Foundation

VIRTUAL AWARDS FUNCTION - 2021

Date:
Monday, 06 December, 2021
Time : 06.30 pm

Link: [JBFAwards.dreamcast.in](https://www.jamnalalbajajawards.org)

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An initiative by **RED**
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Kamalnayan Bajaj
(1915 - 1972)

Jamnalalji's elder son. A man who was brought up by three great souls - father Jamnalal Bajaj, mentor Mahatma Gandhi and kulguru Vinoba Bhave. He endeavoured to fulfil his father's wish to put into practice Gandhiji's theory of trusteeship. He founded Jamnalal Bajaj Sewa Trust and extended help to many causes like education, medical care and famine and flood relief. He was an original thinker and a maverick; a capitalist with a social outlook and a politician with a conscience. He fueled the industrialisation of a free India and the spirit behind her quest for self reliance.



Ramkrishna Bajaj
(1923 - 1994)

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Technology for
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Dr. Lal Singh
Himachal Pradesh

Set up Himalayan Research Group to strengthen the livelihoods, biodiversity conservation, and overall development of rural mountain communities with application of need based technology models in different parts of the North Western Indian Himalayan Region.



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and Welfare of
Women and
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Sister Lucy Kurien
Maharashtra

Set up Maher in 1997, to provide safe haven for destitute women, abandoned children, men and the old and aged people. Since inception has provided care and shelter to more than 5000 children and 5900 women.



Award for
Promoting
Gandhian
Values Outside
India



Mr. David H. Albert
United States of America

David Albert co-founded Friendly Water for the World to propagate social technology, making it conceivable for communities in sub-Saharan Africa to revive themselves through asset-based community development, community engagement, and longer-term empowerment.



The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

TRAGEDY AND TRUST

Nagaland killings aren't a mere 'blunder'. Exemplary action based on fair probe is the way to earn people's trust — and keep peace

MORE THAN A dozen people, including a jawan, all innocent, were killed in Mon district in Nagaland Saturday in what security forces say was a botched-up counter insurgency operation. The Assam Rifles, which undertook the operation, has officially expressed regret and has ordered an inquiry. Union Home Minister Amit Shah has announced that a special investigation team will probe. A free and fair investigation should be held to get to the bottom of the matter and identify where and how the operation went wrong. Understandably, there is sadness and anger across Nagaland — and elsewhere in the country — at this wanton act of killing. Reports of violence as a response are disturbing and all groups, political parties and community leaders, and the security forces, too, must get together to calm tempers. The government's immediate task is to reach out to the families of the bereaved and act fast to address the breach of trust between the local population and state agencies.

The Mon incident comes close on the heels of the killing of a commanding officer of Assam Rifles, along with six others, in Manipur last month. The tenuous peace in the region, where multiple insurgent groups have been operating for years, can snap at any time if the political leadership, security forces and the civil society cease to be vigilant. The 1997 ceasefire agreement between the NSCN-IM and security forces has held up despite ups and downs only because all actors have invested in peace. Talks with the NSCN-IM for a settlement to end the seven-decade-old Naga insurgency is at an advanced stage — a framework agreement was signed in 2015; this incident could derail the process. The unrest in neighbouring Myanmar has reportedly influenced the priorities of Naga and Manipur insurgent groups that have a base in that country. It may spill over to border districts of Nagaland and Manipur. All these demand extreme vigil and caution from security forces — the Assam Rifles has stated that Saturday's action was “based on credible intelligence of likely movement of insurgents” — which are entrusted with the task of defeating insurgency. They need to be extra cautious and sensitive to local communities while doing their job under extreme pressure.

The Northeast, with its patchwork of identities and a complex history of nation-building, has always been fraught, its geography, history and political economy conducive for insurgent groups to operate. State-building here has to be an extremely cautious exercise and negotiated with multiple stakeholders, who often privilege linguistic, regional, ethnic and clan identity. Over-securitisation of the political discourse or mixing up religion with nationalism can have dire consequences in the region where multiple fault lines have endured for decades. The immediate task is to quell the violence, hold to account those responsible for this tragedy — avoid any move to brush it away as a mere blunder — and keep the peace.

A CODE IN PROGRESS

ART Bill plugs longstanding regulatory deficit. Ways must be found to make it more inclusive

LAST WEEK, THE Lok Sabha passed the Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) Regulation Bill that sets standards and codes of conduct for fertility clinics and sperm banks in the country. The piece of legislation caters to a longstanding need. In the past 20 years, the increase in the number of ART clinics in India has been amongst the highest in the world. They cater to a burgeoning medical tourism industry and significantly, to a growing section of the country's population that is turning to ARTs such as gamete donation, intrauterine dissemination, in-vitro fertilisation and intracytoplasmic sperm injection to have children. Because of declining fertility rates, a substantial section of Indians marrying later than the generation before them, and the increasing provenance of single parenthood, the use of such technologies is bound to grow. At the same time, more than 80 per cent of clinics in the country offering ART facilities are reportedly unregistered. The ethical as well as safety-related issues germane to this regulatory deficit have been a part of conversation for two decades. The ICMR did lay down guidelines for ART clinics in 2005. But these protocols did not have any legislative backing. If the ART Bill becomes a law, it would be incumbent on clinics to ensure that commissioning couples, women and gamete donors are tested according to the established protocols. It also provides for a database of ART clinics in the country. In spite of the broad scope of the Bill it would be, however, pertinent to see legislation in the area as a work in progress — it will demand more sensitivity from lawmakers in dealing with changing social, demographic and medical trends.

The Bill does tick several right boxes in stipulating that the clinics provide counselling about the chances of success, costs, side-effects and risks, including that of multiple pregnancies. Importantly, it talks of informed consent of donors and legalises ART procedures for live-in couples and single women. However, as several members pointed out in the debate in the Lok Sabha, the bill discriminates against LGBTQ and single male parents. It goes against the spirit of the Supreme Court's landmark verdict in Navtej Johar v Union of India and assumes a formalistic position on the rights of same-sex couples to raise a family.

It seems that the heteronormative line of thinking of the Surrogacy Bill passed by the Lok Sabha in 2019 — the Rajya Sabha referred it to a select committee — has driven the ART Bill when it should have been the other way around given that the ART sector is more expansive than the surrogacy sector. The Upper House must take the conversation further and make sure that the law keeps up with the inclusive potential of reproductive technologies.

FREEZE FRAME

E P UNNY



ASHOK GULATI

WHEN I WAS born into this world, I thought I had a right to breathe fresh air, as that was provided free by nature. But being born and brought up in Delhi, I now feel that fresh air has become a luxury, which I can avail only for a few days in a year. For the rest, I have to gasp for fresh air. My lifespan has already been cut short by almost three years by the polluted air, as per experts, and if business as usual continues, millions in the National Capital Region (NCR) will be choking in the “gas chamber” that Delhi has become.

Supreme Court (SC) judges have rightly pulled up the Delhi and central governments for not doing enough to correct this dire situation. They also remarked on what message we are sending to the world. If one looks at the capitals of G20 countries, Delhi's air quality index (AQI) during November 1-15, is by far the worst at 312, as per World Air Quality Index Project. Compare this with Beijing (China) at 91, Buenos Aires (Argentina) at 26, Canberra (Australia) at 20, Sao Paulo (in place of Brasilia) at 18, Ottawa (Canada) at 25, and so on with most of them falling below 50, and some between 50 and 100. India is obviously a clear outlier. But India's distinction goes beyond Delhi. As per the World Air Quality Report of 2020, prepared by IQAir (a Swiss organisation), of the 30 most polluted cities in the world, 22 are in India. So, the problem is much deeper, raising doubts about the quality of our urbanisation.

Before a cure comes the right diagnosis. As per the report of the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change submitted to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, energy generation (largely coal-based thermal power) is the biggest culprit with a share of 44 per cent in greenhouse gas emissions, followed by manufacturing and construction (18 per cent), agriculture (14 per cent), transport (13 per cent) industrial processes and product use (8 per cent) and waste burning (3 per cent). To replace coal in energy generation, so-

Centre and states need to incentivise farmers to reduce rice cultivation to tackle pollution



On a particular day, say November 7, stubble burning contributed 48 per cent of Delhi's air pollution, which fell to just 2 per cent on November 18. The fact is that even for a day, when the AQI is above 350, when Delhiites are already gasping for breath, this stubble burning can be the last proverbial straw on the camel's back. The Centre needs to sit down with neighbouring states and come up with a plan to reduce the rice area in this belt, which is already depleting the water table, creating methane and nitrous oxide, to incentivise farmers to switch to other crops through better returns than in rice cultivation.

lar and wind is the way to go at the all-India level. In this regard, the Prime Minister has done a commendable job in Glasgow to commit that 50 per cent of India's energy will be from renewable sources by 2030. But the current model in solar energy is heavily tilted towards companies. They are setting up large solar farms on degraded or less fertile lands. But that land is gone for the next 25 years only for solar energy. Nothing else can be grown on those corporate solar farms. It is good from an efficiency standpoint to minimise the cost of energy generation, which luckily is now even cheaper than the cost of thermal energy. I have no problem with this model. However, what if we supplement that model by developing solar farms on farmers' fields? This would require solar panels to be fixed at a 10 feet height with due spacing to let enough sunlight come to the plants for photosynthesis. These “solar trees” can then become the “third crop” for the farmers, earning them regular income throughout the year, provided the law allows them to sell this power to the national grid. The Delhi government's pilot in Ujwa KVK land on these lines showed that farmers can earn up to Rs 1 lakh per acre per year from this “solar farming”. This is on top of the two crops they can keep growing under those solar trees. This will double farmers' income within a year. The investment of “solar trees” in farmers' fields is still done by companies. The only thing that farmers have to sign on is a sort of bond that they will not uproot these solar trees for 25 years, as that is the life cycle of such solar projects. Doubling farmers' income by 2022-23 is a dream that Prime Minister Modi has aspired to, and here is a chance to turn that dream into a reality.

But let me come back to Delhi's pollution as Delhiites are gasping for breath right now. As per the System of Air Quality Forecasting and Research (SAFAR), the reasons for poor AQI differ day to day. For example, between November 9 and 13, 30 per cent of Delhi's pollution was due to stubble burning, an-

other 22 per cent from transport, 18 per cent from external (other than stubble burning), 12 per cent from industries, 4 per cent from bio-fuels, dust 8 per cent and the rest-local (6 per cent). But this contribution of stubble burning drops to just 8 per cent if the period considered is from October 30 to November 3. On a particular day, say November 7, stubble burning contributed 48 per cent of Delhi's air pollution, which fell to just 2 per cent on November 18. The fact is that even for a day, when the AQI is above 350, when Delhiites are already gasping for breath, this stubble burning can be the last proverbial straw on the camel's back. The Centre needs to sit down with neighbouring states and come up with a plan to reduce the rice area in this belt, which is already depleting the water table, creating methane and nitrous oxide, to incentivise farmers to switch to other crops through better returns than in rice cultivation.

To tackle vehicular pollution, we need a massive drive towards electric vehicles (EVs), and later towards green hydrogen when it becomes competitive with fossil fuels. Scaling up EVs quickly demands creating charging stations on a war footing, much like we developed vaccines for Covid-19 and scaled up hospital beds during the second wave of the pandemic. Parking lots in offices, housing societies, hotels, hospitals, shopping malls, petrol pumps, etc, need to have fast charging points. This is a business opportunity, but lawmakers can expedite it by changing the rules of the game and providing up-front subsidies on EVs, if need be, equal to the taxes on diesel/petrol vehicles. The hesitancy to buy EVs due to lack of charging stations must go.

Delhi also needs a good carbon sink. Rejuvenating the Ridge area in dense forests and developing thick forests on both sides of the Yamuna may help.

Gulati is Infosys Chair Professor for Agriculture at ICRIER

TEHRAN'S WHITE FLAG

Iran wants the Vienna talks to succeed, end sanctions against it



DEEPIKA SARASWAT

IRAN'S NEW DELEGATION joined the seventh round of talks in Vienna on the revival of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). In sharp contrast to the apprehension that having delayed the talks for four months since the inauguration of the new administration, the hardliner team will lead to a deadlock in negotiations, Deputy Foreign minister and lead negotiator Ali Bagheri told reporters at the end of the first day of talks, that all the issues remaining from the previous six rounds could be negotiated.

The new team, however, brings the political sensibilities of the incumbent conservative administration into its approach to negotiations. Bagheri has maintained that negotiations should not be called nuclear negotiations, as the key objective is the lifting of sanctions. In line with this goal, the Iranian delegation is composed of legal and banking/financial officials, with most of them having served as representatives to international organisations, including IAEA. Upon Iran's insistence, a meeting of the JCPOA Joint Commission's working group on lifting sanctions was held on November 29, the working group on nuclear commitments met the next day.

During the four-month hiatus, Iran expanded its stockpile of 60 per cent enriched uranium and denied IAEA monitoring access to the Karaj centrifuge manufacturing workshop after it came under a sabotage attack in June 2021, for which Tehran blames Israel. As the European Union coordinator of the Joint Commission of the JCPOA reached out to Tehran, raising “urgency” to resume talks, the new administration de-

clared that “Iran's actions will be commensurate with the level of actions of the other parties”. Analysts argue that by enriching nearly weapon-grade uranium, Iran is demonstrating its capability to swiftly retaliate if Washington was to do another volte-face on the agreement. Further, unlike the previous administration, the Raisi administration is delinking Iran's economy from JCPOA negotiations, prioritising economic diplomacy with Asia so that any reneging on a deal by Washington in future does not cause a shock to Iranian economy. In a nutshell, Iran's approach is to build leverage and not compromise on key issues of lifting all sanctions, including those imposed after 2018, and guarantee against future violations of the agreement.

Another indication that Iran is serious about the revival of JCPOA is the continuation of intensive diplomatic outreach with its Gulf neighbours under the Raisi administration, raising hopes that the agreement reached in Vienna will have acceptance from Iran's neighbours who were critical of the JCPOA. Tehran has traditionally refused to link the nuclear talks to discussions on Iran's regional policy and ballistic missiles programme by maintaining they are separate issues and regional issues will be discussed with regional states alone. In October, when Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Abdollahian called on the US president to re-enter JCPOA through an executive order, he also sought to reassure Iran's Gulf neighbours that the nuclear deal “will not be against the region or our neighbours” and that Iranian “negotiators should appraise neighbours and key regional players of nuclear talks.”

Abdollahian has called his UAE counterpart Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al-Nahyan twice in November and emphasised the need for “continuous consultations” between the two countries. Just a few days before the resumption of negotiations, Tehran's chief negotiator Bagheri travelled to Dubai and met senior officials, including Anwar Gargash, diplomatic adviser to the UAE President. Similarly, Raisi administration's willingness to have a fourth round of talks with Riyadh in Baghdad this year bodes well for restoring peace and stability in the region and Riyadh's support for the agreement reached in Vienna. The Biden administration, on its part, has been engaging its regional allies and partners from the beginning of the negotiations, and is supporting its allies' engagement with Iran. Robert Malley, US Special Envoy for Iran, argued in the recently organised Manama Dialogue that many of the region's dysfunctions have roots in Iran's exclusion in the region's security architecture.

Notwithstanding Iran's seriousness towards negotiations, the role of another regional player, Israel, will also influence future progress in Vienna. For now, Tel Aviv is pressing its allies, the US and the UK, for a headline approach to get a “longer and stronger” agreement. But if the negotiations prolong and Iran's stockpile of highly enriched uranium grows, any sabotage attacks on Iran's nuclear facilities will likely sabotage the talks at Vienna.

The writer is associate fellow, Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defense Studies and Analysis

DECEMBER 6, 1980, FORTY YEARS AGO

QUTUB TRAGEDY

WHAT HAPPENED AT the Qutub on December 4 beggars description. The tragic deaths, of children in particular, have been mourned by the nation. Forty-five people, most of them children, had been killed in a stampede of panic stricken people when a power failure turned the historic monument into a tower of fear. Even as a one-man committee visited Qutub Minar on December 5, an element of mystery was added to the tragedy with the Delhi Municipal Corporation claiming that there was no power breakdown in the area during the time of the tragedy. A municipal corporation press release did admit that a truck col-

lided with an electric pole leading to a power breakdown in the Katvaria Sarai area. But it said this happened two hours before the tragedy. Some of the visitors did say that the lights had been deliberately switched off by hoodlums.

GRIEF IN PALI

THERE WAS NOT a single smiling face in Pali village in Haryana's Faridabad district. The women sat crying in sympathy with those who were in bereavement. The men sat in stony silence. The streets were deserted. At the village crematorium there were 26 tiny smouldering heaps — of children who had

been taken by their school for an excursion to Delhi. A visit to the Qutub Minar, Birla Mandir and the zoo. It turned out to be a death trap.

WHEAT IMPORTS

INDIA IS IMPORTING one million tonnes of wheat from Australia in addition to the 1.5 million tonnes from the US. The consignment of wheat from the US has already begun to arrive. The decision to import wheat from the two countries was taken simultaneously. But no quantity was fixed because the government wanted to verify the quantity of wheat reserves in the country.

THE IDEAS PAGE

Resetting Putin's red carpet

Great power politics — conflicts between Russia, China and the West — puts limits on the bilateral relationship. But Delhi and Moscow have no reason to be satisfied with the poor state of their commercial ties



RAJA MANDALA
By C RAJA MOHAN

AS PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi and the visiting Russian president, Vladimir Putin, try to reset their relationship today amidst a series of recent differences ranging from Af-Pak to the Indo-Pacific, two factors will continue to limit the possibilities for the bilateral partnership. One is the continuing conflict between the Kremlin and the West. The other is the absence of a thriving commercial relationship between India and Russia.

The recent story of India-Russia relations is about keeping an old romance alive as Delhi and Moscow align with more attractive partners. If Delhi's love affair with Washington has never been as intense as it is today, Moscow's embrace of Beijing is tighter than ever. That the US and China are now at each other's throats makes the great power dynamic a lot more complicated for India and Russia.

This would not have mattered if Russia had a sensible relationship with America and India's ties with China were peaceful and stable. That Delhi and Moscow have problems with the best friend of the other would have been more manageable if business ties between India and Russia were solid. Intensifying the strategic side of the relationship — as Modi and Putin are expected to do this week — is not enough to lift the bilateral relationship out of the stasis it finds itself in.

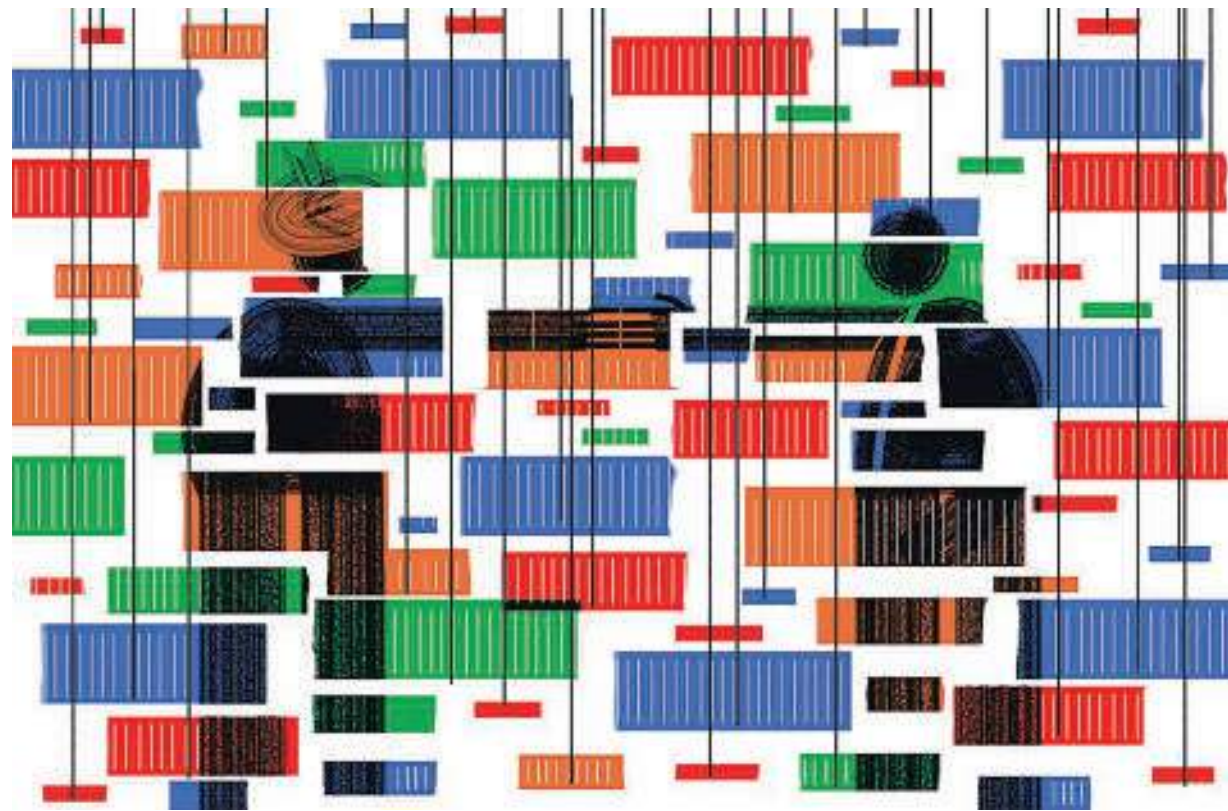
Monday's summit will see the institution of a new "two plus two" mechanism that brings the foreign and defence ministers from both sides into a single forum. There is speculation about a new 10-year defence pact between the two countries. The two leaders are also expected to preside over the signing of an agreement on mutual logistical support for each other's armed forces. India has such agreements only with a select few partners like the US and France.

Russia is pleased that the S-400 missile sale has gone through despite strong US opposition. For it signals Delhi's commitment not to let Washington roll back India's longstanding defence ties with Russia.

For now, Delhi has certainly dodged the US sanctions on the purchase of S-400 missiles. But India's deepening defence ties with Russia will continue to raise political eyebrows in Washington and Beijing. Delhi remains wary of the growing military partnership between Russia and China and their shared opposition to the Indo-Pacific framework.

The structural constraints posed by the great power dynamic and vastly different appreciation of the regional security environment could be reduced if matters improve between Washington and Moscow. But few international observers of US-Russia relations are willing to bet on that prospect. But against the grain of conventional wisdom, Washington and Moscow are looking to ease some of these tensions and find the basis for a sustainable engagement.

In Washington, the Biden administration recognises the importance of ending this permanent crisis in US-Russian relations. Presidents George W Bush and Barack Obama made repeated attempts at resetting bilateral relations only to see them getting



CR Sasikumar

worse. President Donald Trump sought to break the paradigm of the Russia relationship, but found himself confronting the entire political and security establishment. Given the Democratic Party's conviction that Russia stole the election from Hillary Clinton to install Trump in the White House, there was little chance of a reset.

President Biden, however, has begun a new effort to improve ties with Russia. He opted for an early meeting with Putin — at the end of his trip to Europe in June. After four years of intense hostility from the Democratic Party, Biden offered respect for Russia, and signalled his willingness to treat it as a great power. His Democratic predecessor, Obama, used to dismiss Russia as a declining power.

The Biden administration, which is focused on winning the intensifying strategic competition with China, values a stable relationship with Russia. For all its denunciation of the US, Moscow has always been eager for political accommodation with Washington. Nothing pleases Moscow more than the image of being Washington's equal on the global stage. For Moscow, the American problem was never about an ideological principle, but the terms of accommodation.

If the Geneva summit between Biden and Putin laid out a broad framework for engagement on a range of issues, the two leaders are expected to have a virtual summit on Tuesday to review bilateral ties and prevent the escalation of the current military crisis on Russia's border with Ukraine.

A less conflictual relationship between Washington and Moscow will be a huge relief for India; but Delhi can't nudge them closer to each other. Moscow too would love to see better relations between Delhi and Beijing but is in no position to engineer that outcome.

Where India and Russia have greater freedom is in the economic domain, but their failure to boost the commercial relationship has been stark. During the last 20 summits with Putin, the two sides have repeatedly affirmed the importance of enhancing trade and investment ties; but progress has been hard to come by.

Russia is acutely conscious of the huge imbalance in its great power relations. Persistent conflict with the US, Europe, and Japan have moved Moscow ever closer to Beijing. But Moscow knows the dangers of relying solely on a neighbour which has risen to greatness — the Chinese economy at nearly \$15 trillion today is nearly 10 times larger than that of Russia. While resetting Russia's relations with the West is hard, sustaining the traditional partnership with Delhi is of some political value to Moscow. Delhi hopes that Washington appreciates its assessment that Russian neutrality, if not support, is critical in balancing China in the east.

India-Russia annual trade in goods is stuck at about \$10 billion. In contrast, Moscow's annual commerce with China is a little more than \$100 billion. India's goods trade with the US and China is at the level of \$100 billion.

Despite political tensions, India's China trade continues to grow, while Delhi's commercial ties with Moscow are stagnant despite good political relations. The problem clearly can't be fixed at the level of governments. The Russian business elites gravitate to Europe and China. The Indian corporations are focused on America and China.

Russia is acutely conscious of the huge imbalance in its great power relations. Persistent conflict with the US, Europe, and Japan have moved Moscow ever closer to Beijing. But Moscow knows the dangers of relying solely on a neighbour which has risen to greatness — the Chinese economy at nearly \$15 trillion today is nearly 10 times larger than that of Russia. While resetting Russia's relations with the West is hard, sustaining the traditional partnership with Delhi is of some political value to Moscow. Delhi hopes that Washington appreciates its assessment that Russian neutrality, if not support, is critical in balancing China in the east.

Russia knows India's strategic cooperation with the US has acquired an unstoppable momentum; and Delhi knows it has no veto over the Sino-Russian strategic partnership. Moscow and Delhi are learning to live with this uncomfortable unreality and stabilising their political ties within that context.

But Delhi and Moscow have no reason to be satisfied with the poor state of their commercial ties. The success of Monday's summit lies not in squeezing more out of bilateral defence ties, but in laying a clear path for expansive economic cooperation, and generating a better understanding of each other's imperatives on Afghanistan and the Indo-Pacific.

The writer is director, Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore and a contributing editor on international affairs for The Indian Express

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"It may or may not have been done to appease the world powers — which have yet to accept the new Afghan government — but it is a welcome move on the part of the Taliban to take a notable step concerning the rights of Afghan women."

— EXPRESS TRIBUNE, PAKISTAN

Leaders for COP27

Scale of global warming challenge requires leaders unshackled by incrementalism. Next COP should be led by collective experts



OVER THE BARREL

By VIKRAM SINGH MEHTA

IDID NOT intend to write about COP26. Much has already been written about the subject and I am no climate change expert. But I changed my mind after reading Ashlee Vance's biography of Elon Musk. The book triggered the reflection that the current gap between the ambitious rhetoric of climate change summitry ("blah blah" in Greta Thunberg's words) and action can only be bridged by shifting the loci of responsibility and authority for climate change governance from those fixated on the short-term and, in the larger scheme of matters, inconsequential details like the next elections, to those who have a track record of bringing about radical change in the face of adversity. I know this reflection goes against the structure of the present international order and I will be critiqued for engaging in an academic parlour game. But I believe, on occasion, there is merit in arguing the counterfactual. That is why I share my thoughts.

After 26 meetings, it is clear COP summitry can make incremental progress. The world has, however, run out of time. It must accelerate the implementation of the action plan towards net zero. For that, it must redesign the nature of climate change governance.

COP26 was not all "blah blah". Ninety per cent of the world committed to a net carbon zero target; 23 countries agreed to stop financing fossil fuels by the end of 2022; 100 countries committed to end deforestation; the accounting systems for calculating carbon emissions were finalised and notably, the phase down of coal and inefficient fuel subsidies was accepted. On the substantive issue of climate finance, however, it was still "blah blah". The earlier pledge by the developed world to channel \$100 billion to the less developed was not met; they committed a lowly \$346 million to the climate adaptation fund. PM Modi's call that \$1 trillion be raised for climate mitigation and adaptation was not taken up seriously.

The NGO, Climate Action Tracker, has analysed the consequences of COP incrementalism. They calculate that were there no climate change policy, global temperatures would rise by between 4.1 and 4.8 degrees C above pre-industrial levels. This would be existentially catastrophic. Were, however, every country to implement their non-binding nationally determined commitments for 2030, the temperature rise would be 2.4 degrees C and, if over and above that, they met their binding commitments including net zero targets, the increase would range between 1.8 and 2.1 degrees C. Their message is: The increase can be kept within a "sustainable" range but further prevarication in the implementation of the action plan towards net zero carbon will push the increase above an acceptable threshold with devastating consequences.

There is broad consensus on what must

be done to get to net zero. Many people have written on the subject but John Doerr's recently published book, *Speed and Scale — A Global Action Plan for Solving our Climate Crisis Now* provides a particularly compelling account. Doerr lays out a six-point action plan for bringing carbon emissions down from the current annual amount of 59 GT to zero by 2050. I summarise the plan below. (The number/comment within brackets is the carbon reduction from the action/the key factors for success).

Electrification of transport (6 GT; battery technology); decarbonisation of the grid (21 GT; 50 per cent of electricity from solar and wind; no new oil and gas plants after 2021; retirement of thermal power); fix food (7 GT; no nitrogen-based fertilisers; contain methane/nitrous oxide emissions from rice farming); protect nature (7 GT; net zero deforestation and elimination of deep sea trawling); clean up industry (8 GT; reduce carbon intensity in cement/steel/aluminum); remove carbon (10 GT; nature-based and engineering solutions).

Doerr is not breaking new ground. Most countries have already commenced the journey. But no one country can singly address the systemic challenge of global warming. It requires collective action. And, therein lies the rub. The current institutions of governance have created a forum for collaborative effort but the rules of engagement reinforce separateness. This is the reason institutions need to be redesigned. This is why I am engaging in this "Muskian" parlour game. Why Musk? He is hardly a likeable character. Certainly his biographer does not sketch him out to be so. But the answer is this game is not about Musk. It is about the qualities required to break with incrementalism. It is about the imperative of making things happen.

Musk is today amongst the richest persons in the world. His wealth comes from three companies renowned for their engineering, technical, operational and human resource excellence. Musk created these companies in the face of extreme odds. There were many who thought his vision was between "daff" and "bat s**t crazy". This is not surprising. How can one take seriously someone whose life mission is to create an alternative habitable colony on Mars because our planet is at risk? But Musk was not deterred and he proved his critics wrong. The reasons for his success are manifold but in my view the most important are his uncompromising commitment to his vision, his "all or nothing" approach and his determination to achieve the "impossible upon the impossible". (One example: He had his people build a space avionics system for \$10,000 when the cheapest external quote was \$10 million).

Musk's career story and qualities are the pegs on which I hang my larger point that climate change governance needs leadership that can pull teeth from stone. There must be many like Musk. They need to come together. The leadership of COP27 should be handed over to such people: A collective of technocrats, environmentalists, financiers, sectoral experts unshackled by sovereignty and politics and capable of driving technological change, catalysing green investment and forging global collaboration.

The writer is chairman and distinguished fellow, Centre for Social and Economic Progress



SHREEKANT SAMBRANI

HASMUKH SHAH (1934-2021) was many things: He held many official positions under various administrations, but was not a bureaucrat; he was a senior public sector manager, but was not a professional manager; he held politically sensitive appointments and was a confidant of many politicians and industrialists, but was himself neither; he sponsored numerous artists and writers, but he was neither. So, I fall back on the title of Robert Bolt's play about Sir Thomas More, much used, but seldom rightly, to describe this great friend and mentor who passed away on December 3.

Hasmukhbhai, as he was universally called, grew up in a small princely state in Saurashtra and Ahmedabad, enjoying an unhurried education. He thought he might pursue a PhD in anthropology, because people in the Northeast fascinated him (this interest in faraway places and people stayed with him), but joined the editorial team of Gandhiji's collected works, which took him to Delhi in the early 1960s.

Vadilal Dagli, the renowned Gujarati business journalist, suggested that he might see Morarji Desai, who was looking for a personal secretary. He stayed in that position until Desai's sacking as deputy prime minister in 1969. He came back to serve in the Desai secretariat when the former became prime minister in 1977 and remained until Indira Gandhi's second term. Sensing the discomfiture of the new political set-up with him, he returned to Indian Petrochemical Corporation (IPCL), which he

A man for all seasons

Hasmukh Shah left a mark on policy and finance, as well as arts, heritage, ecology

had joined in the early 1970s. He eventually became its chairman and successfully managed its privatisation into the Reliance fold. In his own very modest words, in his Gujarati memoirs *Dithu Mai* (As I see it), "I first became a teacher, researcher and editor. Thereafter, I so-journeyed through politics and public life. I later became a link in financial and policy realms."

His years with Desai were a walk on eggshells. The ever-principled Desai, seen as being cantankerous, needed Hasmukhbhai's tact and manifest people skills to get most things done. He describes most sensitively Desai's troubled elevation as prime minister and his even more troubled eventual departure in brief chapters of his memoirs. I tried to persuade him to write a full-length book on his years with the ramrod-straight disciplinarian. He followed the idea briefly but then abandoned it because he could not do a tell-all book.

His narration of his years with IPCL is equally self-effacing. His lasting contribution was not just in profitably expanding the public sector giant, but also imbuing it with a sense of what we now call corporate social responsibility. Some examples: He was to procure land for expansion at Dahej, then a backwaters barren area adjoining the Gulf of Khambhat, some 70 km south of Vadodara. The salinity-affected land fetched as little as Rs 6,000 an acre. Gujarat Industrial Development Corporation thought it could get 2,000 acres at Rs 18,000 an acre.

Hasmukhbhai held a meeting with landowners, keeping the brokers out. The farmers' anger was palpable. He encouraged them to ask for a higher price, but they went no further than Rs 50,000 an acre. He finally settled the deal at Rs 56,000 an acre for 2,000 acres and created great goodwill among farmers. He said that even at this price, land accounted for less than 2 per cent of the project cost, while it made a huge difference to the farmers, whose total capital it was.

Later, during the Manmohan Singh government, there was considerable thought about land acquisition and pricing. He wrote offering to share his thoughts and experiences. That letter was not even acknowledged.

Hasmukhbhai organised artists' camps on the sprawling IPCL grounds every winter. This was perhaps the first instance of a public sector company turning a patron of the arts. Vadodara already had a considerable reputation as an arts centre. IPCL's initiative helped cement it further.

His successful effort at privatising IPCL attracted the attention of Narendra Modi, then the chief minister of Gujarat. Modi tasked Hasmukhbhai with working out plans for disinvestment in four leading state public sector enterprises. Hasmukhbhai went to the assignment with his usual zeal, only to meet a solid wall of resistance from administrative service members who normally were the chief executives of such companies. Modi abandoned

the plan, but not before counting Hasmukhbhai among his closest advisors.

He and his wife Nila were inveterate travellers. Every winter, they went to far corners of the world. They were easily the most travelled people I have ever known. He had planned on writing someday about these lands and their people, thus partly fulfilling his ambition of college days.

He was the moving spirit behind countless cultural, artistic, ecological and heritage initiatives, especially Darshak Itihas Nidhi, in Vadodara, which has perhaps far more such bodies than any other city of its size. His name often sufficed as a fund-raiser. His last public appearance six weeks ago was at the release of a book on the ecology of coastal Gujarat under the aegis of Gujarat Ecology Society. Hasmukhbhai had told me two years ago that he considered this work to be the capstone of all his efforts.

Sitanshu Yashaschandra, the well-known Gujarati litterateur, says in his afterword to *Dithu Mai*, "I am afraid that [the trend of such engrossing books] may end with this book." That fear is now applicable to all the various activities this multifaceted man took on as an active participant, generous mentor and benevolent patron.

The writer taught at IIM, Ahmedabad and was the founder-director of the Institute of Rural Management, Anand

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

CENSORING HISTORY

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Bad education' (IE, December 3). The Central Board of Secondary Education's (CBSE) decision to take strict action against those responsible for asking which political party was in power in Gujarat during the 2002 anti-Muslim violence in the state in a question paper is an attempt to push into oblivion one of the worst massacres witnessed in post-Independence India. The CBSE's terming the question as "inappropriate" is beyond comprehension as its own sociology textbook for Class 12 mentions the anti-Muslim violence. Thus, by the CBSE's logic, the textbook becomes inappropriate, to begin with. One wonders how asking a question about this violent episode harms the sentiments of people. If it does, the CBSE is more concerned about the sentiments of those who butchered Muslims in Gujarat in 2002 than those who were at the receiving end of the violence. The editorial correctly asks if someone in the CBSE felt its political masters may not be pleased with the question. Those who seek to permanently erase the 2002 anti-Muslim violence from public memory do not shy away from highlighting the 1984 anti-Sikh violence for their narrow political gains. Both hate-driven carnages targeted against minorities are a part of our history and must be taught.

Samiul Hassan Quadri, Bikaner

MSP VIABILITY

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Fertile

ground' (IE, December 3). Celebrations by farmer unions' over the acceptance of their demand by the NDA government for the repeal of the three farm laws are natural. But now they should avoid insisting on the approval of a Minimum Support Price, that too with a legal guarantee, for practically every crop. This is because the government will find it neither fiscally possible to grant MSP for sundry crops, nor is it physically possible to store such huge stocks.

Tarsem Singh, Mahilpur

IMPRACTICAL COURT

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'SC warns Delhi govt on pollution: Will appoint someone to administer' (IE, December 3). The recurrent annual administrative, political and judicial interventions to address the protracted problem of air pollution in Delhi during the winter months has become a ritual theatre of the absurd. In November 2019, the anguished Supreme Court while admonishing the Centre, Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh for air pollution in Delhi-NCR had lamented, "This has been going on since long. Is this not worse than internal war? Why are people in this gas chamber?" In 2021, the SC is rather upset with the Centre and Delhi government again. However, giving only 24 hours for a concrete action plan to set right the systemic failure is high on righteousness but lacking in practicality. A systemic problem can only be solved through a systemic approach and not through emergency diktats.

L R Murmu, Delhi

8 GOVT & POLITICS



STRATEGY MEET

TRINAMOL CONGRESS'S parliamentary party is likely to meet in Parliament on Tuesday to chalk out the strategy for the remaining part of the Winter Session of the House. TMC national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee, who represents Diamond Harbour constituency in Lok Sabha, is likely to fly down to Delhi for the meeting. The TMC's moves are being closely watched at a time its ties with the Congress have grown increasingly strained, raising question marks over Opposition unity.

THE CHALLENGE

INDIA'S AMBASSADOR to Russia, Pavan Kapoor, has a big test within a week of his assuming charge. While much of the groundwork for the Russian President's visit to India was done by his predecessor D B Venkatesh Varma, Kapoor is now handling the home stretch and will be part of the delegation for talks. The fact that Putin has made only one visit outside Russia during the pandemic — the other one being to Geneva to meet US President Joe Biden — the Russian President's visit to India is being seen as the importance being attached by Moscow to its ties with Delhi. Kapoor, considered one of the seasoned diplomats in the Indian Foreign Service fraternity, presented his credentials to Putin on December 1 at a ceremony in Alexander Hall of the Grand Kremlin Palace.

THE JOURNEY

RAJIV RANJAN Mishra, Director-General, National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG), is set to bid adieu to Namami Gange after a happening tenure of more than five years. A 1987-batch Telangana cadre IAS officer, Mishra served at the NMCG in various capacities during his two stints. Before his superannuation on December 31, Mishra is expected to come out with a book on the Ganga. It is learnt that the book captures the journey of the government's Namami Gange programme and the efforts made by previous governments to clean the river. G Ashok Kumar, a 1991-batch IAS officer from the Telangana cadre will succeed Mishra as NMCG D-G.

Chaturvedi cites suspension from House, quits Sansad TV show

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 5

SHIV SENA MP Priyanka Chaturvedi, who was suspended last week from Rajya Sabha on the first day of the Winter Session, on Sunday stepped down as the anchor of *Meri Kahani* — aired on Sansad TV.

In a letter to Vice President and Rajya Sabha Chairman M Venkaiah Naidu, Chaturvedi said she is stepping down from the show for being "denied space on it for discharging parliamentary duties due to arbitrary suspension".

"After my arbitrary suspension, that has totally disregarded established Parliamentary norms & rules to stifle my voice, my party's voice inside the chamber, I am unwilling to continue taking space on Sansad TV when my primary oath to the Constitution is being denied to me... I believe injustice has been done but as it is considered valid in the eyes of the chair, I must respect it," she wrote.

On *Meri Kahani*, Chaturvedi interviewed women parliamentarians on non-political subjects, sharing their stories.

JD(U) gen secy K C Tyagi's son Amrish joins BJP in Lucknow

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
LUCKNOW, DECEMBER 5

JD(U) GENERAL secretary K C Tyagi's son Amrish Tyagi on Sunday joined the BJP in Lucknow in the presence of Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Dinesh Sharma and other senior leaders. Several leaders from different political parties, including the SP and the BSP, and other social organisations too joined the ruling party at its state headquarters.

Asked why did not join the JD(U), Amrish said, "I have experience of election management. I was planning to join politics and work around the National Democratic Alliance (NDA). My father's party was a part of the NDA for over 20 years. Had I joined the JD(U), people would have accused us of indulging in dynastic politics. So I decided to join the BJP that is the largest democratic organisation in the world."

Asked if he had plans to contest the upcoming UP elections, Tyagi said, "I want to start from zero. Whatever responsibility BJP will assign to me, I will follow that as a worker."

Yogi slams Akhilesh: Entire UP is my family, you only care for yours

LALMANI VERMA
LUCKNOW, DECEMBER 5

UTTAR PRADESH Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Sunday responded to SP chief Akhilesh Yadav's jibe that those without family do not care for people, by saying that the 25 crore people of Uttar Pradesh were his family.

Addressing a public meeting in Chandauli district after launching various projects, Adityanath said, "The 25 crore population of the state is family for me. Had Akhilesh Yadav understood this definition of family, he possibly would not have commented on me not having a family. He should be aware that the people of the state are my family, and I will do whatever needs to be done keeping them in mind. But you [Akhilesh] have a narrow mindset, so you care about your family only and not the state. That resulted in riots, anarchy was at its peak and his ministers jeopardised the dignity of women."

The CM hit out at alliances between Opposition parties in the past, such as the SP-Congress tie-up in the 2017 Assembly elections and the SP-BSP alliance in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls.

"What did the *bhai-behen* duo [Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra of the Congress] do? What did the *do ladkon* ki



Uttar Pradesh CM Yogi Adityanath during the launch of 5,000 new health sub-centres, 15 BSL-2 laboratories and Mother Newborn Tracking App (Mantra), in Lucknow, Sunday. PTI

jodi [Akhilesh Yadav and Rahul Gandhi] do, and what did *babua aur bua ki jodi* [Mayawati and Akhilesh] do? They never did development because they lacked thought for that. They developed themselves only and for them, only their own families were the entire state," said Adityanath.

He said the Opposition had no issues to raise against the government, and accused the Akhilesh-led SP government of misusing money meant for

development.

"The money that was unnecessarily spent on the extravagance of leaders of the ruling party between 2012 to 2017, the same money is now being spent on the restoration and beautification of places of mythological and historical significance," he said at the Sakaldiha Assembly constituency in Chandauli that was won by the SP in 2017. The BJP won the other three seats in the district.

SP MLA, workers scuffle with cops

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
LUCKNOW, DECEMBER 5

AN SP MLA, some party workers and policemen were involved in a scuffle at a venue in Chandauli district where Uttar Pradesh's Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath addressed a public meet Sunday.

A purported video of the scuffle of Sakaldiha MLA Prabhunaranayan Yadav and Deputy Superintendent of Police Anirudh Singh on Sunday emerged on social media.

While Chandauli police said SP workers and the MLA tried to move towards the venue and mild force was used to disperse

them, Yadav alleged that the police officers misbehaved with the SP workers and male officers assaulted women party workers without any provocation.

Chandauli SP Ankur Aggarwal told reporters, "There was a programme of the honourable chief minister here. There were some Samajwadi Party workers who wanted to hand over a memorandum. They had contacted officials earlier too, and we had asked them to submit the memorandum peacefully... There was some pushing and shoving... They had not taken permission to attend the programme, and they created a law-and-order situation."

Aggarwal added, "When the

police officers asked them to hand over their memorandum, they did not... Police force had to be used to stop them... The security situation in CM's programme is on high alert... We will check the videos to see what happened."

Yadav told *The Indian Express*, "We were holding a peaceful protest... These policemen started to lathi-charge us without any reason, and when I intervened, the local DSP misbehaved with me..."

Varanasi (Range) IG Suvendra K Bhagat said a fair probe would be conducted. "We will look into who started the scuffle. All allegations being levelled by the MLA will be probed thoroughly and action will be taken accordingly."

Akhilesh hits out at Maurya over 'lungi chhaap goons' remark

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
LUCKNOW, DECEMBER 5

SAMAJWADI PARTY (SP) president Akhilesh Yadav on Sunday hit out at Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya for saying that "*lungi chhaap*" goons used to roam freely in the state before the BJP came to power in 2017. At a traders' meeting in Prayagraj on Friday, Maurya also alleged that people wearing "*jalidar topi* [netted caps]" used to threaten traders and encroach upon their land.

Speaking to the media at the SP office after flagging off a yatra by ally Gondwana Ganatantra Party, Akhilesh said as the Assembly elections near the language of BJP leaders would get dirtier as they were scared.

"The BJP leaders' language will change even more as elections come closer. The language



SP chief Akhilesh Yadav

will get worse and dirt will increase. Their decisions have made traders' lives difficult. Be it demonetisation, or GST. And the corruption in the government has made everyone unhappy. People from all segments are unhappy."

He added, "As far as clothing is concerned, and there are other questions being raised before the elections. The BJP should go through the pages of its manifesto and should check its poll promises. All of their promises turned out to be *jumlas* and that

PM to unveil fertiliser factory, AIIMS and lab in Gorakhpur tomorrow

Lucknow: Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to inaugurate projects worth Rs 10,000 crore in eastern Uttar Pradesh on Tuesday, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath told reporters in Gorakhpur on Sunday.

Adityanath said Modi would inaugurate a fertiliser factory worth Rs 8,603 crore, an AIIMS that has been built at a cost of Rs 1,011 crore, and an ICMR-RMRC lab in Gorakhpur.

"The arrival of PM Modi on December 7 in Gorakhpur will fulfil the dreams of eastern UP that were neglected by the failures of the previous governments," Adityanath said, adding that the three mega projects constitute the biggest investment so far in eastern UP.

"What was impossible for the opposition, PM Modi has made it possible. The prime minister has provided these projects for the welfare of farmers, women, youth, children and for the upliftment of the region," he said. **ENS**

Was offered money, cabinet berth to join BJP: Bhagwant Mann

BJP dismisses claim, says 'figment of imagination'

MAN AMAN SINGH CHHINA
CHANDIGARH, DECEMBER 5

AAP MP and the party's Punjab president Bhagwant Mann on Sunday alleged that he was offered money and a Union cabinet berth by a senior BJP leader as enticement to join the party.

He also alleged that the BJP was trying to poach MLAs of AAP in Punjab and that similar allurements have been made to them too.

BJP state general secretary Jivan Gupta dismissed Mann's allegations as a figment of his imagination. "These allegations are just an attempt by Bhagwant Mann to increase his own importance in AAP. Lately, he has been sidelined in AAP and therefore he has resorted to such wild allegations against BJP," he said.

Mann, at a press conference, said, "I was approached by a very senior BJP leader who asked me what amount of money I would take to join BJP. He also said that since I was the lone MP of AAP, my joining BJP will not attract anti-defection law and I will be offered a cabinet berth of my choice at the Centre," Mann said.

The two-time Lok Sabha MP from Sangrur in Punjab added that he declined the offer saying that he was "on a mission and not commission". He said he had brought up AAP in Punjab through blood and sweat and that he will not abandon the party.

Kejriwal: AAP govt in Goa will give Rs 1,000 to all women

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
PANAJI, DECEMBER 5

AAP NATIONAL convener and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday said that if his party were to form the next government in Goa, it will give Rs 1,000 to all adult women in the state, claiming that this would perhaps be the "world's biggest women empowerment programme".

Addressing a gathering at Navelim in South Goa, Kejriwal said, "As soon as the AAP government is formed, every woman above 18 — daughter, sister, mother, daughter-in-law, mother-in-law, and grandmother — will get Rs 1,000 per month in their accounts."

"There are young women who can't attend college because their fathers do not have money. They can go to college with this money. If AAP comes to power, no woman in Goa will have to be financially dependent on her father or husband for small needs. This scheme will empower women financially," he said, adding that women's empowerment "is when women remain financially independent".

Women who are financially comfortable have the option to opt out of the programme, Kejriwal said. The AAP leader claimed that the decision to deposit Rs 1,000 in the bank account of each woman in the state is financially sound and will benefit 5.5 lakh women.

"Goa's budget is Rs 22,000 crore. If we eliminate 20 per cent corruption charges from the budget, which is Rs 4,000 crore, we can provide 300 units of free electricity, unemployment allowance, free pilgrimage, Griha Aadhar, and monthly allowance to all women above the age of 18 years," Kejriwal said.

Speaking of the elections, Kejriwal said that Goa's leaders were either talking about political alliances between parties or were switching from one party to another. He said that no other party was talking about jobs or education or other issues that people in Goa faced.

"We are making a plan for Goa's development. No other party is doing it. They have nothing to do with Goa. They only want to loot Goa," the AAP chief said.

Following allegations by the Congress that a minister in the Pramod Sawant government was involved in a "sex scandal", the AAP on Sunday also demanded action against the minister.



Mann at a press conference on Sunday. Express

"BJP has no stature in Punjab. Its leaders are not allowed to even enter the villages due to the three farm laws that it enacted and which resulted in the death of more than 700 farmers. No one who has the future of Punjab on his mind will join a party which caused the death of so many people in Lakhimpur Kheri," he said.

When asked to name the BJP leader who made him the offer to join the party, Mann said that he will do so in due course of time. "BJP has been doing this in other states such as MP, Karnataka, Goa and Meghalaya. They think they can do this in Punjab too. They claim to have broken up Congress also. These are very bad signs in a democracy if parties are sought to be broken through money power," he said.



Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal

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Govt warns officers of action if transfer requests forwarded by ministers, MPs

New Delhi: The Centre has warned assistant section officers under the Central Secretariat Service (CSS) cadre of disciplinary action in case transfer requests are forwarded from ministers and MPs.

In an order, the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) said it has been receiving numerous inter-cadre transfer requests on personal/medical grounds to attached or outstation officers of various ministries in the grade of Assistant Section Officer (ASO) in the CSS cadre.

"It is informed that all such acts will invite appropriate action, including disciplinary action, as per extant rules in all such cases," the DoPT said. **PTI**

Ahead of Dec 10 legislative council polls, JDS, BJP move closer

JOHNSON T A
BENGALURU, DECEMBER 5

THE NOVEMBER 30 photographs of Prime Minister Narendra Modi leading JDS supremo H D Deve Gowda by his hand before the two held a "cordial meeting" at Parliament House have put the spotlight on the two parties ahead of a crucial Vidhan Parishad election scheduled for December 10.

The ruling BJP and the opposition JDS have shared a blow hot, blow cold relationship in Karnataka ever since the latter parted ways with the Congress in July 2019 — after their alliance government fell apart due to defections to the BJP. But now, with elections to 25 seats in the state legislative council, the JDS has seemingly decided to drop its

stance of equidistance from the BJP and the Congress and to throw in its lot with the ruling BJP.

Soon after the Deve Gowda-Modi meet, Karnataka Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai announced that Deve Gowda's son H D Kumaraswamy and former BJP CM B S Yediyurappa would chalk out a plan for a JDS-BJP alliance for the council elections.

The December 10 polls are being held on account of 15 Congress members, 6 BJP members and four JDS members retiring in January 2022 from the 75-member council, where the BJP currently has a strength of 32 seats, the Congress 29 and the JDS 12. This is apart from an Independent member and the council chairman, who is from the JDS. The BJP is keen to wrest a few seats from the Congress while the Congress and JDS are keen to at



PM Modi and JDS supremo H D Deve Gowda during their meet at Parliament on November 30. Courtesy: Twitter/@narendramodi

least retain their numbers.

One of the reasons for the possibility of a JDS-BJP alliance for the council polls is that the JDS has fielded a candidate only in six of the 25 district-wise constituencies.

A second reason is that the BJP is desperate to wrest control of the Upper House (where it now depends on the JDS for passing Bills) and is keen to ensure that the Congress loses significant ground.

EXPLAINED
Old friends
THE UNDERSTANDING between the JDS and BJP in Karnataka is not a new one, except that this time, for the December 10 elections, it is more overt than earlier. Deve Gowda has enjoyed a cordial relationship with Modi for long, with the two often making it a point to greet each other on social media on special occasions.

"In six constituencies where we have fielded candidates, there are candidates from all three parties. We cannot ask BJP to support

our person. In other places, Congress and BJP are fighting and JDS will decide on these constituencies keeping the future in mind," said Kumaraswamy.

The dalliance between the JDS and BJP in Karnataka is not a new one. Deve Gowda and Modi have shared a cordial relationship.

Despite Deve Gowda maintaining JDS's independent status, the party has in recent times helped the BJP tactically — especially in facilitating the passage of BJP-backed bills.

In February this year, the JDS supported the ouster of council chairman K Prathapchandra Shetty, of the Congress, and facilitated the election of MK Pranesh of the BJP as deputy chairman in exchange for a JDS candidate, Basavaraj Horatti, being given the post of the council chairman.

IDEA EXCHANGE

NEWSMAKERS IN THE NEWSROOM

We are not against anyone; we are for ourselves and for our people. We are not saying that we are against Iran, China, Pakistan or anyone. At the end of the day, we are trying to stabilise West Asia to build prosperity

Shubhajit Roy: This year, we mark 13 years of 26/11 terrorist attacks in Mumbai. What changed in the relationship between Israel and India post 26/11?

I wasn't here to witness the changes but since the attack, the cooperation between the nations on the issue of counter-terrorism has been intimate. Be it the methods of work or technology, the two countries are working closely.

Shubhajit Roy: What if today a similar attack happened, do you think an Israeli operation is possible here?

The intimacy between the two countries is such that whatever India will ask will be seriously and positively looked at. We also worked together during the COVID pandemic. When most of the world stopped the export of shielding equipment for medical staff and people, India decided to export to Israel at a very sensitive time. When the second wave hit here (India), Israel also sent oxygen and other things. We look at each other as very close friends and help in whatever way we can.

Shubhajit Roy: Israel suffered the pandemic early on but it was also one of the fastest movers when it came to vaccination. What lessons did you learn?

Israel was one of the first countries to close the country because, initially, we didn't know what was happening. Because of a lack of information, you're nervous. Once Pfizer had the vaccines, Israel was able to convince them that we can be a real test bed because Israel is a very small country — 9 million people. We have been living in a sense of emergency from Day 1, so we are well-organised in executing things. We told Pfizer that every Israeli is under one of four health service providers. All of them are non-profit organisations. We are also very digitised, we have a good database. Therefore, we told Pfizer that if you allow vaccination in Israel, we'll be able to provide microdata on side-effects, problems and age groups. Most of the initial information that was released by Pfizer was based on Israeli database. We were the first to vaccinate. One of the problems was that we are a young country. Thirty per cent of our population is under 16 (years of age). The most we could do was vaccinate 70 per cent of the population, and we vaccinated 90 per cent of this 70 per cent. We also have a lot of anti-vaxxers. We went for the first and second vaccination and we were the first ones, unfortunately, to realise that the second dose's effect faded after six months. So we went for the booster dose before it was approved by the FDA (Food Drug Administration), because we had the experience. We started vaccinating children from the age of five last week.

Shubhajit Roy: Agriculture is one of the areas of cooperation which has emerged between the two countries. There are 29 centres of excellence in 12 states across the country. Tell us a little about this area of cooperation.

We started our cooperation with India 25 years ago. For these centres of excellence, Israel brought the technology, India brought the land, manpower and the initial investment. Israelis came in, with out-sourced companies, and they put up their greenhouses. I went to two places in Haryana — one was for horticulture and one for bees. We also did water management, which is a strong part of Israel. Haryana is well-organised and they took all this technology and did it in layers. All the jobs are done by Indians, Israelis come from time to time to see if the technology is up-to-date or to fix something. Now, to take it to the next level, there's an agreement between our two governments to increase the centres of excellence to about 50, and, in three years, have 1,500 villages of excellence.

Shubhajit Roy: To take you back to the region... especially the Abraham Accords and last month when foreign minister S Jaishankar visited there was this new Quad of West Asia — the UAE, Israel and India and the US taking place. You said earlier that you are in a very hostile region. So, what are these shifts?

There's a very significant shift in the Middle East. Many Gulf and Arab countries for years used Israel as the reason to explain to their public why they were underprivileged; you always need an enemy. For years, they have been poisoning their own population with the Palestinian issue. But many of them, out of fear of Iran and the changes in the Middle East, were cooperating with Israel for years. Because of the Abraham accords, their coopera-

WHY NAOR GILON

An Israeli diplomat who has been foreign affairs advisor to three Israeli Prime Ministers, Naor Gilon took charge as his country's ambassador to India two months ago. He has served in the US and was ambassador in Italy and The Netherlands, before he came to Delhi. As strategic partners, the relationship between the two

countries has grown in the past few years in areas as diverse as defence and agriculture, counter-terrorism and sophisticated technology. As the two countries celebrate 30 years of diplomatic ties in 2022, Ambassador Gilon's role in elevating the strategic partnership to the next level will be key in the coming years

NSO is a private Israeli company, which developed a tool for countering terrorism and probably saved lives. Understanding the gravity of the tool, Israel put export control measures on the tool

'Intimacy between the two countries such... whatever India will ask will be positively looked at'

Naor Gilon talks about India and Israel coming closer post 26/11, Israel's vaccination drive and lessons it learnt from the pandemic, the Pegasus spyware and loss of privacy. This session was moderated by Shubhajit Roy, Deputy Chief of National Bureau



Shubhajit Roy, Deputy Chief of National Bureau, *The Indian Express*, with Israeli ambassador Naor Gilon. *Gajendra Yadav*

tion with Israel went from under the table to above it. The UAE is the strongest advocate of this line. Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan are there. Some countries are reluctant to take it to the open but they are still there. This is a huge shift. For they did what leaderships should do; they put the interests of their citizens first. And India did it before them, this de-hyphenation. When Indian Foreign Minister S Jaishankar visited Israel, we went to this fighter-jet training Blue Flag in the south of Israel. It was for the first time that Indian jets joined this training. We are working together in many fields. This group of four is not intended for military things. It's a group of like-minded countries from different regions. The world is divided between pragmatists and extremists. The pragmatists are coming forward and saying that we are trying to make the lives of our people better. Israel and India belong to this group.

Kaunain Sheriff M: There's evidence that we need to vaccinate the entire world so that we don't have a new variant. What is the global strategy on vaccination because till now, only 50 per cent of the globe has received just the first dose?

This argument is not new, and, yes, the world is a global village. The manufacturing power of vaccines is becoming sufficient for the world today but I'm not sure if all the governments are able to vaccinate efficiently their population. Israel was quick on its feet and reached an agreement (with Pfizer). Maybe some will see it as selfishness but we also did it for the world, so that we can share the data with the world. Europe, now, will start the booster dose earlier than expected because of Israeli results. Many countries are lagging behind in vaccination and I don't think it's about money; vaccines are getting cheaper and the manufacturing capacity is increasing. So, the more global we go (with the vaccinations), the better it will be for all of us.

Monojit Majumdar: The new variant (Omicron) is in your country...

We will, unfortunately, have to take measures again but we are now more relaxed and understanding. It's bad but it's doable; we can live with it; we can find an equilibrium that will enable us to minimise the harm.

Shubhajit Roy: NSO, the Israeli technology company, created Pegasus for security reasons. It also has been used on civil society — politicians, journalists and activists. Two of our

colleagues were on the list of potential targets. As a fellow democracy, you feel concerned that a technology as potent as this has been used against its own citizens?

NSO is a private Israeli company, which developed a tool for countering terrorism and probably saved lives. Understanding the gravity of the tool, Israel put export control measures on the tool. So, they are limited in their export to only government players and only certain government players. About all the rumours or claims around it, I have no knowledge about it. When it comes to India, it's an internal political fight. I am a diplomat and the new ambassador, I am not allowed to go into internal debates here. I will leave it at that.

Shubhajit Roy: Does the Israeli government have information that NSO has supplied or exported the technology to other governments?

As I said, export of NSO, a private company, is under supervision. They are not allowed to export, they don't have a licence to export.

Shubhajit Roy: The Israeli government will have access to names of countries, agencies and actors to whom NSO might have provided the spyware?

They get an export licence.

Shubhajit Roy: Would you be comfortable sharing that information to some court if it asked?

If it's hypothetical, I will not go into it.

Raj Kamal Jha: So, the Israeli government would know if the NSO sold the software to the

Indian government?

Every export of this private company's technology has to go under licence. I hope they stand by the commitment because it's a legal issue here.

Raj Kamal Jha: Would the government have a view on how the software has been used or does it keep an arm's length?

When you sell a tool to someone, you don't know how they will use it in general. You sell someone something but you're not controlling what they do with it.

Shubhajit Roy: There's no end-user verification?

There is end-user verification. Why not? Export licence is to an end user.

Raj Kamal Jha: How seriously do you take NSO being put on the US Commerce Department entities list?

I will not go into anything beyond that. I cannot. I can tell you the same thing in seven different ways but it will still be the same thing.

Ritika Chopra: You said you are not sure whether the software was misused or not because the government maintains an arm's length. But the fact is, that whether Israel is not sure about the end use of that product, there is another democratic country and one of Israel's strongest allies, which has imposed sanctions. So, when the US accuses the NSO group of acting against its own national interest, does that, by way of association, not worry Israel at all?

I said what I wanted to say. I think I have answered the same question in a different way.

I think that we are part of this technology revolution and we are losing our privacy. It's already a dead game. Now the question is who is listening to us? How much is this into us?

Raj Kamal Jha: Is there a lesson from the controversy... the need for stronger regulation, firewalls?

I think we are part of the technology revolution and we are losing our privacy. It's already a dead game. Now the question is, who is listening to us? The question is, do we want only the bad guys from having it? Because you cannot restrict the bad guys. So, the question is whether you also want to stop the good guys from having it. This is a good question that I don't have an answer to. I don't know if Israel is limiting or not limiting. But I think the world is beyond that point of no return. People feel that they are already overexposed, I feel that I'm overexposed as a human being. But that's life.

I'm speaking beyond the issue of Pegasus, in a wider context. Yes, I think we should regulate in general — like we tolerate many things in life, like drugs and crimes to a certain level, and, from that level on, it is unacceptable. But it's not going to be bulletproof because we are already there. It's really terrifying to understand how much information can be gathered on us without even meeting us or seeing us or knowing anything about us. We have to limit it like we have to limit everything that has a bad influence.

Rakesh Sinha: How do you view India's de-hyphenation of relations with Iran and Israel?

Every country has its own interests, its own fears, its own concerns. I'm not sure that I like everything India does and I don't think that India likes everything we do. But it's a friendship, it's like a married couple. Coming back to Iran, I don't think that the difference is so big between India. For us, Iran is a concern and I'll tell you why. Because if you look at the Middle East, all the places where you see problems, you see an Iranian footprint.

Rakesh Sinha: This cooperation between Israel, the UAE, the US and India, do you see it as a counter pact, which we now see after the withdrawal of the US forces from Afghanistan, where you have China, Iran, Pakistan and Turkey?

This pact is not against anyone; it's for the moderates and the pragmatics who want to make their lives better. I think we are coming together to do good for our people and for the region, to stabilise, to do business, to build infrastructure.

Aakash Joshi: There was this report in *The Wall Street Journal* about the Khalifa port. The Chinese have built a surreptitious base. How do you see the

Chinese expansion in the Middle East because there is a commercial interest that many countries will have dealings with China?

We are not against anyone; we are for ourselves and for our peoples. We are not saying that we are against Iran, China, Pakistan or anyone. At the end of the day, we are trying to stabilise West Asia to build prosperity... We don't see China as a military threat to Israel. On the contrary, we are cooperating with China economically; we're doing things together. You are neighbours, you have your own issues with China. We don't see China as a direct threat to Israel in any way — not military, not otherwise.

Shubhajit Roy: What about the defence relationship between China and Israel? Is it as robust as India's relationship with Israel?

Israel's relationship with India on the defence side is much more robust than that with China. Lot of our technology is American and we need to get American permission to export them. As you know, the Americans are restricting export to China and hardly restricting export to India.

Aashish Aryan: Many companies such as WhatsApp, Apple are suing the NSO. What does it reflect on other startups in Israel?

Israelis companies have been most traded on Nasdaq. So, things (NSO being sued) are not connected in anyway. Do you think if one Indian company does something, it will influence other Indian companies around the world?

Sandeep Singh: Israel recognised cryptocurrencies as actual currencies in 2018. What has the experience been so far because there have been a lot of concerns of cryptocurrencies being used for terror-funding, drug trafficking?

I don't know. I'm not an expert on this. I don't think Israel is a leader when it comes to regulating cryptocurrencies. I really don't have enough knowledge about it.

Krishn Kaushik: Do you think the ATHOS artillery deal has been sacrificed for India's indigenisation push?

We are trying to adjust ourselves, like everyone else, to the rules of Make In India. I don't know what will happen with this specific deal. We are ready to share the cost of development and the experience we have.

10 THE WORLD

TOP OF THE WORLD



Bob Dole was a former leader of the Senate

USA

Longtime GOP leader Bob Dole dies at 98

BOB DOLE, who overcame disabling war wounds to become a sharp-tongued Senate leader from Kansas, a Republican presidential candidate and then a symbol and celebrant of his dwindling generation of World War II veterans, has died. He was 98. His wife, Elizabeth Dole, posted the announcement Sunday on Twitter. Dole announced in February 2021 that he'd been diagnosed with stage 4 lung cancer. During his 36-year career on Capitol Hill, Dole became one of the most influential legislators and party leaders in the Senate, combining a talent for compromise with a caustic wit, which he often turned on himself but didn't hesitate to turn on others, too. **AP**

RUSSIA

Airliner had to lose height to avoid NATO spy plane: Moscow

A RUSSIAN Aeroflot airliner flying from Tel Aviv to Moscow was forced to change altitude over the Black Sea because a NATO CL-600 reconnaissance plane crossed its designated flight path, Russia's state aviation authority said on Saturday. The state airline said flight SU501 carrying 142 passengers had had to drop 2,000 feet on Friday after air traffic control told it that another aircraft had crossed its path. The aviation authority said an increase in flights by NATO aircraft in the region was creating risks for civilian planes and that Moscow planned to lodge a diplomatic complaint over them. **REUTERS**

AUSTRIA

Avalanche kills 3 skiers, injures 2

THREE SKIERS have been killed and two injured in an avalanche in central Austria, authorities said Sunday. The victims were part of a group of 11 skiers, eight of whom were hit by a roughly 655-foot wide slab of snow as they ascended a slope during a ski tour on Saturday in the Tweng area, in Salzburg province. Three of the skiers were buried by the avalanche, while another two were partly buried and able to free themselves, regional police said. **AP**



INDONESIA VOLCANO TOLL RISES TO 14

Trucks and buildings covered by volcanic ash in Sumber Wuluh Village, East Java province, Indonesia, on Sunday. The eruption of Indonesia's Semeru volcano has killed at least 14 people and injured dozens, the disaster mitigation agency said on Sunday, as search teams looked for victims in a landscape covered in deep layers of ash. Semeru, the tallest mountain on Java island, threw up towers of ash and hot clouds on Saturday that blanketed nearby villages in East Java province and sent people fleeing in panic. **Reuters**

Five dead after Myanmar security forces ram car into Yangon protesters: report

REUTERS
DECEMBER 5

FIVE PEOPLE were killed and at least 15 arrested after Myanmar security forces in a car rammed into an anti-coup protest on Sunday morning in Yangon, local news portal Myanmar Now reported.

Witnesses on the scene told Reuters dozens had been injured. Photos and videos on social media show a vehicle that crashed through the protesters and bodies lying on the road.

Another protest was held in Yangon in the afternoon despite the morning violence.

Anti-military protests are

Protesters change tactics

THE DAYS after the Feb 1 coup in Myanmar saw massive protests for which tens of thousands turned out. The military cracked down heavily on the protests, and an estimated 1,300 people have been killed during demonstrations, according to reports. Protest leaders were arrested, and the mass protests died down. But they

EXPLAINED

have now been replaced by flash mob protests that seem to spontaneously break out in different parts of the country. These protests are carried out by hundreds of people, instead of thousands, and had, until Sunday, not faced the worst of the military's violent crack down that earlier protests were subjected to.

continuing despite the killing of more than 1,300 people since the February 1 coup.

The opposition's shadow government said it was heartbroken to see peaceful protesters

crashed and shot to death.

"We will strongly respond to the terrorist military who brutally, inhumanly killed the unarmed peaceful protesters," the National Unity Government's defence ministry said in a statement on social media after Sunday's attack.

In the incident, a "flash mob" protest in Yangon, Myanmar's largest city, was rammed minutes after it started, witnesses said.

"I got hit and fell down in front of a truck. A soldier beat me with his rifle but I defended and pushed him back. Then he immediately shot at me as I ran away in a zig-zag pattern. Fortunately, I escaped," a protester who asked not to be identified, said by phone.

LYNCHING OF SRI LANKAN MAN IN PAKISTAN

Pak PM dials Lanka President, assures justice

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
COLOMBO, DECEMBER 5

PAKISTAN PRIME Minister Imran Khan has assured Sri Lanka's President Gotabaya Rajapaksa that the mob that lynched Sri Lankan national Priyantha Kumara Diyawadana over allegations of blasphemy will face justice, the President's office here said on Sunday.

Khan telephoned Rajapaksa and said that 113 people were arrested so far, it said.

"All the videos and information



Imran Khan and Gotabaya Rajapaksa

related to the incident have been obtained by the Pakistani security forces," a statement from the Sri Lankan President's office said.

Khan informed Rajapaksa



of the hardline Islamist party Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) attacked a garment factory and lynched its general manager Diyawadana, who was in his 40s, before setting his body on fire over allegations of blasphemy.

As pressure mounted on the Pakistani government to bring the guilty to justice, over 800 people have been booked under terrorism charges while 13 prime suspects are among 118 arrested so far in the horrific lynching of the Sri Lankan national in Punjab province.

that Diyawadana, who had served in Pakistan for a long time, had shown a high level of professionalism as a manager.

On Friday, angry supporters

CNN fires Chris Cuomo for role in brother's scandal

DAVID BAUDER & MICHELLE L. PRICE
NEW YORK, DECEMBER 5

CNN FIRED anchor Chris Cuomo on Saturday less than a week after new information emerged about how he assisted his brother, former New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo, as the politician faced sexual harassment allegations earlier this year.



Chris Cuomo

The network had suspended its prime-time host on Tuesday to investigate his conduct, after New York's attorney general released details showing he was more in-

volved than previously known in helping to strategize and reach out to other journalists as his brother fought to keep his job.

CNN hired a law firm for that review, which it would not identify. The lawyers recommended Chris Cuomo's termination and CNN chief Jeff Zucker informed the anchor of the decision on Saturday.

"It goes without saying that these decisions are not easy, and

there are a lot of complex factors involved," Zucker said in an email to CNN staff on Saturday.

The network said that "while in the process of that review, additional information has come to light." CNN would not discuss that information, or characterise whether it had anything to do with his brother. Cuomo issued a statement calling the decision disappointing. **AP**

them originating from one government-controlled port in Syria, some in hauls whose street value could exceed \$1 billion, according to law enforcement officials.

Officials in Italy found 84 million pills hidden in huge rolls of paper and metal gears last year. Malaysian officials discovered more than 94 million pills sealed inside rubber trolley wheels in March.

These seizures likely represent only a fraction of the drugs shipped, drug experts say. But they provide a window into the scope of the trade, suggesting that the industry has exploded in recent years.

More than 250 million cap-

tagon pills have been seized across the globe so far this year, more than 18 times the amount captured just four years ago.

Even more concerning to governments in the region, the Syrian network built to smuggle captagon has begun to move more dangerous drugs, like crystal meth, regional security officials say.

The biggest obstacle in combating the trade, officials said, is that it has the backing of a state that has little reason to help shut it down.

"The idea of going to the Syrian government to ask about cooperation is just absurd," said Joel Rayburn, the US special envoy for Syria during the Trump

administration. "It is literally the Syrian government that is exporting the drugs. It is not like they are looking the other way while drug cartels do their thing. They are the drug cartel."

Captagon was originally manufactured by a German pharmaceutical company as a stimulant to treat attention deficit disorder and narcolepsy. In the 1980s, users in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states started taking it recreationally to get an energy boost, banish fear and stay awake to study for exams, work, party or drive long distances. Its white pills were stamped with two crescents, giving it the Arabic nickname "abu hilaalain," or "the one with two moons". **NYT**

POWERFUL ASSOCIATES OF PRESIDENT BASHAR AL-ASSAD ARE MAKING AND SELLING CAPTAGON, AN ILLEGAL AMPHETAMINE

World's newest narcostate: On Syria's ruins, a drug empire flourishes

BEN HUBBARD & HWAIDA SAAD
BEIRUT, DECEMBER 5

BUILT ON the ashes of 10 years of war in Syria, an illegal drug industry run by powerful associates and relatives of President Bashar al-Assad has grown into a multi-billion-dollar operation, eclipsing Syria's legal exports and turning the country into the world's newest narcostate.

Its flagship product is captagon, an illegal, addictive amphetamine popular in Saudi Arabia and other Arab states. Its operations stretch across Syria, including workshops that manufacture

the pills, packing plants where they are concealed for export, and smuggling networks to spirit them to markets abroad.

An investigation by *The New York Times* found that much of the production and distribution is overseen by the Fourth Armored Division of the Syrian army, an elite unit commanded by Maher al-Assad, the president's younger brother and one of Syria's most powerful men.

Major players also include businessmen with close ties to the government, the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, and other members of the president's extended family, whose last name ensures protection for illegal ac-

tivities, according to *The Times* investigation, which is based on information from law enforcement officials in 10 countries and dozens of interviews with international and regional drug experts, Syrians with knowledge of the drug trade and current and former United States officials.

The drug trade emerged in the ruins of a decade of war, which shattered Syria's economy, reduced most of its people to poverty and left members of Syria's military, political and business elite looking for new ways to earn hard currency and circumvent American economic sanctions.

Illicit speed is now the coun-



A destroyed shopping mall in Homs, Syria, in 2014. **NYT**

try's most valuable export, far surpassing its legal products, according to a database compiled by *The Times* of global captagon busts.

In recent years, the authorities in Greece, Italy, Saudi Arabia and elsewhere have seized hundreds of millions of pills, most of



Kolkata



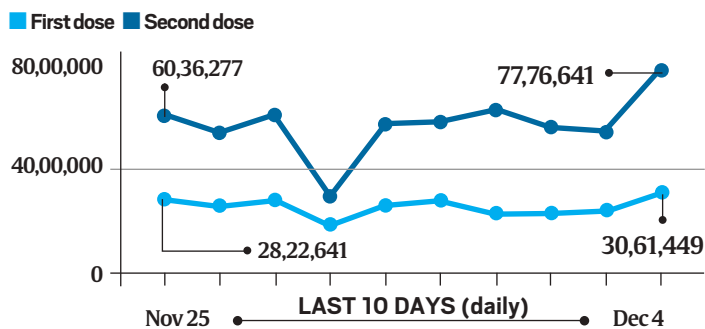
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If there are questions of current or contemporary relevance that you would like explained, please write to explained@indianexpress.com

CORONAVIRUS DASHBOARD

INDIA TOTAL DOSES 127,61,83,065
(1st DOSE: 79,90,71,752; 2nd: 47,71,11,313)



DOSES ON DECEMBER 4 1,08,38,090

DEC 3: 78,39,461 (1st DOSE: 23,70,010; 2nd: 54,69,451)

DOSES ON DECEMBER 4, BY STATE

TOP 5

Bihar	15,81,194
Tamil Nadu	15,71,643
Rajasthan	11,30,826
Uttar Pradesh	11,26,080
Maharashtra	10,21,093

BOTTOM 5*

Punjab	1,11,389
Jharkhand	1,36,740
Haryana	1,39,395
Delhi	1,65,311
Odisha	1,70,205

*Excluding states smaller than Delhi by population (2011)

ACTIVE CASES

99,155

819
from Dec 3

Source: Ministry of Health & Family Welfare; Dec 4 figures updated on Dec 5

Antarctica's 2 minutes of darkness, and why that's unusual in summer



PEOPLE WATCH SATURDAY'S total solar eclipse from the Polar Union Glacier Camp in Antarctica.

FOR 2 MINUTES, the eclipse brought darkness to Antarctica — something that otherwise never happens in Antarctica during the summer. Antarctica has six months of continuous daylight in the summer (the current season in the southern hemisphere) and six months of continuous darkness in the winter. **THIS IS BECAUSE** of Antarctica's location on the South Pole, and the

way the tilt of the Earth (the alignment of its axis in relation to its orbit around the Sun) places the continent during these two phases. It is the tilt that gives us the seasons, which are different in the two hemispheres.

DURING THE WINTER, Antarctica is on the side of Earth tilted away from the sun. This causes six months of darkness. During the summer, it is on the side tilted towards the sun. This gives it constant sunlight — Saturday's two-minute break was an exception.

Photograph: Felipe Trueba, Imagen Chile via AP

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State of Pakistan's economy

Tweeting from a Pakistan embassy handle, a hacker recently flagged rising inflation in the country. A look at Pakistan's current and impending economic crises, and what it has been doing to tide them over.

AANCHAL MAGAZINE & ANIL SASI
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 5

A HACKER on Friday posted a tweet from the official handle of the Pakistani embassy in Belgrade, claiming government officials had not been paid for three months amid galloping inflation, and mockingly asked Prime Minister Imran Khan if this was "Naya Pakistan" he had promised. The Foreign Office in Islamabad said the claim in the tweet was "baseless and unfactual".

Pakistan's GDP growth is projected to touch a 4-year high of 5% in the fiscal year ending June 2022 — at the same time, heightened inflationary risks and an imminent balance-of-payments crisis has the country teetering on the brink, dependent on external debt bailouts in order to stay afloat.

Forex and currency crises

Pakistan has repeatedly run into macro-economic crises: runaway inflation, current account and trade deficits, depleting foreign reserves, and currency devaluations. It is faced with a combination of these problems again.

The two immediate threats to the country's \$263-billion economy come from the build-up of inflationary pressures, and a payments crisis that stems from a combination of global and domestic factors — problems that the pandemic has exacerbated. The situation is similar to, and worse than, the crisis of 2018, when Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves plummeted to multi-year low.

As of November 19, Pakistan's entire liquid foreign reserves stood at \$22.773 billion, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), the country's central bank. Of this, \$16.254 billion was held by the SBP; the remainder was with commercial banks. The SBP's reserves declined by \$691 million during the week ended November 19, primarily on account of external debt repayments, Geo News reported.

Pakistan's annual economic growth in calendar year 2018 was 5.8%, but fell to 0.9% a year later, and further to 0.53% in 2020, according to the World Bank. This has led to a building-up of deficit on the current account — which captures the difference between a country's import and export of goods and services, and includes net transfers such as foreign aid, over a designated period.

A persistently high deficit can potentially lead to an excess supply of a country's currency in its foreign exchange market, which eventually negatively impacts the value of the currency — this is a reason why the Pakistani rupee has been in a tailspin.

KHUSHBOO NARAYAN
MUMBAI, DECEMBER 5

PROMINENT BUSINESS families that run empires such as the Reliance Industries Group and the Shriram Group have been in the news recently for their plans to set up trusts to ensure smooth transition of assets and control of the business to their heirs. This is primarily to avoid the messy legal battles and litigation seen among business groups in the past. According to the Knight Frank Attitudes Survey 2021, the Covid-19 pandemic has influenced 84% of ultra-wealthy Indians to reassess their attitude toward succession planning.

What is succession planning in family businesses, and how has it changed over the years?

Succession planning for a large or small family business entails transition of the man-

INFLATION IN DEVELOPING ASIA (% PER YEAR)

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022*
Developing Asia	2.5	2.9	2.8	2.2	2.7
South Asia	3.7	5.0	6.5	5.8	5.1
Afghanistan	0.6	2.3	5.6	5.0	4.0
Bangladesh	5.8	5.5	5.7	5.6	5.8
Bhutan	3.6	2.8	3.0	8.2	6.2
India	3.4	4.8	6.2	5.5	4.8
Maldives	-0.1	0.2	-1.4	2.5	2.0
Nepal	4.2	4.6	6.2	3.6	5.2
Pakistan	4.7	6.8	10.7	8.9	7.5
Sri Lanka	4.3	4.3	4.6	5.1	5.3

Source: Asian Development Outlook, ADB

*Projected

The IMF bailout

As growth fell and debt services obligations mounted, the country, like several times in the past, has been faced with a potential balance-of-payments crisis. A BoP crisis is triggered when a country is unable to finance its import bills or service its external debt. Pakistan imports most items of domestic consumption, making it more vulnerable to these pressures; the increasing debt servicing obligations have added to the pressure.

In 2019, Pakistan sought a rescue lifeline from the IMF, like it has 13 times over the last four decades. In exchange for a \$6 billion funding package, Pakistan had to commit to structural reforms and reducing public debt. But the funding plan stalled earlier this year over issues related to reform commitments, and an agreement could be reached only on November 22.

"The Pakistani authorities and IMF staff have reached a staff-level agreement on policies and reforms needed to complete the sixth review," the IMF said in a statement that day. Once the review is complete, 750 million in IMF special drawing rights (around \$1 billion) will be available to Pakistan, taking total disbursements to about \$3 billion.

That same day, Shaukat Tarin, who is equivalent to Pakistan's finance minister, pledged to undertake four other actions: withdrawal of tax exemptions and subsidies, an increase in levy on petro products, higher power tariffs, and an audit of some \$1.4 billion in "extra funds" lent to Pakistan in April 2020 in view of the pandemic.

Pakistan's government bonds reacted the day the deal was finalised, jumping between 1.3 and 2.8 cents on the US\$, their best day in over a year, according to Reuters data.

The Saudi deal

On November 27, Pakistan is reported to have clinched a \$3 billion loan from Saudi Arabia as its cabinet approved an agreement to keep the amount in the central bank, according to local media reports. In November 2018, Pakistan had inked a \$3 billion loan, from which about \$1 billion was reported as having been disbursed.

Under the new arrangement, the \$3 billion from the Saudi government would remain in the SBP's deposit account for a year, Geo News reported. It quoted Muzammil Aslam, Spokesperson for the Prime Minister Finance Advisor, as saying Pakistan was expecting to get \$7 billion from three sources over the next 60 days, including \$3 billion in deposits from Saudi Arabia, a \$1.2 billion Saudi Oil Facility with deferred payments, a \$800 million Islamic Development Bank oil facility. All of these dollar inflows, he said, would be sufficient to alleviate pressure on the country's import bills. But the loan deal with Saudi Arabia comes with extremely stringent conditions, including record high interest rates of nearly 4%, default clauses that are near draconian, and restrictions on the legal recourse Pakistan will have against any Saudi claim.

Inflation surge

Pakistan's record inflation is pushing up the price of daily staples amid mounting threats of unrest, according to media reports. Headline inflation reached 11.5% in November, up from 9.2% in October.

Annual food inflation has been in double digits in most months since mid-2019, surging to as high as 23.6% in January 2020, 17.8% in July 2020, and 15.9% in April 2021, according to the State Bank of Pakistan quoted by a November 17 World Bank paper. November

marked a return to double digits.

According to the Chairperson of the Consumer Association of Pakistan, Kaukab Iqbal: "The rising prices of food items, particularly fresh fruits, milk, and chicken are having a major impact on the livelihoods and nutrition levels of all families. But much of the burden of this falls on the poor as higher prices put protein and vitamin-rich foods out of their reach."

While inflation is also driven by global commodity prices, regressive domestic policies have not helped matters either, with Islamabad having "systematically penalised the production of high-value products by focusing support on wheat and sugarcane", according to the World Bank paper authored by Daud Khan, Namash Nazar and Willem Janssen. As a result, Pakistan remains an importer of horticultural products, dairy products despite having a massive number of animals producing below potential, and cotton to feed the domestic textile industry, the authors noted.

As far as balance of payments is concerned, Pakistan's current account deficits in September and October have been way larger than anticipated, reflecting both rising oil and commodity prices and improving domestic demand. The burden of adjusting to these external pressures, as the SBP's Monetary Policy Statement in November noted, has largely fallen on the rupee. The balance of risks has shifted away from growth and towards inflation and the current account faster than expected.

Looking ahead

Pakistan is expected to grow about 5% in fiscal year 2021-22 (July-June annual cycle), SPB governor told CNBC Reza Baqir on November 24. "This is a four-year high and this growth is reflected in robust and brisk demand of even non-energy imports in Pakistan," he said.

In September, Fitch Solutions had projected growth of 4.2% in the year ending July 22, much lower than Baqir's estimate. His assertions are also more optimistic than the government's target of 4.8%.

On November 24, the SBP raised its policy rate by 150 basis points to 8.75%, stating that "risks related to inflation and the balance of payments have increased while the outlook for growth continued to improve". The bank also lifted the cash reserve requirement for commercial banks by one percentage point, the first such move in over a decade.

But Baqir has asserted the government has to do more to bring down inflation, including actions to ensure "there's no hoarding or price speculation for basic commodities".

Big business families and succession via trusts

agement, the ownership and control of the business to the next generation of leaders, most often from within the family. Over the years, this process has changed from writing a will to setting up a management trust to manage the assets of the business and to ensure systematic decision-making and execution, helping the business become a wealth creator even after the demise of its founders.

A trust is a fiduciary relationship in which one party, called a trustor, transfers an asset/property, to another party, called a trustee. The trustee then manages this asset for the benefit of a third party, called a beneficiary.

Why are big family businesses opting for the trust route for succession planning?

According to experts, most successful family businesses want a succession plan that maintains the integrity of the business and also meets the aspirations of each fam-

ily member, especially when the family has more than one child, differently abled members, ancestral properties, and international assets.

Traditionally, what the general law provides is the will system. However, a will is not a permanent instrument. Even if it is registered when the person is living, it can be changed until the last minute. Apart from this, a will cannot be functional while the person is alive.

"A will takes effect only after the demise of someone. The will has no value till the time the person is alive, so the person who has created the asset has little way of seeing what is happening after the ownership changes. This is one of the key reasons why people look for succession planning using a trust structure. A trust structure can be given effect while you are living and you have a control over how circumstances pan out," said Vishwas Panjari, Partner at Nangia Anderson LLP.

Also, unlike a will, which is frequently challenged in courts, trusts are effective tools to avoid legal battles between heirs and beneficiaries, say experts. Trusts can also be used to initiate the heirs into the family business as they can be used to control the timing and proportion of assets distribution. Moreover, once a trust is created, the trustor has little to no direct control over its assets. As a result of this, the assets are protected from any action taken by creditors or banks in the event of a default by the business.

What are the tax implications?

Trusts are tax-efficient. "While the reason for estate planning is not to reduce tax but obviously the structure has to be efficient. Very broadly, the transfer of assets to a trust in which your family members are the beneficiaries are not taxable at either end. It means neither the transferor nor the beneficiary will be taxed," said Panjari of Nangia Anderson.

A wrong conviction, the exoneration, and Alice Sebold's pulled memoir

PAROMITA CHAKRABARTI
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 5

FOUR DECADES ago, a miscarriage had landed a Black man in jail for a crime he hadn't committed. This came to light last week when Sebold's publishers announced they were pulling her 1999 memoir *Lucky* from the shelves.

Anthony Broadwater, who had been convicted of raping and assaulting American writer Alice Sebold in 1981, was exonerated in November by a New York Supreme Court justice for grave lapses in the conviction procedure.

Crime and conviction

Sebold, now 58, became a household name after the publication of her memoir, *Lucky*, in 1999. In it, she revisits a traumatic episode from her life — on May 8, 1981, when Sebold, then a freshman at Syracuse University, was walking home through a tunnel to an amphitheatre near campus, she was assaulted and raped.

Even though she reported the crime afterwards, her assailant could not be traced. The title of the memoir, which went on to sell over a million copies, draws from her conversation with a police officer, who told her she was "lucky" to be alive, unlike another woman who had been raped and murdered at the same location. Sebold suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder after the assault, taking refuge in alcohol and drugs, before eventually getting her life back on track.

Five months later, Sebold came across a Black man near the campus, who she believed was her assailant. The man, Broadwater, was arrested in 1982 and served 16 years in prison. Broadwater, who maintained his innocence throughout, was denied parole several times and put on New York's sex offender registry after his release in 1999.

The exoneration

The possibility of a film adaptation led to a reinvestigation and eventual exoneration of Broadwater. In 2019, when producer



(From left) Anthony Broadwater reacts after his exoneration; Sebold, who has apologised to him; and her memoir, now being pulled. Broadwater & Sebold photos: AP

Timothy Mucciante came on board for a screen adaptation of *Lucky* by director Karen Moncrieff, he noticed discrepancies about the trial that struck him as irregular. In a recent interview to the BBC's Today programme, Mucciante said, "Certain things leapt out at me as being unusual in the American criminal justice system — specifically, the line-up procedure, where

Alice picked the wrong person as her assailant... but they tried him anyway."

Mucciante left the project soon after, but his concerns led him to hire a private investigator to reassess the evidence.

In November, a New York Supreme Court justice officially exonerated Broadwater, pointing out serious lapses in the original conviction procedure, includ-

ing overwhelming reliance on an untrustworthy forensic technique and on Sebold's testimony. Broadwater, now 61, broke down after the verdict was delivered.

Over a week after Broadwater's exoneration, Sebold tendered an apology in a post on Medium. "First, I want to say that I am truly sorry to Anthony Broadwater and I deeply regret what you have been through. I am sorry most of all for the fact that the life you could have led was unjustly robbed from you, and I know that no apology can change what happened to you and never will... I am grateful that Mr Broadwater has finally been vindicated, but the fact remains that 40 years ago, he became another young Black man brutalised by our flawed legal system. I will forever be sorry for what was done to him."

Publishers' move

In a statement, Sebold's publisher Scribner announced that it would be pulling *Lucky* from the shelves. "Following the recent exoneration of Anthony

Broadwater, and in consultation with the author, Scribner and Simon & Schuster will cease distribution... while Sebold and Scribner together consider how the work might be revised," it said. Pan Macmillan, Sebold's UK publisher, too, will follow suit.

According to reports, the film adaptation, too, stands cancelled after it lost funding.

Sebold's other works

In 2002, Sebold's best-known work till date, *The Lovely Bones*, was published — the story of a young girl who was raped and murdered at 14. The book went on to sell over 10 million copies globally. It was later adapted into a film by director Peter Jackson, featuring Saoirse Ronan, Susan Sarandon, Stanley Tucci, Mark Wahlberg, and Rachel Weisz in 2009. The film was nominated for the Oscars.

In 2007, Sebold's second novel, *The Almost Moon*, was released to mixed reviews. The story of a dysfunctional family, it explores the murder of a woman by her daughter, a model for art-classes.



Kolkata

12 ECONOMY

MPC SET TO UNVEIL BIMONTHLY POLICY ON WEDNESDAY

RBI likely to stick to gradual exit from ultra-accommodative stance: Experts

ENSECONOMICBUREAU
MUMBAI, DECEMBER 5

DESPITE THE threat posed by the new Covid variant — Omicron — the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is likely to continue with its plan on gradual exit from the ultra-accommodative monetary policy settings, experts said.

The near-term retail inflation is likely to remain within the MPC target band of 4 to 6 per cent. This, in turn, should give the Monetary Policy Committee time to assess the medium-term implications of Omicron by continuing to maintain an accommodative pause in policy rates in December. The MPC is scheduled to unveil the bi-monthly policy on December 8.

“While on-track recovery and

above-target inflation make a case for policy normalisation, authorities are likely to be watchful of the new risk on the horizon — the Omicron variant. Notwithstanding the caution, we still expect a gradual exit from the ultra-accommodative policy settings to continue,” said Radhika Rao, senior economist, DBS group.

“We believe the talks of a reverse repo rate hike in the MPC meeting may be premature as the RBI has been largely able to narrow the corridor without the noise of rate hikes and ensuing market cacophony,” said Soumya Kanti Ghosh, group chief economic adviser, State Bank of India.

“We expect the RBI to continue normalizing high banking system liquidity by further adjusting quantum and tenor of existing

EXPLAINED Eye on Omicron

THE NEAR-TERM retail inflation is likely to remain within the MPC target band of 4 to 6 per cent. This, in turn, should give the Monetary Policy Committee time to assess the medium-term implications of Omicron by continuing to maintain an accommodative pause in policy rates in December.

VRRR operations. Interest rate markets have re-aligned to this new reality and expected to re-

main range bound around current levels in the absence of a policy surprise,” said Churchill Bhatt, EVP debt investments, Kotak Mahindra Life Insurance Company.

Indications of the US Fed removing policy support at a faster pace, to keep inflation under check, are visible. This is aimed at completing the taper at an earlier date with a possible rise in interest rates sooner. This can impact future strategies of central banks. Covid is also making a comeback in Europe and the new variant from South Africa does not portend well for the world economy with possibilities of lockdowns, thus again forcing a reversal of policies.

On the growth front, while most economic indicators have surpassed pre-Covid levels, there is still a lot of slack in the economy.

Hence, RBI may decide to wait and watch till the next MPC meeting in February 2022. The RBI will be concerned about inflationary pressure building in the economy. Currently the upward pressure on inflation is because of high commodity prices and supply bottlenecks. “However, with economic growth gathering momentum, there is threat of further demand side pressure on inflation. We can expect the RBI to start hiking rates from 2022. The RBI will also narrow the corridor between repo and reverse repo rate, with sharper hike in reverse repo rate. The quantum of rate hike will be dependent on how the Covid scenario pans out and its subsequent impact on economic growth in 2022,” said Rajani Sinha, chief economist and national director-research, Knight Frank India.

MARKET WATCH

M-CAP OF 7 MOST VALUED COS JUMPS

New Delhi: Seven of the top 10 valued companies together added Rs 1,29,047.61 crore in market valuation last week, with Tata Consultancy Services emerging as the biggest gainer. During the last week, the BSE benchmark gained 589.31 points or 1.03 per cent. **PTI**

INTERVIEW WITH CHAIRMAN, EDELWEISS GROUP

‘For startup IPOs, must look beyond valuations, focus on tangible change to ecosystem’



Rashesh Shah

RASHESH SHAH, chairman of Edelweiss group, says the stock markets are in the midst of a structural growth story and IPO market is witnessing a new era of value creation through evolved technologies. Shah spoke to GEORGE MATHEW on various issues relating to the markets and financial sector. Edited excerpts:

Do you think Indian stock markets were overvalued? Do you expect more correction in the near future?

At any given time, stock markets are priced in for the future rather than the status quo. The current valuation of the Indian market is a reflection of the strong belief in the growth in India over the next decade or so. While there may be areas which are overvalued today, there are also many parts which are undervalued and provide good investment opportunities for long term. We are in the midst of a structural growth story and any near-term corrections should be seen as opportunities for the long term.

What's your view on the valuations of unicorns entering the IPO market? Are they overvalued considering the fact that most of them are loss making?

Like most other markets, the startup market also goes through up cycles and down cycles. We are currently in what is clearly an up-cycle. However, we must look beyond valuations and focus on the real and tangible change that these startups are bringing about to the ecosystem, not just in India but globally. Clearly, many of these business models are re-defining and transforming the way we do business and they must be looked at and evaluated in that context. We are certainly seeing a new era of value creation through evolved technologies and while valuations may become overheated at any point of time, their overall impact in our lives cannot be underscored.

The US Fed is likely to tighten the monetary policy soon to check inflation. Do you think FPIs will pull out more funds from India?

There are two big factors playing out in the market today — one is the tsunami of domestic investment we have seen over the last year or so. Even though FPI investments in the last few months have been subdued, domestic investments have more than made up for this shortfall. This is a trend

which will continue going forward as a larger segment of the country gets acquainted with the long-term benefits of having equity exposure in their portfolio. Secondly, the structural growth story playing out in India has been a natural attraction for FPIs, especially with the challenges in other growth economies. Hence, a tightening in the monetary policy might lead to some short-term knee-jerk reaction but the overall trend will continue to be favourable.

Do you expect interest rates to rise in India soon? When do you expect the RBI to normalise the policy?

We are some distance away from the rise in interest rates. As the economy continues to see strong recovery, it would be good to let the animal spirits expand wide before thinking about a rate cut. There are still pockets of industries which are yet to see tangible recovery to pre-covid levels and it would be prudent to consider rate cuts only some way down the line.

Bad loans of NBFCs are expected to rise following the recent changes in NPA norms by the RBI. How is the sector taking the regulatory changes?

While there will be some near-term impact, I think many NBFCs will be proactively working towards adhering to the new guidelines while maintaining asset quality. Hence, the monitoring and follow-ups would become more intense and get initiated well in advance. However, this might create short-lived challenges for the end consumer in the short term. However, as the industry evolves to a new norm, new regulations should become par for the course.

What's your assessment on the economic recovery? Will the emergence of new Covid variants delay the recovery?

India has been on an unprecedented vaccination spree. It has been a humongous exercise but one executed with relentless and unerring focus. The economic recovery has come on the back of this drive and is well and truly underway. While it is difficult to comment on new variants, initial estimates seem to indicate that the new variants seem to be less harmful, even if they could be more viral. Hopefully, this will lead to faster immunity and coupled with the vaccination drive, prevent any outbreak similar to Wave 2.

Corporate earnings are looking healthy. Do you think the slowdown of profits is behind us?

We saw what would be the bottoming out of corporate profits last year and we are now at the beginning of a decadal growth cycle. We are definitely looking at improving corporate profitability in both short term and long term. For Edelweiss, the profit improvement is not only driven by the return of profitability in credit but also strong growth in our asset management and wealth management businesses. Our mutual fund and alternatives business have seen breakout quarters and both our insurance businesses have done consistently well, being the fastest growing in their respective sectors. Despite the uncertainty due to Covid, we have added around 2 million customers in the last one year itself and currently we serve 5 million customers across our businesses. This is also the beginning of another long-term journey for us, and we are only at the cusp of it.

What's your plan/strategy going forward as fintech companies are changing the way the financial sector is functioning?

We see the fintech wave evolving two-folds. One, there will be opportunities for partnerships between banks and NBFCs on one side and the fintechs on the other. Many of our businesses are today working closely with these fintech companies to enable these partnerships, be it our retail credit businesses, our insurance businesses or our MF businesses. Secondly, there is also an opportunity for us to learn from these fintech businesses, which is what we are also focused on, as we evolve into tech-enabled plays in some businesses like retail credit while being fintech players ourselves in some of our businesses like general insurance.

‘Salesmen threaten supply disruptions in protest against RIL’

REUTERS
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 5

HOUSEHOLD GOODS salesmen have threatened to disrupt supplies to mom-and-pop stores if consumer companies provide products at lower prices to Reliance Industries, according to a letter seen by Reuters.

Reuters reported last month Indian salesmen representing companies such as Reckitt Benckiser, Unilever and Colgate-Palmolive said their sales had dropped 20-25 per cent in the last year as mom-and-pop stores were increasingly partnering Reliance. Citing the story, the All India Consumer Products Distributors Federation, which has 4,00,000 members, has written to consumer companies demanding a level playing field, saying they must get products at same prices like other big corporate distributors such as Reliance. If the pricing-parity demand is not met, the group said in its letter, its salesmen will stop distribution of products to mom-and-pop stores, and will also not supply newly launched consumer goods if such partnerships continue beyond January 1.

The group's president, Dhairiyashil Patil, said the letter was sent to Reckitt, Hindustan Unilever, Colgate and 20 other consumer goods companies. None of the 3 companies, as well as Reliance, responded to requests for comment.

TAXATION WATCH INCOME TAX

Over 3 cr ITRs filed so far on new portal: almost half of total from last fiscal year

ENSECONOMICBUREAU
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 5

OVER 3 crore income tax returns have been filed so far on the new e-filing portal for assessment year 2021-22 (financial year 2020-21). The Income Tax Department in a statement issued on Sunday urged taxpayers who are yet to file their income tax returns for AY 2021-22 at the earliest.

To put the numbers in perspective, the total number of income tax returns filed in financial year 2020-21 were 7.38 crore, as per government data. In 2019-20, 6.78 crore income tax returns were filed including revised returns, while in 2018-19, 6.74 crore ITRs were filed.

As of December 3, ITR filing has increased to 3.03 crore ITRs for AY 2021-22. Over 52% of these ITRs are filed using the online ITR form on the portal, the tax department said.

As many as 2.69 crore returns have been e-verified, of which more than 2.28 crore are through Aadhaar based OTP. In November, 48 per cent of the verified ITRs 1, 2 and 4 have been processed on the same day. Of the verified ITRs more than 2.11 crore ITRs have been processed and over 82.80 lakh refunds for AY22 have been issued.

The Income Tax Department has urged all taxpayers to view their Form 26AS and Annual Information Statement (AIS) through the e-filing portal to verify the accuracy of the TDS and tax payments. “It is important for taxpayers to cross check the data in the AIS statement with their Bank passbook, interest certificate, Form 16 and Capital gains

As of December 3, ITR filing has increased to 3.03 crore ITRs for AY 2021-22. Over 52% of these ITRs are filed using the online ITR form on the portal, the tax department said

statement from brokerages in case of purchase and sale of equity/Mutual funds etc,” it said.

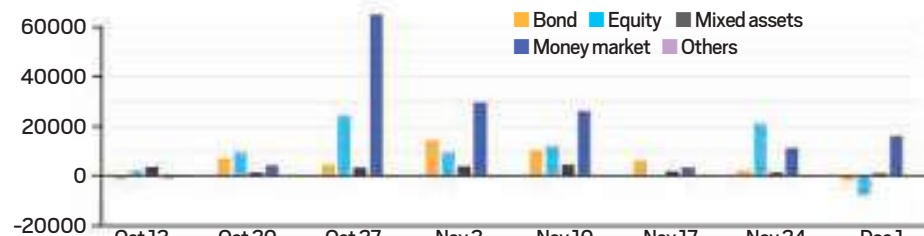
The government has extended the due date for filing ITRs for 2020-21 fiscal twice. The due date for ITRs for individuals whose accounts are not to be audited was extended to December 31 from September 30, while that for companies was extended to February 15, 2022 from the earlier extended deadline of November 30.

The new income tax portal, www.incometax.gov.in, which was launched on June 7, has faced glitches since its launch. The Finance Ministry had on August 23 “summoned” Infosys CEO Salil Parekh to explain the issues resulting in disruption of the portal developed by the software major. In the meeting with Parekh on August 23, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had expressed “deep disappointment” over persisting glitches for more than two months after portal launch and was given a deadline of September 15 to Infosys to resolve the issues. In October, the income tax department had stated that a number of technical issues in the new income tax portal have been resolved and the performance of the portal has substantially stabilised.

‘Global equity funds see biggest outflow in over 7 months’

Global equity funds faced outflows in the week ended December 1 on worries about the Omicron variant, while the Fed's hawkish tilt on unwinding added to investor concerns

FUND FLOWS INTO GLOBAL EQUITIES, BONDS AND MONEY MARKETS (IN \$ MN)



Source: Refinitiv Lipper data/Reuters

LIC improves asset quality ahead of IPO, lowers net NPA to 0.05%

ENSECONOMICBUREAU
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 5

AHEAD OF its proposed initial public offering (IPO), LIC has improved its asset quality for the financial year ended March 2021.

The non-performing assets (NPAs) as of March 31, 2021, are Rs 35,129.89 crore out of a total portfolio of Rs 4,51,303.30 crore, according to the latest Annual Report of Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC).

The sub-standard assets are Rs

254.37 crore whereas the doubtful assets are Rs 20,369.17 crore and loss assets are Rs 14,506.35 crore. An amount of Rs 34,934.97 crore is provided as per IRDAI guidelines in the books of accounts towards non-performing assets, it said. The percentage of gross NPA is 7.78 per cent while the net NPA is 0.05 per cent at the end of March 2021. This is lower than gross NPA of 8.17 per cent (as a percentage of its debt portfolio) and net NPA of 0.79 per cent in the previous year.

In absolute terms, the NPA

was Rs 36,694.20 crore out of a total debt of Rs 4,49,364.87 crore in 2019-20. Stress threshold for banks is different from that for insurers. LIC usually makes full provisions for all NPA in the debt book.

The corporation has made provisions to the tune of Rs 37,341.6 crore, of which Rs 34,934.97 crore is towards doubtful, sub-standard, and loss assets.

The government earlier this year amended the Life Insurance Corporation Act, 1956, to facilitate the listing of LIC. **WITH PTI**

Maruti: Long wait period due to chip shortage can negatively impact demand

ENSECONOMICBUREAU
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 5

LONGER WAITING periods with semiconductor shortage affecting production can have a negative impact on car demand, although the supply constraints of chips have gradually improved over the last few months, according to a senior official of car market leader Maruti Suzuki India.

The company currently has a pending order of around 2.5

lakh units with demand in the market continuing to be buoyant, while its production was over 80 per cent of normal in November.

“The bookings show that the demand continues to be quite robust, both in terms of inquiries and the bookings, but now availability is an issue and waiting periods have gone up,” Maruti Suzuki India Ltd (MSIL) Senior Executive Director (Marketing & Sales) Shashank Srivastava. **WITH PTI**

‘Create robust, digital platform for easy credit availability to small biz’

ENSECONOMICBUREAU
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 5

IT MINISTER Ashwini Vaishnaw on Sunday exhorted the banking industry to create an innovative digital platform — as powerful, seamless and robust as UPI — for providing quick and easy credit to MSME, small businesses, and those at the bottom of pyramid.

The building blocks required to create such a platform are already available, given the strong ecosystem of Aadhaar, mobile phones, UPI (Unified Payments Interface)



ASHWINI VAISHNAW
IT Minister

platform and digilocker, he said asking the banking industry to come up with innovative idea and

solutions in three months. Vaishnaw was speaking at 'Digital payment Utsav' which was part of a weeklong showcase of India's achievements in digital space titled 'Azadi Ka Digital Mahotsav' in the capital.

Throwing a “challenge” at the bankers present in the audience, the Minister said: “Can we create a platform as powerful, seamless, good, as digital as UPI platform for providing very quick and easy credit to the MSME, small industries, small businessmen...people really at bottom of pyramid.” **WITH PTI**

BRIEFLY SBI NPA sale

New Delhi: SBI has invited bids from asset reconstruction companies, and other financial institutions to sell an NPA account KSK Mahanadi Power Company, with outstanding against the company over Rs 4,100 crore. **PTI**

Bahrain currency

Dubai: The Central Bank of Bahrain plans to offer a digital dinar through a digital payments platform. Sky News Arabia reported Sunday. The central bank aims to raise the share of financing for small- and medium-sized enterprises to 20 per cent of financial portfolios of local banks by the end of 2025. **REUTERS**

Amid Evergrande crisis, more Chinese developers to issue ABS

REUTERS
BEIJING, DECEMBER 5

SOME OF China's major property developers are planning to issue asset-backed securities in the near term, a further sign that regulators are marginally broadening financial channels for developers amid Evergrande's debt crisis.

China Evergrande, wrestling with debts of more than \$300 billion, said on Friday that there was “no guarantee” it would have enough funds to meet debt repayments, prompting the country's top financial regulators to calm the market.

The regulators said any fallout was controllable, and that developers' normal funding needs would be met, but the sector is facing another year of tight funding conditions and refinancing risks,

Moody's said in a note last week.

Country Garden, the country's top property developer, said on Sunday that the company is considering applying for the issuance of supply chain asset-based securities (ABS) in the near term.

“As an innovative financing tool, supply chain ABS products can support upstream suppliers' financing and ease financing difficulties for small and medium firms,” the company said in a statement on its official WeChat account.

It also pledged to control company's risks via prudent operations, according to the statement.

Four other developers, including Huafa Industrial and Greentown China, have received regulatory feedback on their plans to issue ABS totalling nearly



Evergrande project in Beijing. Reuters file

16 billion yuan (\$2.51 billion), the Shanghai Stock Exchange disclosed on December 3.

The Securities Times reported that China Vanke is also planning to issue supply chain ABS worth

777 million yuan in the near run. “Restrictions on domestic real estate bond financing have eased, and the amount of bond issuance in November is about 3 times that of October,” analysts with CICC wrote in a note, adding that bond financing is recovering in an orderly manner.

China's property market, which accounts for a quarter of gross domestic product by some metrics, has been cooling sharply since May with sentiment shaken by intensifying liquidity stress that has engulfed some of the country's most indebted developers.

Analysts do not believe Beijing will ease up much on its campaign to rein in developers with high leverage levels, but they do expect some policy tweaks to ensure home prices and sales don't fall too quickly.

Rangnick starts Man Utd term with 1-0 win

REUTERS/ENS
MANCHESTER, DECEMBER 5

SHIVANI NAIK
MUMBAI, DECEMBER 5

What she has borrowed from Ratchanok's game is those subtle pace variations to unsettle opponents. It started pretty straightforward: don't give Sindhu any pace. The early 4-0 lead in the first set, and the subsequent closing out, came from not allowing Sindhu to dominate.



This wasn't the traditional stealing of space, and spoiling the rhythm. It was like going looking for some BTS emotional plug, but out comes Woosung's raspy trill from *The Rose*. Not jarring, just jostled on court.



"Fred has these moments, one shot per year. Everyone is happy for him because he's such a nice guy. He works a lot and people don't talk about him. He deserves the praise," said Fernandes.

The push to the top of the table came courtesy West Ham's 3-2 win over Chelsea, as the Hammers came from behind twice to pip the reigning Champions League winners.

PISCES (Feb 20 - Mar 20)
It's a matter of swings and roundabouts: domestic improvements are proceeding without a hitch and, on the other hand, you may face a temporary disappointment as decisions are delayed. This is a day to broaden your horizons.

14 SPORT

DJOKOVIC STILL COY ABOUT OZ OPEN

World No. 1 Novak Djokovic isn't ready to say whether he will defend his Australian Open title next month in Melbourne. The issue: Tournament participants are required to be vaccinated against COVID-19, and Djokovic has refused to say whether he has been. He previously has stated his opposition to vaccination mandates for players.

REUTERS

BRIEFLY

Five cities to host 16-team Davis Cup Finals next year

Madrid: Buoyed by the success of the multi-city format of this year's Davis Cup Finals, the 2022 edition of the men's team competition will be held across five cities, the International Tennis Federation (ITF) said on Sunday. This year's 18-nation competition was staged across three cities -- Madrid, Turin and Innsbruck -- and the Russian Tennis Federation and Croatia will meet in the final in the Spanish capital later on Sunday. The 2022 Finals will see 16 nations competing in four groups across four cities with the top eight teams advancing to the knock-out stages in a neutral fifth host city, the ITF and event owners Kosmos Tennis said. "For the group stages we envision all four of those being teams that are competing in the competition," ITF chief David Haggerty told Reuters, adding that the governing body expects to make a decision on the host cities in March.

REUTERS

Rain plays spoilsport in Pak vs Bangla Test

Dhaka: The majority of play on day two of the second cricket test between Bangladesh and Pakistan was washed out due to persistent rain on Sunday. Just 6.2 overs from a possible 98 were possible as Pakistan resumed the day on 161-2 and reached 188-2 before the umpires called it a day. Skipper Babar Azam was batting on 71 with Azhar Ali on 52 at stumps. Rain and bad light also interrupted the game on day one, allowing just two sessions. As the game started after the lunch session on Sunday, Babar resumed with a boundary through fine leg off pacer Khaled Ahmed, showing his intention to score quick runs. Azhar also hit a boundary in the second ball he faced off pacer Ebadot Hossain. He then struck two consecutive fours in Ebadot's next over to reach his 34th test fifty off 126 balls just before rain forced the postponement. Left-arm spinner Taijul Islam, who didn't bowl on day two, remains Bangladesh's biggest threat with match figures of 2-49.

AP

BRIEF SCORES: Stumps Pakistan 188 for 2 (Babar 71*, Azhar 52, Taijul 2-49) vs Bangladesh

Germany bow out with 'dead rubber' win

Madrid: Germany bowed out of the Davis Cup with a win in the doubles rubber of their semi-final in Madrid against Russia. Kevin Krawietz and Tim Puetz fought back to beat Aslan Karatsev and Karen Khachanov 4-6, 6-3, 6-4, but it was scant consolation as singles victories for Andrey Rublev and Daniil Medvedev had earlier given Russia an unassailable 2-0 lead in the best-of-three tie. Croatia await Russia in Sunday's showpiece after they eliminated Novak Djokovic's Serbia on Friday. Both finalists will be aiming for a third Davis Cup title. The Russian team is officially being called RTF (Russian Tennis Federation) in the competition because of the ongoing doping suspension in international sport.

AP

Too little, too late

New Zealand batters show resilience on a surface that has lost its bite, but hosts hurtling towards victory

ABHISHEK PUROHIT

MUMBAI, DECEMBER 5

For more than an hour on Sunday afternoon at the Wankhede Stadium, New Zealand did not lose a single wicket, courtesy a 73-run fourth-wicket partnership between Daryl Mitchell and Henry Nicholls. Considering that their entire first innings had folded for 62 in about two hours on Saturday, it was a massive improvement already, albeit from the lowest of bases.

The lull in the wicket procession was enough for the vocal upper tier of the Dilip Vengsarkar Stand, the erstwhile North Stand, to start chanting, 'Monday office jaana hai, out karo, out karo. [We have to go to work on Monday, so get them out].'

It was a sample of the monstrous expectation India face at home, where a Test match win -- and even a win with days to spare -- is taken for granted. But it wasn't as easy as it had been on Day Two, when New Zealand had lasted a mere 28.1 overs.

The bite and zip that had delivered the historic perfect ten for Ajaz Patel, and then produced the lowest total ever against India in a blink-and-miss New Zealand reply, had gradually dissipated. It was miles away from the slow and low Kanpur track of course; it was more of slow turn and slow bounce. The moisture from all the rain in the lead-up to the match had diminished by the third morning, and batters were no longer getting rushed.

"Two days back, due to the underlying moisture, the ball had fast turn and as time is progressing, the track is slowing down a bit. So today, even when there was turn, the batter had enough time to go on the back foot and negotiate it," said Axar Patel.

They had to make mistakes. "Only if the batter is making mistakes, then it is a bit difficult for him. We have been in umpteen situations like these and we know what needs to be done in these circumstances. It won't always be the case that batters will get out quickly so one needs to have patience."

Patience game

Patience was what India had to work with. Mitchell, especially, was batting with controlled aggression, having seen Mayank Agarwal take the attack to the New Zealand spinners in both his knocks.

Mitchell batted on the leg stump, trying to stay leg side of the ball and play straighter towards the off-side. He was also using his feet constantly to get to the pitch of the ball and work it around. He charged the spinners often and lofted them cleanly to the straight boundary. "Set the template from Mayank's batting, the way he put pressure on our spinners. It's just about trying to put pressure back on the bowlers," Mitchell later said.

"That's the beauty of Test cricket. They (bowlers) are constantly throwing things at you and you're trying to counter that. You have to keep trying to win the small battles." It remains essentially a one-ball game for batters though, and Mitchell would succumb in a mini-battle against

Axar on 60. He'd just stepped out to hit his ninth boundary, a straight six to the left-arm spinner. Axar gave the next ball some air too, but this one was a touch wider and the length had been pulled back a tad. Mitchell found himself nowhere near the pitch, still went through with his big swing, and mishit to the lone man sweeping on the off-side rope.

Two overs later, Tom Blundell pushed Axar straight to mid-off and set off for a non-existent single only to be run out for a duck. After that brief revival from 55/3, New Zealand had slipped to 129/5.

Mohammed Siraj could not produce a wicket burst with the new ball like he had on Day Two. But R Ashwin spun out the openers Tom Latham and Will Young as well as Ross Taylor with the new SG in the first hour.

The veteran Taylor's horror tour ended with 11, 2, 1 and 6. He'd tried defending without success; in most likely his final Test innings in India, he tried hitting out, and edged a slog to depart off his eighth delivery.

It was after India had batted for 49 overs to pile up a gargantuan lead of 539. The top four of Agarwal, Cheteshwar Pujara, Shubman Gill and Virat Kohli made 62, 47, 47 and 36, none of them going on to convert their starts. All of them fell to varying kinds of soft dismissals, before Axar heralded the declaration on 276/7 in 70 overs with an unbeaten 41 off 26. Ten-for man Ajaz registered match figures of 14/225, the best ever haul against India.

Axar was asked why India had batted for so long despite their lead having already grown so much. He said the plan had been to bat as if they were chasing a target on a turner.

"I won't call it a delay as there is so much time left in the game. The idea was to bat as long as possible in this kind of a situation, you don't get every day, so the plan was to make the most of it," Axar said. "We were trying to explore options and check

out what if we have to chase on this kind of a track on the last day, trying to express ourselves in a different situation." That India were treating their second innings as a simulation chase tells you everything about how much they have bossed this match so far. Another home series win is a matter of five strikes on Day Four, with New Zealand technically needing another 400 runs.

SCOREBOARD

India 1st innings: 325
New Zealand 1st innings: 62
India 2nd innings: 276/7 (Decl)
New Zealand 2nd innings:

Tom Latham lbw b Ashwin 6
Will Young c (SK Yadav) sub b Ashwin 20
Daryl Mitchell c J Yadav b Patel 60
Ross Taylor c Pujara b Ashwin 6
Henry Nicholls batting 36
Tom Blundell run out 0
Rachin Ravindra batting 2
Extras: (B-8 LB-1 NB-1) 10
Total: (For 5 wickets in 45 overs) 140

Fall of wickets: 1/13 2/45 3/55 4/128 5/129
Bowling: Mohammed Siraj 5-2-13-0, Ravichandran Ashwin 17-7-27-3, Axar Patel 10-2-42-1, Jayant Yadav 8-2-30-0, Umesh Yadav 5-1-19-0.



Daryl Mitchell scored a fighting knock of 60 from 92 balls. AP



R Ashwin spun out openers Tom Latham and Will Young as well as Ross Taylor in the first hour.

PTI

Neutral venues could get IPL games

DEVENDRA PANDEY

MUMBAI, DECEMBER 5

IN THE backdrop of some associations stating that they have built infrastructure but not getting international games, which can help them to maintain their stadium, the Indian cricket board (BCCI) is exploring the possibility of two IPL games per team to be played on neutral venues from next season onwards. The suggestion was made by a few state associations during the board's Annual General Meeting in Kolkata on Saturday, and the associations want the board to request IPL teams to play at least two games each on different venues.

The topic came to the fore after the BCCI told the state associations to develop infrastructure, for which the board would help them financially. Some associations, then, pointed out that they have the requisite infrastructure but are not getting games. Presently, each association gets to host at least one international game in a span of three years, as part of the board's rotation policy. But given the large number of international stadiums in the country, 24 in the latest count, many venues get matches few and far between.

Often smaller associations bear the brunt. "A small association hosts interna-

The topic came to the fore after the BCCI told the state associations to develop infrastructure, for which the board would help them.

tional games every three or sometimes four years," pointed out a BCCI official, in terms of anonymity.

"The BCCI wants each association to build their own stadium and infrastructure. A few state associations argued that they have built stadiums and are not getting any competitive games. It will be better if the BCCI decides to have IPL games in these smaller venues too so that they can get some revenue at the same time generate interest [among the locals]," he said.

Past incidents

In the past, some IPL franchises had allocated games to smaller venues. Punjab Kings used to play their games in Dharamshala and Indore. Delhi Capitals have played in Raipur and Chennai Super Kings shifted games to Ranchi, hometown of their talisman, MS Dhoni.

With two new IPL teams to play in the IPL from next season, some associations feel that the BCCI should make it mandatory for

IPL teams to play in neutral venues. "There will be 10 IPL teams from next season. If these ten teams decide to play two games each then 20 matches can be played in a neutral venue. It will help states to generate revenue and at the same time, help state associations too. The Indian board has informed us that they will look into it and speak to the IPL franchise," a state association member said.

Retired judge committee head

The board has approached a retired Chief Justice to look into CVC Capital Partners' acquisition of the Ahmedabad franchise, one of the two new teams from the next edition, a couple of weeks ago.

CVC Capital allegedly has links with a betting company, which the board came to know only after the team had acquired the franchise. CVC Capital Partners' has, apparently, ties with Tipico, a sports betting and online gaming company, and Sisal, a betting gaming and payments, consumer/retail company.

The board hasn't given a letter of intent to CVC and the franchise's fate hangs in the hands of the retired judge. The Indian board had issued a tender process, inviting bids for its two new franchises. While Sanjiv Goenka's company won the Lucknow one, CVC won the bid for Ahmedabad.

Junior World Cup: Second loss against France exposes India's deficiencies

MIHIR VASAVDA

BHUBANESWAR, DECEMBER 5

INDIA'S JUNIOR World Cup campaign ended just the way it began: heads in their hands, on their knees and jubilant French players dancing and celebrating around them.

When France defeated India in the opening group-stage match, it was seen as the biggest upset of the competition. But after they won the third-place playoff on Sunday 3-1, it seemed like the most obvious result. What wasn't so obvious was the outcome of the final. It was stunning, the manner in which Argentina outwitted six-time Junior World Cup winners Germany 4-2 in a final for the ages. Both results hold a lot of significance going forward, giving a glimpse into the teams that could challenge those on the top of the pile.

After their senior side won the Rio Olympics gold medal, Argentine hockey seemed to have lost its way a little in the last few years. But the current bunch of players -- coached by Lucas Rey, their Rio Olympics hero who is now becoming their messiah -- have sparked hopes of a revival, the way the 2016 junior title became a springboard for India going forward.

Compared to the final, the consolation third-place match at World Cups is much-maligned, often considered a second-class event. At times, however, it can also define tourna-

ments. And Sunday's game between India and France felt like that.

Colt from Les Bleus

France symbolise all things that are going right in international hockey, which at the moment seems so competitive that any of the top-eight sides can beat the other on their day -- and the Junior World Cup has shown that it will remain that way for a foreseeable time.

In 2013, when Les Bleus -- to borrow the moniker associated with their football team, finished as the runners-up behind Germany, it heralded a new era for them. A lot of those players went on to form the core of the senior team, which made waves at the 2018 World Cup. The money pumped into French hockey, in lieu of the Paris Olympics, meant that their performance three years ago wasn't a one-off. France have continued to punch above their weight in Europe and recently secured qualification for the 2023 World Cup, making it rare back-to-back appearances for them in what is the biggest event on the hockey calendar after the Olympics.

The performance of their under-21 side will give them hope that their rise will continue unabated.

France were easily the more dominant of the two teams in the third-place match. They bossed the midfield, sliced through the Indian defence with utmost ease and cleverness, and showed a lot of energy right from the time the anthems were played. It helped their cause



France players celebrate a goal against India on Sunday.

HI

that the defending champions never turned up for the game.

Timothee Clement -- remember the name -- scored a hat-trick from penalty corners, taking his tally to 14 in the tournament, four behind the top-scorer Miles Bukkens of the Netherlands. A lot of France's plan revolves around getting Clement into the game by rushing forward and winning penalty corners. And when they earned them -- more than a dozen on Sunday -- Clement is always threatening with his power and placement.

France's third-place finish also points at the depth in European hockey. While the usual

suspects have been winning all the important tournaments, teams like Wales -- who scripted a remarkable tale to qualify for the 2023 World Cup and a slightly-stagnating Ireland underlines Europe's strength.

South American challenge

With this in mind, Argentina's triumph becomes significant.

Victories at junior level don't necessarily translate into senior success but Sunday's win comes as a timely booster shot for Argentine hockey. Los Leones, as they are called, have been on a downward spiral of sorts since win-

ning gold at the Rio Olympics.

One of the reasons for that, according to their former senior captain and U-21 team coach Lucas Rey, was the internal problems at a federation level. It led to a constant chopping and changing of coaches, and some of their key players, including star drag-flicker Gonzalo Peillat, fell out of favour. This showed in their performances, with the team finishing a poor seventh at both, the 2018 World Cup and 2020 Olympics.

Rey, an Argentine legend, has taken it upon himself to revitalise their hockey. Under him, the team was surprisingly good, playing with an equal measure of creativity and cunningness. Argentina will try to ensure a smooth transition of these players into the senior fold, with the hope to make them a force once again.

Argentina's presence at the top will be crucial for world hockey, given that Australia and India are the only two countries apart from them to constantly challenge the European dominance on the field.

Ominous signs for Asia

This brings us to Asia, where the teams are falling behind the rest of the hockey world at an alarming rate.

One thing that the Junior World Cup proved -- if any further proof was needed -- was the downfall of South Korea and Pakistan, once a continental force but now a pale shadow of their past. While Pakistan, who still showed

some skills but lacked severely in fitness, will pin their hopes on the new foreign coach, Siegfried Aikman, things look ominous for South Korea, where hockey has been rapidly declining in the priority list.

Malaysia continue to punch above their weight, as they showed with a spirited draw against Belgium in the group stage. But the gap between India and the rest of Asia, even at a junior level, seems widening. This, despite the fact that this was one of the most under-prepared Indian teams of recent times. India's inexperience showed throughout the competition, starting and ending with the games against France. On Sunday, the players were guilty of making some basic blunders, including missed trapping, the inability to grasp the five-yard rule for aerial balls and going for solo efforts instead of playing smart hockey, especially inside France's 'D'.

In all their knockout matches -- against Belgium in the quarterfinals, Germany in the semis and France in the playoff -- India could not take advantage of their biggest asset, penalty corners. Figure this: in these three games, India could earn only five penalty corners from 58 circle penetrations while their opponents got 21 corners from 76 entries inside the 'D'.

Penalty corners -- both, defensive and offensive -- were their undoing eventually on Sunday, just like it was in the opening match. India's campaign ended the same way it began.