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Baghel wins C'garh CM race

58-yr-old five-time legislator to take oath at 4.30 pm today

PNS ■ RAIPUR

The powerful OBC leader Bhupesh Baghel overcame all odds and outsmarted his competitors within the party on Sunday as he was chosen unanimously as the leader of the Congress Legislature Party in a jam-packed but emotionally charged-up meeting at party State headquarters here.

Congress observer Mallikarjun Kharge informed mediapersons that Baghel emerged as consensus candidate for the next Chief Minister of the mineral-rich State. The 58-year-old five-time legislator Baghel will take oath as the third Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh on Monday at 4.30 pm at Science College ground.

Kharge said names of Ministers would be declared later "after detailed discussions with all stake-holders".

State Congress president Baghel faced a stiff challenge from TS Singhdeo, party's lone Lok Sabha member from State, Tamradhwaj Sahu and former Union Minister Charandas Mahant.

Shortly after Baghel was elected the Congress Legislature Party leader, he announced to write off bank loan of farmers within 10 days, a prime poll campaign promise that led to the BJP's rout in Assembly elections.

Baghel said the Congress Government will unravel the conspiracy that led to the killing of top Congress leaders by Maoists in the Jheeram



Senior Congress leader Mallikarjun Kharge, Chhattisgarh Chief Minister designate Bhupesh Baghel, Congress State in-charge PL Punia and others during a Press conference after the Congress Legislature Party (CLP) meeting in Raipur on Sunday

No mama Quattrocchi in BJP's defence deal: PM

Hurls corruption charges against grand old party

PNS ■ RAE BARELI/PRAYGRAJ

Highlighting the Supreme Court clean chit to the Government in the Rafale deal, Prime Minister on Sunday unleashed a vicious attack on the Congress from the home turf of its supreme leader, Sonia Gandhi, and hurled corruption charges against the grand old party in defence purchases making stinging jibes like the absence of "Quattrocchi uncle" or Christian Michel in the BJP Government's defence procurement.

The Prime Minister also accused the Congress of trying to malign and influence judiciary.

The Prime Minister was making his first public speech after the Supreme Court gave a clean chit to the BJP Government in Rafale deal and BJP lost the three Hindi heartland States of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh to the Congress.

Claiming that country will never forgive Congress for attempting to weaken the Army, Modi said the main Opposition party is disturbed over NDA Government's performance because this Government has carried out defence deals without involving people like Quattrocchi or Michel.

"Congress' history in defence deals is involvement of people like Mama Quattrocchi or Christian Michel who was recently brought to the country," Modi said while addressing a public meeting in Rae Bareli, the Parliamentary constituency of UPA chairperson Sonia.

Earlier, Modi flagged off the new rake of rail coaches and dedicating projects worth



Prime Minister Narendra Modi, performs rituals at Sangam, the confluence of the Rivers Ganges and Yamuna, in Prayagraj on Sunday

around ₹1100 crore for the district here on Sunday.

He also asked why it is that whenever Congress made attack on the Indian army, people from the across the border in Pakistan clap and why they appreciate the country's oldest party.

Cong asks SC to recall Rafale judgment

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Continuing to target the Centre over Rafale, the Congress on Sunday urged the Supreme Court to recall its related judgment and issue notices to the Central Government for contempt of court and perjury, alleging the Centre had provided false information to the apex court.

Addressing a Press conference, senior Congress leader Anand Sharma said the Government is guilty of committing breach of privilege of both Houses of Parliament by misinforming the Supreme Court that the CAG report on Rafale aircraft pricing had been presented to the Public Accounts Committee of Parliament.

"We demand that the SC immediately recall that judgment which is void. This entire episode has dented the dignity of the highest court which cannot be allowed," he told reporters.

FM rubbishes Opposition's JPC demand

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Arun Jaitley on Sunday rubbished the Opposition demand for a parliamentary panel probe into the Rafale deal and said the Supreme Court had the last word on the issue and there could not be a contrary verdict by a political body. The FM said the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG)'s view on the deal is not relevant after the SC's clean chit to the Government.

Citing washout of four day's proceedings in Parliament, Jaitley said the Congress will prefer disruptions in Parliament over discussion on Rafale during the remainder of the session.

Detailed report on P5

In clarion call to Opp, Stalin raises pitch for Rahul as PM

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ CHENNAI

In what is being described as the battle cry for the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, a call has been made by the combined Opposition parties in the country that Rahul Gandhi should be the Prime Ministerial candidate to take on Narendra Modi. DMK president MK Stalin who was the host of a mammoth public rally at Chennai on Sunday evening, asked the people in the country, including all the major political parties to elect Rahul as the Prime Minister in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

"Only Rahul has the ability and capability to defeat the fascist-Nazi-communal Narendra Modi Government," declared Stalin in the public meeting which was attended by a galaxy of Opposition leaders that included UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi, Rahul, Chief Ministers N Chandrababu Naidu (Andhra Pradesh), Pinarayi Vijayan (Kerala), V Narayanasamy (Puducherry) and a host of other leaders.

Earlier in the day, Sonia unveiled the life-size statue of late DMK chief M Karunanidhi at Anna Arivalayam, the party headquarters in Chennai's Mount Road.

Sonia and Rahul flew down to Chennai to attend the function. It may be noted that in 2004, it was Karunanidhi, then DMK president, who wanted the Opposition parties to endorse the name of Sonia as Prime Minister of the country.

"We will build a new India. Welcome Rahul, give the nation good governance."

As the son of Dr Kalaignar, I propose the candidature of Rahul from Tamil Nadu," said Stalin.

This is the first time Stalin or for that matter anybody from the Opposition benches proposed the name of Rahul for the post of PM though the Congress leaders had made it known many times in the recent past that the young president of the party would lead the nation and take India to new heights.

Skilled Jharkhand can meet global human resources demand: CM

PNS ■ RANCHI

Batting strongly for developing a talent pool in Jharkhand, Chief Minister Raghuraj Das said that youths of the State can meet the demand of skilled manpower required world over. The CM was in Dubai to promote Skill Summit slated to take place next month in Ranchi.

"Skilling Jharkhand in present perspective is akin to fulfilling the need of skilled manpower of the entire world. We in the State are working as per the dreams of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, that is to transform youths into skilled human resource, and have also gone for building a new Jharkhand where imparting technical training besides degrees is our top priority," said the CM during the road show organised at Creek Heights of Dubai on Sunday.

The CM on the occasion also underlined the huge demand of workforce in the Middle East and other Gulf countries while admitting that the youths back home should be trained as per the requirements in these countries. He also lauded the progress made by the State in terms of business sectors and agriculture.

"Jharkhand is one of the fastest growing States of the country which has recorded higher growth rate than Gujarat. Farm sector has also seen a quantum jump. We have the best labour and industrial policy and our State is among the top four-five States in the 'Ease of Doing Business'



CM Raghuraj Das addresses Road Show at Dubai on Sunday for the Global Skill Summit. Principal Secretary to CM Sunil Kumar Barnwal, Development Commissioner DK Tiwari and others are also seen

standards," added the CM.

Indian Ambassador to the UAE Navdeep Suri was also present on the occasion who said that India is the third largest business partner country after China and the USA in the region. "The relation between the two countries has seen a new height after Narendra Modi becoming Prime Minister. Efforts of Jharkhand Government in this direction are praiseworthy. UAE can play a big role on building a skilled Jharkhand," he said.

Also present there was Development Commissioner DK Tiwari along with Principal Secretary to the CM Sunil Kumar Barnwal and Secretary of Higher and Technical Education and Skill Development Rajesh Kumar Sharma and other officials of the State Government.

The delegation accompanying the Chief Minister held series of interactions with various companies working in the field of skill development and others who were invited to attend the summit.



Pusarla V Sindhu of India holds the winner's trophy after beating Nozomi Okuhara of Japan in their women's badminton singles final at the BWF World Tour Finals in Guangzhou in southern China's Guangdong province on Sunday

Govt to promote water transport during Kumbh

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

To promote tourism in water transport during Kumbh Mela beginning from January 15, 2019, the Narendra Modi Government plans to promote the use of inland waterways for ferrying pilgrims and tourists.

The Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) has set up four floating terminals, one each at Kila Ghat, Saraswati Ghat, Naini Bridge and Sujawan Ghat. In addition, two vessels — CL Kasturba and SL Kamla — and small boats will be deployed for pilgrim movement. The ships will ferry passengers between these terminals and also between Varanasi and Allahabad, a distance of 60 km. Over 70 Heads of Missions based in Delhi have reached Prayagraj to witness the preparations for the



Kumbh Mela to be held next month.

It is estimated that over 15 crore people will visit next year Kumbh Mela. The Kumbh Mela is believed to be the largest religious gathering in the world and is held every 12 years on the banks of the 'Sangam' — the confluence of the holy rivers Ganga, Yamuna and the mythical Saraswati — in Prayagraj (Allahabad).

Officials said the route for the water transport service will stretch from Sujawan Ghat to Rail Bridge (Naini Side) and then to Boat Club Ghat to Saraswati Ghat ending at Kila Ghat. Multiple terminals will be constructed on this stretch of 20 kms and boats and vessels will be provided by the Mela Authority. Fairway with navigational aids will be maintained between Prayagraj and Varanasi

with targeted least available depth (LAD) of 1.0 m. Five temporary jetties at Chatnag, Sira, Sitamarhi, Vindhyachal and Chunar have also been set up for embarkment and disembarkment of passengers.

Sources also said that a Russian company is expected to start an airboat service. The airboat will have an engine of a vehicle and carry 16 people at a time. It can cruise up to 80 kilometers per hour and requires a depth of only 1 meter. The Kumbh Mela is a religious Hindu pilgrimage that is celebrated four times over a course of 12 years. The geographical location spans four locations (each hosts a Mela every 12 years): Haridwar on the Ganges in Uttarakhand, Ujjain on the Shipra in Madhya Pradesh and Nashik on Godavari in Maharashtra

(apart from Allahabad).

The UP Government has drawn up an estimate of more than Rs 4,200 crore for the preparations around next year's Kumbh Mela and has asked the Central Government to bear more than half the cost. This will make the mega pilgrimage in 2019 the costliest ever. The last full Kumbh Mela in 2013 cost less than a third of the amount estimated for next year.

The Mela, which usually extends up to 55 days, draws millions of pilgrims from across the world, who take the holy dip at the sacred confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati rivers.

The Government also plans to run vessels, mini cruises and commercial ships in the River Yamuna from Prayagraj to New Delhi in near future.

Ensure more price for paddy: Saryu Roy

PNS ■ RANCHI

The State Government's Food Supply Minister, Saryu Roy on Sunday, instructed his department's Secretary to collect data from Department of Agriculture that how much paddy produced in various districts.

Expressing happiness over the award given to the State in development for good show in agricultural Roy said that growth recorded in paddy production across the State should be collected district wise and block wise so that the government could procure paddy as per Minimum Support Price (MSP).

The Minister further said that according to numbers paddy production, during the year 2016-17, has been more than 48 laks metric tons. But purchasing on MSP has been 2



Saryu Roy

The Minister further said that according to numbers, paddy production, during the year 2016-17, has been more than 48 laks metric tons

lakh metric tons to 2.25 lakh metric tons. It is necessary to know the mismatch between production and purchasing, he added.

He instructed that to purchase increased quantity of paddy we have to use the instrument which has helped the agriculture department to get success in production of paddy. Roy instructed the Secretary that he should ask the Secretary, Department of Agriculture to provide help of krisi mitra, cooperative institutions and others.

The Minister further said, "The Government of India has fix paddy purchase rate at Rs. 1750 per quintal. The department has proposed to give Rs.200 per quintal as bonus to the farmers. The rate of paddy in market is very lower than MSP of the government. There is need to bring farmers at government purchase centers. Krishimitra should start the work from their heart so that the farmers get benefit of production."

One protesting para-teacher dies

PNS ■ RANCHI

A para-teacher sitting on agitation in front of the Social Welfare, Women and Child Development Minister, Louis Marandi's residence at Dumka has died on Sunday.

Opposition parties have reacted sharply over the issue. Jharkhand Vikas Morcha (JVM) spokesperson Yogendra Pratap Singh said, "It is very sad that earlier a female para teacher had died and now another passed away near the Minister's residence."

Somehow directly and indirectly the BJP led State government is responsible for it," he added. Singh further said that the Government should give Rs 20 lakh as compensation to the victim family.

While expressing sorrow on the death of para teacher the State Congress Spokesperson

Opposition parties have reacted sharply over the issue. Jharkhand Vikas Morcha (JVM) spokesperson Yogendra Pratap Singh said, "It is very sad that earlier a female para teacher had died and now another passed away near the Minister's residence"

Rajesh Thakur said, the State government has crossed the limit of insensitivity. It exhibited the wrong work style of the government, he added.

Thakur further said that the government should take moral responsibility of the death of the para teacher and give Rs 25 lakh as compensation to their kith and kin.

Cops seize 20 tonnes of illegal coal

PNS ■ GIRIDIH

Giridih police launched an anti-coal smuggling drive in the Maoist-hit Pardih, Nainadih and Ojhadih areas of Bengabad block on Saturday evening and seized 20 bullock carts and 10 motorbikes loaded with 20 tonnes of illegal coal, said Giridih superintendent of police SK Jha. Sources said that illegal mining activities of coal smugglers in the forest have also been busted.

The intention of the police was to break the financial backbone of the coal smugglers apart from curbing illegal trade of coals.

Sources said illegal coal mining in these forests is a major revenue generation point for local coal smugglers.

A team of police personnel of Bengabad police equipped with hi-tech weapons raided the forest area of Pardih, Nainadih, and Ojhadih villages forest and found several illegal mines from which coal smugglers excavate coal with the help of local residents and transport it outside the district.



The police team, on reaching the spot, found huge stocks of coal dumped in front of the illegal mines which were being loaded on to bullock carts. The workers, sensing trouble, had fled from the site when police arrived. As many as 20 bullock cart with more than 20 tonnes of coal were seized.

Police also recovered 10 motorbikes and dozen cycles were recovered, said an official. The SP said this is the second time when police had recovered illegal coal from the

villages. "Few months ago, police had seized 50 bullock carts from the same area."

A police officer who was part of the raid team including Officer-in-Charge Faiz Rabani, ASI Bhola Saw and Jitendra Ram said that before escaping, the coal mafia had punctured a tyre of motorbikes to prevent police from taking it to the police station. In the past 12 months, police have recovered illegal coal worth around Rs 50 lakh through raids at different places of the district," he said.

Legal services cum empowerment camp organised

PNS ■ GOMIA

Bokaro district principal-session judge Md Sakir said that the Government schemes should not just remain on paper but people should reap the benefits from them. He said that the very purpose of the schemes is that the people at the ground level are benefited from it.

Addressing a legal services-cum-empowerment camp organised at IEL Ground on Sunday, Md Sakir lauded the efforts of the district administration and Jharkhand State Legal Service Authority (JHALSA) for successfully organising the camp where beneficiaries received assets worth over Rs 1 crore.

Referring to 'Legal Services Camp Module' led by Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi, who is also the executive chairman of National Legal Services Authority (NALSA), Sakir said legal services should not remain limited to legal awareness of the citizens but also



educate the weaker section of the society to draw benefits under various schemes.

Over hundred people from different villages benefited from the camp which was organised under the guidance of Jharkhand legal Service

Authority (JHALSA).

aRs 20000 each were distributed among two beneficiaries under disaster management from the district at the camp. As many as two dozens women beneficiaries were given gas connection under

Ujjawla yojana, while job cards, pension certificates were given under skill development scheme.

A total of 18 stalls of government departments, including health, social welfare, education, civil supplies, skill devel-

opment and social security, were set up at the camp for the participants to understand their legal rights.

He also congratulating the beneficiaries said that JHALSA had carried awareness drive with regard to the camp due to

which people in large numbers have benefited from it. He said that people think that the services of legal service authorities are limited to providing legal aid to citizens. "To give a man his due as per law is legal service," he said.

ADJ Ranjit Kumar, District session Judge-1&2 Tenughat Utam Anand, Gulam Haider, Prabhas Dutta, Bermo SDPO Subash chandra Jat, Gomia BDO, Moni Kumari, CO Yaswant Naiyaka, Circle Inspector S.Saiyaya, Dr Halan

Warla, Circle Inspector Suresh Barnawala, local mukhiyas Dhanajay Singh, Purnan Mahto, Harishankar Prasad along with senior officials of various government departments were present on the occasion.



Opposition leader Hemant Soren along with others release New Year Christmas calendar during the pre-Christmas celebrations carnival at St. Paul Church, Bahubazar in Ranchi on Sunday
Vinay Murmu | Pioneer

Students showcase culinary skills in Master Chef contest held by Hoteliers Association

PARVINDER BHATIA ■ JAMSHEDPUR

Keeping in mind the wide diversity of eating habits in the city Jamshepur, Hoteliers and Restaurant Association (JHRA) organised Master Chef competition on Sunday. The event was organised as part of the Jamshepur Carnival at Gopal Maidan. On the second day of the carnival, school students participated in it.

Sharing the details of the event, Rajeev Singh Dugal President, JHRA said that the hoteliers association has been associated with Jamshepur Carnival and to make the entire fest more interesting such contests are being organised.

He noted that the contest emphasised that cooking is not a daily chore but is all about dedication, knowledge, patience and expertise. He said that our city is known for serving quality food and the

"Food has become important in our lives. Cooking skills of Indians are unique and complement their stories and experiences. Best way to appreciate their talent is to showcase their adventure in every dish and task which we would be assigning them," said Dugal

association wants to connect with people having passion for cooking.

"Food has become important in our lives. Cooking skills of Indians are unique and complement their stories and experiences. Best way to appreciate their talent is to showcase their adventure in every dish and task which we would be assigning them," said Dugal.

Ronald D'costa, a senior hotelier of the city said that the carnival will provide the citizens a taste of Jamshepur.

He said that the association wants to take the fest to national arena, where in the food from Jamshepur can be promoted. Randeep Singh, secretary, JHRA said that Pradeep Khosala, corporate chef, Zaique-Hyderabad has been invited to be part of the show.

On December 18 Khosala will conduct session for food lovers. Singh said that Jamshepur Hoteliers and Restaurant Association is also participating in the carnival by organising a food festival. A total of 14 different stalls from Hyderabad to Chinese food will be served. The hotels of the city will showcase their best of cuisines here.

Jamshepur Carnival 2018, is being organised starting from December 15 to 18, 2018 at Gopal Maidan in Bistupur.



Rajeev Singh Dugal President, JHRA interacts with students at Gopal Maidan on Sunday

Pioneer photo

Police claim to solve murder mystery in 72 hours

PNS ■ RANCHI

Sansidhar police have claimed to solve the murderer mystery of 65 years old Saheb Pal within 72 hours. Own brother of the deceased Uday Pal has been arrested in the connection and sent to the judicial custody. The Police had recovered the dead body of Saheb Pal, resident of Chechariya in Banshidbar Nagar, from his house on December 12.

Uday Pal runs a private clinic in the deceased's house. Police have also recovered the murder weapon, shirt with blood marks from a bush about 300 meters away from the crime scene, said Banshidbar SDPO Niraj said. "The reason for the murder was that Saheb Pal had a land with market value of Rs three crore, which Uday wanted to Grab. A few days ago Saheb had asked Uday to evacuate the house. Upset with it, Uday decided to kill him at his house by sharp edge axe. Uday has confessed to the crime," said the SDPO.

FIR against beneficiaries of PMAY

PNS ■ GARHWA

Ranka police have registered FIR against 135 beneficiaries of Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana under criminal breach of trust on Saturday. BDO of Ranka Mohalad Parvej said, "We had issued notices to the beneficiaries several times to complete the construction of their houses. But, even after the notices, there was no effect on the beneficiaries and the construction did not start."

When it was investigated, it was found that some of beneficiaries who did not start work are not in their village. They have migrated in other states in search of job."

completed the construction work after taking several installments under the scheme.

The beneficiaries against whom the FIRs have been lodged said the FIRs are unfair and they are being victimised and also alleged that FIRs had been lodged to put pressure on them to complete the construction of the house quickly.

District Board member of Ranka block Uma Devi said, "The government's scheme is flawed. Beneficiaries are given Rs 2.25 lakh in the urban area while in rural areas they have given only Rs 1.5 lakhs, which is not sufficient."

The FIRs are being registered only to put pressure to meet the target," she said.

Opportunities for Business with S. E. Railway – Vendor Registration

- S. E. Railway is primarily engaged in business of transportation of Iron Ore, Coal, Steel, Cement etc. apart from providing passenger services.
- To run the train services safely and efficiently, it requires a large number of items for maintenance of Coaches, Wagons, Diesel Locomotives, Electric Locomotives, S & T Gears etc. All purchases are made through e-procurement on IREPS Portal (www.ireps.gov.in) in fair and transparent manner. To participate in e-Tenders, Registration in IREPS Portal and Digital Signature (Class-III) is mandatory, GST Registration of Firm and GST compliance is also necessary.
- Safety and Critical items required by Railway are purchased from approved sources of RDSO/Lucknow (www.rdsso.indianrailways.gov.in), CLW/Chittaranjan (www.clw.indianrailways.gov.in) and RCF/Kapurthala (www.rcf.indianrailways.gov.in). Procedure for approval of Vendors of manufacture and supply of safety items and critical items are available on Websites of these organizations. List of Approved Vendors are also available on their Website.
- For other items, purchases are made from Registered Sources of S. E. Railway.
- To give an opportunity to local people for participation in the procurement process, it has been decided to open the Registration process by Stores Department, S. E. Railway. Interested Vendors may come forward and apply for registration with PCMM's Office, S. E. Railway. Form for Registration with S. E. Railway is available at our Website www.ser.indianrailways.gov.in
- Interested Vendors are requested to register themselves on IREPS Portal, obtain Digital Signature (Class-III) as mentioned in the Second Para and then download the Application Form and submit the same alongwith copy of required documents, complete in all respect latest, PCMM/ S. E. Railway/Kolkata or to SMM/Electric Loco Stores Depot, Jamshepur-831 002 (Jharkhand).

Principal Chief Material Manager

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(PR-951)

35 shelter homes in State unfit for living: Child rights commission

Ranchi tops the list while the abodes face axe

PRAGYA PALLAVI ■ RANCHI

The nodal organisation for protection of Child Rights – Jharkhand State Commission for the Protection of Child Rights (JSCPCR) has marked as many as 35 functional shelter homes across the State as substandard.

The commission in its report submitted to the State government in mid September had pointed out that quite a number of shelter homes meant for children in need of care and protection are shod-

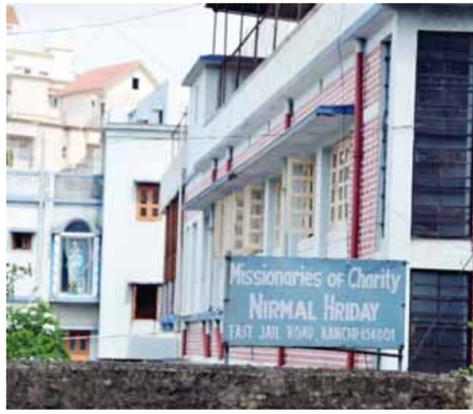
dy. JSCPCR in collaboration with the district administration team of all the 24 districts here has inspected the status of shelter homes.

Abiding by the instructions of the State government, the supervisory body – JSCPCR has prepared the final draft after scrutinising the conditions of around 130 shelter homes operating within urban vicinity including those functional in remote areas of the State. The report prepared in one month will be brought into public domain soon.

“Our finding suggests that over 35 shelter homes meant for children are of inferior quality with no basic amenities available there. During the

inspection conducted in the month of August, all norms prescribed in Juvenile Justice (JJ) Act – Form 46 was followed by the team to compile a report about a shelter home condition. From its registration to its maintenance including its coordination with the district administration in nurturing the future of kids’ were taken into consideration,” said JSCPCR Chairperson Aarti Kujur.

Kujur further added that Ranchi district has substandard shelter homes for children in maximum number. “The condition of each district is more or less similar when it comes to operation and maintenance of shelter homes yet the State



Capital has a significant number of shelter homes for children, lacking all basic amenities. Considering the environment at the substandard shelter homes, soon the decision of its closure will be finalised. Following the legal technicalities, three-month tenure is given to a few shelter homes that though have been marked as substandard but have the scope of improvement,” she added.

Also, the JSCPCR Chairperson said similar things about the adobes in operation at a Khunti, Jamtara from where the cases of atrocities against the children are rampant. Kujur and her team in its recommendations has suggested to the State government to establish proper rehabilitation centres before closing the substandard shelter homes for the children.

Chief Minister Raghubar Das in July 2018 had ordered an inclusive investigation into the functioning of shelter homes and non-government organisations (NGOs) working for child welfare in the State. The decision was considered after a Missionaries of Charity (MC) run shelter home in Ranchi was found to be allegedly selling newborns for adoption.

Das then had issued the order at a meeting called to review the functioning of shelter homes amid complaints that trafficking and selling of children were rampant in

Jharkhand. The CM had directed the officials of JSCPCR at the meeting to work in coordination with district child welfare committees and probe the functioning of the shelter homes and submit a report by August 15.

“Take stern action against the NGOs, if irregularities are found in their works or some suspicious activities is reported from there,” Das was quoted while issuing the instructions.

A previous record of JSCPCR suggested that there are 50 shelter homes operating in the State, 10 are government-run observation homes, 15 are State adoption agencies whereas NGOs run 25 shelter homes.

Jharkhand Olympic body has no allotted office in City

MRITUANJAY KUMAR SINGH ■ RANCHI

Even after seven years of National Games held at Khelgaon in Jharkhand capital organiser Jharkhand Olympic Association (JOA) is still looking for a proper address as the State Governments has not allotted office to the prestigious sports body.

Speaking on the issue Treasurer JOA, Madhukant Pathak said, “Since the formation of the State, the JOA had its office at Morabadi in Ranchi till 2014.

The District Sports Department removed the lock of JOA and put its own lock at the same office forcefully in mid of 2014. Even they had not given our furniture and almira kept in the office.”

Pathak further said, the sports body demanded several times to the State sports department in written since 2014 to provide office premises. Lamenting on the issue he said, “As next national games are round the corner which is scheduled to be held in March, 2019 we have to start our preparations for the game.

We have hired a rented flat at Harmu in Ranchi to operate our work which around five kilometre from the Mohrabadi stadium. The office will be inaugurated after mid of January, 2019.”

Informing the issue, the Treasurer said, “In May 2018, we had met Secretary, Department of Sports, Manish Ranjan.

He had assured us that the department will provide office within one month. The secretary got transferred to other department after sometime



and the allotment of the office is still pending.

We have given a letter to Chief Minister Raghubar Das in December 2017 but the Government had not pay attention to our request.” Speaking on the issue Deputy Director, Department of Sports Vedratn Mohan clarified that the department had requested at

that time to the various sports associations that they returned the office premises as the department has requirement of the place for its other activities.

Mohan further said, “The department has assured the sports associations that they will get well furnished office premises in next financial year as in ongoing financial year the department has no budget in this regard.

Till now the State government has not given permission to give office premises to the association when the government will give permission on the issue then the department will allot them the office.” He further replied that the department has not removed any locks all the associations had willfully returned the allotted premises.

- Speaking on the issue Treasurer JOA, Madhukant Pathak said, “Since the formation of the State, the JOA had its office at Morabadi in Ranchi till 2014
- Pathak further said, “We have hired a rented flat at Harmu in Ranchi to operate our work which around five kilometre from the Mohrabadi stadium. The office will be inaugurated after mid of January, 2019”
- We have given a letter to Chief Minister Raghubar Das in December 2017 but the Government had not pay attention to our request.” Speaking on the issue Deputy Director, Department of Sports Vedratn Mohan clarified that the department had requested at that time to the various sports associations that they returned the office premises as the department has requirement of the place for its other activities
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‘Roadmelters’: A shrine for bullet lovers

Bullet enthusiasts spread message of road safety too

PARVINDER BHATIA ■ JAMSHEDPUR

The streets of Jamshedpur get out of the Sunday morning slumber every week with the heavy ‘thudding’ noise of 40-odd Enfield bullets.

For the bike enthusiasts of ‘Roadmelters’, a Jamshedpur based bullet club, the thundering sound of the Royal Enfield Bullet fascinates them like nothing else.

Roadmelters comprising of Royal Enfield riders of Jamshedpur was started in 2008 with a number of six and now has grown to a strong number of 40. “We represent the spirit of riding in Jamshedpur with being the only club. We are not only fans of bullet but we also give message of road safety. Where ever we go for ride we make sure that we educate the people to follow traffic rules,” noted



Members of Roadmelters display their skills on bikes in Jamshedpur

Pioneer photo

Prabir Shaw, a senior functionary of the club.

Tej Singh, another member of the club says, “ We believe in melting the miles away. Our objective is to meet like minded people, learn about the bull, know each other better, go for long rides and live like we care a damn”.

As always the passion shared by the bullet enthusiasts led to different games and var-

ious activities, tasks that tested both the rider and their trusty motorcycles in a safe environment. “We are really happy the way the club has witnessed the response. We have been to several trips too. The Bullet is undoubtedly the oldest and most famous bike without losing its favour over the years,” said a club member.

Shaw says that there are only two requirements for

joining the club: “You need to have a Royal Enfield Bullet to join our rallies. It could be your own or one you have borrowed. The club is open to people from all backgrounds and nationalities. There isn’t any shortcuts to learn. You need to have the passion. Also, you fall and learn, they say in unison”.

“Made like a gun, goes like a bullet’ was the motto of the

Enfield Cycle Company which began manufacturing the Royal Enfield motorcycles in the late Nineteenth century. The legacy of the super bike has endured in India with the one word bullet from the slogan.

At the moment, the club has more than 40 members belonging to different localities but connected by their love for the bikes. The bikers are die-hard fans of their Royal Enfields. The bikes were used in the World Wars and are known for their heavy-set looks and distinct sound.

“The club provides a common platform to all Bullet riders who want to share their riding experiences. Members also discuss the performance of their respective bikes and how to improve the standard of biking,” said club member Navdeep.

BJP claims victory on ‘kissing competition’ issue

Ranchi: BJP State

spokesperson Pratul Shahdeo on Sunday said it is victory for the people of Jharkhand that JMM MLA Simon Marandi couldn’t organise kissing competition during late night fair in Pakur.

Shahdeo further said, “The BJP has clearly cautioned the JMM MLA that if he will organise kissing competition which is against the culture of Jharkhand then he will have to face dire consequence.” Informing the whole issue the BJP Spokesperson said, “Last year also Simon Marandi had organised the fair and maligned the



Pratul Shahdeo

image of the area at national level. Simon Marandi backtracked this year due to BJP’s caution, administrative pressure and anger of local people.”

He said, “If JMM leaders will try to organise such kind of competitions in future the BJP will not permit them. The leaders should understand that it is not Italy and Rome, it is Santhaal Paragana. There is no room for such kind of competition in the culture and civilization of Jharkhand.” Shahdeo condemned the JMM leaders’ thinking to organise such kind of competitions. PNS

Weather conditions favourable for Rabi crops: Agro-Met experts

Impact of cyclone ‘Phethai’ over J’khand to sway mercury level



PNS ■ RANCHI

The irregular low to moderate rainfall due to the impact of the cyclone ‘Phethai’ will prove beneficial for the farming community in the days to come. If Agro-Met experts are to be believed then the present weather conditions are in favour of Rabi crops cultivation.

According to the agro scientists, the rainfall in mid December is often considered to be a boon for the Rabi cultivators. “Those farming Rabi crops like wheat, mustard, green chickpea (chana) coriander need irrigated fields before sowing. The irrigated fields have high soil moisture content. Considering the previous record of a past few years, there was some amount of rainfall recorded annually in the last week of the November; hence, the low to moderate rainfall in mid December is a blessing for the farmers,” said an Agro-Met Expert.

In Jharkhand, the sowing of

Rabi crops like wheat, mustard, green peas etc begins in mid December and is harvested in February. Meanwhile, the impact of cyclone ‘Phethai’ over Jharkhand is expected to bring the mercury level down.

“Cyclone ‘Phethai’ over southwest Bay of Bengal has moved further northwards at a speed of 16 kmph. It is very likely to intensify further into a severe cyclonic storm during the next 24 hours. As per the weather prediction, it will remain active for two days, December 16 and 17. Its impact will start weakening from December 18.

The advancement of the cyclone will result in fall in the mercury level, increasing the chilliness,” the weather bulletin released by Ranchi MET observatory Centre on Sunday read.

Further, Senior Scientist – Ranchi MET Observatory Centre stated, “For next two days cloudy sky will be there over the State. Leaving out a few

parts of Jharkhand, low to moderate rainfall will occur in the State on December 17 whereas on December 18, rainfall will lash all districts of Jharkhand especially the Southern and Central parts of the State which includes Ranchi, Bokaro, Gumla, Hazaribagh, Khunti, Ramgarh, East Singhbhum, West Singhbhum, Simdega and Seraikela-Kharsawan.”

The weathermen have denied the chances of heavy rainfall except for the isolated places. Stating about the maximum and minimum temperature which is predictable for the next two days, Sharma said, “There is chance of maximum temperature falling down further. The maximum temperature is estimated to remain somewhere between 17 degree Celsius to 19 degree Celsius here for two day until the impact of ‘Phethai’ is not over while the minimum temperature will be recorded between nine to 11 degree Celsius.”

SSP initiates steps to improve cyber crime investigation

PNS ■ RANCHI

Ranchi SSP on Sunday directed police officials that FIR of any cyber crime victim must be registered at first police station he or she approaches, adding there should be no negligence on this account.

He said that since speed is important the concerned PS must inform the cyber cell immediately so that preventive steps are started. These were among the several instructions issued by SSP Anis Gupta to the SPs, DSPs and the officers in-charge of police stations in a review meeting on Sunday.

Notably, the direction was given two days after Oli Minz, an announcer in All India Radio was made to run from



Ranchi SSP Anish Gupta holds cyber crime meeting with senior police officials at his office in Ranchi on Sunday

Vinay Murmu | Pioneer

one police station to another in connection with registration of case related to illegal withdrawal of one lakh from his bank account. Minz has later said that he was brother of Prime Minister’s

personal assistant,

Speaking to media persons after the meeting SSP informed that action plan has been prepared to strengthen investigation in cases related to cyber crime. He stated Ranchi cyber cell would get two additional inspector rank officers. Presently the cyber cell has a DSP, an inspector and 20 technical staffs.

He said that a pool of inspector ranked officers would investigate the cyber cases. He added training to enhance skills of cyber cell team would start from Monday.

He stated city SP has been asked to inquire into the Oli Minz case adding action would be taken against police-

men found guilty.

He observed that in the recent past more cases related to fraudulent withdrawal than e-purchasing has taken place.

On naxalism Gupta stated that police have identified the extremists including the CPI (Maoists) and the PLFI who are active in Ranchi district adding operation would be intensified to nab them.

He pointed out CPI (Maoists) is active in Bundu Chandil area adding that Maoist Baida Pahan is working to strengthen his organisation in Silli-Kasmar (Bokaro) area. He added Mithlesh alias Duryodhan is operating in Khelari. The PLFI is active in the Bundu-Arki area, he stated.

Police step up strategy to handle Maoists’ renewed thrust : DGP

M FAIYAZ AHMAD ■ DALTONGANJ

Chief of Jharkhand police CDK Pandey expressed confidence that extremism in Jharkhand is on its last legs and it would be wiped out soon. He also claimed that the menace has been controlled 80 per cent and mentioned that the time is suitable for ending it.

“Eighty percent of extremism here has been contained, curbed and finished. Extremism in Jharkhand is to be essentially understood and thought of in right context and not in any way outlandish one. Here its dimension is different,” said the DGP. He also cited an incident of arson which took place in Chatra district where four vehicles of NTPC were put on fire by the Maoists last week.

DGP said this arson was carried out by a group of Bihar led by Karu Yadav. Top Maoists’ leaders have pushed him in here to create disturbance. “Jharkhand police will abort their nefarious and evil designs. Our police have also re-drawn its strategy to checkmate and fail and foil the plan of the Maoists. They will be contained and their sinister designs will be smashed” added the DGP.

He said Maoists are making all out efforts to sneak in Jharkhand from Bihar and Odisha side of borders. “Some have come here too but our men are after them. Days are not far off when they will be neutralised them completely. We need to further tune in our intelligence. It has to be smart and pin pointed. It will render the lives of the Maoists further



DK Pandey

“Jharkhand police are equally after them with its own redefined and redrawn strategy to counter them, neutralize them and drive them out from here”

miserable as our police are reaching out in those areas which some time back were a

forbidden one. Our foot steps are everywhere. Those outlaws too hear our sounds of boots,” said the DGP.

“We seek people’s cooperation. We know Maoists base has eroded completely. They are not getting any big support from the people which they used to command in the past. I ask people to help police fighting these criminals with clinical precision,” he added. Reminded that incidents of extremism have come from Chatra, Latehar and other places too then what it means that Maoists have ‘arrived’ again to which the DGP said the top leadership of this banned organization has worked out on a national plan to revive extremism in its left wing extremist hit districts in the country.

The DGP said the Maoists’

national plan is to revive extremism and for revival they are indulging in such aberrations of arson which do not give them anything in terms of profit except that their presence gets noticed which too is for a shorter duration.

Jharkhand police are equally after them with its own redefined and redrawn strategy to counter them, neutralize them and drive them out from here.

He added the Maoists’ episode in Saryu in Latehar be seen as the part of the same national plan of Maoists for revival which will be contained with a very firm hand there. On Saturday IG CRPF and IG (Ops) Jharkhand arrived to Saryu in Latehar district and reviewed the anti-naxal operations there.



Chief Minister Raghubar Das along with Principal Secretary to the CM Sunil Kumar Barnwal, Development Commissioner DK Tiwari meets Navdeep Suri, Ambassador of India in UAE during the Road Show organised for Global Skill Summit 2019 in Dubai on Sunday

Pioneer photo

Ahsien School organises Introduction Ceremony

PNS ■ JAMSHEDPUR

City-based educationalists CSS Razi, Vice Chancellor, Arka Jain University, Mohammed Zakaria, Principal, Karim City College and Ketty Narielwala called for a need to promote value-based education in the city.

Addressing a gathering on the occasion of Introduction Ceremony of Ahsien International School at Mango, Kapali, in front of Albela Gardens, the speakers said that education is the most important tool for the progress of the society.

Mohammed Zakaria said that steps should be taken to children become promising citizens of the future. He lauded efforts to start a new school in the city and extended his warm wishes.

On the occasion, Asif Mehmood, founder of Ahsien International School said that

their school is based on CBSE pattern and has started admissions for classes L.K.G, U.K.G and class 1 starting from 10 December.

Every year a new class will be started at the school. The first session of the school 2019-2020, will start from April 1, 2019.

Mehmood said that his only aim is to provide quality education based on values to the students of every section of the society. The school will be developed as a hub of education, which will be a leader in quality and value-based education.

On the occasion, Mehmood, Narielwala and Nazam Ansari, co-founder of the school launched school's website.

The website is one click away from all the information related to the school.

Mahmood said that schools play very important



Educationalist Ketty Narielwala hands over form to the first student of the school Yameen Ahmed

Every year a new class will be started at the school. The first session of the school 2019-2020, will start from April 1, 2019

role for the overall development of children. He said that this is the place where a child spends most of his time. It is important to provide best care and education to students. He said that children are the future of our country.

On the occasion Narielwala handed over form to the first student of the school Yameen Ahmed.

Two new political outfits launched in Punjab

MONIKA MALIK ■ CHANDIGARH

Sunday, December 16, marked the launch of two new political outfits in Punjab, with the decisive 2019 Lok Sabha polls just about a few months away.

Both the parties have so much in common — they are breakaway faction of the main political outfits in the State, formed by the rebel leaders of these parties, and both the parties are in opposition in the Congress-ruled state.

Senior leaders of the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) splintered from the party to

form the Shiromani Akali Dal (Taksali), while another outfit — the Punjab Democratic Alliance (PDA) comprised suspended and rebel leaders of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP).

With the ruling Congress has all along been sitting on the fence closely watching the infighting between both the parties, the formation of new political outfits has sent alarm bells ringing in its camp.

"Infighting was good for us, but with the new political parties coming up, things may go wrong way for the Congress. It may do some-

thing what People's Party of Punjab (PPP) did in 2012 assembly elections—not winning any seat but eating into Congress' vote," a senior Congress leader told The Pioneer, off the record.

In the past, Punjab has always witnessed a one-on-one contest between the Congress and the SAD-BJP combine. It was only after 2014 Lok Sabha polls, that AAP emerged as an alternative in the state by winning four, out of the total 13 seats.

However, the party failed to keep up the momentum in the next three years, and finished at distant second to

Congress in 2017 assembly polls, with just 20 seats in 117-member House. But, the plus point is that it has pushed the SAD-BJP combine to the last spot, becoming the principal opposition party.

But with the emergence of two new political fronts, and the minute possibility of their joining hands, the ensuing 2019 elections are expected to be a cliff-hanger.

Currently, AAP has four MPs, out of which two have been suspended since 2015. Among them Dr Dharamvira Gandhi on Sunday announced formation of Punjab

Democratic Alliance (PDA) with AAP's rebel MLAs, led by Sukhpal Singh Khaira, and others.

SAD is also represented by four MPs in the Lok Sabha, out of which its Khadoor Sahib MP Ranjit Singh Brahmura has revolted and on Sunday announced SAD (Taksali). Another SAD MP from Ferozepur, Sher Singh Ghubaya, has also revolted against the party, with his son, Devinder Singh Ghubaya currently being the Congress MLA.

Besides, the Congress party has three MPs and BJP two.

Rebel AAP leaders launch new alliance in Punjab

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

The aam aadmi in Punjab will have a new face. For, the Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) rebel faction, demanding complete autonomy for the state unit, on Sunday joined hands with like minded parties to announce the formation of a new party based on the principles of democracy.

AAP's rebel leaders, comprising suspended MP Dr Dharamvira Gandhi, suspended MLA Sukhpal Khaira, along with Lok Insaaf Party (LIP) MLAs Simarjeet Bains and Balwinder Bains, and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) state president Rashpal Raju, joined hands to form a new political front in the state — Punjab Democratic Alliance (PDA).

Launching with the commencement of nine-day Insaaf March that began at Takht Dandama Sahib at Talwandi Sabo and covered 180 kms and 54 villages, the PDA was launched formally at a rally in Mehmampur near Patiala.

PDA also announced to contest the ensuing Lok Sabha elections, while welcoming "more like minded parties and individuals who maintain equidistance from the Congress, BJP and SAD, so that Punjab can be saved the agony of corruption, feudalism and draconian family rule".

"The new political formation of like-minded leaders aims to clean the corrupt polity of Punjab," said Khaira, MLA from Bholath.

Khaira, who was unceremoniously removed as the Leader of Opposition in Vidhan Sabha by the AAP central leadership in August and later suspended from the party previous month, said that the alliance would aim to liberate Punjab from the clutches of corrupt traditional parties and the corrupt feudal families.

"The actions of these corrupt parties and leaders had ruined a glorious state like Punjab for their lust to amass ill-gotten wealth by looting the people. Punjab is facing a colossal debt of Rs 2.5 lakh crore, farmers and labourers

"THE CONGRESS GOVERNMENT HAS HOODWINKED THE INSAAF MORCHA BY MAKING FALSE PROMISES ON THE ISSUE, WHICH WILL NEVER BE IMPLEMENTED"

are committing suicide, lakhs of unemployed youth have taken to drugs or are migrating to foreign shores because of hopelessness, frustration and dejection," he said.

Khaira also vowed to continue seeking justice for sacrilege of Guru Granth Sahib and the victims of Behal Kalan police firing. "The Congress government has hoodwinked the Insaaf Morcha by making false promises on the issue, which will never be implemented," he said.

He announced that if the government failed to render justice on sacrilege and Behal killings within a month, the PDA would announce an action plan on the occasion of Maghi in January.

Dr Gandhi, Patiala MP, condemned the BJP-led Central Government for encroaching upon the rights of the states, including Punjab through gross centralisation.

Suspended from AAP in 2015, Dr Gandhi said that the larger aim of the PDA would be to strive for a federal India and a democratic Punjab.

"It is unfair for the Central Government to unilaterally implement schemes for education, healthcare, rural development, MNRREGA, without taking into consideration the aspirations of the people of the state," he said.

Other leaders criticised the BJP-led Central Government and the Congress-led Punjab Government for failing to fulfill promises made before the elections.

Simrajeet Bains, president of the LIP which was an AAP's alliance partner for 2017 state polls, targeted the Congress Government for its failure to redress the grievances of small and medium scale industry and its workers.

"The so-called relief of Rs

five per unit electricity charges has only benefitted a few hundred large industrial houses, while more than 30,000 smaller industries are paying through their nose for heavy electricity tariffs," he said.

Bains said that the state's employees are up in arms against the draconian policies of Congress Government which is playing a cruel joke on its own employees by snatching their dues.

"Teachers are being forced to work at labour rates of Rs 15,000 per month at a time when inflation is at its highest peak. The government has failed to implement the report of sixth pay commission, not paying DA to its employees etc," he said while advocating to restart the old regular pension scheme that was scrapped by Capt Amarinder Singh in 2004.

BSP state president Rashpal Raju said that the weaker sections and Dalits are being exploited through petty welfare schemes of Atta-Dal, meagre pensions etc, while they are being denied their right of quality education, healthcare, affordable housing and employment.

AAP's suspended MLA Kanwar Sandhu charged the Capt Amarinder Singh led government for perpetrating the Akali-sponsored mafia raj. "Congress mafia now continues to rule the roost by illegal mining, liquor trade, transport, cable network etc. The political class and bureaucracy have joined hands to blatantly loot the people of Punjab," he said.

Kharar MLA, Sandhu said the Capt Amarinder Government appears to be an extended version of the Badal government with same corrupt work culture and even same officers like DGP Suresh Arora.

Expelled SAD leaders floats political outfit SAD(Taksali)

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH/AMRITSAR

Shiromani Akali Dal's (SAD) expelled "taksali" (traditional Akali) leaders on Sunday announced the name of their new party — Shiromani Akali Dal (Taksali) — while unanimously nominating Khadoor Sahib's sitting MP Ranjit Singh Brahmura as its president.

The sad turn of events for the Akali Dal came just a couple of days after the party observed its 98th foundation day on December 14, and a few months ahead the crucial 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

The name of the new party was announced by the expelled leaders — Brahmura, former Minister Sewa Singh Sekhwan and former MP Rattan Singh Ajnala, among others — after paying obeisance at Akal Takht, the Sikhs' highest temporal seat.

Talking about the new party's political agenda, they told that the new outfit would take up issues pertaining to Punjab's right over capital Chandigarh, and river water issues and other rights of inhabitants of Punjab.

The new outfit will fight against the drug menace affecting the State, said Brahmura. Sekhwan declared that the new party — SAD (taksali) — would be the "real" Akali Dal "based on the original consti-



tution of 1920" with the required modifications.

"To point out the illegal, wrong, incorrect decisions taken by the Badals as the conscious of Guru Sikhs could not bear these wrong deeds done by them, the new Shiromani Akali Dal (Taksali) is formed. This party is dedicated to the holy Gurudwaras, Sri Guru Granth Sahib and Sikhs," said Brahmura.

Mincing no words, Bahmura said that this Akali Dal (Taksali) is aggrieved by the decisions taken by the Badals, "like pardon to 'pakhandi sadh of Dera Sirsa' for their personal and individual financial-political gains".

"Both the Badals and their associates are responsible for Kotkapura, Behbal Kalan and Bargari incidents. The families of victims are looking for justice and relief but so far no result," he said, while addressing the press conference in the open space in front of Golden Temple complex, sitting on the ground, as they were denied permission by the SGPC.

The Taksali Akali leaders declared that the Badals would not be allowed to capture Gurudwaras and other religious places as if these were their personal property.

Equating the Badals and Majithia with Aurangzeb,

Brahmura said that the newly-formed SAD (Taksali) will have full concern with the Gurudwaras and religious activities. "In this newly-formed Akali Dal (Taksali), all sects would be given adequate representation and the Deputy Chief Minister will be selected from the SC/BC community if they come to power.

"Our Sikh brother residing in foreign countries will also be given sufficient membership and leadership in the newly-formed SAD (Taksali) so that the glory of Sikh religion can be spread all over the world," he said.

On December 2, the expelled SAD leaders had

declared that they would float a new political outfit based on the Akali Dal's old constitution, which was framed in 1920.

They had accused SAD, led by Sukhbir Badal, of distorting the party's constitution. The expelled SAD leaders had trained their guns at Sukhbir, accusing him of causing irreparable damage to the SAD and its cause.

Acting tough, SAD's core committee had expelled Brahmura and Ajnala from the party's primary membership for six years, along with their sons — former MLA Ravinder Pal Singh Brahmura and former MLA Amarpal Singh Bony — as the two leaders were allegedly indulging in "anti-party activities".

Earlier, the party had also shown the door to Sekhwan for speaking against the party shortly after he had announced his resignation as senior vice-president and core committee member.

Brahmura had recently resigned from the post of SAD's senior vice-president as well as its core committee membership citing age and health reasons. Earlier, Sekhwan, Brahmura and some other Taksali Akalis (old guard) had raised their voice against SAD's alleged deviation from its 'panthic agenda'.

Vice President honours CRPF personnel for bravery

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu on Sunday said that Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) has played a key role in maintaining the unity and integrity of the nation.

This force has a glorious past, praise-worthy present and a future filled with hope and service, Naidu said at the Passing out Parade of the 50th Batch of the Directly Appointed Gazetted Officers (DAGOs) of CRPF in the premises of the CRPF Academy, Gurugram.

Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal was also present on the occasion.

The Vice President said, CRPF personnel have always won the faith and confidence of the people wherever they have been deployed.

He said CRPF has played a significant role right from the days of unification of the coun-

try to successfully tackling separatism in the North east and terrorism in Punjab.

Appreciating the Civic Action Programmes of CRPF, the Vice President said that such programmes increase the acceptability of the police among the public.

He called upon the force personnel to upgrade their professional efficiency in view of the newer challenges arising out of cyber technology.

He also called upon the government and the authorities to give attention to the facilities being provided to the personnel of the force, especially those who are posted in difficult and inaccessible areas and also to take special care of the health and educational needs of the families of the force personnel.

Earlier, in his welcome address, Director General, CRPF Rajeev Rai Bhatnagar, said that CRPF is the world's



largest armed police force and is the lead force in tackling the issues of internal security of the

country.

Underlining 78 years of glorious history of the force, Bhatnagar said that the force personnel have always exhibits the highest standards of valour and sacrifice.

He said last year only CRPF personnel have been awarded as many as 135 Gallantry medals including seven Shaurya Chakras, which is a record in itself.

He added that the force has constantly been upgrading itself tactically to effectively meet new challenges.

On the occasion, the chief guest presented gallantry medals to the awardees and trophies to the trainee officers. Those who were honoured included 18 officers/personnel, who received Police Medals for Gallantry. Similarly, trainee officers like Nishant Yadav (all round best trainee), Gyanendra Giri (best in outdoor subjects), Banai Singh Meena (best in

physical training) and Ujwal Kumar Tiwari (best firer) received trophies from the Vice President.

With their passing out on Sunday, the officers will undergo specialized counter insurgency training before being posted in different parts of the country. Earlier, the chief guest, accompanied by Bhatnagar inspected the parade and took salute in the colourful march past.

As many as 48 trainee officers including 4 lady officers, 11 post-graduates and as many as 37 engineering graduates passed out from the academy, after undergoing a rigorous training regime spanning 52 weeks. Like the previous batches of the DAGOs of CRPF, the 50th Batch too bears a pan-Indian character with the trainee officers representing as many as 16 states of the country having different socio-educational background.

Balloons with 'Pakistan Zindabad' slogan found at Int'l Gita fest venue

PNS ■ Chandigarh

Green-coloured balloons with 'Pakistan Zindabad' slogan written on them were found at the site of the International Gita Festival, 2018 being held in Haryana's Kurukshetra.

Some children were found playing with the balloons, police said on Sunday.

An FIR has been registered in this regard following a complaint by Malkhan, a home guard, who found these balloons in the hands of children at the festival, Chhauto Ram, SHO, Adarsh police station said. He said, "We are probing who brought these balloons and gave them to the children." The police were told that some youth were found carrying these balloons, but they could not be traced, the officer said.

Cong are bad losers: Jaitley

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Rejecting demand for a parliamentary panel probe into the fighter jet Rafale deal, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley Sunday described the Congress as "bad losers", saying that the Supreme Court had the last word on the issue and there could not be a contrary verdict by a political body.

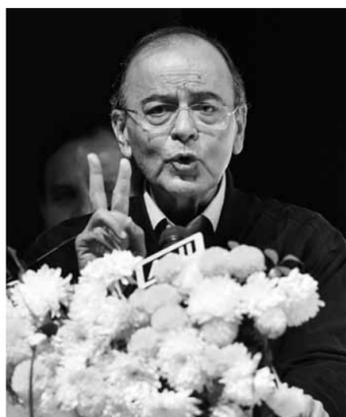
The Finance Minister said the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG)'s view on the deal is not relevant after the Supreme Court's clean chit to the Government.

Citing a wash-out of four days' proceedings in Parliament, Jaitley said the Opposition Congress will prefer disruptions in Parliament over discussion on Rafale during the remainder of the Session.

The Congress, which was not a petitioner before the apex court, has sought the multi-crore Rafale deal to be referred to a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) to go into the price arrived at by the BJP Government versus the one negotiated by the previous UPA regime, as also how billionaire Anil Ambani's group with virtually no experience in manufacture of fighter jets was selected as an offset partner for the deal.

The Congress has alleged that the French Government was pressurised by the Modi Government to include Ambani group as the offset partner as the deal makes it obligatory on the part of the selling country to offer 50 per cent of total business to domestic Indian players.

"After the Supreme Court has spoken the last word, it gets legitimacy. A political body can never come to a finding



The CAG review is not relevant to the final findings on procedure, pricing and offset suppliers. But bad losers never accept the truth. Having failed in multiple lies they have now started an innuendo about the judgement

After the Supreme Court has spoken the last word, it gets legitimacy. A political body can never come to a finding contrary to what the court has said

contrary to what the court has said," Jaitley wrote in a Facebook blog, titled 'Rafale - Lies, Shortlived lies and now further lies?'

On the Congress claiming 'ambiguity' in the Supreme Court judgment said the deal has been examined by the CAG and is now before Parliament's Public Accounts Committee (PAC), Jaitley said.

"This was factually and accurately stated by the Government before the court. The audit review of Rafale is pending before the CAG. All facts are shared with it. When its report is out, it will go to the PAC. Notwithstanding this factually correct statement made,

if an ambiguity has emerged in the Court Order, the correct course is for anyone to apply/mention before the court and have it corrected," he said.

The correct picture has been presented to court and it must now be left to the wisdom of the court to state at which stage the CAG review is pending. "The CAG review is not relevant to the final findings on procedure, pricing and offset suppliers. But bad losers never accept the truth. Having failed in multiple lies they have now started an innuendo about the judgement," he said.

Jaitley said the Congress, having failed in their initial falsehood, is now "manufacturing further lies about the judgement."

"On facts it lied. The judge-

ment of the Supreme Court conclusively establishes the Congress party's vulnerabilities in a discussion on Defence transactions.

"It will be a great opportunity to remind the nation of the legacy of the Congress Party and its Defence acquisitions - a great opportunity indeed for some of us to speak," he wrote.

The Finance Minister, who had alongside the Defence Minister led a spirited counter-attack against the Congress on Friday post the Supreme Court ruling, said the opponents of the Rafale deal had a choice of forum to present their side, and they chose the Supreme Court.

"The court conducts a judicial review, it is a non-partisan, independent and a fair Constitutional authority. The court's verdict is final. It can't be reviewed by anyone except by the court itself," he said.

Ruling out setting up a JPC to go into the deal, Jaitley said, "How can a Parliamentary Committee go into the correctness or otherwise to what the court said. Is a Committee of Politicians both legally and in terms of human resources capable of reviewing issues already decided by the Supreme Court?"

"On areas such as procedure, offset suppliers and pricing, can a Parliamentary Committee take a different view of what the court has said?" he said, asking if a contract be breached, nation's security be compromised and the pricing data be made available to Parliament or its panel.

He asked what was the experience of JPC when it took up the Bofors deal — the only occasion when it investigated a Defence transaction.

PAC may not summon A-G, CAG

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) may not summon Attorney General and the CAG over the public auditor's report on Rafale deal, as several of the members, including those from Opposition parties, are apparently not in favour of the proposal by panel chairman Mallikarjun Kharge.

On Saturday, Kharge had said he will request all members of the panel to summon the Attorney General and the CAG to ask them as to when the public auditor's report was tabled in Parliament.

Responding to his remarks, senior BJD MP Bhartuhari Mahtab said PAC chairman can call the AG and the CAG in his personal capacity but not before the entire panel as the Rafale deal was not part of its agenda for 2018-19. The CAG report on the deal has not been placed before the panel, he said.

The controversy was triggered after the SC judgment on the Rafale issue mentioned

■ In the 22-member panel, the BJP has a majority with 12 MPs and there is one member each of its allies, Shiv Sena and SAD. The Congress has three members in the panel, including panel chairman Mallikarjun Kharge. There are two TMC MPs and one member each of the TDP, the BJD and the AIADMK

■ The BJP-led NDA MPs in the panel are strongly opposed to the idea, with the ruling party members saying it was like "questioning" the SC

■ BJP MP Gopal Shetty sought to know how the chairman can call the two top Government officials on the topic which was not in the committee's agenda and when the CAG report had not been placed before the panel

■ BJP's ally partner SAD MP Prem Singh Chandumajra said it would be unfair for the panel to start questioning the Supreme Court's order



the Government on the Rafale deal, and it is unfortunate that Congress and a seasoned politician like Kharge are politicising this sensitive issue of national security," BJP MP Anurag Thakur said.

Another BJP MP Gopal Shetty sought to know how the chairman can call the two top Government officials on the topic which was not in the committee's agenda and when the CAG report had not been placed before the panel.

BJP's ally partner SAD MP Prem Singh Chandumajra said it would be unfair for the panel to start questioning the Supreme Court's order.

Internal security improved vastly since 2014: Rajnath

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Home Minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday said the internal security scenario in the country has vastly improved ever since the NDA Government came to power in 2014. Addressing a 'Vijay Diwas' function here, Singh said the left-wing extremism-affected districts have shrunk from 90 to just about 12, while there has been an 80 per cent decline in insurgency in the North-east. "The internal security scenario has vastly improved during the last four years," he said.

The Home Minister said the Border Security Force (BSF), which guards the India-Pakistan border, has been given complete freedom to retaliate effectively to ceasefire violations by Pakistan. Singh said the ex-servicemen can play a key role in inculcating a sense of national pride among the youths. Recalling the heroics of Brigadier Mohammad Usman, Maha Vir Chakra awardee and Major Somnath Sharma, India's first Param Vir Chakra, Singh said some youths today have their idols in cricketers and film stars, but if someone asks them to name Param Vir Chakra recipients, they may not be able to name even one.

The Home Minister said martyrs like Chandrashekar Azad and Bhagat Singh were all driven by passionate patriotism.

"The society has to stand up with the veterans today and an action plan needs to be framed to preserve individual honour and nation's integrity among the citizens," he said. Singh said our armed forces



Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh releases a newsletter at the inauguration of Vijay Diwas function, in New Delhi, on Sunday

proved in 1971 that they have the capability to rewrite history and redraw maps. The Indian Army has since emerged as a professional model before the world, he said.

On the occasion, the Home Minister honoured families of martyrs and released the first quarterly newsletter of Veterans

India Association, an NGO. Singh also declared that he would contribute his one month's salary to the organisation's corpus for martyrs' welfare. 'Vijay Diwas' is celebrated to mark India's historic victory over Pakistan in 1971 war which led to the creation of Bangladesh.

No gathbandhan can stop BJP, its agenda: Shah

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Asserting that the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) was unbeatable, BJP chief Amit Shah said Sunday no 'gathbandhan' or 'mahagathbandhan' (alliance) can come in the way of the BJP and its agenda of inclusive growth.

Addressing the concluding session of the two-day workshop of the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha here, he said if everyone works together, no alliance can stop the BJP from fulfilling its agenda of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas' (collective effort, inclusive growth).

Shah urged young party workers to spread the message of development to all Indians. He said BJP-led NDA would score a repeat victory in 2019 Lok Sabha poll.

The workshop was attended by national office-bearers of BJYM, state presidents and district presidents from all States.

The focus at the workshop was to design a strategy for BJYM workers, right up to the mandal level, to reach out



to voters in the run up to the 2019 Lok Sabha election.

Various sessions were held on organisational management, dissemination of key schemes and achievements of the Government, and media and social media, according to a party release.

The seven 'Morchas' of the BJP are holding country-wide conventions across the country to step up party's campaign on Lok Sabha-2019. Some of these conventions will also be addressed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Shah.

Reiterate my commitment to building strong, united & vibrant Cong: Rahul

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

On a day Rahul Gandhi completed a year as Congress president, he reiterated his commitment to building a strong, united and a vibrant party.

Gandhi, after being elected unopposed as the Congress chief, took over his new assignment on December 16 last year from her mother, Sonia Gandhi, at the party

headquarters on Akbar Road here.

"On the 1st anniversary of taking over as Congress president, I reiterate my commitment to building a strong, united and vibrant Congress party.

"I am overwhelmed by the greetings and messages I've received today and thank each and every one of you for your affection and support," he posted on Twitter on Sunday.



New Maldivian President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih and First Lady Fazna Ahmed are escorted by Union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri upon their arrival at AFS Palam, in New Delhi, on Sunday

Terror group issues dos and don'ts for its cadre

RAKESH K SINGH ■ NEWDELHI

Terror group Ansar Ghazwat-ul-Hind, the affiliate of the al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent, has issued a detailed list of "Dos and Don'ts" for its cadres to evade the glare of the security agencies amid the ramped up hits by the security forces in Jammu & Kashmir.

The advisory by the terror group could be a precursor to attacks by the ultras in Jammu & Kashmir as the outfit is operationally active in the Valley.

The group, led by Zakir Musa who is an engineering drop out is a tech-savvy terrorist, develops its own apps for communication within the outfit and keeps changing such applications, a possible reason why he has been successful in evading the law enforcement agencies in India.

The guidelines include maintenance of secrecy and sharing of information on the need to know basis.

"We will rub their (Indian) best Army and tactics into dust...The only thing needed is that we should ensure that we have our connection with Allah very strong and change our war strategies and make them better," says the latest internal communication from the outfit.

On secrecy and sharing of information on the need to know basis, the guidelines stipulate, "One of the fundamental pillars of armed fighting is secrecy and its (secrecy) is the principle of 'giving information on need to know basis'."

The document also mentions the Prophet who used to send raiding parties of the Sahaba (Holy army) and write the target in a letter and order the Sahaba to only open the letter it reached a specific place.

Mobile phones should be used very less and with precaution. Use of VPN and Tor as



also other encrypted and secure apps is also advised.

Internet should also be used when necessary and the medium should be avoided to make any sensitive communication. The guidelines also exhort the cadres to make their hideouts without the help of any civilian or private worker and personally take all the necessary things like utensils and eatables without outside help. The location of the hideouts should only be known those Mujahideens in the field who are associated with it.

The guidelines also advise the Mujahideens to stay away from residential areas and whenever there is a requirement 2-3 persons should go to any place together.

The outfit has further advised that the movement of Mujahideens should be limited. The mujahideens have also been advised to spend maximum time in hideouts so that the 'enemy' (security forces) does not have any clue about them.

"Whenever you make any movement, analyse everything around you and even above you as the Indian Army is now using silent drones during the night whose light is only visible. Such gadgets serve as the best spies for the security forces

and there is a need to protect the Mujahideens from such equipment," reads the terror group's advisory.

The Mujahideens have also been advised to frequently change the timings of the movement and prefer unconventional time.

After maghrib (evening) prayers, the spies also come into action more and to deceive them the change in timings is a must, it says. "Do not give away the location of your hideouts and other points to anyone in any circumstances. Division of the armed work and others in the cells is required so that secrecy is maintained and in case a Mujahideen is arrested or is exposed, other fellow jihadis remain safe.

Country lost 2,330 jumbos in 6 years

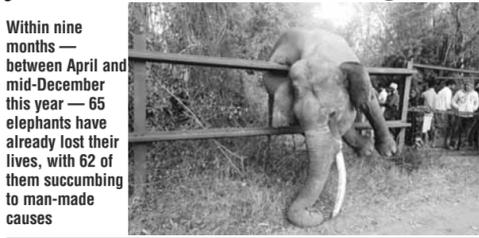
ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Even as the heart-wrenching death of a male tusker while he was crossing over the railway fence to save his life from villagers in Karnataka's Nagarhole National Park on Saturday has shocked the wildlife lovers, various data shows that this incident just adds up to the long list of elephant deaths reported from across the country.

According to the statistics, electrocution, train accidents, poaching, habitat loss and poisoning are taking toll on the jumbos whose number has declined from around 30,000 in 2012 to 27,312 in 2017. In other words, the country has lost 2,330 jumbos in six years.

"The way we are losing, killing elephants is heart-rending. So deep rooted in our culture, held sacred...Intelligent, empathetic, social...yet, this is the sorry fate of our National Heritage Animal," tweeted author and conservationist Prerna Bindra, calling the Nagarhole National Park incident 'heart-broken'.

This is what happens when



we block elephant passages, she said asserting that elephants are wide ranging animals, who need to move given they are copious consumers, and seed dispersers shaping forests and eco-systems as they travel. She has filed a PIL in the Supreme Court seeking removal of spikes and other artificial objects as fences to allow free movement of the elephants.

Elephants move long distances at such artificial barriers and times can have an adverse effect, she said.

Biologist with Wildlife Conservation Society India Vidya Athreya? tweeted, "The railway sleeper fences, has not decreased conflict and has worsened the life of elephants.

...Lord Ganesha forgive us for the way we Indians treat our elephants..." In fact, last week in Karnataka a tusker was killed after it was hit by a train at Kakanamane near Bage in Sakleshpur taluk. The incident came a few months after when two elephant calves died near Yedakumari on June 3, 2018.

The elephants in the neighbouring State Odisha too are unsafe. In the latest incident, in Kamalanga village in Odisha's Dhenkanal district, seven elephants died of electrocution on October 26, 2018. As per the State Forest Department, 109 elephants died of electrocution over nine years to 2018; that is 12 elephants a year or an elephant monthly.

During the release of the

report here last year, Elephant expert and head of Asian Nature Conservation Foundation (ANCF) R Sukumar had warned that as the elephants are expanding to new areas, it could lead to more human-animal conflicts.

"This expansion has been happening gradually over 30 years. It is worrying because it will be difficult to manage. The real challenge is that elephants are moving to other forest areas, which could increase the potential for conflicts with humans," he had said suggesting that the maintaining elephant corridors is need of the hour to save both elephants and humans.

As per the Synchronized Elephant Population Estimation India, a report by the Elephant Division of the Union Environment Ministry, "as a consequence of being squeezed out of their homes and migratory routes, India, home to the world's largest population of Asiatic elephants (27,312), also ranked first globally over five years to 2017 by elephant deaths."

During the release of the

3-DAY PROTESTS BY SEPARATISTS

Day 1: Shutdown hits Valley

KHURSHED WANI ■ SRINAGAR

The normal life went out of gear in Kashmir Valley on Sunday on first day of three-day shutdown called by the separatists to protest against the killing of seven civilians near an encounter site in south Kashmir where three terrorists and a soldier got killed on Saturday morning. The Army appealed to the people not to pay heed to the separatists' call to march towards the headquarters of the XV Corps in Srinagar on Monday while as Governor Satya Pal Malik appealed to the people to keep a distance from areas where anti-militancy operations were in progress.

Police and paramilitary personnel were deployed in strength in sensitive parts of Kashmir to prevent assemblage of people or anti-government protests against the spree of killings in south Kashmir's Pulwama district. At least seven civilians were killed with firearms on Saturday afternoon after crowds of people staged protests and attempted to march towards the encounter site in Sironoo village of Pulwama. Three Hizbul Mujahideen terrorists including a former army soldier Zahoor Ahmad Thokar, who had deserted the armed forces



Police detain a supporter of Jammu & Kashmir State lawmaker Engineer Abdul Rasheed during a protest in Srinagar on Sunday

last year to join terrorist ranks had been killed in the encounter.

An Indian army soldier, 29-year-old Sower Kishan Singh, was also killed in the encounter. A native of Binchri village of Ratangarh Tehsil in Churu, Rajasthan, had sustained gruesome injuries in the encounter and later succumbed at 92 Base Hospital in Srinagar.

The separatist leadership in Kashmir—Joint Resistance Leadership (JRL) comprising Syed Ali Geelani, Mirwaiz Umar Farooq and Yasin Malik called for three-day shutdown against the killings and asked people to march towards XV

Corps headquarters on Monday. The army has foiled such attempts in the past.

Shops, business establishments and fuel stations remained closed while public transport was generally off the roads in summer capital Srinagar. The traffic movement was very low on Srinagar-Jammu National highway and most of the inter-district routes. Restrictions under Section 144 were imposed in district Pulwama.

The train services across Kashmir remained suspended for the second consecutive day for security reasons. The mobile internet services in

Srinagar, Pulwama and Shopian districts were suspended as a precautionary measure.

Sources said that many civilians wounded in the indiscriminate firing were battling for life in various hospitals in Srinagar.

Reports of shutdown have been received from Chenab Valley's Banihal, Khari, Bhadarwah, Doda, Thathri, Gandoh and Kishtwar areas against Pulwama civilian killings.

Reports said thousands of people participated in the funerals of slain terrorists and civilians in Pulwama district.

Former legislator Sheikh Abdul Rashid was briefly taken into custody when he attempted to march towards the office of United Nations Military Observers Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) to present a memorandum seeking the international body's intervention in stopping killings in Kashmir. Activists of National Conference also staged a protest march.

Meanwhile, Governor Satya Pal Malik while expressing grief over the loss of civilian lives has directed Divisional Commissioner, Kashmir to inquire into the Pulwama incident. He appealed to the people not to go near such areas during or immediately after anti-terrorist operations.

Gehlot, Pilot to take oath at Albert Hall

Jaipur: A galaxy of political leaders and Congress workers will descend on the premises of the historic Albert Hall in Jaipur on Monday for the oath-taking ceremony of Ashok Gehlot as Chief Minister of Rajasthan.

A fine example of Indo-saracenic, a revival architectural style mostly used by the British in the later 19th century, the foundation of the iconic structure was laid in 1876 during the visit of the Prince of Wales, Albert Edward, to Jaipur.

The construction was completed in 1887 by the architect Samuel Swinton Jacob, who was the director of Jaipur PWD then.

Located in Ram Niwas Garden outside the old city wall, the hall is a museum where thousands of people visit during the tourist season, usually during the winters.

On Monday morning, Congress leaders Gehlot and Sachin Pilot would take oath as chief minister and deputy chief minister of Rajasthan respectively at Albert Hall.

Several senior Congress leaders and hundreds of party workers are expected to attend the event.

"Congress president Rahul Gandhi, former prime minister Manmohan Singh and other leaders will attend the ceremony," Gehlot told reporters Sunday.

Oath-taking ceremonies



Chief Minister designate Ashok Gehlot and AICC general secretary Avinash Pandey review the preparations a day before the swearing-in ceremony at Albert Hall in Jaipur on Sunday

are usually organised at the Raj Bhawan. However, the function in 2003 and 2013, when Vasundhara Raje took oath as Chief Minister, was held at Janpath outside the Rajasthan Assembly building. And this time, Albert Hall has been decided as the venue for the event.

"There would be a large number of guests and leaders of various political parties will attend the ceremony. So, Albert Hall was finalised," Satyendra Singh Raghav, the Pradesh Congress Committee spokesperson said.

"The ceremony will be held in the open... Seating arrangements are being made to accommodate about 11,000 people," an official of the public works department said.

Nearly 2,000 VIP guests will attend the function.

Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge, Puducherry CM V Narayanasamy, Punjab CM Amarinder Singh, former Haryana CM Bhupinder Singh Hooda and others will attend the function.

Allies of the Congress party will also be present during the ceremony at Albert Hall, a distinctive landmark in Jaipur where cultural functions are also held on different occasions.

With its beautiful architecture dominated by onion domes, archways and terraces, the building of the hall became an integral part of its display, its architecture and stone ornamentation became a source of reference for varied classic Indian styles of design from Mughal to Rajput.

The corridors were deco-

rated with murals in a variety of styles, including the Ramayana, reproducing paintings from illustrations in the Persian Razmnama prepared for Emperor Akbar.

European, Egyptian, Chinese, Greek and Babylonian civilizations were portrayed in the murals to enable the people of the region to compare and contrast them with their own and develop their knowledge of the history and art.

Raje was 'careless' in fulfilling people's expectations in Rajasthan: Gehlot

Jaipur: Senior Congress leader Ashok Gehlot, who will be taking oath as Chief Minister of Rajasthan on Monday, said outgoing Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje was "careless" in fulfilling people's expectations despite a huge mandate in the last elections.

Holding Raje responsible for the financial condition of the state, Gehlot said she could have done more work if she wanted. "What is the financial condition of the state is known by all. The BJP got a huge mandate in the last elections and people had expectations from Raje, but she was careless and passed five years in carelessness," Gehlot said.

People have started showing gotra, janeu to become prominent in politics: Yogi

Faizabad: Taking a veiled dig at Congress chief Rahul Gandhi, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has said people have started showing their gotra and janeu (sacred thread) to become prominent in the country's politics.

Addressing a gathering in the district on Saturday he said, the people who had described themselves as accidentally Hindus were now realising that they were Hindus in the real sense and it was a victory of Sanatan faith.

He said Google failed before the epic Ramayana, which was written by sage Valmiki, and he asserted that the knowledge of the spiritual books was correct instead of what the search engine said.

"The word Kumbh has started becoming prevalent. It has become a fashion and trademark for the branding of one's programme... These days people are showing their Gotra and janeu to become prominent in the country's politics," Adityanath said without naming Gandhi.

"The people who described



Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, BJP UP Chief Mahendra Nath Pandey and others during the unveiling and inauguration of Kumbh Mela 2019 works at Jhushi in Allahabad on Sunday

themselves as accidentally Hindu are now realising that they are also Hindus. (They are realising) it is not accidental and we are Hindus in the real sense. Now they are remembering their janeu and Gotra. I think this is the victory of India's Sanatan faith. This is the victory of our beliefs," he said.

He claimed the people who were criticising the Kumbh Mela were trying to destroy the Indian culture and were conspiring to disgrace the country

with the help of foreign funds. The BJP leader claimed that they were trying to defame Hindu religion over the Sabrimala issue when everybody knew the tradition of the temple.

He claimed that those who had never been to temple were issuing statements over the issue and a similar environment was being created over the grand Kumbh Mela by terming it an anti-Dalit convention.

Assam panchayat polls: BJP continues to lead

Counting continues for fifth day

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

The BJP is maintaining a lead in Assam panchayat polls by pocketing 41 per cent of the total seats and marching ahead of the Congress which secured 32 per cent of the seats, as counting continued for the fifth day on Sunday.

The BJP has bagged 10,953 seats, followed by the Congress 8,646, Independents 2,927 as counting for the 26,808 posts across the State continued, Assam State Election Commissioner (ASEC) said in a press release.

The Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), an alliance partner of the BJP-led Government which contested independently, was in the fourth position with 1,853 seats till Sunday evening while minority dominated, the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) of the Opposition, bagged 1,309 posts, the ASEC said.

As per the results declared for 25,787 seats by the State

Election Commission, 20,990 posts are of gaon panchayat members (GPM), 2,192 are of gaon panchayat presidents (GPP), 2,186 are anchalik panchayat members (APM) and 419 are zila parishad members (ZPM). The BJP has won 8,730 GPM seats, followed by the Congress 6,971, AGP 1,580, AIUDF 1,018, BPF 54, CPI(M) 31, CPI 4, TMC 2 and Independents 2,596.

For the GPP posts, BJP has secured 991, Congress 759, AGP 137, AIUDF 130, BPF 2 and Independents 173.

In the APM seats, BJP bagged 1,020, Congress 769, AGP 117, AIUDF 136, CPI(M) and TMC — 1 each and Independents 142.

The ASEC said that in ZPM constituencies, BJP won 212, Congress 147, AGP 19, AIUDF 25 and Independents 16. The elections were held in two phases on December 5 and 9 to elect 21,990 GPM, 2,199 GPP, 2,199 APM and 420 ZPM across the state, recording an overall 82 per cent voting.

Of the total 78,571 contestants, 734 had been elected uncontested.



Women take part in a bike rally during 'Vijay Diwas' to commemorate 1971 India-Pakistan war in Karad, Maharashtra on Sunday

Tripura CM urges B'desh to work closely with India

Agartala: Tripura Chief Minister Biplab Kumar Deb on Sunday urged Bangladesh to work in close coordination with India to strengthen both the nations.

Deb was speaking here after laying wreath in memory of war martyrs on the occasion of 'Vijay Diwas', celebrated

every year on this day to mark India's decisive win over Pakistan in 1971, and the birth of Bangladesh.

He said Tripura shares a long history of friendship with Bangladesh, and the state played a crucial role in the 1971 war. "People of Tripura whole heartedly supported the war...

India is the closest neighbour of Bangladesh... I hope this historic relation would strengthen both the countries in future," Deb said. Bangladesh Assistant High Commissioner in Tripura Kiriti Chakma said his office here observed 'Vijay Diwas' with a seminar on the liberation of Bangladesh.

Dalai Lama arrives in Bodh Gaya



Gaya: Tibetan spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, on Sunday arrived in Bodh Gaya where he will stay in a monastery for 23 days.

The Dalai Lama, who reached Gaya international airport by a chartered plane, proceeded to the monastery from the airport amid tight security, Gaya District Magistrate and Bodhgaya Temple Management Committee (BTMC) chairman Abhishek Kumar Singh said.

He will visit Mahabodhi temple on Monday morning to offer prayers, Singh said.

A large crowd was waiting on both sides of the road to get a glimpse of the Nobel Peace Prize winner, he added.

Earlier, on his arrival at Gaya airport, senior officials, including Magadh divisional commissioner T Bindeshwari, Magadh R Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Binay Kumar, District Magistrate Abhishek Kumar Singh, Senior SP Rajiv Mishra, BTMC secretary N Dorje and Airport director Dilip Kumar welcomed him.

Didi not to attend Kamal Nath's swearing-in

Kolkata: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee will not attend the swearing-in ceremony of Congress leader Kamal Nath as Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister, official sources said on Sunday.

There was, however, no reason cited for Banerjee not going to Bhopal for the swearing-in ceremony on Monday, an official of the Chief Minister's Office (CMO) said.

Trinamool Congress MP Dinesh Trivedi will be representing the party at the event, which the Congress intends

to showcase as a picture of Opposition unity. "I have been directed by the party chief (Banerjee) to be present at Monday's swearing-in programme," Trivedi told PTI.

Asked whether he was carrying any message for the function, Trivedi said, "There is no message as such. My going there is a message itself."

The Congress has invited leaders from across the political spectrum.

Apart from party chief Rahul Gandhi and United Progressive Alliance (UPA) chairperson Sonia

Gandhi, Banerjee, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, Bahujan Samaj Party supreme Mayawati and Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav were invited for the event.

Banerjee, who had earlier floated the idea of a federal front of regional parties, has been seen recently exchanging bonhomie with Naidu, and her counterparts from Delhi and Telangana, Arvind Kejriwal and Chandrashekar Rao respectively, apart from DMK president M K Stalin. But, the same warmth

has not been seen for the Congress.

Nath, a nine-time parliamentary member from Chhindwara seat and currently president of the Madhya Pradesh Congress, will become the first Chief Minister of a Congress Government in the central Indian State after a gap of 15 years. Digvijaya Singh was the last Congress Chief Minister of the State.

The BJP had snatched power from the Grand Old Party in 2003 and went on to retain it till its narrow defeat in the recently-held Assembly election.

Srinagar freezes at - 4.2° C, coldest of season

Srinagar: Srinagar experienced the coldest night of the season on Saturday night as the mercury continued its downward spiral in most parts of the Kashmir valley and Ladakh region. Srinagar, the summer capital of Jammu & Kashmir, recorded a low of minus 5.6 degrees Celsius Saturday night, down from minus 4.2 degrees Celsius the previous night, MET officials said Sunday.

It was the coldest night of the season so far in the city, they said. The night temperature in the city has dropped over five degrees since Thursday as the valley is moving closer to the 40-day harshest winter period, locally known as 'Chillai Kalan', which begins December 21.

The officials said Qazigund, Kupwara and Leh also experienced the coldest night of the season Saturday night along with Srinagar. Qazigund, the gateway



town to the valley, in south Kashmir recorded a low of minus 5.6 degrees Celsius Saturday night, compared to the previous night's minus 5 degrees Celsius.

The officials said it was the coldest December night in Qazigund in the last four years. The town had recorded a low

of minus 5.9 degrees Celsius on December 27, 2014.

The nearby Kokernag town recorded a low of minus 5.7 degrees Celsius Saturday night, up from minus 6.6 degrees Celsius the previous night, they said.

Kupwara in north Kashmir saw the mercury going down

from minus 4.5 degrees Celsius the previous night to settle at a low of minus 6 degrees Celsius Saturday, the official said. They said it was the coldest December night in Kupwara in the last five years.

The night temperature in Pahalgam, which serves as one of the base camps for the annu-

al Amarnath yatra in south Kashmir, settled at a low of minus 9.3 degrees Celsius, compared to the previous night's minus 9.5 degrees Celsius. The ski-resort of Gulmarg in north Kashmir recorded the minimum temperature of minus 9.5 degrees Celsius, Saturday, up two notches from the previous night, the officials said.

The mercury in Leh town, in Ladakh region, went down from the previous night's minus 13.9 degrees Celsius to settle at a low of minus 15.6 degrees Celsius Saturday night.

Leh was the coldest place in Jammu and Kashmir.

The officials said the mercury in the nearby Kargil town settled at a low of minus 10.8 degrees Celsius, compared to minus 10.2 degrees Celsius the previous night.

The MeT Office has forecast mainly dry weather for the week ahead.

COMPENSATION FOR VIOLENCE-HIT SIKHS Meghalaya 'unhappy' with Punjab: Minister

PTI ■ SHILLONG

The Meghalaya Government was "unhappy" with the decision of the Punjab Cabinet approving ₹60 lakh compensation to the Sikh community residing here who were affected during the June riots, a State Minister said on Sunday.

Meghalaya Urban Affairs Minister Hamletson Dohling urged the Punjab Government to reconsider the Cabinet decision to grant the relief to the affected Sikh community in Shilling and said it would "add more fuel to the fire" as the State Government is trying to solve the issues amicably.

"We are unhappy with the decision and we request them (Punjab Government) not to add fuel to the fire," Dohling said. The Punjab Cabinet had earlier this week approved the proposal for providing ₹60 lakh as compensation to the Sikh community against damage caused to their properties during violence in Shilling in June earlier this year.

Of the ₹60 lakh sanctioned by the Punjab Cabinet, ₹50 lakh is earmarked for reconstruction of Khalsa Middle School as the building was declared unsafe. The rest of the amount would be given to Sikhs whose shops and trucks were damaged in the riots. Dohling said the high level committee appointed by Meghalaya Government headed by Deputy Chief

The Punjab Cabinet had earlier this week approved the proposal for providing ₹60 lakh as compensation to the Sikh community

Minister Prestone Tyngsong is taking into consideration all aspects of the case and is trying its best to solve the issues amicably.

The Meghalaya Urban Affairs Minister said, "The decision is nothing but to mislead the people of the nation because not a single stone was thrown at the school or the Gurdwara during the protest in June."

He claimed that the Meghalaya police had handled the situation and all efforts are on to end the problems there (Punjab lane) once and for all. Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad Sangma will soon speak to his Punjab counterpart in this regard, he said.

Clashes erupted when a bus driver and his friend were attacked at the Punjabi Lane area and they received injuries. As rumours of the assault spread on social media, local people grouped together and went to attack the residents following which the entire area was put under curfew for over a month.

POLITICS OVER RATH YATRA

BJP to move HC after TMC's denial

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

A day after the Bengal Government denied permission citing law and order reasons to the BJP organising Rath Yatra in the State, the saffron party said it would move the High Court once again seeking orders directing the administration to clear the Yatra gridlock.

Bengal BJP president Dilip Ghosh on Sunday said his party would move the High Court "once again to knock sense in this autocratic Government".

The Trinamool Congress was "intentionally influencing the administration to withhold the permission for the Rath Yatra which has no religious implication but a purely political programme. In fact we were asked by the top officers present during the meeting and we made it clear that this is a political programme and has nothing to do with any religious issue," Ghosh said adding the Government was still

The Trinamool Congress was "intentionally influencing the administration to withhold the permission for the Rath Yatra which has no religious implication but a purely political programme"

blocking the Yatra because the ruling party was convinced of BJP's rising graph in the State.

"Bengal is a fit case for Article 356 and we will take this issue up at a future date if such undemocratic situation continues," he said adding the "by stopping the Yatra on law and order grounds only shows the feeble administrative condition in the State," he maintained.

Earlier the representatives of the BJP and the State Government engaged in bilateral talks following a High Court order. After the talks the Government denied permis-

sion to the Yatra saying "the areas proposed to be covered by the Yatra are, because of publicity and propaganda gradually turning into communal-ly sensitive pockets. Intelligence reports indicate that public perception is that the religious overtones of the Yatra will be turned into a propaganda."

It also quoted intelligence reports saying "in several districts, organisations with overtly communal agenda like the RSS, Bajrang Dal and the VHP would actively join the 'Yatra'. This is grave apprehension of 'breach of peace' and communal violence during and in the aftermath of the Yatra."

On Sunday senior State Ministers including Jyoti Priya Mullick and Sadhan Pandey quoted from a speech of Sadhvi Saraswati — who on Saturday while delivering a public speech from the dais of Hindu Jagran Manch asked the Hindus to "spend Rs 1,000 each and get yourselves swords ... and behead those who indulge in love jihad," — say-

ing "these people from the Sangh Parivar are trying to ignite communal riots in the State and the Yatra will only add fuel to fire."

The Government had done the right thing by denying permission to the Yatra, they said suggesting the State would in every likelihood use the Sadhvi's speech to buttress its arguments in the Court.

Meanwhile the CPI(M), alleged the Trinamool Congress was trying to "provide oxygen to a moribund BJP which was licking its wounds after the electoral defeat in Hindi heartland."

The Government by denying permission to the Yatra was "making the BJP more relevant knowing full well that they don't have the organisational strength to organise such a huge show. Denying permission to them will lead to press statements and street corner meets which will only help BJP collect sympathy from the market" senior CPI(M) leader Tanmoy Bhattacharya said.

Army celebrates 'Vijay Diwas' in J&K

PTI ■ JAMMU

General Officer Commanding-in-chief, northern command, Lt Gen Ranbir Singh on Sunday led his men and celebrated the 47th anniversary of Vijay Diwas, marking India's military victory over Pakistan in 1971 war.

The celebration commemorated with a wreath-laying ceremony at 'Dhruva Shahid Smarak' by Lieutenant Gen Singh at Udhampur garrison with traditional enthusiasm, a defence spokesperson said.

Each year December 16 is celebrated as 'Vijay Diwas' to commemorate India's victory over Pakistan in 1971. The victory is unique and unparalleled as it was on this day that 93,000 Pakistani troops surrendered to the Indian Army eventuating in subsequent secession of East Pakistan into Bangladesh.

On this occasion, the Army

- The celebration commemorated with a wreath-laying ceremony at 'Dhruva Shahid Smarak' by Lieutenant Gen Singh at Udhampur garrison with traditional enthusiasm, a Defence spokesperson said
- Each year December 16 is celebrated as 'Vijay Diwas' to commemorate India's victory over Pakistan in 1971
- The spokesperson said a grand and solemn wreath-laying ceremony was also organised with full military honours at 'Balidan Stambh' her
- A large number of serving and retired soldiers were present on the occasion

commander complimented the rank and file of northern command for their steadfastness, dedication and selflessness, the spokesperson said.

He said the Army Commander exhorted all ranks to rededicate themselves in the service of the nation and confront new challenges with professionalism and courage.

The spokesperson said a grand and solemn wreath-laying ceremony was also organised with full military honours at 'Balidan Stambh' here.

A large number of serving and retired soldiers were pre-

sent on the occasion, he said.

General Officer Commanding (GOC), Tiger Division, Maj Gen Sharad Kapur paid tribute to the gallant soldiers at 'Balidan Stambh'.

Among others, Maj Gen (ret'd) Goverdhan Singh Jamwal, Hony Capt (ret'd) Bana Singh and a large number of serving officers, junior commissioned officers and jawans of the 'Tiger Division' paid homage to the brave soldiers, who laid down their precious lives for the country during the 1971 Indo-Pak war, he said.

Ailing Goa CM makes rare public appearance, inspects 2 bridges

Panaji: Ailing Goa Chief Minister Manohar Parrikar on Sunday inspected an under-construction bridge on Mandovi River here, the first time he has been seen in public since returning to the state on October 14 post hospitalisation in Delhi's AIIMS.

He later inspected the work of a bridge over Zuari River near Agassaim village, some 15 kilometres from here.

Parrikar, who is suffering from a pancreatic ailment, has been recuperating at his private residence near here since October 14 and this is the first time he has moved out of the house, officials said.

A senior Chief Minister's Office functionary Sunday said Parrikar travelled from Porvorim to Merces inspecting the bridge, the third over the Mandovi.

The bridge, which is expected to be completed next year, will connect Panaji to the rest of north Goa. PTI

Sabarimala darshan denied to 4 transgenders

Kottayam: The Kerala Police on Sunday denied entry to four transgenders who came for a darshan to the Sabarimala temple.

Speaking to the media here, Ananya, one of the four, said that they were subjected to ridicule, threats and was asked to return by the police at Erumely, the first base camp at the temple town.

"We began our pilgrimage on Saturday from Ernakulam and the special branch wing of the police was witness to the prayers and all the ritual functions that we undertook. But when we reached Erumely, the



top police official was very rude and so was the female officials," said Ananya.

"First they said, we will not be allowed to visit the temple in the ladies dress and they

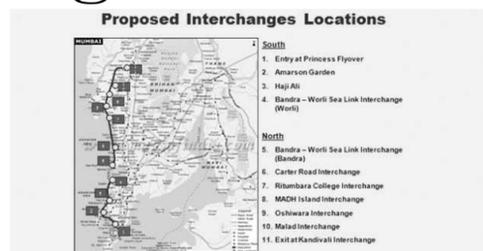
asked us to change to a man's attire. Initially, we refused and after some time, we decided we will change, but the police changed their minds and asked us to return." PTI

Sena inaugurates Coastal Road project

Doesn't invite anyone from BJP

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In an apparent effort to ensure this party hog the entire credit for launching a major development project ahead of the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, Shiv Sena president Uddhav Thackeray on Sunday performed the "bhoomi puja" for Mumbai's ambitious ₹15,000 crore 29.2-km coastal road project, amid a boycott of the function by his party's senior ruling alliance partner BJP.



Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis was conspicuous by his absence at the foundation ceremony held at Amasons garden near the Breach Candy Hospital in south Mumbai, in the presence of Mumbai Mayor Vishwanath Mahadeshwar, State Industry Minister Subhash Desai, Sena's

south Mumbai MP Arvind Sawant, Uddhav's wife Rashmi Thackeray and son Aditya. There were also no BJP functionaries at the function.

Sources in the ruling BJP said that the Sena had not invited Fadnavis for the function. As a consequence, the BJP leaders and corporators stayed

away from the function.

Sources in the Sena attributed the party's decision not to invite Fadnavis or any other BJP leader for the coastal road "bhoomi puja" to the BJP-led Maharashtra Government's decision of not inviting Uddhav for the "bhoomi puja" ceremony of two metro projects to be performed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Kalyan in the neighbouring Thane district on December 18.

Ahead of Sunday's function, a poster war had broken between the Sena and BJP. While the Sena on put up posters announcing the "bhoomi puja" for the coastal road project, the BJP put up banners at the junction of the Shiv Sena's headquarters "Sena Bhavan" thank-

ing Prime Minister Modi and Chief Minister Fadnavis for issuing necessary permissions for taking up the coastal road work speedily. The BJP also put up posters along Lady Jamsheji Road at Mahim in south-central Mumbai.

To be developed by the Shiv Sena-ruled BMC and State-run Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation (BMC) in four packages, the coastal road will connect Marine Lines in south Mumbai with Kandivli in north Mumbai. Along the 29.2 km stretch, the coastal road will have tunnels, bridges, interchanges, elevated stretches and roads on reclaimed land, along with pedestrian underpasses and foot over bridges (FoBs).

Builder booked for trying to grab Dilip Kumar's bungalow released, Saira requests meeting with PM



Mumbai: Following the release of builder Samir Bhojwani, who had falsely claimed ownership of the two plots on which Dilip Kumar's bungalow was built, the legendary actor's wife Saira Banu Khan has requested to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi to discuss the issue.

The 96-year-old actor's bungalow is located in the upscale Pali Hill area of Bandra.

On Sunday, Banu's request was shared on Kumar's official Twitter account. "Request from Saira Banu Khan: The Hon'ble @PMOIndia Shri @narendramodi Sir, Land Mafia Samir Bhojwani released from jail. No action taken despite assurances by CM @Dev_Fadnavis. Padma Vibhushit betrayed,

threatened by money and muscle power. Request meeting with you in #Mumbai," the tweet read.

Earlier this year Banu had approached police and lodged a complaint against Bhojwani. In January, the Economic Offences Wing (EOW) of the Mumbai Police had registered a case of cheating against the builder for allegedly trying to grab the bungalow of the veteran actor.

The police officials suspected that Bhojwani forged certain documents to grab the property. After the offence was registered, a team of EOW sleuths raided Bhojwani's residence in Bandra from where they seized weapons, including knives and daggers. Bhojwani was arrested by EOW in April this year. PTI

B'desh honours Indian bravehearts of 1971 war posthumously

Kolkata: The Bangladesh Government, on the occasion of 'Vijay Diwas', on Sunday posthumously honoured 12 Indian Armed Forces personnel for sacrificing their lives during the 1971 India-Pakistan War. Describing the honouring of the families of the martyred personnel as a great initiative by the Bangladesh Government, GOC-in-C Eastern Command of the Army Lt Gen M M Naravane said the process of honouring martyred soldiers will continue in the years to come and it will strengthen the bond between the two countries.

"We were forced into this conflict because of a humanitarian crisis of gigantic proportion, resulting in the annihilation of Pakistan Army and the birth of Bangladesh," Naravane said.

"Very rarely it has happened that when two countries fight, a third country is born," he said.

The Bangladesh Government has decided to honour over 1,600 Indian Armed Forces personnel who laid down their lives in the eastern theatre during the 1971 Indo-Pak War.

Vijay Diwas (victory day) is celebrated every year on this day to mark India's decisive win over Pakistan and the birth of

The Bangladesh Government has decided to honour over 1,600 Indian Armed Forces personnel who laid down their lives in the eastern theatre during the 1971 India-Pak War

Bangladesh. The families of seven Indian Army soldiers, two Air Force, two BSF personnel and one Navy personnel were handed over 'Sammanana' plaques by Bangladesh Minister of Liberation War Affairs A K M Mozammel Haque at the Indian Army's Eastern Command Headquarter Fort William here.

Prior to this, a wreath laying ceremony was held at Vijay Smarak to pay respects to the martyred soldiers. Honouring soldiers who were martyred in the war in the eastern theatre commenced in 2017 with the Bangladesh prime minister giving away the plaques to families of seven soldiers, he said.

The GOC-in-C of Eastern Command, the Flag Officer

Commanding-in-Chief, Eastern Naval Command, Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Eastern Air Command, retired Armed Forces officers and leaders of a Bangladeshi delegation visiting India for the occasion, laid the wreaths at the memorial.

The Bangladesh delegation included 30 'Muktijoddhas', who took part in the liberation war, and six serving officers of Bangladesh's Armed Forces.

Describing December 16 as the most glorious day in the life of every Bengali, Haque said the fruits of freedom were achieved after suffering a nine-month long genocide by the Pakistani forces, wherein 30 lakh people lost their lives and two lakh women were raped.

"The Indian soldiers fought for our cause and laid down their lives," he said.

Following the wreath laying ceremony, four Hawk trainer aircraft of the IAF performed a fly past over the Vijay Smarak in a 'Missing Man' formation, which is an aircraft manoeuvre used to honour the dead or missing.

This was followed by three helicopters from the Army Aviation Corps, which flew at tree-top level, with one showering rose petals over the Assembly. PTI



Mahila Vikas Manch members protest against the alleged cases of violence against women in Patna on Sunday PTI

Six killed in explosion in Karnataka sugar factory

Bengaluru: At least six people were killed in an explosion in a boiler at a sugar factory in Bagalkot district of Karnataka on Sunday.

"Six people have died on the spot due to the blast in the boiler of the sugar factory in Kulali village," a police control room official told IANS from Mudhol, about 550 km northwest of Bengaluru.

At least three others were injured in the blast, the official added. Chief Minister H.D. Kumaraswamy directed district officials to shift the injured to hospitals immediately and asked for the site to be inspected to ascertain the cause of the explosion. "The death of the six people in the blast in the sugar factory is saddening. Bagalkot district officials have been

directed to conduct a probe and submit a report. The State government will provide compensation to the deceased's kin," a statement from the Chief Minister's Office said.

The sugar factory is run by the Nirani Group — owned by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) lawmaker from the state, Murugesh Nirani, and his brothers. PTI

800 special trains for Kumbh pilgrims

Lucknow: To facilitate pilgrims arriving in large numbers during the Kumbh Mela in 2019, the railways has proposed running 800 special trains from various stations of Allahabad district, an officials has said.

These trains would be in addition to the regular trains run by the North Central Railway (NCR). PRO NCR Amit Malviya said, "Six special trains will come to Allahabad from different railway zones of the country for pilgrims and tourists participating in the Kumbh Mela."

He said the railways planned to operate four to five special trains to ferry 5,000 Pravasi Bhartiyaas from Allahabad to New Delhi. They will be in Allahabad to participate in the Kumbh Mela after



attending the Pravasi Bhartiya Divas at Varanasi.

The Pravas Bhartiyaas will be taken to New Delhi for Republic Day celebrations.

He also said branding of the Kumbh Mela will be done on 1,400 coaches of special trains and the originating trains of the NCR by vinyl wrapping,

er big branding exercise for the Kumbh Mela," Malviya said.

He also said that to promote local culture, the North Central Zone Cultural Centre, under the Ministry of Culture, will be co-opted to put up stalls in passenger enclosures showcasing the art, culture and heritage of Allahabad and surrounding areas.

"Four big enclosures to house about 10,000 pilgrims have been constructed at Allahabad Junction railway station. These will have vending stalls, water booths and ticket counters, LCD TVs, public address system, CCTV cameras and separate toilets blocks for men and women. Similar passenger enclosures have also been built at other stations," the PRO said. PTI

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Vedanta welcomes NGT order; says workers to get back livelihood

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Mining company Vedanta Ltd on Saturday welcomed the National Green Tribunal order to resume operations at the company's facility in Thoothukudi in Tamil Nadu, and said those affected by the plant's closure will get back their source of livelihood.

In a statement issued late Saturday, Vedanta Ltd's Sterlite Copper Plant, Chief Executive Officer, P Ramnath said, "We welcome the order given by the National Green Tribunal on allowing us to resume operations of our copper smelter at

Thoothukudi".

"We are happy that all those affected by the closure will get back their source of livelihood and the town of Thoothukudi will revert back to normalcy," he said in the statement.

Stating that the company had been operating smelter by adapting "best practices" followed globally, the official noted, "We thank the people of Thoothukudi for the faith reposed in us and for their support".

"We will continue to work for the welfare of the communities around the region and remain committed to grow sustainably along with

the people of Thoothukudi," he said.

The National Green Tribunal on Saturday set aside the Tamil Nadu Government order for closure of Vedanta Ltd's sterile copper plant at Tuticorin, which was at the centre of massive protests over alleged pollution, saying it was "non-sustainable" and "unjustified".

The Tamil Nadu Government, meanwhile, said it would challenge in the Supreme Court the NGT order setting aside the closure of the Vedanta Ltd's Sterlite Copper plant in Tuticorin in the wake of protests by locals.

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The National Small Industries Corporation Ltd.
Ref No: SIC/CC/53/34/2018
Dated- 17th December, 2018
TENDER NOTICE
Empanelment of Multi Media Creative Agency
NSIC intends to empanel one Creative Agency so as to drive the various initiatives of NSIC in an aggressive manner for the promotion and development of NSIC Schemes for the MSME sector. The detailed terms and conditions are available on the NSIC website (http://www.nsic.co.in). The last date of receipt of offers in a closed envelope is 08th Jan 2019 in The NSIC Ltd, NSIC Bhawan, okhla industrial estate, New Delhi- 110020 (Tel-01126926275). Kindly subscribe on the offer envelope "Empanelment of Creative Agency". Any Corrigendum or further announcement (if any) in this regard would be uploaded on NSIC Website only.

Mallya: Innocent?

Nitin Gadkari's comments on Vijay Mallya have thrown the cat among the pigeons



There is no doubt that Vijay Mallya is a failed businessman. He squandered away thousands of crores of money by running an airline. In the process, he lost control of the jewels in his crown — United Breweries and United Spirits — the largest beer and spirits company in India respectively. But the question writ large is whether there was malice involved in Mallya's refusal to pay back the billions he borrowed from the Indian public sector banks to fund his airline?

Certainly, Mallya is not the first person to fail in business nor will he be the last. He is also not the only person to lose everything when running an airline. The aviation business is brutal. In the past few weeks alone, a couple of start-up airlines in Europe have collapsed with others on life support. The situation of Mallya's erstwhile 'frenemy' Naresh Goyal's Jet Airways, too, is precarious with reports of delayed salaries and service cancellations filling newsprint in the business pages. This is an unforgiving business. Mallya will not be the only billionaire who ended up barely a millionaire, as the oft-quoted saying goes, after entering the business. But is Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari right in saying that Mallya had no malice in not repaying his loans? This newspaper does not believe so. There are certainly questions that must be answered about why the Indian public sector banks kept loaning Mallya's Kingfisher Airlines with money even when it was clear to all and sundry that the airline was going to crash and burn. There also arises the question about how Mallya managed to get a stunning valuation for his airlines brand when later it was not worth even pennies and how he used that valuation to acquire loans. Thus, it is contingent upon the Indian courts to prove that there was no malice involved and not for Mr Gadkari to give Mallya a clean chit. And Mallya, despite his protestations of innocence, did weaken his own case by fleeing to the UK.

There is no doubt that Mallya suffered from poor public relations. For example, he celebrated his birthday party lavishly in Goa even though his airlines employees were not being paid. His constant parties with nubile nymphets clad around him did make the public and authorities jealous. After all, which middle-aged man would not like to live life that way? It is also true that on the scale of things, Mallya is not the worst offender when it comes to not repaying banks. But he is close to the top. That, coupled with his extravagant lifestyle even in self-imposed exile in the UK, have made the gregarious, party-loving man a persona non-grata among his one-time friends. Mallya should now come to India to face justice and answer questions. As slow as the Indian justice system has become, until he answers those questions in an Indian court on Indian soil, he will always be considered guilty by the Indian public even if logically he might not be. It is, therefore, contingent on the authorities to pursue his extradition with haste, which oddly enough will also be good for Mallya himself.

Back on course

Rajapaksa's ill-timed power rush cost Sri Lanka dearly. The top court has thankfully rescued it from deep crisis



Sri Lanka's much disputed Prime Minister and strongman Mahinda Rajapaksa's ill-advised move to manipulate the nation's executive with impunity and suit his partisan and political ambition has clearly backfired and cost the nation a stasis it could hardly afford. With a crucial budget held up and countries wondering which government to deal with — the ousted one of UNP's Ranil Wickremesinghe or the coalition sanctioned by President Mathiripala Sirisena with Rajapaksa as imposed Prime Minister — the island nation was on the precipice. Thankfully the Supreme Court ordered the

reinstatement of status quo ante after Rajapaksa repeatedly failed to prove a majority in the Parliament, which President Sirisena dissolved to hold snap polls. The court sternly reminded that a nation cannot be held hostage to a person's whim and muscle and that neither elections nor the dissolution of Parliament can be forced upon a system that already had a working majority and ability to last out a full term. The court underlined that the Constitution could not clearly be interpreted in personalised ways. Yes, Rajapaksa was clawing his way back to relevance after he was trounced by his one-time protegee and then rebel Sirisena. But as Sirisena and Wickremesinghe had difficulty negotiating with each other along the way, Rajapaksa swiftly played on the heft of restoring Sinhalese identity, floated his new outfit and topped the verdict in the local elections. At this point, he clearly overreached himself, cornering President Sirisena in his impatience, forcing him to pull out of the coalition Unity government, coopt his party and name him Prime Minister. Now that Wickremesinghe has legitimacy and sympathy for being turfed out abruptly, Rajapaksa is left with ghosts of his past out to devour him — allegations of autocracy, corruption, nepotism, China tilts and, of course, war crimes while eliminating the Tamil movement from the face of the island. If indeed he had waited out for Wickremesinghe to fail at the hustings, he could have attempted a return to Lanka's narrative and wiped off his past. Now, all anybody will remember is his avarice. Constitutionally, he could not have become the President, having served two terms, but he could have attempted a comeback as a prime ministerial hopeful though people anticipated he would move amendments to arrogate more powers to himself. Sirisena, seen as an acceptable moderate when he took over the reins, has had a greater loss of face. His UPFA was in a minority in the coalition (even with Rajapaksa's faction) and yet he ventured to sack Wickremesinghe, whose UNP has the bigger mandate.

India can now breathe a tad easy as it was uncomfortable with Rajapaksa though the latter had engaged with the Modi government in Delhi very recently. As President, he had parcelled the nation's ports and infrastructure to the Chinese. Wickremesinghe has been more favourable for us. His ouster, in fact, was a result of Sirisena's disagreement with him over the development of a container terminal in Colombo and his pro-India tilt. Therefore, India has to tip-toe cautiously around the prevalent anti-mainland narrative and develop a strategic depth at a time when the hawks have been compromised.



BALBIR PUNJ

Mixed bag for both

A glance at the recent Assembly poll results will invariably lead to a fallacious conclusion that the Congress is the sole winner. But truth be told, while it won, the BJP didn't lose either

A quick glance at the recent Assembly poll results will invariably lead to a fallacious conclusion that the Congress, with three additional major States in its kitty, is the sole winner, and BJP, a clear loser. There is little doubt that the election outcome is confusing. The electorate has voted the Congress to power without rejecting the BJP. While in Chhattisgarh, the Congress' victory is convincing and clear, so are its defeats in Telangana and Mizoram.

In Madhya Pradesh (a State with the largest number of seats, 29, in the Lok Sabha, out of the five States that went to polls), the losing BJP got marginally more votes than the victorious Congress. The BJP, even after bagging 47,827 more votes than its immediate rival, had to concede defeat. The BJP had polled 1,56,42,980 votes and the Congress 1,55,95,153. Thanks to the infirmities of our electoral systems, the BJP had to contend with 109 seats and the Congress romped home with 114 seats, two short of majority.

In fact, had the BJP polled 4,337 more votes than it did in seven seats in Madhya Pradesh, it could have well crossed the majority mark. The seven seats which it lost by a slender difference are Gwalior South (121), Suwasra (350), Jabalpur North (578), Rajnagar (732), Damoh (798), Baira (826) and Rajpur (932).

The Congress, on the other hand, suffered a loss of only three seats — Jarora (511), Bina (632) and Kolaras (720) — with a small margin. In contrast, in 2013, the BJP's victory in Madhya Pradesh was decisive. The party polled 44.88 per cent votes against 36.38 per cent by the Congress.

In Rajasthan (25 Lok Sabha seats) the margin between the victor and vanquished was razor thin. The Congress' share of votes was 39.3 per cent, 0.5 per cent higher than that of the BJP's 38.8 per cent.

The Chhattisgarh results, of course, should set the BJP worrying for the party's defeat here was convincing. Its vote share dropped from 41 per cent in 2013 to 33 per cent and that of the Congress improved, from 40.3 per cent to 43 per cent. While the Congress has won the three heartland States, it has all but bowed out of the North-East, losing its last government in Mizoram.

What is the political message of this verdict? Prime Minister Modi's detractors will see the results as a precursor to the 2019 Lok Sabha polls. But unfortunately for them, each election has a different nuance and undertone. In March 1998, the BJP won 182 Lok Sabha seats and the Congress dropped to 141. By end of that year, Assembly elections were held in Delhi, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. The BJP was routed. Four months later, in April 1999, the Vajpayee Government fell by one vote. Fresh parliamentary elections followed. The BJP under Vajpayee was back in power at the Centre, winning all seven seats from Delhi and performing well in the Hindi heartland.

In early 2004, the BJP leadership dis-



solved the Lok Sabha and advanced parliamentary elections by five months because in December 2003, it swept polls in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. The Vajpayee-Advani duo thought that results of these Hindi heartland States reflected the general mood in favour of the NDA and, thus, an early parliamentary election would help them easily return to power. However, the BJP lost.

Fast forward to December 2013, the BJP lost the Assembly election to a newly-founded Aam Aadmi Party in Delhi, but won all seven Lok Sabha seats in the April-May 2014 parliamentary elections. The election results have a lesson for the prognosticators of the mahagathbandhan as well. The Congress-TDP-Left coalition was supposed to give a tough fight to the ruling TRS and dethrone Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao. However, the KCR-led TRS won 88 of 119 seats. Its poll percentage was 46.9, way ahead of the Congress' 28.4 per cent. Chandrababu Naidu's TDP only won two seats.

Incidentally, poll results were declared the day Rahul Gandhi completed one year as president of his family fiefdom. The post-poll developments — his choice of Kamal Nath for Madhya Pradesh and efforts to buy peace in Rajasthan by virtue of a patch-up arrangement between Ashok Gehlot and Sachin Pilot — provide indications as to how the party will function under his leader-

“ THE ELECTION RESULTS HAVE A LESSON FOR THE PROGNOSTICATORS OF THE MAHAGATHBANDHAN AS WELL. THE CONGRESS-TDP-LEFT COALITION WAS SUPPOSED TO GIVE A TOUGH FIGHT TO THE RULING TRS AND DETHRONE CHIEF MINISTER K CHANDRASHEKAR RAO. HOWEVER, THE KCR-LED TRS WON 88 OF 119 SEATS. ITS POLL PERCENTAGE WAS 46.9, WAY AHEAD OF CONGRESS' 28.4 PER CENT. CHANDRABABU NAIDU'S TDP ONLY WON TWO SEATS ”

ship. Kamal Nath's selection by Rahul Gandhi underlines the fact that the Congress will continue to give precedence to political expediency over ethics or high principles. Kamal Nath, one of the richest politicians in the country, has been accused of leading violent mobs against beleaguered Sikhs in 1984 during the riots that followed the assassination of Indira Gandhi.

Here are excerpts from a book, *When a Tree Shook Delhi: The 1984 Carnage and Its Aftermath*, by HS Phoolka, an advocate and Manoj Mitta, a journalist. The book was published a decade ago and Kamal Nath has not gone to the court against the charges levelled against him. “The leader in question was Kamal Nath, who was at the time of the 1984 carnage, an up and coming Congress MP from Madhya Pradesh. In a siege that lasted over five hours, Kamal Nath is said to have been there for about two hours.

“Given the strategic location of Rakab Ganj Gurdwara, Kamal Nath's presence at the site of violence was confirmed by two of the senior-most police officers, Commissioner Subhash Tandan, and Additional Commissioner Gautam Kaul, as also by an independent source, *The Indian Express* reporter, Sanjay Suri.

“Another distinguishing feature of the Rakab Ganj episode was the evidence of political complicity: The presence of Congress MP Kamal Nath on

the spot for a major part of the siege. That he was there at all, for whatever reason, given that the other Congress leaders were discreet enough not to hobnob with mobs in places where they were liable to be noticed by journalists.

“Since Kamal Nath spent about two hours in front of Rakab Ganj Gurdwara Gate on November 1, *The Indian Express* reported the next day that he had led the mob. The interference of his complicity was no reflex reaction, as made clear by journalist Sanjay Suri, in his report, as also in his affidavit before the Misra Commission, and oral deposition before the Nanavati Commission.

“Suri found that Kamal Nath was ‘controlling the crowd’ which he said was looking to him for direction. Though he could not vouch for what exactly Kamal Nath had told the crowd, Suri said that ‘some mobs had charged at the gurdwara’ in the Congress leader's presence. Equally significant, he testified that while all that drama was going on, the bodies of those Sikhs were still burning on the roadside.”

An interesting sidelight of the recently conducted polls was that the EVM's credibility was restored. Except for a feeble attempt to question its working in Telangana, the Congress happily accepted the verdict in the rest of the four States.

(The writer is a political commentator and a former BJP Rajya Sabha MP)

SOUNDBITE

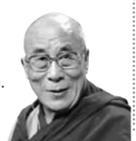
The parties to armed conflicts, including non-state actors, continue to flout the international humanitarian law and perpetrate egregious abuses of human rights.

UN Ambassador —Tanmaya Lal



Religion is like medicine and there is no single medicine that suits all. All religions preach the same things. I never said Buddhism is the best religion for inner peace.

Tibetan spiritual leader —The Dalai Lama



Our formal education system is not good enough for the growth of young minds. Such education cannot be a prerequisite for success.

Actor —Emraan Hashmi



In India, it is perfectly OK to be corrupt, or to be dishonest — that is nothing that brings you down, because we have seen it day in and day out.

Infosys co-founder —NR Narayana Murthy



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Action time now

Sir — This refers to the editorial, “Rahul's day dawns” (December 12). Congress president Rahul Gandhi must be congratulated for a job well done. The Congress, which had lost all hopes of revival both at the State and national level after suffering a massive defeat in the 2014 Lok Sabha poll, stormed back to power in three crucial States. The present wins in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan will certainly have definite ramifications for the Congress in the 2019 Lok Sabha election.

Kamal Nath is a sure bet for Madhya Pradesh. Not only does he have experience in hand, but is also a nine-time Lok Sabha member, who has been Union Minister for two terms. He is someone who will bring experience and sagacity to his job. After taking office, it should be action time for him as well as other Chief Ministers in Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh. There is a lot of work that needs to be done.

Devendra Khurana Bhopal

Sound governance Gandhi's next test

This refers to the editorial, “Generational conflict” (December 15). Congress president Rahul Gandhi was justified in taking his time to appoint the Chief Ministers of Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. It is a different matter altogether that Rahul Gandhi should have anticipated a Congress victory and, therefore, could have made up his mind even before the declaration of results. But politics is not as straightforward as it is expected to be because ambitions of the players keep vacillating from time to time. In Madhya Pradesh, Kamal Nath being the State Congress chief and a close lieutenant of the Gandhis, was the undisputed favourite.

Similarly, in Rajasthan, Ashok Gehlot, a staunch Gandhi loyalist who enjoyed the confidence of the party's first family, was largely seen to help the Congress when it was in Government. Sachin Pilot was never the first choice for the Congress though he commanded the trust of young Rajasthanis. By taking his own time, Rahul



Gandhi has exhibited eagerness to take all leaders into confidence. His keenness to build from the wins in the two crucial Hindi heartland States was evident. A sound administration in the two States can hold the party in good stead in 2019.

Ganapathi Bhat Akola

Strengthen IT network

Sir — This refers to the report, “Will submarine optic cable imperil coral reef?” (December 14). It must be said that the laying of undersea optical cable connecting the Andaman and Nicobar islands with Chennai for a distance of 2,246 km will in no way affect the marine life

and the telecom department must go on with the plan of laying the cable across the sea. Admittedly, coral reefs are rich in and around these islands and hundreds of varieties of fish species are commonly found in these areas. But considering the strategic position of the Andaman and Nicobar islands, secure, robust and affordable telecommunication facilities car-

rying a bandwidth of 100 gigabits per second have been planned for the islands by the Department of Telecommunications. So, the cable connection between the mainland and the islands must not be shelved at any cost citing environmental problems.

TK Nandanani Kochi

Short-term measure

Sir — Recently, former RBI governor Raghuram Rajan said that loan waivers can never be a solution to farm distress. Politicians in their eagerness to capture power announce freebies and farm loan waivers. Once they come to power, they start struggling to redeem their promise. The common man is mercilessly targeted by way of rise in direct and indirect taxes to meet the cost of loan waiver.

With other parties preparing to waive off the loan, the Modi-led BJP naturally has to fall in line with them for survival. Ultimately, the nation suffers. Posterity will blame previous Governments for their plight.

The future of the country is bleak if the lawmakers do not understand how it impedes a political party's ability to take a long-term view. Political interests are overriding the national interest. The nation has everything to pay for need but not for greed.

KV Seetharamaiah Hassan

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

Congo's struggle for democracy

The political game in the Democratic Republic of Congo is played for high stakes but it rarely if ever focusses on the welfare of citizens



GWYNNE DYER

Maybe the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is a bit more democratic than the mere Republic of Congo but it's a matter of (fairly small) degree. President Denis Sassou has ruled the Republic of Congo for 33 of the past 38 years, winning a couple of civil wars in the process and changing the Constitution when term limits got in the way of his staying in power. He's still there. President Joseph Kabila of the DRC, on the other hand, is actually leaving the presidency after a mere 17 years in power. He hung on for two years past the scheduled election in 2016, offering a series of increasingly absurd reasons for the delay but the election will actually be held on December 23 — and Kabila will not be a candidate. So two cheers for democracy in the DRC.

The Republic of Congo is the little Congo (population five million), with nothing much to offer to the world except oil. That gives it a certain fragile prosperity, although much of the oil money is stolen by Sassou and his associates. The DRC is the big Congo, with 85 million people scattered across a largely roadless country the size of western Europe. It should be rich: It has oil, cobalt, gold, diamonds and coltan (used in electronics). But the money is almost all stolen, and it is just about the poorest country in Africa (no 51 out of 52). When it got its independence from Belgium in 1960, the DRC was no poorer than other countries in the region (although the Belgians had completely neglected education, and only 17 Congolese had university degrees). What has condemned it to seemingly perpetual tyranny, violence and poverty is its uniquely awful style of politics. The first post-colonial leader, Patrice Lumumba, was overthrown within months of taking office, and murdered shortly afterwards. His successor, Mobutu Sese Seko, a former private soldier in the Belgian colonial Army, then ruled the country (and looted it) for 32 years. He was finally driven from power in 1997 by a combination of rebellions at home and invasions by African armies that came "to help."

The invaders helped themselves to a lot of the country's mineral wealth, and put into power Laurent Kabila, a former Marxist revolutionary and guerrilla leader, who had served as a Congolese front-man for the invasion. He was assassinated by his bodyguard in 2001 and his cronies and allies chose his son Joseph Kabila, then only 30 years old, to replace him. Kabila Jr, having initially been very reluctant to take the job (presumably because of the high fatality rate), eventually got into the spirit of the thing. He proceeded to loot the DRC for a further 17 years — *Bloomberg* reports that his wife, children and close relatives hold 120 mining permits, the main source of money from bribes — and was naturally most reluctant to leave office when constitutional term limits obliged him to step down.

But the pressure mounted inexorably on him, both from better-run African countries and from Western countries, including even Donald Trump's former UN Ambassador Nikki Haley. After two years of stalling during which sanctions were imposed on a number of the regime's senior members, Joseph Kabila agreed to hold elections this month. So is democracy coming to the Congo at last? Don't count on it. The regime's choice for a successor, Emmanuel Ramazani Shadary, is a close colleague of Kabila's with no independent support base of his own. So if elected, he would faithfully serve Kabila's interests. Indeed, Shadary could even serve as a place-holder until the following election, when it would be constitutionally permissible for Kabila to run for the presidency again (rather as Vladimir Putin put Dmitry Medvedev in the Russian presidency for four years before taking it back himself).

Of course, Shadary has to win the election first, but that may not be hard. Apart from having all the resources of the state at his disposal, Shadary faces a disunited opposition. The seven leading opposition parties, some of them simply the personal political vehicles for one man, tried to agree on a united front last month but the agreement broke down within a day and there are two competing coalitions of parties running against Kabila's nominee.

One is led by Felix Tshisekedi, a long-standing Opposition figure, the other by Martin Fayulu, a prominent member of parliament. There's not really much difference between them, and the split is mostly due to the fact that too big a coalition means that if you win, there are too many people seeking a share of the spoils of victory. Nobody imagines that corruption will end if Shadary is defeated. Since the opposition vote is being split in this way, Shadary will probably win — and Kabila could be back four years later. Or he could end up dead. Any of them could. The political game in the DRC is played for high stakes but it rarely if ever focusses on the welfare of the citizens.

(The writer is an independent journalist)

THE UNION GOVERNMENT LIED IN THE SUPREME COURT ABOUT PRESENTING THE CAG REPORT IN THE HOUSE AND IN THE PAC. WHERE IS IT?

—PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN MALLIKARJUN KHARGE

POINT COUNTERPOINT



KHARGE SHOULD FILE AN AFFIDAVIT OR REVIEW PETITION IN COURT, SAYING HE DID NOT RECEIVE THE REPORT AND THE COMMITTEE HAS NOT EXAMINED IT.

—BJP LEADER SUBRAMANIAN SWAMY

Takeaways for the big two

With the Congress regaining control and the BJP having a brush with trouble, there are lessons for all national parties. It's time to focus more on policies and less on hollow sloganeering



AMITABH SHUKLA

The Assembly election results of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh have not only set the template for the Lok Sabha election, which is expected to be announced in the first week of March next year, but has also clearly drawn the battle lines for what is expected to be one of the fiercest elections ever. For the Congress, the biggest takeaway from the polls is, undoubtedly, the emergence of Rahul Gandhi as an unassuming leader who has shed his past baggage of indifference, political immaturity and dynasty to come on his own. For the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the biggest setback has been the demolition of the myth and hype built around the invincibility of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and party chief Amit Shah.

Till these elections took place, the BJP had become one big electoral juggernaut, very convincingly demolishing one political opponent after the other. The routine rout of the Opposition in the elections had built an aura of invincibility around the Modi-Shah duo — the mass connect of Modi and the Chanakya-like strategy of Shah had become a part of political punditry and was also instilled as an ideal combination in some of the BJP-RSS workers.

On the contrary, repeated defeats had affected even the body language of the Congress leaders, who went into a defeatist mode, occasionally without putting up any fight, like in Goa. Rahul Gandhi and *pappu* had almost become synonymous, popularised as it was by WhatsApp groups of the BJP's IT cell. So much so that there was a time when even die-hard Congress workers started believing the falsehoods doing the rounds on how ineffective Rahul Gandhi was as a leader and how his stewardship was taking the party towards peril.

December 11, 2018, changed this political narrative for all time to come. Its developments have come barely three months before the announcement of the general election, triggering a political tsunami and throwing open all sorts of possibilities. All of a sudden, there is a spring in the steps of the Congress workers while in the BJP, an element of doubt has crept in.

This brings forth the most plausible question: Will the Modi magic work or not? Even though party spokespersons keep hammering the fact that the Prime Minister's personal integrity is intact and that issues for Assembly and Lok Sabha polls are entirely different, this is hardly convincing for both sceptics and supporters. They know it well that victory in the Assembly elections in these very States five years ago, in 2013, had set the ball rolling for the saffron party and it built on the momentum of the wave in May 2014.

Five years down the line, that pace is now with the Congress and it will expectedly follow it till the 2019 Lok Sabha poll. In fact, the Grand Old Party was building a thrust ever since it made crucial headway in the Gujarat Assembly polls in December 2017, where for the first time, Modi had to campaign really hard and Shah had to use all his electoral arithmetic to romp home. A resurgent Congress had given the BJP a run for its money in a State which for long had been considered a laboratory for Hindutva politics.

There was more to follow. Karnataka was

“ DECEMBER 11, 2018 CHANGED THE POLITICAL NARRATIVE FOR ALL TIME TO COME. BARELY THREE MONTHS BEFORE THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE GENERAL ELECTION, THE ASSEMBLY RESULTS HAVE TRIGGERED A POLITICAL TSUNAMI AND THROWN OPEN ALL SORTS OF POSSIBILITIES. ALL OF A SUDDEN THERE IS A SPRING IN THE STEPS OF THE CONGRESS WORKERS WHILE IN THE BJP, AN ELEMENT OF DOUBT HAS CREPT IN ”



widely billed to go the BJP way. This is what the spin doctors of the party had projected — the sulking Yeddyurappa was back with the BJP, moneybags were with the party managers, the Congress Government was facing anti-incumbency and what not. Everything was supposedly going for the BJP and against the Congress. But that was not to be. The BJP failed to get a majority on its own. “Congress-mukt Bharat was too arrogant a slogan,” said a BJP leader on condition of anonymity, adding that this was a classic case of unrealistic politics, bereft of grassroots reality. He hoped that this slogan would never be raised now, and even if it did, it would instantly become a matter of ridicule.

Similarly, the systematic targeting of the likes of Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi were in bad taste and the appropriation of other Congress stalwarts by extolling the virtues of the likes of Sardar Patel and Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose did not quite have the intended effect. “Leave historical figures alone for history books and academic discussions, not for electoral rhetoric and as poll issue,” summed up the leader.

In the run-up to the Lok Sabha poll, obviously, the BJP will try to turn it into some sort of a presidential election, pitching Modi *versus* Rahul, and asking people if they would vote for an untested, unwilling and timid leader or go for the qualities of “a time-tested, strong face with muscular politics.”

The BJP's second strategy would be to polarise the election with a strong pitch for building the Ram Mandir at Ayodhya. But given the fact that the

issue has already been milked to the hilt by the party for over the last quarter of a century and which yielded rich electoral dividends up to a point, this plank has reached a saturation level. The BJP can no longer hope for the same result and the law of diminishing returns will automatically apply. This is what happened in the three States.

So what's the way forward for the BJP? First, it has to abandon the Congress-mukt Bharat pitch. Second, it must draw a list of achievements of its major decisions — demonetisation and GST — and keep hammering about their long-term benefits repeatedly and see how much traction it gets. Third, now that it has been cleared by the Supreme Court in the Rafale jet deal, it should keep the Opposition in the loop for future acquisitions rather than being defensive about them. Fourth, it would have to stop pitchforking the Modi-Shah axis and democratise its intra-party discourse. “At present, party MPs are treated more like booth-level workers to whom directions are hurled and there is no process of consultation or listening involved,” a BJP MP told this writer after the poll results.

Last but not the least, it would have to stop polarisation of votes through hawkish leaders like Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. He will hardly attract any new votes as the Assembly elections of Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, where he campaigned extensively, have proved that there aren't many takers for the religion card. At the same time, it would damage the

body politic of India. Already, banners have come up in Lucknow extolling the hardliner Yogi as “Prime Minister material” and Modi has been painted as some sort of a liberal.

Similarly, what's the way forward for the Congress? Right now it is the default Opposition party in several States and is expecting to get the anti-incumbency votes from those who expected too much from the first majority Government of the BJP in decades. This complacency has to end. First, it has to come out with an aggressive and workable solution to the problems it has been highlighting. It should spell out what it would do to solve farm distress beyond loan waivers. Second, if traders and small enterprises are distressed, what is the solution to the woes? Third, offending slogans like “chowkidar chor hai” should be banned; it is similar to “Congress-mukt Bharat” and even worse.

It should articulate what its policies would be at the Centre and how different they would be from the ones followed by the BJP Government? It also has to spell out its plan for job creation and how it proposes to go about it.

The days of sloganeering are over. The youth had a lot of expectations in 2014 and will have similar expectations in 2019 as well. Hollow and emotive slogans will no longer yield electoral dividends. Both parties should come with policies, which are implementable with details of how they intend to proceed. That would be the key to gaining the trust of our electorate.

(The writer is Senior Editor, The Pioneer, Chandigarh)

A healthcare safety net for all

The new drug regimen for filariasis in India will be a key step in achieving ‘health for all.’ But more than the drug, people need to be educated about the spread, treatment and ways to mitigate the disease. Awareness calls for collective efforts



NS DHARMSHAKTU

Countries across the world celebrated December 12 as the Universal Health Coverage (UHC) day to mark the journey towards achieving ‘health for all.’ Over 40 years have passed since the target of universal health was set by the World Health Organisation (WHO) Assembly in 1977 to ensure affordable healthcare across the globe. This is an opportune moment to take stock of how we have fared so far.

There is no denying the fact that ‘health for all,’ which is a part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), can only be achieved through effective community engagement and universalisation of healthcare services. India, too, has

been steadily working towards this goal, and like many other nations, our journey towards universal health coverage is defined by the reach of our healthcare delivery system to the last mile of the population.

Since population coverage is fundamental to this journey, investing in health programmes that deliver treatment to families at their doorstep irrespective of their socio-economic status will play a key role in realising the ‘health for all’ dream. One such scheme is the Mass Drug Administration (MDA), which will soon be strengthened with the introduction of new triple-drug therapy that will help the elimination of lymphatic filariasis.

A disease that affects the marginalised sections of society, filariasis is a mosquito-borne infectious disease that has become one of the major public health challenges for the country today. A known cause of permanent disability, it damages the lymphatic system, and if left untreated, it incapacitates individuals during the peak of their productive

years. Reports from the National Vector-Borne Disease Control Programme indicate that around 8.77 lakh cases of lymphedema (swollen limbs) and 3.87 lakh cases of hydrocele (swollen scrotal sac) were caused due to filariasis in 256 endemic districts across India. It also estimated that around 20 million children and adolescents suffer from Acute Adenolymphangitis that on an average lasts for about four to seven days in each episode. People with lymphedema need disability impairment services and they must be covered under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016.

The Government of India launched the MDA programme in 2004 with a combination of two drugs — diethylcarbamazine citrate (DEC) and albendazole. While administration of the drug is free of cost, preventive treatment has helped the programme reduce infection levels in 107 out of 256 districts. A major challenge is low compliance to the treatment by communities.

A large section of society still

does not know about filariasis and the importance of consuming MDA medicines annually. When more than 65 per cent of the population fails to comply with MDA treatment, it creates a potential reservoir of infection for parasites to feed on, thus reducing the probability of the programme's success. As a result, even today, about 377 million people in India remain at the risk of contracting filariasis. The need of the hour, therefore, is to educate people about how filaria spreads, its consequences, vector-control measures and promote a sense of ownership of elimination efforts in the community.

Tanzania and Togo are successful examples of developing countries that combined community engagement and effective use of MDA treatment to eliminate filariasis. Recently, Kenya, Samoa and American Samoa rolled out the new Triple Drug Treatment (IDA). India will be the first country in South East Asia to introduce the programme. The third new drug,

Ivermectin, will prove to be a game-changer for the elimination of filariasis. It paralyzes not just the microfilariae but also the adult worm, making IDA a faster means to break filariasis transmission. The WHO has been playing an important role in establishing link with external partners. It is also helping in expanding the supply of medicines and building capacity in endemic countries.

Apart from this, innovative strategies that include a vector-control component in smart cities missions, mandatory web-based reporting of vector-borne disease cases, ensuring proper sanitation and sewage facilities, clean water supply and regulated construction sites, can help control spread of vector-borne diseases like filariasis.

Fostering collaborations with all relevant stakeholders — between local civil society organisations and departments, especially at district, block and village levels — can contribute to better eliminate lymphatic filariasis. Local health com-

mittees and governance structures can be effective mechanisms to ensure community participation — people are more likely to use and respond positively to health services when they are involved in decisions related to delivery of public health services.

Progressive strategies like these and policies such as the Ayushman Bharat National Health Protection scheme, which aims to holistically address health at the primary, secondary and tertiary level, can have far-reaching impact in eliminating vector-borne diseases. These efforts, however, should not just be a one-point destination but a long-term investment and commitment towards shaping communities as agents of change. It is the responsibility of each one of us to encourage better health-seeking behaviour and build an inclusive and sustainable pathway to forge a truly strong and healthy India.

(The writer is Principal Advisor, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare on public health. The views expressed are personal)



FOREIGNEYE



TRUMP INTERFERES IN CRIMINAL INVESTIGATIONS

United States President Donald Trump is right to try to negotiate a trade settlement with China, but he should leave Meng Wanzhou out of it. Instead, he should demand that the Canadian prisoners be released and that a close US ally not be punished for respecting the rule of law. (The Independent editorial)

Rules for in-flight, maritime mobile services notified



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

People will soon be able to make calls and access internet through their phones during air travel and ship voyage within Indian territory as the Government has notified rules for providing such services.

Indian and foreign airlines and shipping companies operating in the country can provide in-flight and maritime voice and data services in partnership with a valid Indian telecom licence holder.

"These rules may be called the Flight and Maritime Connectivity Rules, 2018. They shall come into force on the

date of their publication in the Official Gazette," the notification dated December 14 said.

The in-flight and maritime connectivity (IFMC) can be provided using telecom networks on ground as well as using satellites.

The services can be provided by a valid telecom licence holder in India through domestic and foreign satellites having permission of the Department of Space, it said.

"In case of using satellite system for providing IFMC, the telegraph message shall be passed through the satellite gateway earth station located within India...And such satel-

lite gateway earth stations shall be interconnected with the NLD (national long distance) and the sector has moved out of bottom of sales cycle. Since building within the deadline is mandatory under the real estate law, completion rate of housing projects has improved, too," it said in a year-round up for the housing market.

On new supply, the realty portal said that only 1.9 lakh new units were launched in 2018, down 22 per cent from the previous year.

The developers exercised caution in launching new projects as they have to strictly follow deadlines under the provisions of the new real estate law RERA. Liquidity crunch and unsold stocks also restrict-

Housing sales up by 25% in 2018; supply 22% down in 9 cities

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Housing sales are estimated to have increased by 25 per cent this year at 3.1 lakh units in nine major cities of the country, driven by improved demand especially for affordable homes, according to PropTiger.Com.

The nine cities tracked by News Corp-backed PropTiger are — Mumbai, Pune, Noida, Gurgaon, Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad, Kolkata and Ahmedabad.

Last year, housing sales were hit due to lingering adverse impact of note ban, the new realty law RERA that came into effect from May 2017 and the GST implementation.

"The downside in home sale numbers has been arrested and the sector has moved out of bottom of sales cycle. Since building within the deadline is mandatory under the real estate law, completion rate of housing projects has improved, too," it said in a year-round up for the housing market.

On new supply, the realty portal said that only 1.9 lakh new units were launched in 2018, down 22 per cent from the previous year.

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ed new supply.

As per data, the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR) alone will sell more than 1 lakh units in 2018, 34 per cent higher than the previous year. Pune is also reporting an increase of 47 per cent in sales in 2018 over the previous year.

Both the cities benefited from a proactive real estate regulator, it added.

Southern cities also recorded increase in sales volume compared to previous year. In north, Noida has shown improvement in sales on the back of price cut undertaken by most developers.

"Combination of drop in new launches and improvement in sales has brought down inventory overhang to the lowest in the past five years. Currently, we have only 29 months of unsold inventory at aggregate level of the nine cities.

"There will be over 7.5 lakh apartment and villa properties available for sale with developers in the top 9 cities as on December 2018. Unsold inventory decreased by 14 per cent in 2018 as compared to 2017," PropTiger said.

The company noted that the Indian real estate sector has undergone a massive transformation in the past two years on the policy front. 2018 has been the year of implementation and adaptation by the stakeholders of these policy changes.

Nasscom partners IIT-Madras for training workforce in digital skills

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Industry body Nasscom has collaborated with the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras for its FutureSkills Platform that is targeted at re-skilling/upskilling four million people on digital skills.

Under its FutureSkills Platform, Nasscom aims to re-skill/upskill four million people from the IT-ITes industry, students entering the workforce and employees of other industries/government on digital skills.

"The partnership (with IIT-Madras) will facilitate the building of an able workforce to support the industry and other stakeholders. This will ensure that there is plenty of trained manpower for the jobs being created in the evolving ecosystem," Nasscom said in a statement.

The partnership will be directly with the Sector Skills Council (SSC) which is the education and skill development initiative of Nasscom.

The SSC and IIT Madras will work towards building a skills academy and establish a program with extensive courses and training programmes to facilitate skill building in the institution, the statement said.

This partnership will help Nasscom build a future-ready workforce, ready to work with emerging technologies and cutting-edge skills in IT and contribute meaningfully to the tech sector, he added.

Business Corner

FINANCIAL HELP WORTH ₹53 LAKH TO 971 STUDENTS

Financial assistance of ₹53 lakh was handed over to 971 students to help them pursue their college education at



Vellore on Saturday. The financial assistance has been extended to them by Universal Higher Education Trust. The Trust has been extending financial assistance to poor young men and women since 2012 to help students who had cannot afford college education due to the poor economic background of their families.

KVS CELEBRATES FOUNDATION DAY



Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan on Saturday celebrated its Foundation Day at Dr. Ambedkar International Centre in New Delhi. Secretary (School Education & Literacy), MHRD, Rina Ray graced the occasion as Chief Guest. In recognition to the meritorious services of selected Teachers and other Staff from the Kendriya Vidyalayas all over, 'National Incentive Awards' for the year 2018 and 'Innovation & Experimentation Awards' were given away on the occasion.

POLICE CHAMPIONSHIP-2018 ORGANISED BY CISF, CONCLUDES



A grand function was organised by CISF on the occasion of Closing Ceremony of 67th All India Police Athletics Championship-2018 held from 10th to 14th December, 2018 at Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium, New Delhi. Shri Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore, Minister of State (I/C) Youth Affairs and Sports graced the occasion as Chief Guest. Rajesh Ranjan, DG, CISF, DsG of States and CPOs, former DsG of CISF & other CAPFs, Arvind Kumar, Special Director, IB, Alok Kumar Pateria, ADG, CISF, Sudhir Kumar, IG (NCR) and other senior officers of CISF & AIPSCB were present on the occasion.

Anti-dumping duty on Chinese chemical for 5 years

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The revenue department has imposed anti-dumping duty for five years on a Chinese chemical used in making detergents to guard domestic players from cheap imports from the neighbouring country.

The levy on 'Zeolite 4A' [Detergent grade] has been imposed on recommendations of Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR) after conducting a probe in this regard.

The duty in the range of \$163.90-207.72 per tonne of the chemical will remain in force for five years (unless revoked, superseded or amended earlier), said the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) in a notification.

DGTR, the investigation arm of the commerce ministry, had conducted the probe on complaint of Gujarat Credo Mineral Industries and Chemicals India which alleged injury to the domestic industry on account of the cheap import from China.

GST led to 'household savings' as tax rates came down

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

An average Indian household is saving up to ₹320 every month on purchase of commonly used goods including cereals, edible oil and cosmetics post GST implementation, a finance ministry source said citing an analysis of consumer expenditure data.

The Government rolled out the Goods and Services Tax (GST) on July 1, 2017, amalgamating 17 different central and state taxes including excise duty and sales tax or VAT.

The GST not just made India one market by levying uniform tax rates on goods and services, it also did away with tax-on-tax prevalent in the previous system.

Also, GST rates have been lowered on an array of commonly used goods and services which resulted in monthly savings for consumers, the source said.

An analysis of household expenditure pre and post GST rollout shows tax rates have come down on as many as 83 items including on food and beverages as well as daily use goods like hair oil, toothpaste, soap, washing powder and footwear.

If a household spends ₹8,400 a month post GST on 10 goods — cereals, edible oil, sugar, chocolates, namkeen and sweets, cosmetics and toiletries, washing powder, tiles, furniture and coir products and other household products — its monthly savings would come to ₹320, the source said referring to the expenditure analysis.

On a monthly spending of ₹8,400 on these regular use items, the tax paid under GST is ₹510. This compares to ₹830 tax charged previously, resulting in a saving of ₹320.

In the old system, the central Government would levy excise duty when a good is produced in a factory and the State Governments would charge VAT on top of this. This meant that consumer not just paid VAT on the basic price of the good but also on the excise duty charged by the centre.

With the introduction of the new indirect tax, that pattern has been eliminated. The GST is levied at the consumption end or when the final consumer buys the product or service.

The source said an array of goods including milk powder,

curd, buttermilk, spices, wheat, rice, nutrition drinks like Horlicks/Bournvita, pasta, idli dosa batter and mineral water are taxed at lesser rate under the GST than previously.

Household goods of daily use like curry paste, tooth powder and paste, hair oil, soap, cosmetics and perfumes, detergents, butter bans, sanitary ware and footwear too attract lesser tax now.

The source said that wheat and rice have been exempt from tax under the GST as against 2.50-2.75 per cent tax incidence previously. Similarly, tax on milk powder is down to 5 per cent from previous 6 per cent.

Similarly, sugar confectionary is taxed at 18 per cent post GST, as against 21 per cent in the earlier indirect tax regime.

The tax rate on sugar and edible oil has come down to 5 per cent under the new tax system, from 6 per cent earlier. Also namkeens and sweets are now taxed at 5 per cent, as against 12 per cent/7 per cent earlier.

Also tax rate on washing powder and tiles has come down to 18 per cent from 28 per cent earlier.

Goyal's 'turnaround' man Kardassis leaves Jet Airways

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Nikos Kardassis, the former CEO of Jet Airways, who made a come back to the carrier in an advisory role and was tasked to turnaround the cash-strapped airline, has once again parted ways with it, a source said.

The Greek-American aviation veteran in his third come back to the Nareesh Goyal-controlled Jet Airways in May this year was roped-in to revive the fortunes of the full service carrier following its dismal financial performance since January this year.

"Kardassis, whom Goyal roped-in to help him in the airline's turnaround plan, had gone on leave to his native place in November but after that he did not return," said a source privy to the development.

The former chief executive parted ways with the airline after Goyal initiated discussions with his investment partner Etihad Airways for further stake sale to garner funds, said another source.

Jet Airways did not

respond to queries on the issue.

Amid persisting financial turbulence, the airline has been implementing a turnaround plan, which includes both cost saving and revenue enhancement.

With three back-to-back quarterly losses and a net debt of ₹8,052 crore as on September 30, the airline is also working on ways to raise funds and reduce costs.

The UAE national carrier Etihad Airways holds 24 per cent stake in Jet Airways, which it acquired in 2013.

"Kardassis had in 2013 also quit the airline as its chief executive officer as he was largely kept out of discussions on the deal with Etihad at that time," said the source close to the development.

Goyal had brought Kardassis on board to help him and the senior management on cost-saving and productivity improvements, in the aftermath of ₹636.45 crore loss in FY 18, with March quarter loss alone of a massive ₹1,036 crore.

369 infra projects show cost overrun of over ₹3.58L crore

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

As many as 369 infrastructure projects, each worth ₹150 crore or above, have shown cost overruns to the tune of over ₹3.58 lakh crore owing to delays and other reasons, a report said.

The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation monitors infrastructure projects worth ₹150 crore and above.

"Total original cost of implementation of the 1420 projects was ₹18,05,667.72 crore and their anticipated completion cost is likely to be ₹21,63,672.09 crore, which reflects overall cost overruns of ₹3,58,004.37 crore (19.83% of original cost)," the ministry's latest report for September 2018 said.

Of these 1,420 projects, 369 reported cost overruns and 366 time escalation.

According to the report, the expenditure incurred on these projects till September 2018 is ₹7,83,503 crore, which is 36.21 per cent of the anticipated cost of the projects.



However, it said the number of delayed projects decreases to 300 if delay is calculated on the basis of latest schedule of completion.

For 651 projects, neither the year of commissioning nor the tentative gestation period has been reported. Out of 366 delayed projects, 100 have overall delay in the range of 1 to 12 months, 69 have 13 to 24 months, 91 projects reflect delay of 25 to 60 months and 106 projects show 61 months and above delay.

It also said the average time overrun in these 366 delayed projects is 45.95

months. The brief reasons for time overruns as reported by various project implementing agencies are delays in land acquisition, forest clearance and supply of equipment.

Besides, there are other reasons like fund constraints, geological surprises, geo-mining conditions, slow progress in civil works, shortage of labour, inadequate mobilisation by the contractor, Maoist problems, court cases, contractual issues, ROU/ROW (right of use/right of way) problems, law and order situation, among others.

Projects worth ₹44.6k cr underway for rail connectivity to ports

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

As many as 52 projects for rail connectivity to ports are underway entailing an investment of ₹44,605 crore, an official said Sunday.

These projects are being undertaken by the Indian Port Rail Corporation Ltd (IPRCL) and the Ministry of Railways.

IPRCL has taken up 32 projects worth ₹18,253 crore across nine major ports, of which eight projects worth ₹175 crore have been completed, a Shipping Ministry official said.

The official said in addition, 23 rail connectivity projects worth ₹24,877 crore identified under Sagarmala have been taken up by the Ministry of Railways, out of which seven projects entailing ₹2,491 crore investment have been completed.

Sagarmala is a port-led development programme of the country which seeks to reduce logistics cost for both overseas and domestic trade.

Govt to launch broadband readiness index of States: Sundararajan

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Government is planning to launch broadband services readiness index of states based on parameters like infrastructure, approval processes and utilisation of high speed Internet, a top telecom department official said Sunday.

"According to a study by ICRIER (a research firm), \$100 billion investment will have seven-fold multiplier effect on GDP. There is a need of a national mission to make this happen. We are going to launch broadband readiness index for states which will be vital for investments," Telecom Secretary Aruna Sundararajan told.

She said the Ministry of Electronics and IT has also shown interest in states readiness index and want to expand it further.

The telecom ministry will hold first workshop on implementation of the National Digital Communications Policy (NDCP) which envisages \$100 billion investment in telecom sector by 2022, broadband connectivity at 50 megabit per second speed to every citizen, telecom connectivity at every corner of India and creating 40 lakh jobs.

"This is first preparatory national workshop on implementation of NDPC in which 25 states have confirmed to participate. Here we will launch National

Broadband Mission to achieve objective of broadband for all," Sundararajan said.

Industry leaders and associations will discuss at the NDPC workshop issues they are facing in states especially in rolling out telecom infrastructure which in turn impact investments.

"We want to ensure that 5G is not limited to urban areas. It should reach rural areas. For this, we have to work with states to ensure that there is 100 per cent penetration of optical fibre cables. Without massive OFC penetration, 5G services will not expand. States have to provide smooth right of way permissions," Sundararajan said.

5G networks are said to provide broadband speed of 1 Gbps. Theoretically, a high definition 2-hour video can be downloaded in 5 seconds at this speed.

The telecom secretary said there is a need to increase mobile tower base by three times and OFC rollout by four-folds to achieve 'broadband for all' target under the National Broadband Mission.

"We have to roll out wifi services in rural and urban areas. To deliver benefit of NDPC to people and create jobs, states have to come forward. We will do comparative evaluation of all states and highlight best policies for other states to adopt it," Sundararajan said.

The telecom ministry has floated tender to roll out 10 lakh wifi hotspot across

all 2.5 lakh village panchayats.

At present, 1.21 lakh panchayats are ready with broadband services infrastructure. The DoT has awarded task to roll out wifi services in 62,000 panchayats to Telecommunications Consultants India Limited (TCIL) and is working with ITI for setting up wifi hotspots in other panchayats.

"Broadband services have been started in all panchayats covered under Phase 1. Now we are looking at utilisation of broadband where states need to come forward and identify institutions like school, police stations etc that are to be connected with wifi," Sundararajan said.

She said states have to ensure that there is enough electronic equipment available at their institutions to start using BharatNet broadband network for various services like tele-medicine, e-health, e-education etc.

"DoT is working to create state-of-the-art telecom infrastructure in next four years and we want states to draw a road map to start using it. At the workshop, we will work on yearly targets that States need to achieve," Sundararajan said.

She said the telecom ministry will discuss with states usage of broadband for development at aspirational districts, enhancing connectivity in Naxal-affected areas, north eastern states and islands.

END OF POLITICAL CRISIS IN SRI LANKA Victory for democracy, says Ranil

PTI ■ COLOMBO

Ranil Wickremesinghe on Sunday staged a triumphant comeback as Sri Lankan Prime Minister to end the unprecedented political turmoil in the country, 51 days after he was sacked by his bete noire and President Maithripala Sirisena, who also dissolved Parliament, controversial decisions which were nullified by the Supreme Court.



Sri Lanka's reinstated Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe surrounded by his loyal lawmakers and supporters speaks after assuming duties in Colombo, Sri Lanka on Sunday

Wickremesinghe, the 69-year-old United National Party leader, was administered the oath of office by President Sirisena, who had sacked him on October 26 and installed former rival and ex-strongman Mahinda Rajapaksa in his place. The UNP leader had refused to step down asserting that his sacking was illegal.

A sheepish Sirisena, who had ruled out reappointing Wickremesinghe as prime minister, was smiling with Wickremesinghe as he handed him the letter of appointment.

discussions will take place Sunday to select the Cabinet. The Cabinet is expected to be limited to 30 and will include a few Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) members who have offered support to Wickremesinghe.

Sri Lankan media reported. Earlier, Wickremesinghe's party said it was ready to work with President Sirisena, who was "misled by some groups" against the unity government.

His re-appointment comes a day after Rajapaksa resigned Saturday, after two crucial Supreme Court decisions made his efforts to cling to premiership untenable.

Wickremesinghe's supporters took to streets to celebrate after he took oath at the Presidential Secretariat for the record fifth time.

It is expected a new Cabinet will be formed by Monday and a vote on account will be passed to provide for the required provisions until a budget for 2019 is formulated,

UNP deputy leader Sajith Premadasa said that he was not surprised that the President had agreed to appoint Wickremesinghe as Prime Minister again despite taking a firm position earlier that he will not appoint the UNP leader.

"This showed the true character of the President," he was quoted as saying by the Colombo Gazette.

Premadasa said that the President was "misled by some groups who were against the unity Government" and this resulted in the President removing Wickremesinghe.

Premadasa said, "The lessons from the incident must be used to strengthen the foundation of democracy and promote justice and fairness."

Sirisena and Rajapaksa suffered reversal setbacks since October 26, forcing the president to reinstate Wickremesinghe.

Rajapaksa, 73, had sought to secure a majority in the 225-member Parliament but failed. Sirisena then dissolved Parliament and called snap elections on January 5.

However, the Supreme Court overturned his decision and halted the preparations for snap polls.

The Supreme Court on Thursday unanimously declared that the dissolution of Parliament by Sirisena was "illegal."

The apex court on Friday also refused to stay a court order restraining Rajapaksa

from holding the office of Prime Minister until it fully heard the case next month.

Rajapaksa signed his resignation letter during a multi-religious service at his home that was attended by several lawmakers of United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA), Buddhist and other religious leaders. After signing the resignation letter, Rajapaksa said that following the February 10 local government election, the aim of his party is to have a general election.

However, he said that he has no intention of remaining as Prime Minister without a general election being held, and in order to not hamper the President in any way, he resigned from the position of Prime Minister and made way for the President to form a new Government.

Rajapaksa said that since a general election can no longer be held, the UPFA cannot implement any of the measures they had planned to take "to prevent the country from becoming another Greece."

Most of the countries had not recognised Rajapaksa's government.

The global credit rating agencies — the Fitch, the Standard & Poor's and the Moody's — had also downgraded Sri Lanka's rating owing to the current political crisis.

UK SPAT Theresa May, Tony Blair trade Brexit snipes



AP ■ LONDON

The comments come amid heated discussions on whether another Brexit vote is appropriate

British Prime Minister Theresa May and former Prime Minister Tony Blair have exchanged sniping attacks as Britain's divorce from the European Union keeps getting uglier.

May has accused Blair of "undermining" her efforts to deliver Brexit by calling for a second referendum on whether or not Britain should leave the bloc. May, of the Conservative Party, says his comments were "an insult to the office he once held."

Blair shot back, declaring that May had been "irrespon-

The comments come amid heated discussions on whether another Brexit vote is appropriate

able" for trying to "steamroll" lawmakers into accepting her deal or face the prospects of no deal at all.

The former Labour Party leader says Sunday he had a right to comment on "the most important decision our country has taken since the end of World War II."

The comments come amid heated discussions on whether another Brexit vote is appropriate.

UN calls for 'credible' probe into Jamal Khashoggi murder

AFP ■ DOHA

UN chief Antonio Guterres called on Sunday for a "credible" probe into journalist Jamal Khashoggi's murder in Saudi Arabia's consulate in Istanbul.



ed to the murder of the journalist, a critic of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

Earlier this month, the minister said Turkey was in talks over a possible United Nations investigation into the killing which has provoked global outrage.

According to Turkey, a 15-member Saudi team was sent to Istanbul to kill Khashoggi, a palace insider turned critic of the regime.

Riyadh has since detained 21 people over the murder. Despite speculation that the powerful crown prince ordered the hit, the kingdom has strongly denied he was involved.

The murder has damaged Riyadh's international reputation, and Western countries including the United States, France and Canada have placed sanctions on nearly 20 Saudi nationals.

Netanyahu warns Hamas after deadly West Bank attacks

AFP ■ JERUSALEM

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Sunday he had issued a warning to Hamas after recent deadly attacks in the occupied West Bank, including two shootings claimed by the Islamist movement.

Netanyahu referred to a controversial Gaza ceasefire in November that ended the worst escalation between Israel and Hamas since a 2014 war.

"I conveyed a clear message to Hamas — we won't accept a situation of a truce in Gaza and terror in Judea and Samaria," Netanyahu told a cabinet meeting, using the biblical name for the West Bank, as is Israel's official policy.

"We will exact a high price over them," he said of the attacks.

Hamas runs the Gaza Strip but also has a presence in the West Bank. Netanyahu's comments came after two soldiers were shot dead at a central West Bank bus station near a settlement on Thursday.

On the same day, a baby prematurely delivered after his mother was shot and wounded in a separate attack nearby on December 9 also died.

Hamas claimed responsibility for the December 9 shooting and another in the West Bank on October 7 that killed two Israelis.

The two Palestinians behind those attacks were shot dead by Israeli forces during arrest raids last week, Israeli officials said.

Israel's security forces say they have also arrested at least 37 Hamas operatives in connection with recent violence.

Almost every part of Trump's life is under investigation

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Investigations now entangle Donald Trump's White House, campaign, transition, inauguration, charity and business.

For Trump, the political, the personal and the deeply personal are all under examination.

Less than two years into Trump's presidency, his business associates, political advisers and family members are being probed, along with the practices of his late father.

On Friday, Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke became the fourth Cabinet member to leave under an ethical cloud, having sparked 17 investigations into his actions on the job, by one watchdog's count.

All of this with the first special counsel investigation against a president in 20 years



hanging over Trump's head, spinning out charges and strong-arming guilty pleas from underlings while keeping in suspense whether the president — "Individual 1" in prosecutor Robert Mueller's coded legalese — will end up accused of criminal behavior himself.

The scope of the scrutiny has shaped Trump's presidency, proving a steady distraction from his governing agenda. So far, much of it has been launched by federal prosecutors

and government watchdogs that eschew partisanship.

The intensity is certain to increase next year when Democrats assume control of the House and the subpoena power that comes with it.

Although Trump dismisses the investigations as politically motivated "witch hunts," his high-octane Twitter account frequently betrays just how consumed he is by the scrutiny. He's also said to watch hours of television coverage on milestone days in the investigations.

Almost midway through his term, Trump is struggling to deliver on his central campaign promises. He may end the year without a Republican-led Congress giving him the USD 5 billion he wants for a border wall. And he's reviewed few legislative priorities for 2019.

GLOBE TROTTER

41 PEOPLE HURT IN JAPAN RESTAURANT EXPLOSION

Tokyo: Japanese police say more than 40 people have been injured in an explosion at a restaurant in northern Japan. The explosion occurred in Sapporo, the capital city of Japan's northern main island of Hokkaido.

CAR BOMB KILLS 8 IN SYRIA'S AFRIN: MONITOR

Beirut: A car bomb killed at least eight people including four civilians near a pro-Turkey rebel post in the northern Syrian city of Afrin on Sunday, a British-based war monitor said.

Nobel laureate urges Yazidi protection until ISIS leaders tried

Doha: Nobel laureate and former jihadist captive Nadia Murad called for the protection of women belonging to her Yazidi minority until Islamic State leaders are tried for crimes against the community.

"All the victims need a safe haven until Daesh is brought to the international courts," the 25-year-old Iraqi said at an international conference in Doha, using an Arabic acronym for the jihadist group. AFP

Georgia's first female President sworn in

AFP ■ TELAVI (GEORGIA)

Georgia on Sunday swore in its first female president, Salome Zurbishvili as opposition parties continue to denounce her election as fraudulent and demand snap parliamentary polls.

The inauguration paved the way for a new constitution to come into force, transforming the country into a parliamentary republic with a largely ceremonial president.

Yellow vest protesters still block French traffic circles

AP ■ PARIS

Yellow vest protesters occupied dozens of traffic roundabouts across France on Sunday even as their movement for economic justice appeared to be losing momentum on the fifth straight weekend of protests.

The road blockades remained despite a call by Interior Minister Christophe Castaner to free the roundabouts from the traffic chaos created by the protests. Eight people have died in incidents tied to the yellow vest movement, mostly from traffic accidents linked to roads blocked by protesters.

The demonstrators are demanding more measures to help France's workers and retirees and want top officials in President Emmanuel Macron's centrist government to resign, including Macron himself.

Despite the cold weather, protesters occupying a roundabout near the southern city of Orange close to a major highway pledged to keep holding more demonstrations, including blocking fuel depots.

"Mr. Castaner, if you want us to clear roundabouts, you will need to offer your resignation. We don't need bandits of your kind," a protester identified as Nicolas told the BFM TV channel.

Some yellow vest protesters — whose movement takes its name from the safety garb that all French motorists must carry — set up a small fire with wooden planks and held a barbecue at a roundabout near the city of Reims in the Champagne region. Some of them wore Santa hats and deployed a banner that read

"Revolution 2018." On Saturday, yellow vest demonstrators took to the streets in cities across France, including in Paris, but in far fewer numbers than on previous weekends: 69,000 compared to 125,000 a week before. Paris police had to fire tear gas and water cannon across the Champs-Elysees and some protesters scuffled with police.

In an effort to defuse France's social crisis, Macron has announced a series of measures aimed at improving people's spending power.

Nations at climate talks back universal emissions rules

AP ■ KATOWICE

Nearly 200 countries at the UN climate talks have agreed upon universal, transparent rules on how nations can cut greenhouse gas emissions and curb global warming, putting the principles of the 2015 Paris climate accord into action.

"We will all have to give in order to gain," he said. "We will all have to be courageous to look into the future and make yet another step for the sake of humanity."

The talks in Poland took place against a backdrop of growing concern among scientists that global warming on Earth is proceeding faster than governments are responding to it. Last month, a study found that global warming will worsen disasters such as the deadly California wildfires and the powerful hurricanes that have hit the United States this year.

Alarmed by efforts to include this in the final text of the meeting, the oil-exporting nations of the U.S., Russia, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait blocked an endorsement of the IPCC report mid-way through this month's talks in the Polish city of Katowice. That prompted uproar from vulnerable countries like small island nations and environmental groups.

The final text at the U.N. talks omits a previous reference to specific reductions in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, and merely welcomes the "timely completion" of the IPCC report, not its conclusions.



Economists believe that an international trading system could be an effective way to drive down greenhouse gas emissions and raise large amounts of money for measures to curb global warming. But Brazil wanted to keep the piles of carbon credits it had amassed under an old system that developed countries say

wasn't credible or transparent. Among those that pushed back hardest was the United States, despite President Donald Trump's decision to pull out of the Paris climate accord and his promotion of coal as a source of energy.

"Overall, the U.S. role here has been somewhat schizophrenic — pushing coal and

dissenting science on the one hand, but also working hard in the room for strong transparency rules," said Elliot Diringery of the Center for Climate and Energy Solutions, a Washington think tank.

When it came to closing potential loopholes that could allow countries to dodge their commitments to cut emissions, "the U.S. pushed harder than nearly anyone else for transparency rules that put all countries under the same system, and it's largely succeeded."

"Transparency is vital to U.S. interests," added Nathaniel Keohane, a climate policy expert at the Environmental Defense Fund. He noted that breakthrough in the 2015 Paris talks happened only after the U.S. and China agreed on a common framework for transparency.

to the Paris vision of a common transparency framework for all countries that also provides flexibility for those that need it," said Keohane, calling the agreement "a vital step forward in realizing the promise of the Paris accord."

Among the key achievements in Katowice was an agreement on how countries should report their greenhouse gas emissions and the efforts they're taking to reduce them. Poor countries also secured assurances on getting greater predictability about financial support to help them cut emissions, adapt to inevitable changes such as sea level rises and pay for damages that have already happened.

"The majority of the rulebook for the Paris Agreement has been created, which is something to be thankful for," said Mohamed Adow, a climate policy expert at Christian Aid. "But the fact countries had to be dragged kicking and

screaming to the finish line shows that some nations have not woken up to the urgent call of the IPCC report" on the dire consequences of global warming.

In the end, a decision on the mechanics of an emissions trading system was postponed to next year's meeting. Countries also agreed to consider the issue of raising ambitions at a U.N. summit in New York next September.

Canada's Environment Minister Catherine McKenna suggested there was no alternative to such meetings if countries want to tackle global problems, especially as multilateral diplomacy is under pressure from nationalism.

"The world has changed, the political landscape has changed," she told The Associated Press. "Still you're seeing here that we're able to make progress. We're able to discuss the issues. We're able to come to solutions."

Trend Slazer

Strike a balance in life: Malaika

Actress MALAIKA ARORA is one of the fittest celebrities in Bollywood and is currently in the news more for her relationship with actor ARJUN KAPOOR, but she says that it comes with the territory. She feels one needs to strike the right balance and say "no" when required. Asked about how she handles the lows in her life, Malaika said, "At the risk of sounding cliched, my friends, family and yoga really keep me going." She comes across as someone who is very calm and balanced deep down, and explaining that, she said, "Like I said earlier, it's all a part and parcel of the business. You have to accept that it is a part of the profession you're in. You must learn to strike a balance."



'When inspiration comes in and I know that my boys could contribute in the best of their capacity to a song, then I'll definitely want to work with them. At the moment, they are still in school and I want them to focus on learning music and building their personalities and balancing that between studies and sports.'

—Shaun

Actress SANYA MALHOTRA is in no hurry to reach "anywhere or become anyone," and says she is focusing on collaborating with "nice people" for good work. Sanya entered the industry with *Dangal*, and followed it up with *Pataakha* and entertainer *Badhaai Ho*. "I'm literally living my dream. As a kid, I used to do it in front of the mirror, when I do it in front of the camera I feel really unbelievable. I just want to enjoy this period," Sanya said. She will be seen in *Photograph* next.



Emily is ready for Mary Poppins 2

Actress EMILY BLUNT says she is ready for a sequel to *Mary Poppins Returns*. Blunt expressed her wish to enter the universe again. When pointed out that most superhero movies have sequels, asking if she would like to play Poppins again, Blunt said, "Yes. I want to be her again. I like being her." Blunt described Poppins as "completely bizarre and unknowable." The actress added that she hasn't seen the original 1964 classic and she didn't want to revisit it before filming *Mary Poppins Returns*.



DISRUPTOR OF RELIGIOSITY

For ANIL CHAWLA, directing a *Ramayana* in Urdu is a representation of what India is all about, discovers SAMI SATTAR

In the divisive times that we live in, when Urdu — a language that was born in the country — is considered the exclusive preserve of Muslims, it is only fitting that Jashn-e-Rekhta, the biggest festival in the world celebrating its multi-faceted nature is organised by Sanjiv Saraf, a Hindu. And if that is not enough to cock a snook at all those who abhor the idea of an inclusive India and believe that Maryada Purshottam Rama belongs only to the Hindus, the organisers staged *Ram Kahani Urdu Wali* over the weekend. As the name suggests, the epic *Ramayana* was staged in Urdu.

Said director Anil Chawla, who also plays the role of Laxman, "When Rama did not create the divisions, who are we to do so? It is this feeling and tradition of communal amity that we are observing and trying to erase the difference between Hindus and Muslims. This is ultimately the message that there is no reason to fight. We should live together. Both *mandir* and *masjid* can co-exist."

While Chawla discussed the more philosophical aspect of the performance, in the green room make-up artist Shamim Ahmed was engaged with tackling more of the practical — how to make sure that the get-up of Rama and Ravana befit their stature and role. Meanwhile, Hanuman was putting forth his arguments with Ravana while standing next to a table — delivered in chaste Urdu.

The organisers of this Ram Lila are from the Bannu region of southern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. After the Partition, Bannuchis were allotted property in Faridabad and have a very significant presence in the city. "I watched Ram Lila with my ancestors who were migrants and it is there that I got hooked," said the 40 something Chawla.

And the tradition is being carried on by the younger generation. "Today, we have the young generation with us and the role of Sita, Rama and Angad are played by actors who are in their 20s. All of them speak chaste Urdu during the play. The remaining cast consists of people in between the ages of 20-50," he said.

The Ram Lila has been staged for the last 21 years. "For 11 years, we have been performing it in a park of sector 15 of Faridabad. The entire *Ramayana* is staged



over 11 days for two and a half hours each day with about 15,000-20,000 spectators," he told us.

However at the Jashn-e-Rekhta, the performance was for an hour. "The Rekhta Foundation had asked us to stage the scenes where five main characters — Rama, Lakshman, Sita, Ravana and Hanuman — should be there. So if we would have taken Sita *Swayamwar*, Hanuman would have been missing. In the Dashrath-Kaikeyi scene, the other characters would go missing." That's why they zeroed down on episodes relating to Sita *Haran* and Ravana-Hanuman *Samwad*. The latter is when Hanuman goes in search of Sita, plucks fruit from Ashoka Vatika and Meghnad catches hold of her to present him in the court of Ravana.

There are other facets to the play apart from the fact that both Rama and Ravana speak Urdu. "Given the fact that the pronunciation of the language certainly takes more effort, the rehearsals initially were prolonged. We practised reg-

UNLIKE OTHER RAM LILA PERFORMANCES, WHERE THE DIALOGUES ARE RECORDED OR THERE ARE PEOPLE TO PROMPT THE ACTORS, HERE EVERYONE HAS LEARNT THEIR LINES TO PERFECTION

ularly for a good one month. However, the cast is now trained and can do with lesser rehearsals," said Chawla.

Sample the lines which are spoken by Laxman a little before Sita's abduction, "Jab aap ki zabaan se aise bure khayalat ka izhaar ho raha hai, toh zaruri hai ki hamare liye koi naya bakheda tayyar ho raha hai. Farebi rakshas hain, jaal dhoke ke bichaate hain, roop maya ke ghaadi bhar me banate hain (When such bad thoughts are being expressed by you, there is some new mayhem being unleashed on us for sure. The crafty demons want to ensnare us in a web of deceit). Spoken in impeccable Urdu, adequate leverage was given to the sounds from the epiglottis. Moreover, since most people cannot read the Urdu script, the dialogues were written in Devanagari script and given to them. It also had a smattering of verses from Tulsidas, Valmiki as well as other sources.

Moreover, unlike other Ram Lila performances, where the dialogues are recorded or there are people to prompt

the actors, here everyone had learnt their lines to perfection. "Even when it is a 20-line *shayari*, each actor knows it by heart. This is essential to convey the depth of the emotion that the verses are trying to convey. When you see it, you realise how much effort and passion has gone into its staging," said Chawla. The artistes not only deliver their dialogues but also sing.

The passion is also evident in the fact that none of the actors charge for being a part of the Ram Lila. And this seems to be paying dividends. Last year they became one of the first ones to stage a Ram Lila at Prithvi Theatre, Mumbai, where they were invited. "Our six-hour long performance was much appreciated. The one at Rekhta is a first too," he said. They've also been a part of the Surajkund Mela where this is a highlight. "It is only because of the *kripa* of Rama ji that we are doing well," he said.

And if the *kripa* is maintained over India, a Ram Lila in Urdu would no longer stand out but be as acceptable as the one written by Tulsidas or Valmiki.

TECH TALK

AI not gender-neutral yet

More diversity in machine learning will lead to creating products that don't discriminate



The challenges of making the technology industry a more welcoming place for women are numerous, especially in the booming field of artificial intelligence.

To get a sense of just how monumental a task the tech community faces, look no further than the marquee gathering for AI's top scientists. Preparations for this year's event drew controversy not only because there weren't enough female speakers or study authors.

The biggest debate was over the conference's name. The annual Conference and Workshop on Neural Information Processing Systems, formerly known as NIPS, had become a punchline symbol about just how bad the gender imbalance is for artificial intelligence. Thousands of AI researchers convened in Montreal last week under a slightly tweaked banner — NeurIPS — but with many of the same problems still under the surface.

AI's challenge reflects a broader lack of diversity in the tech industry. At major tech companies, women account for 20 percent or fewer of the engineering and computing roles. By some accounts, AI's gender imbalance is even worse: One estimate by startup incubator Element AI shows women making up just 13 percent of the AI workforce in the U.S.

The challenge has repercussions far beyond career recruitment. Artificial intelligence and a self-training discipline known as machine learning can mimic the biases of their human creators as they make their way into consumer products and everyday life.

"The more diversity we have in machine learning, the better job we will do in creating products that don't discriminate," said Hanna Wallach, a Microsoft researcher who is a senior program chairwoman of the conference and co-founder of an associated event for

women in machine learning. AI systems look for patterns in huge troves of data — such as what we say to our voice assistants or what images we post on social media. These systems can share the same gender or racial prejudices found there.

Such misfires have increasingly attracted attention. A rogue Microsoft chatbot spouted sexist and racist remarks. A Google app to match selfies to famous works of mostly Western art lumped many non-whites into the same exoticised figures. In another example, a study looking at several prominent AI systems for recognising faces showed that they performed far better on lighter-skinned men than darker-skinned women.

This year, Google tests of an email feature designed to predict what someone wants to write turned up evidence that its algorithms were making biased assumptions — referring, for instance, to a nurse as "her" and an engineer as "him." The company said it ended up removing all gender pronouns before launching the feature in May.

And while a growing number of researchers and product designers are devoting attention to solving these problems, Wallach said it didn't help to have an "off-putting" name marring an important gathering for sharing new research and recruiting new people.

The conference dates back to 1986 and the name didn't raise as many eyebrows for its first few decades, especially with even fewer women working in tech.

But as the nerdy summit's headcount and its public reputation exploded in recent years, the nickname became increasingly embarrassing. Critics said it added to a hostile environment that for some women also included unwelcome advances and other forms of harassment.

"This name change has opened up so many of the issues that women and minorities face in tech," said longtime conference attendee Anandkumar, who directs machine-learning research at chipmaker Nvidia.

Startup booths hawked T-shirts and other promotional freebies with sexist slogans riffing off the acronym. The connotations became more problematic as the conference attracted corporate giants like Google, Amazon, Microsoft and Facebook as sponsors and attendees — and tried to promote more women and other under-represented groups in its ranks. Conference leaders this year acknowledged "incidents of insensitivity at past conferences" and issued stricter rules banning harassment, bullying and sexualised clothing and activities.

But they resisted changing the name as recently as October, when they released a survey of more than 2,000 attendees — mostly men — that found most were OK with it. That led Anandkumar to start a Twitter hashtag to step up the pressure.

Katherine Heller, a Duke professor and Google researcher who helps lead a new conference committee on diversity and inclusivity, said it helped that some of the industry's leaders also weighed in. Google AI chief Jeff Dean, for instance, tweeted that "enough people are made to feel uncomfortable by the current name."

The conference board relented and announced on November 16 that the new acronym would be NeurIPS. It urged participants to respect it and get back to focusing "on science and ideas."

Organisers moved the conference to a new website, printed new signs and booklets and hired a branding company to design a new logo, though the transition isn't complete. At the same time, it offered more amenities — such as child care — and more panels devoted to addressing bias and inclusion — both in the industry and the technology it creates.

The changes prompted Anandkumar to tweet that she experienced a "feeling of belonging" for the first time in years. She said she hopes it signals a "return of civility" to the field.

Heather Ames Versace, who had criticised the board for being "tone deaf," said the rebranding will help change the world's perception of the tech industry and encourage young women to join it. Versace, co-founder of AI startup Neurala, said that despite improvements, a lot more needs to be done to make AI reflective of society, not just the small group of people working on it.

"With AI, we're creating technologies that learn and make decisions in the real world," Versace said. "We need to make sure they represent a diverse set of opinions." —AP

WEBBED



YOU The web series is back with its season two starring Penn Badgley, Elizabeth Lail, Shay Mitchell.

Based on the eponymously-named Caroline Kepnes's best-selling novel, the show's story makes the most of current technology. Obsessed with an aspiring writer, a charming bookstore manager goes to extreme measures to insert himself into her life. Using social media as tools to gather the most intimate details and get close to her, a charming and awkward crush quickly becomes obsession as he quietly and strategically removes every obstacle — and person — in his way to reach her.

The series was developed by Sera Gamble and Greg Berlanti, who are also executive producers along with Sarah Schechter, Leslie Morgenstein, Gina Girolamo, Marcos Siega. The series releases on December 26 on Netflix.

SELECTION DAY Based on Aravind Adiga's eponymously-named novel, *Selection Day* is a com-



ing-of-age drama about two brothers who are raised by their strict, obsessive father to be star cricket players in India. It's a moving story about ambition, love, acceptance and finding your own path.

Fourteen-year-old Manju is destined for cricket greatness. There's only one problem that he hates cricket. Controlled from a young age by his overbearing and cricket-obsessed father, Manju's main role in life is to support his older brother and fellow cricket star, Radha. When the family moves to Mumbai and the brothers start at a new school, Manju discovers his interests outside of cricket and starts slipping away from Radha and his father's grasp. More importantly, he becomes friends with Radha's greatest cricket rival, a boy who defines freedom and confidence — concepts Manju has never experienced himself.

The series, starring Mahesh Manjrekar Ratna Pathak Shah, Rajesh Tailang, newcomers Yash Dholye and Mohammad Samad as brothers Radha and Manju, releases on December 28 on Netflix.

and Manju, releases on December 28 on Netflix.

ELLEN DeGENERES: RELATABLE



In her first special since 2003, Ellen revisits her road to stardom and details the heartfelt — and hilarious — lessons that she learnt along the way.

During the special, DeGeneres will also address her coming out story, having her sitcom cancelled, and emotional support animals. The *Ellen DeGeneres Show* host launched her career by performing stand-up comedy in the 1980s. Candid humour, heartfelt stories and a little bit of dancing: in her first stand-up special in 15 years, Ellen DeGeneres is ready to do it all in this stand-up comedy show as well. The show streams on December 18 on Netflix.

THE BOYS



Based on the comic book *The Boys* by Garth Ennis and Darick Robertson, the show takes place in a world where superheroes embrace the darker side of their massive celebrity and fame and revolves around a group of vigilantes known informally as the boys, who set out to take down corrupt superheroes with no more than blue-collar grit and a willingness to fight dirty.

The show, starring Erin Moriarty, Karl Urban, Chace Crawford and Antony Starr, is expected to release sometime in 2019 on Amazon Prime Video.



SINCE YOUR OFFICE IS YOUR SECOND HOME

Companies are rejigging office spaces to make them more casual, personalised and comfortable, says SANDEEP ROY

One probably spends more waking hours in office than anywhere else. And that is the reason that office is gradually becoming a home away from home. While workload was a matter of concern as we went across the millennium with assignments and deadlines increasingly intruding into personal space, the trend is turning and offices are becoming a very acceptable second home.

Not surprisingly then, offices are being developed as slightly more informal spaces. They are becoming more personal, comfortable and casual — traits usually attributed to the residence. “Feeling at home in your office” could be a tagline for some future offices.

Most of the innovation happening in the domain of workplace design now will ultimately lead to blurring of this line between home and office in the future. The end objectives though remain the same. What will a well-designed workplace strive to achieve? It will need to be

productive, flexible, comfortable and economical. All this will be assisted through coordinated use of technology, advancement of building materials, furniture and equipment and last but not the least, company culture, policy, processes and systems. Admittedly, in future, the workplace designer will no longer just be that lonely-guy-with-an-aesthetic-sense. (S)he will have to team up closely with the senior management, human resources, IT specialists, facility managers and above all, every user group to deliver that perfect office.

The home is perceived as a personal place and usually offers certain freedom, comfort and familiarity of surroundings. Between home and office is the necessary evil of commute, which is the least personalised and practically impossible to alter. These are the three stages of existence that everyone faces every day and the marked variation in these conditions lead to conflict. That is exactly why the future offices will try to achieve uni-

formity of environment and make you feel at home when in office.

DECISIONS THAT WILL MATTER
How will the offices physically achieve this? What choices will the companies have to make in order to design and build their dream offices by 2020?

Flexibility of spatial usage: The design brief in future will not be definitive about the number of cabins, work stations, hierarchy, meeting rooms but rather it would serve a broad range of functions and number of people over a period of the expected life of the premise. This trend is already observed and designers are giving fancy names like “Agile Working” to the solutions. With prohibitive real estate costs, future spaces will be convertible and adaptable to multiple functions.

Privacy vs Collaboration: A workplace has to cater to both thinking time as well as the one spent in collaborating by any user. Designers call

it “Activity Based Settings”

Density and openness: Optimum Density (number of people per square foot of carpet area) is a matter of increasing debate and will not cease in future, primarily because there is no right or wrong answer. Real estate prices will be the determining factor as companies will try to hit that optimum balance between financial viability and employee comfort. The challenge for the workplace designer is to make the workplace comfortable, flexible and personal and still achieve desired density.

Aesthetics, Colour and Materials: Comparatively, the office look and feel has been less susceptible to prevailing fashion and local influences than residential aesthetics. That is why, with the home invasion into office territory, we will see a more democratic and locally rooted aesthetics emerging. Companies will encourage thematic personalisation as per the

taste of majority users to “feel at home.” Lines between residential and commercial design vocabulary will merge further. The sofas and the lounge setting in offices are already looking more like a living room. Bean bags have entered the office along with garden swings. Indians love colours and we will see a shift to innovative use of the palette moving away from the dreary greys or blues that represented the anonymous global corporate of last millennium.

IT, Services, Facilities, Operations and Maintenance: Sustainability and energy efficiency will continue to be of highest priority. Selection of materials or systems will move to “Life-Cycle Cost” with more vendor support. Remote maintenance and non-invasive (to an operational office) maintenance will become more of a norm than exception.

AND THE FUTURE GOES TO THE Technology Convergence: The key aspect of the future office will be that all the above trends will be coordinated with each other through technology application. The convergence dream of the past will be affordable, robust and simple to make every system, furniture, equipment and user interact with each other seamlessly.

Co-working and Co-living: Co-working is here to stay and will grow stronger in the next decade leading to further democratisation of office ecosystem. Companies of every scale will get access to facilities (for eg a creche in your premises) that only the large corporations could afford. There will be players who will eventually merge co-living and co-working facilities to remove commuting entirely.

Anywhere Working: In our effort to eliminate commute, we will see more of “Anywhere Working.” Small offices are already being designed in mini-vans, SUVs or even tents pegged wherever the city authorities allow you. The office along with plug-and-play technology will reach the user before the user can reach the office.

Nature, Sustainability, Health and Happiness: Last but not the least, nature will come indoors, bringing with it the smell, sight, touch, health and happiness. The focus will be a healthy and happy workforce, which will lead to economic prosperity. To quote Nobel laureate Amartya Sen, “An educated and healthy workforce brings economic growth and for that we need a fundamental change.” We will see that change happening to our workplaces during the next decade.

(The author is a COO of a design company.)

Cooperation is essential for global harmony

Confrontation can be changed into mutual understanding by giving people a vision of a better world, says RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJJI

One clearly visible feature of our present-day society is divisionism, disunity or disintegration, which is based on dissent, discontent or difference in self-interests. This ominous trend of divisionism characterises our society at all the levels. Due to this, all social structures, from the family to the political party to the global society, are breaking down or are showing cracks.

One finds that the dissent or discontent does not confine itself to a decent verbal expression but it finds expression in the form of emotional outbursts in public, destructive criticism, bitter opposition, character assassination, hate-campaigns, public scandals or censure, organised agitations, picketing, strikes and even violent confrontation and war. One result of this tendency, which is spreading, is that while many urgent problems threatening mankind await solutions, others get added to the big stock. The world grievously suffers because of this single factor.

So, an important question that our society is faced with is how to eliminate this suicidal divisionistic tendency and confrontation and to build co-operation? It also needs to focus on how to bring back harmony, love and unity to a world, which is splitting up and developing deep cracks?

In order to find an appropriate answer to this crucial question, we must first accept that the world is breaking into bits because of the different pulls in opposite directions, exerted by various self-interests of nations, political, economic, religious and social groups as well as ambitious individuals. Man is opposing man, nations are confronting nations and one sees overt or covert hatred and hostility everywhere because of a clash of self-interests. When one individual party or nation sees its self-interests challenged or threatened, it challenges and threatens the others. So, the best and, perhaps, the only way of bringing back the sense of co-operation into the society from the level of man to the level of mankind is to give the vision of an inspiring goal which seems to fulfill the individual as well as collective aspirations.

This is the way that confrontation can be changed into global cooperation by giving to the people the captivating vision of the goal of a better world.



Today we see people getting united in groups, big or small, but only to protect, strengthen or improve their position vis-a-vis other groups or the society at large. This is happening because since a long time, the entire approach to cooperation has been of ‘giving’ with an eye on ‘taking’. Over the centuries, it has been forgotten that there is another philosophy of life which is that of ‘giving’ rather than ‘taking’. Remember, if we give more to the community than we take from it, we shall always have a ‘plus’ balance to draw upon. The well-known law of action begetting an equal reaction applies to cooperation also. Hence cooperation automatically begets cooperation, so in ‘giving’, getting is automatically reciprocated. Bhagwad Gita also says, “Perform noble actions without expecting reward, Reward will automatically follow.” This is the Law of Karma in its simplified form. Hence, the much-wanted unity can be restored by giving society a unity of purpose, or goals. Once man and mankind realise that their hopes, aspirations and self-interests can be fulfilled by pursuing a common goal with a sense of togetherness and mutual co-operation and that they have a common enemy which also must be confronted together, then unity will automatically come into play, bringing with it willing cooperation.

This is the way that confrontation can be changed into global cooperation by giving to the people the captivating vision of the goal of a better world.

Go patch-free

DR NIRUPAMA PARWANDA has some useful home remedies to get rid of unwanted red spots on the face

While most women love to apply blush on their face for that tint, but red patches on face do not compliment the appearance. Even though the red spots are a big issue, they aren't. Getting rid of them is an easy task with some really useful ways:

Diet — While the issue may seem to be on the surface, it is important to monitor what goes inside. Avoid eating spicy and junk food if you wish to keep away from further inflammation.

Hydration — Try to keep your skin hydrated and use products that are moisturise naturally rather than the ones which use artificial ingredients. Certain oils like almond and olive are proven to do wonders for the skin.

Sun protection — Since the sun can cause a lot of damage to your skin, it is vital that you are friends with your sunscreen before you leave the house. Exposure to the sun and environmental pollutants can aggravate the condition.

Aloe vera gel — Using aloe vera gel every night before bedtime is a must as it keeps the skin cool and hydrated. It provides a protective layer to the skin and helps to retain mois-

ture. Aloe is also rich in antioxidants and minerals which can help speed healing.

Cucumber — Rubbing a cucumber once or twice a week on your face can be very beneficial. It is considered to be the best home remedy to treat facial redness. The flesh of the cucumber is mostly water, but it also contains ascorbic acid (vitamin C) and caffeic acid, both of which help to soothe skin irritations and reduce swelling. These acids prevent water retention, which may explain why cucumbers applied topically are often helpful for swollen eyes, burns and dermatitis.

Cold compress — Using ice can help to reduce swelling and the redness of pimples. The cold helps to reduce inflammation that has clogged the pores and helps enables topical creams to reach the bacteria



inside the pores.

Oat face mask — While oatmeal alone does not mois-

turise your skin, it is a beneficial component in a moisturising face mask. Oatmeal is a humectant, which means that it

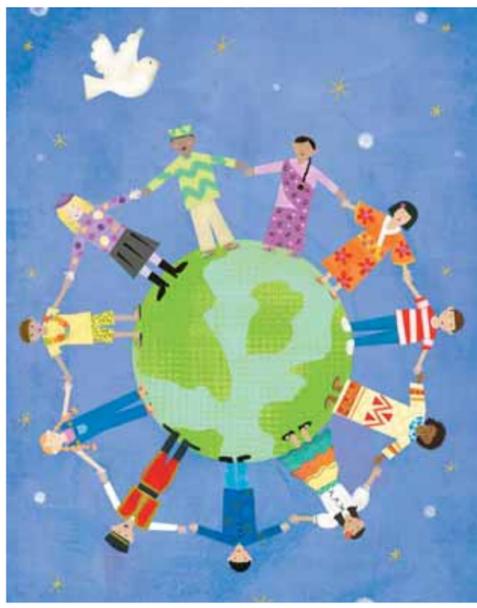
helps your skin retain moisture. When used in conjunction with skin-hydrating ingredients, it helps your skin take on

a glowing, dewy appearance. Mix pulverised oats with some water to make a thick paste and apply the mixture on your face for at least 20 minutes before washing it off with cold water. This helps in treating any kind of redness.

Correct skin products — Knowing your skin type is important before you plan to try any skin care product. It should be the first step of your skin care routine. That's because not every skin care idea or product will suit your skin. Try to avoid trial and error method with the beauty products. Sticking on to the products which you know will suit your skin type is very essential. Try not to use heavy makeup every day.

Green Tea — Whether you are sipping a cup of green tea or applying it to your face, you can be assured that both will help you get rid of bacterial infection and inflammation. Green tea fights skin cancer by promoting DNA repair. It contains a powerful antioxidant called EGCG that fights DNA damage from UV rays to prevent skin cancer. The catechins in green tea help reduce irritation, redness, and swelling.

(The author is the founder and consultant dermatologist at a skin care clinic.)



“ Life has no remote... get up and change it yourself. — Mark A. Cooper ”

HIV VACCINE FOUND EFFECTIVE IN MONKEYS

Scientists have found that an experimental HIV vaccine strategy could be effective in animals. The goal is to identify the rare, vulnerable areas on HIV and teach the immune system to make antibodies to attack those areas. In the study, rhesus macaque monkeys produced neutralising antibodies against one strain of HIV that resembles the resilient viral form that most commonly infects people, called a Tier 2 virus. “We found that neutralising antibodies that have been induced by vaccination can protect animals against viruses that look a lot like real-world HIV,” said Dennis Burton, from The Scripps Research Institute. “Since HIV emerged, this is the first evidence we have of antibody-based protection from a Tier 2 virus following vaccination,” added Matthias Pauthner, a research associate at Scripps. Vaccine is far from human clinical trials, the study provides proof-of-concept for the HIV vaccine strategy Burton and his colleagues have been developing since the 1990s.



GRAPHENE FOR DETECTING BRAIN DISORDERS

Graphene, a form of carbon and the super-strong, ultra-light material discovered in 2004, enables flexible electronic components, enhances solar cell capacity, and promises to revolutionise batteries. Scientists have added one more use to this list. They found a new application of graphene for detecting Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), a progressive brain disorder for which there is currently “no objective diagnostic test.” This is described in the scientific journal Applied Materials & Interfaces of the American Chemical Society. ALS leads to paralysis by rapid loss of motor neurons. Graphene’s use to detect ALS exploits its ability to change the resonant vibrations (phonons), in a very specific and quantifiable way when an extraneous molecule is introduced into the lattice, says the report. The foreign molecule affects the vibrational energies of graphene and the changes can be “accurately mapped using Raman spectroscopy.”



SEEK PHYSICAL THERAPY TO AVOID OPIOID ABUSE

If suffering from neck, back and shoulder pain, visiting a physical therapist early can reduce the consumption of opioids that can lead other health complications also, suggests a study. According to researchers from the Stanford University in the US, physical therapy can be a useful, non-pharmacologic approach for managing severe musculoskeletal pain. The study found that patients who had undergone early physical therapy used 10.3 per cent less opioid medication for knee pain; 9.7 per cent less for shoulder pain; and 5.1 per cent less for back pain in the period three months to a year after their diagnosis. “This is not a world where there are magic bullets. But many guidelines suggest that physical therapy is an important component of pain management, and there is little downside to trying it,” said Eric Sun, Assistant Professor at the varsity.



A DRUG MAY CURE MOTOR NEURON DISEASE

A cannabis-based drug may help ease muscle movement for people suffering from motor neuron disease, the results of a clinical trial have shown. The study, published in The Lancet Neurology journal, showed that chemical compounds — delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and cannabidiol (THC-CBD) derived from the cannabis sativa plant given as an add-on treatment may help ease symptoms of spasticity (tight or stiff muscles). Adults with this who took a combination of anti-spasticity drugs and cannabidiol experienced less spasticity and pain at six weeks follow-up compared with those given placebo. “There is no cure for motor neuron disease so improved symptom control and quality of life are important for patients. Our trial showed a beneficial effect of THC-CBD spray in people on treatment,” said lead researcher Nilo Riva from the San Raffaele Scientific Institute in Italy.



NEW PAINLESS ADHESIVE DETACHES WITH LIGHT

A new painless adhesive that works even on wet surfaces can soon make the removal of band-aids a lot less painful, says an international team of researchers. The adhesive can strongly adhere wet materials such as hydrogel and living tissue and can be easily detached in the presence of (UV) light, a feature that could be applied to a range of new medical procedures. It could be used to attach and painlessly detach wound dressings, transdermal drug delivery devices, and wearable robotics. “Our method of using light to trigger detachment is non-invasive and painless,” said lead author Yang Gao, researcher at Xi’an Jiaotong University. It uses an aqueous solution of polymer chains spread between two, non-sticky materials. Those two adhere poorly together but the polymer chains act as a molecular suture, stitching them together by forming a network with the two pre-existing polymer networks. It is known as topological entanglement.



STICKATHON

RANCHI | MONDAY | DECEMBER 17, 2018



15

Maiden glory for Belgium

Olympic Silver medallist beat Netherlands 3-2 in sudden death to win first World Cup title

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

Aggrity Belgium defeated former champions the Netherlands in sudden death in a thrilling summit clash to win their maiden men's hockey World Cup title at the Kalinga Stadium here on Sunday.

Olympic Silver medallist Belgium created history by eking out a 3-2 win in the penalty shoot-out after the final match of the game's showpiece event ended in a goalless draw.

It was a great day for Belgium hockey as the country registered its second biggest international title after the Olympics Silver in Rio in 2016. In the last edition of the World Cup at The Hague in Netherlands, Belgium had finished fifth.

The Netherlands, on the other hand, failed to match Pakistan's record of a fourth world title for the second consecutive edition. The Dutch had finished runners-up to Australia four years ago in front of their home crowd. They last won a World Cup title way back in 1998 in Utrecht.

Incidentally, it was the Netherlands' second consecutive match that went to shoot-out in the tournament after their victory over Australia in the semi-finals on Saturday.

In Sunday's shoot-out, Belgium goalkeeper Vincent Vanasch outmatched his Dutch counterpart Pirmin Blaak by making four saves to hand his side their maiden World Cup title.

There was hardly anything to separate the two sides in the shoot-out as they were levelled 2-2 after five tries. While Jeroen Hertzberger and Jonas de Geus scored for Netherlands, Florent van Aubel and Victor Wegnez were on target for Belgium.

However, the shoot-out was not without drama as Belgium needed Arthur de Sloover to score from their fifth and last attempt to win the game and he did so, sending the Red Lions



WORLD CUP HOCKEY WINNERS:

Team	Titles	Years
Pakistan	4	1971, 1978, 1982, 1994
Netherlands	3	1973, 1990, 1998
Australia	3	1986, 2010, 2014
Germany	2	2002, 2006
India	1	1975
Belgium	1	2018

It was a great day for Belgium hockey as the country registered its second biggest international title after the Olympics Silver in Rio in 2016

bench into wild celebrations. But the Dutch goalkeeper asked for a referral for a foot and the goal was later withdrawn after TV replays showed the ball indeed touch De Sloover's feet while he was pushing it into the net past Blaak.

The reversal meant that the match went into sudden death and Van Aubel was given the responsibility by Belgium to take

the first opportunity and he duly converted it.

It was then Netherlands' turn to score and continue the sudden death but Hertzberger faltered this time as Belgium goalkeeper Vanasch came up with another brilliant save to hand his side the biggest win of their careers.

The title clash, which was witnessed by none other than cricket legend Sachin Tendulkar and Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, turned out to be a fierce contest between the two European sides.

While the Netherlands took the early initiative and attacked continuously in the first two quarters, Belgium made a strong comeback after the change of ends.

Belgium, though, had the first chance but Tom Boon's deflection in the second minute went just wide. Minutes later, Hertzberger's reverse struck the side-netting.

It was a midfield slugfest between the two teams as both created chances but lacked the final touch inside the opposition circle.

The Netherlands had two penalty corners in the match but the Red Lions defended stoutly to deny them any inroads.



Netherlands players react after their loss against Belgium in the men's final at Kalinga Stadium; (above) Belgium players rush to hug goalkeeper after penalty shoot-out

Belgium, on the other hand, failed to secure a single penalty corner in the game. Two minutes after half time, Belgium skipper Thomas Briels' shot was saved by Dutch goalie

Blaak. Belgium pressed hard in the final 10 minutes of the game, putting relentless pressure on the Dutch defence but a breakthrough eluded them.



Australia thrash Eng 8-1, take Bronze

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

Last edition champions Australia secured a consolation Bronze medal after mauling England 8-1 at the Kalinga Stadium on Sunday.

Tom Craig (9th, 19th, 34th minute) scored a hat-trick while Jeremy Hayward (57th, 60th) struck twice for Australia in the Bronze medal play-off. Blake Govers (8th), Trent Mitton (32nd) and Tim Brand (34th) were the other goal getters for Australia.

World number 7 England's lone goal in the lop-sided match came from the stick of Barry Middleton in the 45th minute.

This was Australia's fifth Bronze medal in the history of the tournament. The last time the Kookaburras had to be satisfied with a third-place finish was way back in 1994 in front of their home crowd in Sydney.

The victory also enabled Australia to further increase their head-to-head record against England. After sitting back in the initial minutes, Australia secured their first penalty corner in the sixth minute but Govers' flick was deflected well over the post.

However, it did not take long for Govers to register his name in the scoresheet. He scored his seventh goal of the tournament with a reverse hit after receiving a through ball.

A minute later, the Kookaburras doubled their lead when Craig scored from close range with a rebound from Brand's pass after his initial try was saved by England goalkeeper Harry Gibson.

England made the scoreline 3-0 in their favour four minutes into the second quarter through another fine field goal by Craig, following a brilliant link-up play with Jake Harvie and Govers.

Australia went into the half time break with a comfortable 3-0 lead. Mitton then extended Australia's lead in the 32nd minute with a rebound after Hayward's try from a penalty corner was saved by Gibson. Before England could settle down from the setback, Australia pumped in two more goals within a minute to make the contest a completely one-sided affair.

First, Brand finished off a fine Mitton pass for the fifth goal and then Craig got the sixth one for Australia and completed his hat-trick with another field strike. England scored a consolation goal just seconds before the end of third quarter with Middleton finishing off into an empty goal from a Phil Roper pass.

Australia scored their seventh goal in the 57th minute when Hayward converted a penalty corner. Australia then secured back-to-back penalty corners in the final minute, the second of which was converted by Hayward to seal a convincing win.

Harendra receives FIH official reprimand

BHUBANESWAR: India's chief coach Harendra Singh has been officially reprimanded by the International Hockey Federation (FIH) for his outburst against on-field umpires after the home team's quarterfinal loss to Netherlands. The reprimand was handed down to Harendra after he and India's analytical coach Chris Ciriello were called for an official hearing by the FIH on Saturday. The India coach's vitriolic outburst didn't go down well with the FIH with its technical delegate Christian Deckenbrock terming Harendra's outburst as "inappropriate" and "unacceptable".

"The FIH Technical Delegate has decided that India's coach Harendra Singh committed a breach of the Code of Conduct (Level 1.2.K: Public criticism of, or inappropriate public comment in relation to an incident at the press conference following the match between India vs Netherlands," the FIH said in a statement on Sunday.

SINGLES

EAST BENGAL EDGE PAST MOHUN BAGAN

KOLKATA: East Bengal returned to winning ways by edging past bitter foes Mohun Bagan 3-2 in a thrilling I-League derby here on Sunday. Mohun Bagan came into the tie unbeaten in the last seven derby matches and took the lead through Azharuddin Mallick in the 13th minute but things turned sour after the break when they were reduced to 10 players after Kingsley Eze was red-carded (59th). East Bengal snatched the lead with Landanmawia Raite (17th, 61st) and Jobby Justin (44th) helping the 'home team' put it across their traditional rivals and make it two wins out of two. Mohun Bagan pulled one back through Dipanda Dicka (75th) but it proved to be a consolation strike in the end.

JOSHNA BAGS 16TH NATIONAL TITLE

NOIDA: Squash star Joshna Chinappa equalled Bhuvneshwari Kumari's record of 16 national titles while Mahesh Mangaonkar won his maiden crown on the concluding day of the premier domestic event at the HCL campus here on Sunday. In the two contrasting finals, Mahesh piped Vikram Malhotra 11-4, 13-15, 11-2, 5-11, 15-13 while Joshna edged out Urwashi Joshi 9-11, 11-1, 11-6, 11-5. In comparison to the gruelling battle in the men's final, Joshna had it easier though Urwashi Joshi of Maharashtra did surprise her by taking the first game. As it turned out, the dent Joshna suffered was more of an aberration. The reigning champion ensured the ride was smooth from there on en route a record equalling crown.

KERALA CRUSH DELHI BY INNINGS AND 27 RUNS

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: Kerala thrashed Delhi by an innings and 27 runs in a Ranji Trophy Group 'B' match on Sunday to earn seven points and lift their tally to 20, as the race for knockout berths got exciting. Delhi, struggling at 41 for five needed skipper Dhruv Shorey to play a long innings. But Jalaj Saxena struck in the 22nd over, getting the captain out for 30. Rawat (31), Shivam Sharma (33) and Subodh Bhati (30) delayed Kerala's wait for a third win of the season, while playing some attacking shots. Sijomon Joseph wrapped up things for Kerala when he had Akash Sudan caught by Sandeep Warrier as Delhi folded for 154 in 41 overs.

YODDHA STUN PIRATES IN PKL

MANCHESTER: UP Yoddha produced a terrific team performance as they earned a resounding 47-31 win over defending champions Patna Pirates in Vivo Pro Kabaddi Season 6. UP Yoddha raiders led by Prashant Kumar Rai (20 points) were in fine form and tormented Patna defence throughout the match. Azad Singh with 8 points made a crucial contribution to UP Yoddha's win. It was a disappointing night for Pardeep Narwal who scored just 2 points. Manjeet top scored for Patna Pirates with 10 points. Patna Pirates are still in contention for a place in the playoffs but will need massive improvement. UP Yoddha can also qualify for the playoffs.

SAINTS STUN ARSENAL; CHELSEA WIN

AFF ■ SOUTHAMPTON

Charlie Austin shattered Arsenal's 22-game unbeaten run as the Southampton striker punished a howler from Gunners goalkeeper Bernd Leno to seal a shock 3-2 win on Sunday.

Austin settled a thrilling Premier League clash at St Mary's when he headed home with just five minutes left after Leno mis-judged Shane Long's cross.

Southampton had twice taken the lead through Danny Ings, only for Henrikh Mkhitaryan's brace to draw Arsenal level on each occasion. Leno's mistake and Austin's

predatory finish handed Arsenal their first defeat in 15 league games and brought a stunning halt to their longest unbeaten run in all competitions since 2007.

Unai Emery's fifth placed team hadn't lost since a 3-2 defeat at Chelsea in August and the north Londoners' first setback since the summer leaves them two points behind the fourth placed Blues, who won at Brighton on Sunday.

While it was a bitter afternoon for Arsenal, Southampton's first win in 15 matches in all competitions was cause for much celebration. Southampton manager Ralph



Charlie Austin celebrates after scoring the winning goal for Southampton against Arsenal.

Chelsea players celebrate their 2-1 victory over Brighton.

Pedro Rodriguez to open the scoring and then chalked up his ninth goal of the campaign, but first in 13 games for club and country.

However, Chelsea failed to build on their 2-0 lead and endured a nervous finale after Solly March pulled one back with his first goal of the campaign.

Victory saw Chelsea open up a three-point lead over Arsenal in fourth and close back to within seven points of leaders Manchester City.

Brighton had only previously been beaten at home by Tottenham Hotspur this season.

Real, Atletico close in on Barca

AFF ■ MADRID

Karim Benzema shot Real Madrid to within two points of La Liga leaders Barcelona with the winner in a scrappy 1-0 win over Rayo Vallecano, while countryman Antoine Griezmann fired a brace in a 3-2 win over Real Valladolid to take Atletico Madrid level with Barca.

Benzema's 13th-minute strike was enough for Real to move up to third on 29 points, two behind Barca, who travel to Levante on Sunday night, and second-placed Atletico.

However they were made to sweat for the victory points by plucky Rayo, who are second-from-bottom but would have snatched a point in stoppage time had Sergio Ramos not cleared the second of Thibaut Courtois' double saves, from Alex Alegría and Emiliano Velazquez, off the line.

Little was seen from Real stars such as Luka Modric, who was presented with his Ballon d'Or ahead of the match at the Santiago Bernabeu, and fans showed their displeasure at the end of an uninspiring contest. Earlier, Griezmann struck the win-



Karim Benzema celebrates after scoring for Real Madrid against Rayo Vallecano.

World Cup winner laid on Nikola Kalinic's second goal of the season in the 26th minute with a superb through ball, then put his side two up on the stroke of half-time.

After Kiko Olivas handled Griezmann's long-range shot, and referee Undiano Mallenco pointed to the spot after a video review, the Frenchman slotted home a neat penalty.

The hosts came roaring back in the second half, twice forcing fine saves from Jan Oblak before Fernando Calero scored for the hosts from a 56th-minute corner.

Saul Niguez then inadvertently pushed Enes Unal's header into his own net nine minutes later, and Valladolid pushed for victory.

However Griezmann stole the three points in a frantic finale, coolly steering home the winner after a scramble in the box following a corner.

On Sunday, Sevilla pulled level on points with Barcelona and Atletico Madrid atop the Spanish league after beating Girona 2-0 at home.

RONALDO PENALTY SEES OFF TORINO

AFF ■ MILAN

Cristiano Ronaldo scored from the spot as Juventus saw off city rivals Torino 1-0 to hammer home their domination in Serie A.

Juventus travelled to the Stadio Olimpico after their year-long unbeaten record away from home ended with a shock 2-1 Champions League defeat by Young Boys in Bern.

But Ronaldo slotted in his 11th league goal this season, and 5,000th for Juventus in Serie A, after 70 minutes after Torino goalkeeper Salvador Ichazo fouled Mario Mandzukic.

Juventus are now 11 points ahead of second-placed Napoli, who travel to Cagliari on Sunday.

Inter Milan are third, 14 points behind the leaders, after Mauro Icardi's 76th-minute penalty sealed a 1-0 win over Udinese on Saturday. Torino proved dangerous for the cham-



Cristiano Ronaldo celebrates after scoring a penalty for Juventus against Torino.

pions with Andrea Belotti forcing a one-handed save from Juventus goalkeeper Mattia Perin, with Armando Izzo nodding over after 51 minutes.

But a poor backpass from Simone Zaza to Ichazo saw the Torino goalkeeper foul Mandzukic and five-time Ballon d'Or winner Ronaldo made no mistake from the spot.

The Portuguese is now level with Serie A's top scorer Krzysztof Piatek of Genoa on 11 goals. It was the seventh straight league win for unbeaten Juventus since being held by Genoa.

Earlier, captain Icardi got Inter back to winning ways with a 1-0 victory over Udinese. Icardi slotted in after 76 minutes at the San Siro with a cheeky 'Panenka' into the centre of goal after a penalty was awarded for a Seko Fofana handball. It was the 25-year-old's ninth league goal this season and 120th for the club.

PTI ■ GUANGZHOU

Relieved P V Sindhu let out a joyous scream when she finally laid her hands on a Gold medal by claiming the World Tour Finals with a win over 2017 world champion Nozomi Okuhara here on Sunday.

With the straight-game victory, coming after seven straight finals losses, Sindhu became the first Indian to achieve the feat.

Playing her third successive season-ending finale, Sindhu, who had lost in the summit clash to another Japanese, Akane Yamaguchi, to settle for a Silver in the last edition, prevailed 21-19, 21-17 in a match that lasted an hour and two minutes.

This was her career's 14th title but the year's first. Prior to this in 2018, she has won Silver at the World Championships, Asian Games, Commonwealth Games, Thailand Open and India Open.

Dubbed a bridesmaid after falling short of Gold on a number of occasions, Sindhu finally broke her jinx, screamed and sunk to her knees.

Saina Nehwal had reached the finals of 2011 World Super Series Finals, while Jwala Gutta and V Diju finished runners up at the 2009 edition.

Sindhu, an Olympic and World Championship Silver medallist, was composed and held her nerves at the crucial moments to stay a step ahead of the Japanese through the match.

'NO ONE WILL QUESTION'

P V Sindhu on Sunday hoped no one will ever question her ability to win big titles, relieved at breaking the finals jinx with a historic triumph at the World Tour Finals.

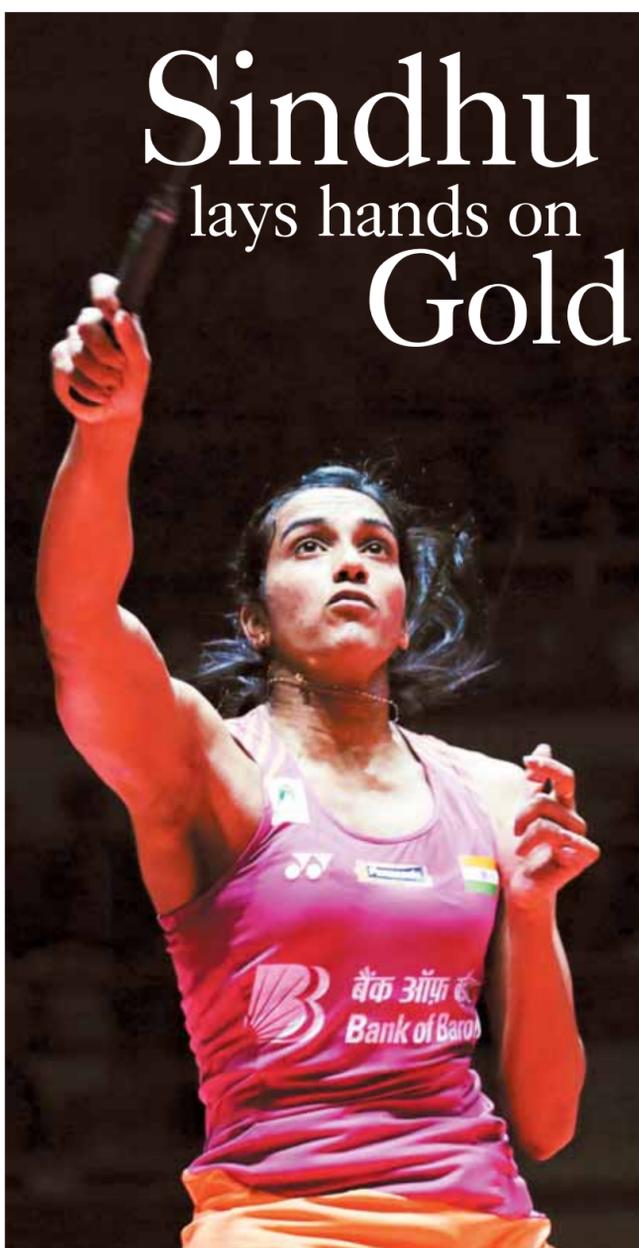
After losing seven successive summit clashes, Sindhu finally settled her finals blues to lift the prestigious season-ending trophy.

"I feel really happy. I have no words because it is my first win this year after coming and losing in the finals, so it is memorable. The year has ended on a beautiful note," said Sindhu, who won Silvers at the Commonwealth Games, Asian Games and World Championships this year.

"Somewhere every time people have been asking me the same question. I hope the question won't again come to me, asking why all the time coming to the finals I lose. I think I can say now that I won Gold and I am really very proud."

Her mentor and chief India coach Pullela Gopichand also stressed on the importance of Sindhu crossing the final hurdle.

"There has been a lot of talk of her losing the finals and I think that at least, not



Sindhu lays hands on Gold

SINDHU'S SINGLES TITLES			
Year	Tournament	Opponent in final	Score
2011	Indonesia International	Fransisca Ratnasari (Indonesia)	21-16, 21-11
2013	Malaysia Masters	Gu Juan (Singapore)	21-17, 17-21, 21-19
2013	Macau Open	Michelle Li (Canada)	21-15, 21-12
2014	Macau Open	Kim Hyo-min (South Korea)	21-12, 21-17
2015	Macau Open	Minatsu Mitani (Japan)	21-9, 21-23, 21-14
2016	Malaysia Masters	Kirsty Gilmour (Scotland)	21-15, 21-9
2016	China Open	Sun Yu (China)	21-11, 17-21, 21-11
2017	Syed Modi International	Gregoria Mariska (Indonesia)	21-13, 21-14
2017	India Open	Carolina Marin (Spain)	21-19, 21-16
2017	Korea Open	Nozomi Okuhara (Japan)	22-20, 11-21, 21-18
2018	BWF World Tour Finals	Nozomi Okuhara (Japan)	21-19, 21-17

PERFORMANCE IN FINALS IN 2018			
Year	Tournament	Opponent in final	Score
2018	India Open	Beiwen Zhang (United States)	18-21, 21-11, 20-22 (lost)
2018	Commonwealth Games	Saina Nehwal (India)	18-21, 21-23 (lost)
2018	Thailand Open	Nozomi Okuhara (Japan)	15-21, 18-21 (lost)
2018	World Championships	Carolina Marin (Spain)	19-21, 10-21 (lost)
2018	Asian Games	Tai Tzu-ying (Chinese Taipei)	13-21, 16-21 (lost)
2018	BWF World Tour Finals	Nozomi Okuhara (Japan)	21-19, 21-17 (won)

FAISEL FEATURES



for anybody else but for Sindhu's mind, I think it is important she won in the final with a comprehensive big win," he said.

"People have been waiting for it and it is great to have this win at the end of the year."

Talking about her title win, world number six Sindhu said: "The last to last year I lost in semifinal and last year I finished runners up. This time I am the winner, so it is a beautiful tournament for me

as I won all matches in the league stages and also the semifinals and finals.

"I would definitely enjoy the moment as I am here. Next we have the Indian league (Premier badminton League), so I will go directly for that and I hope do well there so that would be all for the year."

Sindhu, who had lost in the finals in the last edition, said she sometimes lost focus during the title clash.

All England C'ship will be our target: Gopi

PTI ■ GUANGZHOU

Chief national badminton coach Pullela Gopichand has set his eyes on ending the 18-year-old wait for an Indian to become an All England champion next year after P V Sindhu clinched the season-ending World Tour Finals title.

Gopichand was the last Indian to win the All England Championship in 2001, achieving the coveted feat after 21 years of Prakash Padukone's 1980 title.

Asked about the targets, Gopichand said: "For us the 2020 would be a big one, and then 2022, so basically the Commonwealth, Asian Games and the Olympics are the big event but having said that the All England will be the target next year."

"It has been quite a while since we have won the All England Championship. It will be almost 20 years since Prakash sir won and then I won the Championship so I hope this time it doesn't take so long."

Speaking about Sindhu's win in the final he said, "I think it is a fantastic tournament." "The way she has played, she has beaten players of quality. To beat (Akane) Yamaguchi, (Nozomi) Okuhara, Ratchanok (Intanon) in the same tournament is special. She finishes the year on a high. She has won medals in the major events and that was the target this year," he said.

"It is great to end the year like this but more important is to start the next year with a similar win."

"It was a good match. Overall there was a lot of rallies. Sometimes I was remembering about the last final but I tried to focus again on the match," she said.

"Whenever I play against Okuhara or Yamaguchi I never think it would be easy. I know every time it would be tough. Today also the rallies were 30-40 strokes, but I gave my 100 percent and I won. Okuhara also played very well."

Asked about her targets for next year, Sindhu said: "Next year it will be Olympic qualification year and we have to keep ourself fit and strategies which tournaments to play and we will have Malaysia and Indonesia coming up next year."



We're surprised by on-field call: Bumrah on Kohli's dismissal

PTI ■ PERTH

India were "surprised" at the on-field umpire's call that led to skipper Virat Kohli's controversial dismissal but the team has moved on and is focused on restricting Australia to a low score in the second Test, pacer Jasprit Bumrah said on Sunday.

Kohli's dismissal triggered a controversy after Peter Handscomb took the catch at second slip off Pat Cummins' bowling and on-field umpires deferred to the third umpire with a soft signal of out, meaning only conclusive evidence could overturn the decision.

However, TV replays were not sufficient enough to overturn the decision, which left the Indian fans and Kohli disappointed as the skipper walked off the ground without acknowledging the ovation for his superb innings of 123.

"We were a little surprised by the on-field call but now that it's been done means it's been done. We will move forward with the game. That's about it," said Bumrah when asked about the controversial decision.

Virat Kohli scored his 25th Test hundred to help India score 283 runs in their first innings. But the last six wickets fell for 60 runs which meant that they surrendered a 43-run lead.

Talking about Kohli's knock, Bumrah said, "Obviously, we were in a bit of bother at the start (of the day), and then the way he played, the way he carried his whole innings was infectious."

"He has been doing all the time and he is an inspiring leader. He leads from the front. So, it's a good thing for the team and hopefully he will keep doing it in future as well."

The hosts finished day three on 132-4 and took an overall 175-run lead in the second Test.

Bumrah said that they would want to restrict Australia to as few runs as possible on day four.

"Tomorrow the first session will be important. We want to take early wickets, so it will restrict the total to as less as possible and that will help us to chase it in the fourth innings. In my eyes, our team is capable of chasing any total but we will try to minimise as much as possible," he said.

"If you see the match, nobody has really gotten out (to balls that come) off the track. The crack is just there but it doesn't do a lot. It's only in the mind. So yeah, we will not take that into consideration (while batting)," he added.

FASTEST TO 25 HUNDREDS IN TESTS				
Batsman	M	I	Runs	AVG
Don Bradman (Australia)	45	68	6103	90.43
Virat Kohli (India)	75	127	6491	54.54
Sachin Tendulkar (India)	82	130	6703	57.29
Sunil Gavaskar (India)	79	138	6947	53.85
Matthew Hayden (Australia)	78	139	6894	54.28

Faisal Features

Aussies skimper despite Kohli's ton

PTI ■ PERTH

Captain Virat Kohli became the second fastest to reach 25 Test centuries before Indian pacers made Australia labour for an overall 175-run lead, leaving the second match evenly poised on Sunday.

Usman Khawaja scored an unbeaten 41 runs as Australia reached 132 for four at stumps on day three. Tim Paine (8 not out) was keeping company at the other end.

Earlier, the Indian skipper scored 123 runs off 257 balls. It was his sixth Test hundred on Australian soil, joining boyhood hero Sachin Tendulkar, and he became the second-quickest batsman in Test history to score 25 Test hundreds (in 127 innings) after Sir Donald Bradman's 68 innings.

Post tea, Aaron Finch (25 ret'd hurt) didn't come out to bat after being hit by Mohammed Shami (2-23) in the 13th over. He retired hurt but scans cleared him of serious damage on his right hand's index finger.

It was a fiery spell of fast bowling from the Indian pacers. Marcus Harris (20) too had been hit on the helmet earlier in the eighth over off Jasprit Bumrah (1-25).

The opener, dropped on 1 off Ishant Sharma (1-33) at first slip by Cheteshwar Pujara, added 26 runs with Khawaja.

Harris was bowled off Bumrah in



the 18th over, attempting to leave the ball, assuming it would move away only for it to crash into the stumps. It became two wickets in four overs as Shaun Marsh (5) was caught behind off Shami.

Australia's lead had barely crossed 100 at that stage, as Khawaja and Peter Handscomb (13) put on 21 runs. There was a lot of chatter in the middle while the latter was at the crease, owing to controversy over Virat Kohli's dismissal earlier in the day. Ishant trapped him lbw in the 26th over as Australia were

reduced to 85 for three. The big partnerships weren't coming as Khawaja and Travis Head (19) added another 35 runs, helping the hosts cross 100 in the 30th over.

Head threw it away just like he did in the first innings, holding out to third man off Shami. Only Khawaja stood tall among the regular wickets and anchored the Australian innings.

Earlier, India lost their last six wickets for 60 runs to hand Australia the advantage.

In the morning session, Kohli scored



a masterful hundred as India reached 252 for seven at lunch.

From overnight 172 for three, India made a torrid start to the day as Ajinkya Rahane (51) was caught behind off Lyon on the fourth ball of the first over.

Hanuma Vihari (20) though was up to the task of batting out the next passage of play, as he put on 50 runs with the skipper for the fifth wicket.

He soaked up pressure at one end, even if not scoring too many runs, while Kohli went about his business at the other end as India garnered 42 runs in

the first hour of play.

In doing so, Kohli took India past 200 in the 80th over, and then reached his hundred off 214 balls.

This was also his 34th hundred as Indian skipper across formats, second only to Ricky Ponting's 41 centuries as Australian captain.

The celebrations though were cut short as Australia used the second new ball to good effect with Vihari caught behind off Josh Hazlewood (2-66) in the 86th over.

Kohli fell before lunch, edging Pat Cummins (1-60) to second slip where Handscomb just got his fingers under the ball. TV replays were not sufficient enough to overturn the on-field umpire's soft signal of dismissal.

The visitors lost another wicket in this short passage as Mohammed Shami (0), again batting ahead of Ishant, edged Lyon behind first ball.

Post lunch, India lost their last three wickets for 31 runs and were bowled out for 283 runs in their first innings.

Nathan Lyon (5-67) took his 14th five-wicket haul in Test cricket as Australia took a 43-run lead in the first innings.

Post lunch, India's first innings lasted only another 12.3 overs as the lengthy tail refused to wag for the second time this series.

In doing so, Lyon equalled Muttiah Muralitharan with seven five-wicket hauls against India in Test cricket.

Skippers exchange verbal blows

PTI ■ PERTH

Tensions flared-up towards the end of day three with none other than the two captains, Virat Kohli and Tim Paine, exchanging verbal volleys as the second Test between India and Australia headed for a nail-biting finish.

The Indian skipper was out caught at second slip, and while the catch was referred to the third umpire, it wasn't overturned on account of soft signal.

It led to quite a talkative Kohli on the field during Australia's second innings, which carried on until stumps, with both captains exchanging words.

"If he messes it up, it's 2-0," Kohli said, which was picked up by the microphone after he and his teammates made a loud caught-behind appeal for Paine in the final over of the day.

The Australian captain did not hold himself back and replied "You've got to bat first, big head."

The hosts star-spinner Nathan Lyon, however, played down the incident. "I think Tim just asked him where he was going for dinner that's all. I've played enough cricket against Virat to know what he's like, and I'm not worried about what he's doing or



what India's doing," said Lyon.

"Virat is a great player, he plays on emotion, we all know that, and to be honest I'm not too concerned how Virat reacts or the way he conducts himself. I'm just worried about what we can control in the Australian dressing room and I thought as bowlers we came out today and performed pretty well," he said.

Kohli was his usual animated self but his on-field antics did not go down well with former Australian players Mike Hussey and Allan Border.

"Kohli is out of control... I don't like his attitude at the moment," Hussey was quoted as saying by

Macquarie Sports Radio, while former captain Border told Fox Cricket: "I don't think I've ever seen any captain carry on like that."

With India batting last on a tricky surface, chasing anything above 250 will be a big ask.

Lyon said: "The wicket seems like it's starting to play a few more little tricks. We were expecting the cracks to play a little bit more."

"We were pretty happy with the way we bowled and we know that come the second day we can bowl much better than that. So we can take a few lessons off that first innings," he added.

LATHAM TON PUTS KIWIS IN COMMAND

AFP ■ WELLINGTON

Opener Tom Latham's unbeaten century put New Zealand in charge of the first Test against Sri Lanka in Wellington on Sunday, as the Black Caps raced past the tourists' first-innings total and looked to build an imposing lead.

Latham was 121 not out at stumps on day two with New Zealand cruising at 311 for two in reply to Sri Lanka's modest 282.

It was a frustrating day for Sri Lanka's bowlers on Basin Reserve pitch that transformed into a batters' paradise after wreaking havoc during the tourists' innings on day one.

Black Caps skipper Kane Williamson narrowly missed out on his own century, falling for 91, and all New Zealand's batsmen got good starts, with Jeet Raval making 43 and Ross Taylor not out on 50.

While the Sri Lanka attack worked hard, they could not build pressure and the two New Zealand wickets that fell were the result of rash shots from Raval and Williamson. That was not an issue for Latham, who meticulously crafted his seventh Test century from 219 balls and never looked rattled at the crease.

He combined with Williamson for a 162-run partnership, laying the foundation for a huge total from a line-up that



has eight wickets in hand and has plenty of batting to come.

Sri Lanka will now be hoping for a dramatic New Zealand collapse on day three to salvage any hopes of a win.

Earlier, they added just seven to their overnight total before Tim Southee coaxed an inside edge off Kumara to claim a six-wicket innings haul.

Kumara's departure for a duck left Dickwella stranded on 80 not out after he led a rearguard action for Sri Lanka.