

**OPINION 6**  
GIRLS PLEASE,  
NOT BRIDES

**WORLD 8**  
95 HELD DURING PROTESTS ACROSS  
FRANCE OVER SECURITY LAW

**SPORT 12**  
INDIA BEAT AUS BY  
6 WICKETS IN 2ND T20

Published From  
DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL BHUBANESWAR  
RANCHI RAIPUR CHANDIGARH  
DEHRADUN HYDERABAD VIJAYWADA

\*Late City Vol. 30 Issue 340  
\*Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable

NEW DELHI, MONDAY DECEMBER 7, 2020; PAGES 12 ₹3



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## Farmers urge all to support Bharat Bandh tomorrow

Shops, businesses will remain shut; ambulances, emergency work will be exempted; farmers appeal for peaceful bandh over farm laws

**SHEKHAR SINGH ■ NEW DELHI**  
On the eleventh day of protest, farmers camping at Singhu border protesting the Centre's new agri laws on Sunday sought maximum participation from all quarters in the Bharat Bandh called on December 8 and said over 250 farmers from Gujarat will be coming to the national Capital to join the stir.

Addressing a Press conference on Sunday, farmers said on December 8 there will be chakka jam from morning to 3 pm across the country.

Farmer leaders at the border also welcomed the support extended by a number of political parties and called upon all others to come forward and support the Bharat Bandh on Tuesday.

"This agitation is not only of Punjab farmers but is of entire nation. We are going to strengthen our agitation and it has already spread across the nation. Since the Government was not able to deal with us properly, we gave a call for Bharat Bandh. During Saturday's meeting, even the Ministers were upset with our call for Bharat Bandh," farmer leader Baldev Singh Yadav said at the Press conference.

"We have announced Bharat Bandh on December 8, which will start in the morning and continue till evening. During which, shops and busi-

nesses will remain shut. Ambulances and emergency work will be exempted from the bandh. Also, 250 farmers from Gujarat will be coming to Delhi to join the protest," he added. Yadav also appealed to everyone to make sure that the Bharat Bandh remains peaceful. "We won't let anyone turn it violent and would take strict action against them. We request everyone to be part of the bandh," he said.

Thousands of farmers protesting the Centre's new farm laws stayed put on the borders of Delhi with Haryana and Uttar Pradesh as they threatened to intensify their agitation and block more roads leading to the national Capital if the Government did not accept their demands.

Meanwhile, the traffic situation in Delhi remained in chaos prompting the Delhi Traffic Police to inform com-

muters about alternative routes open for travelling to the neighbouring States of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana. The Delhi Traffic Police tweeted that those commuting to Delhi to come via the DND instead of Noida Link road. "Chilla border on Noida link road is closed for traffic from Noida to Delhi due to the farmers' protest near Gautam Budh Dwar," said the Delhi Traffic Police.

Continued on Page 2



Farmers continue their protest against the new farm laws at Singhu border on Sunday

## Opp parties to participate in nationwide chakka jam

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**

Opposition parties on Sunday expressed solidarity with the protesting farmers and said they would support the call for a countrywide shut-down, or Bharat Bandh on Tuesday. Congress, the Left parties, Samajwadi Party, RJD, AAP, TRS, DMK announced

that they would actively participate in the bandh to ensure it is successful.

Besides, worker and trade unions — Indian National Trade Union Congress, All India Trade Union Congress, Hind Mazdoor Sabha, Centre of Indian Trade Unions, All India United Trade Union Centre and Trade Union Coordination Centre — have also lent their support to the farmers' stir.

The newly-formed People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration in J&K too issued a statement in support of Tuesday's Bharat Bandh. In their joint statement the Opposition leaders said "(we) extend our solidarity with the ongoing massive struggle by Indian farmers... and support their call for a Bharat Bandh on December 8, demanding the withdrawal of retrograde agri-laws and the Electricity Amendment Bill".

"These new agri-laws passed in Parliament in a brazen (and) anti-democratic manner (by) preventing a structured discussion and voting, threaten India's food security, destroy Indian agriculture and our farmers, lay the basis for the abolishment of MSP and mortgage Indian agriculture and our markets to the caprices of multi-national agribusiness corporates," the state-

ment said. Congress chief Sonia Gandhi, DMK's MK Stalin, NCP leader Sharad Pawar, Rashtriya Janata Dal leader Tejashwi Yadav and Akhilesh Yadav of the Samajwadi Party have all signed this statement.

National Conference leader Farooq Abdullah (for J&K's PAGD) and a number of Left parties — the Communist Party of India, the CPI(M), the CPI(ML), the All India Forward Bloc and the Revolutionary Socialist Party — also expressed support for the farmers.

Congress said the party would give "its whole-hearted support" to the Bharat Bandh. "All our district headquarters and pradesh headquarters will participate in this bandh. They will hold demonstrations and ensure that the bandh is successful," said AICC spokesman Pawan Khara.

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said Aam Aadmi Party workers across the country will support the countrywide strike, as he appealed to all the citizens to support the farmers. Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrababoo Naidu, too, lent his support to the Bharat Bandh, saying the farmers were protesting legally.

Continued on Page 2

Boxer Vijender backs farmers, threatens to return award

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**

Boxing superstar Vijender Singh on Sunday threatened to return his award in support of the agitating farmers as BJP sought to point out Vijender's Congress association. The boxer, who addressed the farmers, demanded that the Government take back three farm laws lest he return his Khel Ratna award, the country's highest sporting honour.

Several sportspersons from Punjab and Haryana have backed the farmers agitation and "returned" their awards showing solidarity with the agitation. Among them are Padma Shri and Arjuna awardee wrestler Kartar Singh, Arjuna awardee basketball player Sajjan Singh Cheema and Arjuna awardee hockey player Rajbir Kaur. They have said they will proceed to Delhi on December 8 and will place their awards outside the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Addressing the farmers near Singhu border, 35-year-old Vijender said if the Government does not take back the "black laws", he would request them to take back the Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna award conferred on him earlier.

Continued on Page 2

## Pfizer seeks emergency use nod from India for its Covid vaccine

Shots have shown 90% efficacy; vaccine supply only through Govt contracts

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**

Pfizer Inc has become the first company to seek emergency use approval of its Covid-19 vaccine candidate in India after getting clearance in the UK and Bahrain.

The company said pricing

of the vaccine will depend on the amount ordered and advance commitments with countries.

"Our vaccine approach is based on the principles of ensuring broad access and supplies to Governments. This is reflected in all aspects of our agreements with various Governments, with the pricing strategy being an outcome of volume, advanced commitment, equity and affordability principles," the Pfizer told a news agency.

The shots have shown 90 per cent efficacy in trials. Pfizer has sought emergency use authorisation for its Covid-19 vaccine from the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI).

"Pfizer will supply this vaccine only through Government contracts based on agreements with respective Government authorities and following regulatory authorisation or approval," the company said.

Continued on Page 2

## Unitech founder Ramesh, sons face CBI case for ₹198 cr bank fraud

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**

The CBI has registered a case against the founder of real estate firm Unitech Limited, Ramesh Chandra and his sons — Sanjay and Ajay Chandra — for allegedly defrauding the public sector lender Canara Bank of ₹198 crore. Unitech Ltd has also been named as an accused entity in the case.

After registering the case on December 1 under Indian Penal Code Sections relating to criminal conspiracy, criminal breach of trust and cheating besides provisions of Prevention of Corruption Act, the CBI on Saturday conducted searches on the premises of the accused persons, sources said.

In a complaint filed on November 18 before the CBI, the bank had said Unitech — which had been a customer since 1971 and availed various credit facilities — had defaulted on multiple payments.

The complaint stated that a Supreme Court-ordered forensic audit of Unitech's accounts revealed ₹14,270 crore had been collected from 29,800 homebuyers.

However, ₹5,036.05 crore of this amount had not been utilised for the construction of 74 residential projects.

Continued on Page 2

**Covid-19 IN INDIA**

**TOTAL**

**CASES: 96,73,658**

**DEATHS: 1,40,544**

**RECOVERED: 91,35,003**

**ACTIVE: 3,95,750**

STATES	TOTAL CASES	DEATHS	RECOVERED
Maharashtra	18,52,266	47,734	17,23,370
Karnataka	8,93,006	11,856	8,55,750
Andhra Pradesh	8,71,972	7,033	8,59,029
Tamil Nadu	7,90,240	11,793	7,67,659
Kerala	6,36,393	2,419	5,72,911
Delhi	5,92,250	9,643	5,57,914
Uttar Pradesh	5,54,944	7,924	5,24,860
West Bengal	4,99,697	8,677	4,70,223
Odisha	3,21,196	1,824	3,15,840
Rajasthan	2,80,585	2,429	2,55,729
Telangana	2,73,341	1,472	2,63,744
Chhattisgarh	2,46,809	2,989	2,23,772
Haryana	2,43,896	2,588	2,28,411
Bihar	2,39,126	1,295	2,32,438
Gujarat	2,18,788	4,081	2,00,112
Madhya Pradesh	2,14,505	3,337	1,97,777

## CAPSULE

### DEFIANT TRUMP SAYS US POLL WAS 'RIGGED'

Washington: A defiant Donald Trump is showing no signs of surrender and has reiterated yet again his unsubstantiated allegations of widespread voter fraud, claiming at his first post-poll rally in Georgia that he won a "rigged" US presidential election that he lost. **P8**

### BJP LEADER, WIFE KILLED IN ACCIDENT

Kannauj: A spokesperson of Delhi BJP Yuva Morcha and his wife were killed and five others injured when their car was hit by a truck on the Expressway here on Sunday, police said. The accident took place near Thathia village when Sandeep Shukla (45), his wife, three sons and two neighbours were going to Pratapgarh to attend a wedding.

## Rain, hike in MSP & demand raise pulse, oil prices by 30%

**RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI**

After facing uncertainty due to Covid-19 pandemic, skyrocketing prices of edible oils and pulses have hit the masses hard. The average retail prices of pulses and edible oils have gone up by around 30 per cent in the past few days.

For instance, arhar (tur dal), which was being sold for around ₹70-80 per kg till last month, now costs around ₹125-130 per kg. Moong dal which cost around ₹80-90 per kg is now being sold at around ₹130 per kg.

Similarly, mustard oil is being sold at ₹155-165 a kg. The price of mustard oil was ₹120-135 a kg till last month.

The retail prices of pulses and edible oils were recorded highest in northeastern States.

According to the Consumer Affairs Ministry, the retail prices of arhar, moong, masoor, gram, groundnut, mustard, vana-pati, soyabean, sunflower and palm have increased up to 20-30 per cent while the spike in the case of palm, soyabean and sunflower oils by up to 20-30 per cent as compared to past few months.

The increased prices of pulses and edible oils have been attributed to short supply, destruction of crops due to heavy rainfall, hike in minimum support price and increase in public demand

after opening of restaurants, hotels and roadside dhabas. The reduction in palm oil production in Malaysia in the past six months has been one of the reasons behind increase in prices of other edible oils. The high prices of pulses and edible oils have impacted the sale of small shopkeepers across India.

As per the Ministry's data, the retail prices of mustard oil have gone up from ₹142 per litre in September to ₹156 in November. The groundnut oil is being sold at ₹200 per litre; vanaspati at ₹164; sunflower at ₹150 and palm oil at ₹135. There is an increase of 20 to 40 per cent in the edible oil.

Continued on Page 2

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# Yogi asks UPMRC to complete Agra Metro first phase by '22

## PM Modi to inaugurate construction work today

**PNS ■ LUCKNOW**  
Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's commitment to providing smooth traffic to the people of Uttar Pradesh is gaining momentum as he has directed the Uttar Pradesh Metro Rail Corporation (UPMRC) to complete the first phase of the Agra Metro Rail Project (AMRP) by December 2022.

On Monday (December 7), Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate the construction of the first phase of the AMRP through a virtual programme in the presence of Chief Minister Yogi

Adityanath. UP Governor Anandiben Patel and Union Minister of State for Housing and Urban Affairs (independent charge) Hardeep Singh Puri will also be present on the occasion.

According to officials, the total cost of the Agra Metro rail project is Rs 8,379.62 crore and in the first phase, the Sikandra-Taj East Gate corridor will be constructed and it will have six metro stations.

While the Taj East Gate, Basai and Fatehabad Road metro stations will be elevated, the Taj Mahal, Agra Fort and Jama Masjid halts will be

underground stations.

The 15.4 km-long Agra Cantonment-Kalindi Vihar corridor will have 14 elevated metro stations at Agra Cantonment, Sadar Bazaar, Collectorate, Subhash Park, Agra College, Hariparvat crossing, Sanjay Place, MG Road, Sultanganj crossing, Kamlanagar, Rambagh, Foundry Nagar and Kalindi Vihar.

Besides benefiting the 26 lakh-odd locals of the Taj city, the Metro will also prove to be

a better option for movement to over 60 lakh tourists who visit Agra every year.

All the stations of the AMRC have been planned in such a way that all the four major railway stations, bus depots, colleges, main markets and tourist destinations are well connected for the easy movement of the locals as well as the tourists.

"The Agra Metro will provide an environment-friendly, comfortable and hassle-free means of public transport and it will also make it easy to travel to world famous tourist destinations like Taj Mahal and Agra Fort," said Uttar Pradesh Metro Rail Corporation (UPMRC) Managing Director Kumar Keshav.

"Its biggest advantage will be in tourism development and it is a major challenge for our team to construct a Metro corridor in the heart of the city and make the Metro available within the stipulated time frame," he added.

It may be mentioned here that the UPMRC has set a precedent by constructing the Lucknow Metro rail well ahead of the schedule. The construction work of the Kanpur Metro is also being carried out at a fast pace.

The foundation stone of the Agra Metro Rail project was laid by the prime minister through a virtual programme in May 2019.

While the Lucknow metro is already running, the construction work on Kanpur metro is in the progress.

## Cong, Opp parties have done nothing for Dalits: CM Yogi

### Pays homage to Dr BR Ambedkar

**PNS ■ LUCKNOW**  
Hitting out at the Congress and other opposition parties, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said that they had always used Dalits (Scheduled Castes) and neglected this section as their vote bank but did nothing to improve their lot.

"There are so many welfare schemes of the Centre and the state government for these classes but they had been used as vote banks by the successive governments in the past while doing nothing in their favour," the chief minister said while paying homage to Baba Saheb Bhimrao Ambedkar on his 64th Mahaparirvan Divas on Sunday.

It was only because of the vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi that all the places and 'panch tirthas' associated with Baba Saheb Bhimrao Ambedkar were constructed, he said.

"It is surprising that Baba Saheb's associate, Jogendra Nath Mandal, who was Dalit leader of the same stature, did not get the respect he deserved and this book clearly explains everything and it is also an eye opener," said the chief minister, who also released a book on Dr. BR Ambedkar and Jogendra Nath Mandal.

"When Congress prevented Baba Saheb from going to national assembly after inde-

# UP Govt takes steps to protect cows from winter chill

**PNS ■ LUCKNOW**  
The Yogi Adityanath Government has taken an important decision to protect cows of the state from intense cold and inclement weather in winters as cows living in cow shelters will be given jaggery to eat and winter coats made of jute

and sacks to keep them warm in the chilly nights.

The Animal Husbandry department has already made elaborate arrangements for this.

Apart from this, hay will be laid on the ground in the cow sheds so that the cows can be protected from cold in the harsh winter.

According to Animal Husbandry department's Joint Director Vidya Bhusan Singh, there are 5,173 gaushalas (cow shelters) in the state in which more than 5.26 lakh cows are kept.

He said that with the onset of winter, the work of laying hay in the cow sheds had started.

He said the laying of straw in almost all the cow sheds had been completed.

Apart from this, coats made of jute sacks are being arranged for the cows. This will protect from the winter chill.

At the same time, the gaushalas are being covered with thick polyethylene sheets or tarpaulins to protect cows from cold and gusty winds.

"Jute bags will be used to make coats which will be put on cows to keep them warm in winter. The jute bags will be provided by the district supply department. In some districts, gram panchayats will make coats for cows under the MGNREGA

# Opp parties to participate in nationwide chakka jam

**From Page 1**  
In a press release, Rao recalled that the TRS had opposed the agriculture bills in Parliament as well, while they were being passed, and had argued that the legislations would harm the interests of farmers.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had also threatened to start a country-wide stir if the farm laws were not withdrawn immediately. "I am very much concerned about the farmers, their lives and livelihood," she had said in a series of tweets.

In Tamil Nadu, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam extended support to the countrywide shutdown, saying the demand

sight of farmers sitting outside the capital in the middle of the night in winters waiting for the government to listen to them," he said.

Congress has been opposed to the new legislations since day one, claiming that the laws are exploitative, anti-poor and anti-farmer.

Congress chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala also spoke in support, saying the Congress stood united with them in their struggle. "We will wholeheartedly support the Bharat Bandh call," Surjewala said.

Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot said the party was committed to the farmers. He said that former party chief Rahul Gandhi has been an "ardent supporter" of farmers and every Congress worker stands with him in "taking this cause of farmers to every corner of the nation".

Actor-turned-politician Kamal Haasan's Makkal Needhi Maiam also announced that it would take part in the ongoing farmers protest. In a statement, the party said that a 10-member team will reach Delhi soon to join the farmers.

like cars and two wheelers, it said.

"Singhu, Auchandi, Lampur, Piao Maniyari, Mangesh borders are closed, NH 44 is closed on both sides," the police said. It advised commuters to take alternate routes via Safiabad, Saboli, NH8, Bhopra, Apsara borders, and Peripheral expressway.

People travelling to Haryana can take Dhansa,

seized of the matter and there was no ground to extend interim bail.

In July this year, the apex court gave Sanjay Chandra bail after it was told his parents were severely ill and had been hospitalised. The court was told Ramesh Chandra, 79, had been diagnosed with COVID-19.

The dals were being sold at much higher prices in the NCR markets. Similarly, the Ministry's data quoted that groundnut oil was sold at Rs 180 per litre while mustard oil at Rs 140. The prices are higher in the retail markets.

Traders say the overall Consumer Food Price Index (CFFPI) and inflation rate of vegetables and pulses has been increasing constantly.

**New Okhla Industrial Development Authority**  
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Website : www.noidaauthorityonline.com

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Please ensure to see these websites for any changes/amendments & corrigendum etc.

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The above tenders can be uploaded by date 14.12.2020 upto 5.00 PM. Pre-qualification shall be opened/downloaded on date 15.12.2020 at 11.00 AM.

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**From Page 1**  
Vijender was awarded the Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna in 2009 after becoming the first Indian boxer to win an Olympic medal.

BJP, however, sought to see Vijender as a congressman

**From Page 1**  
Addressing concerns about distribution, the company also said it will utilise GPS-enabled sensors in every thermal shipper that will allow Pfizer to track the location and temperature of doses across their pre-set routes.

The main concern for developing countries like India has been the vaccine's ultra cold storage requirements. Pfizer's mRNA technology needs storage at -75 degrees Celsius

party meet on Friday, cited experts to say that India could have the first coronavirus vaccine in weeks and that eight vaccines will be manufactured in India.

Pfizer, in its application submitted on December 4, has sought permission to import the vaccine for sale and distribution in India. It also sought the waiver of clinical trials on Indian population as per the special provisions under the New Drugs and Clinical Trials Rules, 2019, to get instant approval for emergency use,

according to yet another report. AIIMS Director Dr Randeep Guleria had earlier said that India was in talks with Pfizer-BioNTech regarding its Covid-19 vaccine candidate. He said no such communication had been initiated with Moderna for its experimental Covid-19 vaccine.

The UK has already approved Pfizer and BioNTech coronavirus candidate on December 2 after the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) found the shot safe.

**PUBLIC NOTICE**

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**Naven Kumar Verma, Advocate**  
F-211, Sector-3 vaishali, Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh-201010

# 11TH DAY: PROTESTING FARMERS STAY PUT AT UP GATE

STAFF REPORTER ■ GHAZIABAD

On the 11th day of protest, the farmers stayed put at the UP Gate. Due to the ongoing protest, people coming from Ghaziabad to Delhi faced traffic chaos.

On Sunday, the farmers held a meeting to make the call for Bharat Bandh on December 8, successful. In the meeting, the farmers have also warned other farmers that some anti-social elements can infiltrate the movement and spoil the atmosphere, so do not let their conspiracy succeed.

Rakesh Tikait, the president of Bharat Kisan Union (BKU) said that the farmers' movement is purely apolitical, but if any political leader visits the protest site, we will not oppose them. He said that it is the Indian culture that host always welcomes the visitors.

On the eleventh day of the movement was young genera-

tion to the families of protesting farmers on National Highway 9 to give information about the alleged shortcomings of the new agricultural laws.

A field library has been set up by a man at UP Gate site. Rajeev Chaudhary, a Law graduate who runs this library, said that there are some people coming to the movement site who want to know about the new agricultural law.

In order to charge the mobile of farmers at the movement site, some enthusiastic youths have installed solar panels on their tractors. Farmers said that due to lack of mobile charge, they were having difficulty in communicating, so this arrangement has been made to hold the mobile charge.

Delhi Gurdwara Management Committee has made elaborate arrangements to provide free food to the agitated farmers. The committee's general secretary Harmeet

Singh Kalka said that the free langar will continue here till the movement goes on.

On the other hand, on December 8, the District Administration has made strict security arrangements regarding the shutdown called Bharat Bandh. Tight security arrangements have been made to ensure that farmers do not commit any kind of violence to close the markets.

District Magistrate, Dr Ajay Shankar Pande said that on December 8, security forces will be deployed on the highway. On the other hand, Ashok Goel, vice chairman and rank minister of the Trade Welfare Board, has alleged that some anti-national people have also infiltrated the peasant movement and they want to riot in the guise of the movement.

He has appealed to all the businessmen of Ghaziabad to run their business and business independently on December 8.



Farmers shout slogans during their Delhi Chalo protest march against the new farm laws, at Singhu border in New Delhi on Sunday

Ranjan Dimri | Pioneer

## AAP announces support to Bharat Bandh on Dec 8

CHANDAN PRAKASH ■ NEW DELHI

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) announced their support to the 'Bharat Bandh' called by the farmer unions on December 8 against the three farm laws passed by the Centre.

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said that all party workers across the country will support the strike called by farmers and appealed to all citizens to support the farmers.

"The AAP fully supports the 'Bharat Bandh' called by farmers on December 8. AAP workers across the country will support it peacefully. There is an appeal to all countrymen that everyone should support the farmers and participate in it," Kejriwal tweeted.

The AAP Punjab president and Member of Parliament Bhagwant Mann said that the issue is not specific to any political party, religion or community; instead, this is an issue of the nation and its farmers. He stated that the farmers are not just fighting for their own survival but they are also fighting for the survival of the country.

Challenging the Modi gov-

ernment, Mann said that the central government should agree to the demands of the farmers and revoke the farm laws as trying to extend the protests further would backfire on the government.

Addressing the media in New Delhi, Mann appealed to the people of the country to follow their duty and support the national bandh called by the farmers and make it historic as this country would be unimaginable without its farmers.

Mann said that for the benefit of all, the central government should call a special session and pass an ordinance revoking these black laws and guarantee assured purchase on MSP on all crops.

Taking a jibe at Modi, Mann said that Modi does not understand the fact that Punjab is a land of warriors and martyrs. "This protest is being led by the farmers of Punjab whose ancestors fought against the Mughals for 200 years, against the British for 150 years and kept fighting the food scarcity of the country until they had made the nation self-sufficient. It is in their blood to fight for their rights and justice, he said.

Attacking the central gov-

ernment, Mann said that the government that makes those who work in the blistering heat and the freezing cold to feed the country does not deserve to be called a government. It is just shameful.

The AAP leader and Delhi Environment Minister Gopal Rai said all volunteers and workers will participate in the strike to support the farmers.

"This is not just the farmers' fight but the fight for all countrymen. India is an agricultural country and if farmers are unhappy then the country is affected. I appeal to all to join the protest," Rai said, in a video message.

Rai said that the AAP leaders and volunteers will stand in support of the farmers and the bandh in all the states.

"The three anti-farmer laws passed by BJP run central government have led the farmers, the providers of the nation to leave their homes and protest on the roads since the past ten days. In Delhi's cold winter nights, both young and old are forced to sleep on the pavements. On the other hand, the BJP government is entwined in conversations but is not landing on a concrete solution," he added.

## Slow wind makes city's air 'very poor'

Likely to be improved over next two days due to increase in wind speed

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Air quality in Delhi was recorded under 'very poor category' on Sunday and is likely to improve over the next two days due to increase in the

wind speed, SAFAR said in its short range weather forecast.

While the overall AQI has been recorded 394 on the National Ambient Air Quality Index ( NAAQI ) on Sunday, the 24 hours average AQI on

Saturday was 404.

According to Met Department, the air quality had turned severe on Saturday due to low wind speed slowing the accumulation of locally-generated pollutants.

SAFAR, Ministry of Earth Sciences ( MoES ) in its weather forecast said the overall air quality is at the higher end of Very Poor. "Surface-level winds are moderate and North-north-westerly." "Boundary layer wind direction southerly and not favorable for Stubble fire-related transport. Stubble fire counts from SAFAR-multi-satellite products is around 167 and the PM2.5 percent share is negligible." "Surface winds are forecasted to increase and Air quality is likely to improve marginally by tomorrow but within the Very Poor category owing to slightly better ventilation condition."

It further adds that AQI is likely to further improve on December 8th and 9th due to better ventilation.

In past week trend, the AQI was 382 on Friday, 341 on Thursday, 373 on Wednesday, 367 on Tuesday, 318 on Monday and 268 on Sunday.

Air pollution in the neighbouring cities of Ghaziabad (AQI 430), Greater Noida (404) and Noida (404) continued to remain in the severe zone.

According to prescribed standards of Indian Meteorological Department ( IMD ), an AQI between zero and 50 is considered good, 51 and 100 satisfactory, 101 and 200 moderate, 201 and 300 poor, 301 and 400 very poor, and 401 and 500 severe.

The minimum temperature was 11.4 degrees Celsius on Sunday and the maximum is likely to settle around 28

degrees Celsius, the weather department said.

VK Soni, the head of IMD's environment research centre, said the wind speed remained slow allowing the accumulation of pollutants generated locally. "Easterly winds carrying moisture also led to the formation of secondary particulate matter. All these factors together pushed the air quality in the 'severe' zone," he said.

However, Soni said, the air quality is likely to be in the "poor category" by Monday due to an expected increase in the wind speed.

According to IMD, the maximum wind speed is likely to be 8kmph on Sunday and 15kmph on Monday.

Calm winds and low temperatures trap pollutants close to the ground, while favourable wind speed helps in their dispersion.



## Delhi Police returns ₹7.5 cr, other valuables to public

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Police on Sunday claimed to have returned Rs 7.5 crores and other valuable case properties to their rightful owners in the last six months. Police said that these articles were lying in the custody of Delhi Police from the last several years.

According to Dr Eish Singhal, the Public Relation Officer (PRO), Delhi Police, the special drives to hand over such case properties to their rightful owners were started upon the directions of Delhi Police Commissioner, S N Shrivastava.

"These articles have been returned by 15 Police Districts and their respective Police Stations where after reviewing the articles and other valuables were returned to its rightful owners. Regular special drives have been accordingly launched, which had yielded noticeable results," said Dr Singhal.

"With regard to valuable

articles, such as golden or silver ornaments, or articles stud-



ded with precious stones, it was of no use to keep such articles

in police custody for years till the trial was over. Accordingly,

requests were made by the Station House Officers to concerned Metropolitan Magistrates under Section 451 CrPc to hand over the case property to their rightful owners," said the PRO.

"Similarly, vehicles, mobile phones, Laptops, PCs, CCTVs etc. were also returned, after completing the necessary formalities as per law, to their rightful owners. During the period from June 1 to November 5, around Rs.7,55,62,133 in cash and gold jewellery around 3795.12 grams recovered in different cases was handed over to their rightful owners," said the Public Relation Officer.

"Around 5299 two wheelers, 280 TSRs and 869 four wheeler vehicles were also restored to their rightful owners. As regards the electronics items, 3980 mobile phones, 121 laptop and CCTV and 1931 other miscellaneous items recovered were handed over to their owners," said the Public Relation Officer.

## CM to share his Govt's efforts to make Delhi startup destination at global summit

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal will participate at The IndUS Entrepreneurs (TiE) Global Summit on December 9 and share Delhi's efforts in building a comprehensive framework and turning it into a global start-up destination.

Kejriwal is the only Chief Minister from India who will speak in this summit alongside several industry stalwarts, world leaders and Nobel laureates.

"From Entrepreneurship Mindset Curriculum in schools to a progressive start-up policy, the Delhi government has been in the forefront in making Delhi a global destination for start-ups," the Government said in statement.

The TiE global summit is a virtual conference of world leaders, entrepreneurs, investors & mentors. This summit will be addressed and



attended by government agencies, angel investors, venture capitalists, PEs, global industry leaders, global wealth entrepreneurs, thought leaders, academia, Nobel Laureates, policy makers, and TiE members from global chapters.

Kejriwal is expected to talk about various steps being taken to turn Delhi into a global start-

up destination ranging from launching a progressive start-up policy, providing access to affordable infrastructure for the hi-tech and service industry and providing high-quality skilled manpower through a focus on skilling and building an entrepreneurship mindset right from school education.

## Include SYL construction issue in your demands: Haryana Minister to farmers

PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM

Haryana Agriculture Minister Jai Prakash Dalal on Sunday said that water for irrigation is the biggest issue for Haryana farmers.

The Minister appealed to all the people, organisations who are participating and supporting the ongoing farmers' demonstration in the national Capital should include the construction of Sutlej Yamuna link (SYL) canal for Haryana in their demands.

The Agriculture Minister was addressing a press conference in Gurugram on Sunday. The minister said the state



farmer's first proprietary should be SYL canal and all other issues are secondary.

Dalal said that now all are doing politics in the name of farmers but "we are the sons of the farmer and will continue to

take decisions in the interests of farmers as and when required."

"I am a farmer first, and then a minister and I am also with the farmers. But for Haryana farmers, the biggest

issue now is water for irrigation," the minister said.

He said that the situation of underground water in seven-eight districts of South Haryana is so grim that the water table has gone down from 400 ft to 800 feet and in many areas there is no water. When there will be no water, then how will the crops come up and if there is no crop, then the issue of rate will have no meaning.

"We are requesting all the people across party lines, who are participating in the farmers agitation, all those who supporting it, directly or indirectly, to make include construction of SYL canal in their demand letter for the welfare of

farmers of Haryana, so that when the leaders and officials of the Government of India and the farmers' leaders sit face to face for negotiations, this issue is also discussed," he said.

The minister also informed that the state government has won the case in the Supreme Court and now the SYL canal, the construction of which is pending for the last 40 years and which is considered a line for Haryana, should be completed.

Accusing the opposition parties of misleading the farmers, Dalal said that our opponents propagate that the mandi system is being abolished, whereas in reality, a big mandi will be constructed at Ganaur

in District Sonapat at a cost of Rs 5000 crore with the help of National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), another Apple Mandi is proposed in 100 to 150 acres at Pinjore in district Panchkula and a big flower mandi would be developed in district Gurugram.

"There have been five rounds of talks between the Central Government and the farmers outfits, we are hopeful that the Central Government will find an amicable way out in the interest of farmers. There has been a point-wise discussion between the two sides and consensus has been reached on some points," Dalal added.



# Covid-19 global surveillance system developed



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A first-of-its-kind Covid-19 global surveillance system has been developed. It can dynamically track not just where the virus is now, but where it is going, how fast it will arrive and whether that speed is accelerating. Named as GASSP (Global Sars-Co2 Surveillance Project), it is being rolled out in 195 countries.

"Now we can easily identify outbreaks at their beginning," said Lori Post, the lead investigator and director of the Buehler Center for Health Policy and Economics at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. "You want to know where the pandemic is accelerating, how fast it is moving and how that compares to prior weeks."

Post worked along with James Oehmke of Northwestern, and Charles Moss of the University of Florida to develop the novel surveillance system, based on path-breaking research led by Oehmke.

"We can inform leaders where the outbreak is occur-

ring before it shows up in overcrowded hospitals and morgues," Post said. "Current systems are static and ours is dynamic."

Users will have metrics of the whole world at their fingertips. The global surveillance app analyzes the virus in the same way the field of economics measures the expansion and contraction of the economy.

"These methods are tried and tested, but this is the first time they are being applied to disease surveillance," Post said. "We had the model and metrics validated for medical surveillance and published. We know they work."

Existing surveillance can't identify pandemic shifts or signal a coming outbreak.

Existing surveillance, which hasn't changed much in 50 years, measures the caseload in terms of new and cumulative deaths and infections. They don't identify significant shifts in the pandemic or sound the alarm when there is alarming acceleration of disease transmission signaling an outbreak.

## 47K paramilitary personnel recover from Covid infection

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Out of the over 49,000 Covid-19 cases in the Central paramilitary forces over 47,000 have been cured and only a little over 1,900 (below four per cent) are currently active cases.

As per consolidated data available till Thursday, a total of 49,152 paramilitary personnel contracted the viral disease and 47,057 men recovered from the illness. A total of 1,911 infected personnel constitute active cases in the ranks and the consolidated death toll in the Forces is 184.

The Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) has reported 14,189 cases and 13,845 patients have recuperated from the illness. The Force has at present 270 active cases and it lost 74 lives to the deadly disease.

The Border Security Force (BSF) contracted 13,939 Covid-19 infection but 13,400 patients have defeated the disease and only 495 active



cases in its ranks. It reported 44 deaths due to the disease. The Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) reported 10,182 cases of Covid-19 infection of which 9,410 have recovered and 732 men continue to be active cases. It lost 40 lives to the infection.

Likewise, the Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) recorded 5,320 cases of Covid-19 infection of which 5,116 patients have been cured and only 191 active cases are there in its ranks presently.

The Indo Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) had reported 4,564 cases of Covid-19 infec-

tion and 4,349 patients have recuperated from the disease. There are 203 active cases in its ranks and it suffered 12 casualties.

The National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) reported 631 cases of Covid-19 disease and as many as 620 personnel have been cured. It has 10 active cases now and it lost one life to the viral disease.

The National Security Guards (NSG) reported 327 Covid-19 cases of which 317 patients have been cured and there are 10 active cases without any casualty.

These new metrics also can help developed countries and their health systems prepare for swift changes in the pandemic.

Post also said, "Speed itself doesn't tell us enough," Post

said. "We have to know the acceleration and how that compares week to week—jerk—to be prepared for what's coming in the pandemic."

Jerk is a measure of increasing acceleration and

may help predict the stress the pandemic will place on health care systems. "Jerk can help turn a reactive policy response into a proactive policy response," said Oehmke, adjunct professor of emer-

## Corona has driven courts to adapt to technology: Ex-SC judge Sikri

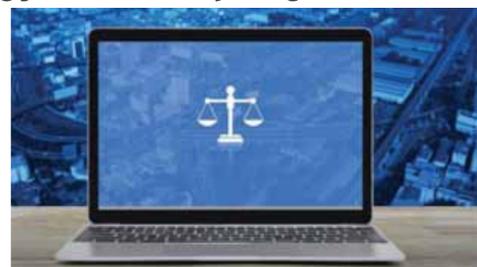
PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought enormous hardship to people but it has also driven courts to adapt to technology to a far greater extent, former Supreme Court judge Justice (ret'd) A K Sikri has said.

Justice (Ret'd) Sikri, however, said the judiciary has the challenge to make legal technology available to the courts in the remotest parts of the country.

"We are a vast country. We have not just the Supreme Court or high courts in metropolitan cities, but there are smaller high courts, mufassil courts and district courts in different parts of the country and at remote places which may not be having this technology," he said, adding the Supreme Court is already working on these challenges.

Justice (Ret'd) Sikri, who is now an international judge at the Singapore International Commercial Court, was speak-



ing on Saturday at a virtual discussion on the 'Legal Powerlist 2020', an event to identify and felicitate hundreds of successful and upcoming lawyers, law firms and law schools in the country.

The event was also attended by senior advocate R Venkatramani, Raian Karanjwala, the Managing Partner of Karanjwala & Co. Law firm; and Karan Kalia, the co-founder and CEO of legal tech platform Legitquest.

Talking about the criticism that judges and the judiciary have been facing on social

media, Venkatramani said rather than pointing towards individuals who behave recklessly on online platforms, there is a need to develop a culture of using social media responsibly.

"There is no option but to live in an open society. Social media is an unowned media. The first milestone to be crossed is that we need to develop a higher level of culture of how one should use social media responsibly. It's useless to talk about picking up individuals who seamlessly cross the limits of this responsibility," he said.

dynamic characteristics of the pandemic," Post said. "Pandemics move around and change. We are like air traffic controllers guiding in an airplane during a thunderstorm. The pilot can't see. They don't

know where to go—they need information. We have to guide that plane on instruments. Analogously, we need to inform public health leaders when there are significant shifts to the pandemic."

## Telugu actress Vijayashanthi quits Cong, to join BJP today

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

After Khusbu Sundar in Tamil Nadu, it's Vijayashanthi in Telangana. The yesteryears' A-list actress, who during her prime was also known as the Amitabh Bachchan of south cinema, quit the Congress on Sunday and is set to rejoin the BJP on Monday.

She arrived in the national Capital along with Telangana BJP chief Bandi Sanjay Kumar and met Union Home Minister Amit Shah and his deputy and Secunderabad MP G Kishan Reddy.

The former MP was not active in Congress activities and programmes in the state for the past few months as she was not happy with the treatment she was being given in the party, sources said.

"Vijayashanthi will formally join BJP tomorrow. She met with Amit Shah today. All those whom KCR sidelined, will join BJP," BJP leader G Vivek Venkatswamy said.

Her return to the BJP fold comes at a time when the party has stormed the TRS citadel in Telangana by bagging the Dubbak Assembly seat, a TRS bastion and becoming the number two party in the



GHMC polls. The BJP's impressive performances have continued after winning four Lok Sabha seats last year.

Vijayashanthi had first joined the BJP in 1998 and was made the secretary of BJP's Women's Wing. During the Telangana separate statehood movement, she worked closely with TRS chief K Chandrasekhara Reddy. She then became an MP from Medak on a TRS ticket and represented the constituency between 2009 and 2014 but thereafter, she parted ways with the TRS and joined the Congress the same year.

During the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, Vijayashanthi had gone to the extent of calling Prime Minister Narendra Modi a "terrorist" while speaking at a public gathering in

Telangana's Shamshabad.

"Everyone is scared that at what moment Modi will shoot the bomb. He looks like a terrorist. Instead of loving people, he is scaring people. It's not the way how a PM should be," she said.

But her entry into the BJP, a sort of homecoming, will give a shot in the arm to the saffron party, which has set its eyes on capturing power in Telangana in 2023.

In October, actor-turned-politician Khusbu Sundar had quit the Congress and joined the BJP within hours after that in the presence of BJP General Secretary CT Ravi, BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra and other members. She resigned from the primary membership of Congress, alleging "suppression".

## 411m Indians need rehabilitation post Covid recovery: Study

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Covid-19 has highlighted the importance of rehabilitation with its post-recovery complications and the need for it to be part of the global public health agenda. And India is among the five countries in the world with the greatest number of people needing rehabilitation services such as physical and occupational therapy or speech and language therapy.

According to a World Health Organisation (WHO) study published in The Lancet journal, China tops the list with 460 million people in need of rehabilitation services followed by India (411 million), the US (149 million), Indonesia (76 million) and Brazil (70 million).

According to the paper 'Global Estimates Of The Need For Rehabilitation Based On The Global Burden Of Disease Study 2019', which provides the first-ever global and regional figures on the number of people in need of rehabilitation, in India, the greatest need is for fractures (90 million people) while in China, it is hearing loss (95 million).

Lower back pain (568 million people), hearing loss (403 million people), and bone fractures (436 million people) accounted for the greatest need for rehabilitation therapies, the study said underlining that one third of the world's population are living with a health condition that benefit from rehabilitation.

The need for rehabilitation services, such as physical and occupational therapy or speech and language therapy, has increased 63 per cent since 1990, from 1.48 billion to 2.41 billion people who could benefit at least once in the course of their illness or injury, mostly because of growing aging population, as per the study, jointly prepared by the WHO and the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME).

The findings indicate the



urgent need to scale up rehabilitation, particularly at primary health care level, to ensure services reach those who need them. The study provides a strong case for policymakers to prioritize rehabilitation to address the functioning needs of their population.

"People living with the long-term consequences of covid-19 have spoken to me again and again about their need for rehabilitation services, along with the need for recognition, and further research," said Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director-general of the WHO.

"Those requiring rehabilitation services may include survivors of both infectious and noncommunicable disease, accidents, conflicts, and so many other health problems that arise over the course of one's life. Rehabilitation services must be part of essential packages of care as part of every country's journey towards universal health coverage," he said.

The new global estimates establish rehabilitation as a key strategy for Universal Health Coverage in the 21st century, experts said.

Dr Somnath Chatterji, one of the authors of the study, from the WHO said: "Rehabilitation services are often seen as a fallback strategy when preventive or curative interventions have failed, or as a disability-specific service needed only by a minority of the population."

The study is based on data from the Global Burden of Diseases, Injuries and Risk

## Implement new health warnings with enhanced pictorial images on tobacco products, States told

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

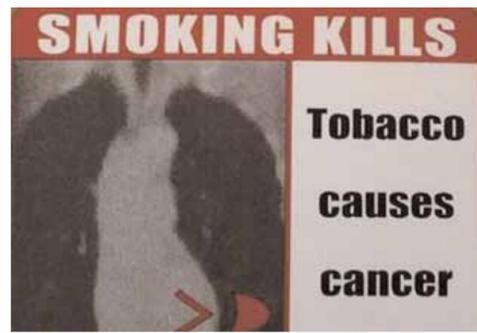
The Union Health Ministry has asked all States to ensure implementation of a new set of health warnings with enhanced pictorial images on all tobacco products as notified by it.

"The depiction of specified health warnings would bring greater awareness and sensitization about the serious and adverse health consequences of tobacco use especially among the youth, children and the illiterate."

"Effective implementation of the Rules depends on concerted efforts of all ministries and departments concerned of the Government of India as well as State Governments. I shall be grateful, if you could kindly take the necessary steps to ensure that the provisions of these Rules are duly enforced, under your jurisdiction," Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan said in a recent letter to chief secretaries and administrators of all states.

The Union health ministry had notified the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products (Packaging and Labelling) Rules on March 15, 2008.

The rules have been amended from time to time for display of specified health warnings on all tobacco product



packs, thereby mandating the display of specified health warnings on both sides of tobacco product packages covering 85 per cent of the principal display area.

According to the rule five of the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products (Packaging and Labelling) Rules, the specified health warning on tobacco product package shall be rotated every twenty-four months.

The new sets of health warnings with enhanced pictorial images on all tobacco products were notified on July 21

All tobacco products manufactured or imported or packaged on or after December, 1, 2020, shall display the first set of images while the second set

of images will be displayed by the tobacco products manufactured or imported or packaged on or after December 1.

"Any person engaged directly or indirectly in the manufacture, production, supply, import or distribution of cigarettes or any tobacco products shall ensure that all tobacco product packages shall have the specified health warnings exactly as prescribed."

"Violation of the above mentioned provision is a punishable offence with imprisonment or fine as prescribed in Section 20 of the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products (Prohibition of Advertisement and Regulation of Trade and Commerce, Production, Supply and Distribution) Act, 2003," the Ministry had said.

which estimates the incidence and prevalence of more than 300 diseases and injuries. The

researchers analyzed data for all 204 countries and territories in the GBD study.

## Cyclone formations in Arabian sea not uncommon, says IMD

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Four of the five cyclones that originated either in the Bay of Bengal or in the Arabian Sea this year were in the category of severe cyclonic storm or above, including Amphan which had escalated into a super cyclone. But formation of cyclones is not uncommon in the Arabian Sea during the pre-monsoon period and in the Bay of Bengal during the post-monsoon months of October to December. Three cyclones—two in the Bay of Bengal and one in the Arabian Sea—have formed in the last one month.

India Meteorological Department (IMD) Director General Mrutunjay Mohapatra said since 1990 four cyclones have formed every year in the seas along the eastern and western coasts (Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea) of the country. "It is normal to have five cyclones a year," he said.

Amphan was the first cyclone of the year. It formed in the Bay of Bengal and intensified into a 'super

cyclonic storm', the first since the super cyclone of Odisha that had ravaged the state in 1999, killing thousands. 'Amphan', however, weakened a bit to become an 'extremely severe cyclonic storm' and slammed the coasts of West Bengal and Bangladesh on May 19.

Another circulation formed in the Arabian Sea within a fortnight, intensifying into a severe cyclonic storm which was called 'Nisarga'. The storm hit Alibag, near Mumbai, and helped monsoon to arrive in Kerala on its normal date of June 1. Cyclone 'Gati' intensified into a very severe cyclonic storm. It affected the western coast during its intensification stage, bringing rains over Kerala, but it crossed the Somalia coast on November 23. Another cyclone was brewing in the Bay of Bengal at the same time.

Cyclone 'Nivar' was initially projected to be a 'severe cyclonic storm'. However, it intensified into a 'very severe

cyclonic storm', crossing the Tamil Nadu coast on the night of November 25. Less than a week later, another storm gathered momentum and intensified into a cyclonic storm. Cyclone 'Burevi' crossed the Sri Lanka coast on November 2 but as it crossed the south Tamil Nadu coast, having its intensity reduced to deep depression. Cyclones not only bring violent winds, but rains accompanied by storm surge.

"A very severe cyclonic storm has a wind speed of 120-160 kilometres per hour and can uproot trees, partially damage communication lines and also damage thatched huts. "An extremely severe cyclonic storm can lead to catastrophic damage, uproot power and communication lines and damage houses and other infrastructure," Mohapatra said. An extremely severe cyclonic storm has a wind speed of 160 to 220 kilometres per hour.

The IMD chief added the storm surge during Amphan was up to 10 metres when sea waters travelled inland.

## US removes ETIM from list of terrorist outfits

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The US has removed the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) from the list of terrorist organisations, signaling Washington's intent of beginning to recognise the rights of the Uyghurs to fight for their homeland, watchers of developments linked to the East Turkistan Republican Party, considered to be ideologically close to the ETIM, said.

"The removal of the East Turkistan Islamic Movement

from the terror list may lead to more horrific and accelerated Chinese genocide against the completely empty-handed Uyghurs," the sources said.

The Uyghur community residing beyond East Turkistan are also likely to be persecuted by soft and hard means in accordance with Chinese traditions and methods, they said.

"China is not so afraid of the Uyghurs because the Uyghurs do not have the tools, ability or power to get

rid of China by military force. But China fears that the Uyghur struggle for independence will gain the support of countries such as the United States, Europe and India, so the Chinese have resorted to all tricks to discredit the Uyghurs in the Western world," they further said.

The political existence of the Uyghurs depends on getting rid of China and accordingly the National Anthem of the East Turkistan State, established on November 12,

1933, is known as the March of Salvation, the outfit said.

"The Uyghurs declared independence in the last century in Kashgar in 1933 and on November 12, 1944 in Guljia. Since then, although we have not been able to get rid of China, but have been looking for all possible ways to get rid of them, it said.

The outfit also views Afghanistan as a gateway of resolution of the Uyghur issue and denied the Chinese charge that the group has any relations with the Al Qaeda.

The ETIM was created and enlarged entirely under China's intelligence program. They were deployed to Afghanistan? Pakistan and Syria and vigorously promoted through the Chinese-influenced media, and have played a role in China's plan to portray the entire Uyghur nation as terrorists and lay the groundwork for genocide, it alleged, adding that the Uyghurs in general are peace-loving and dream for building a modern state for the community.

# Many leaders took money from me: Saradha kingpin

Sudipta Sen writes to PM, CM from jail

PNS ■ KOLKATA

Jailed Saradha chit fund scam kingpin Sudipta Sen has written letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee informing how a number of politicians and influential persons had accepted "financial advantages" from him.

The letter dated December 1, had yet not been posted by the jail authorities, sources said adding it was to be channeled through the ADG Prisons office.

The letter dated December 1, by Sen who is in judicial custody for the past seven years alleges how "many influential persons have taken huge financial advantage from me," and how no action has yet been

taken against them.

The list of the 'beneficiaries' include the names of leaders from "CPI(M), BJP, Congress and the Trinamool Congress," he alleged requesting CBI and police action.

He also alleged that despite bringing the matter to the notice of the CBI the agency had not taken adequate action. "It is painful for me to see that those who are talking of high morals have actually cheated-poor people... I request the CBI and the state police to investigate the matter properly," he wrote.

Reacting to the contents of the letter BJP leader Mukul Roy said that he would not like to speak on subjudice matters reminding how such allegations leveled by a co-accused had no

evidentiary value.

On the other hand former CPI (M) MP and State Legislature Party Leader Sujun Chakraborty said, "This is ridiculous as leaders of the Congress and the CPI (M) are fighting for the cause of the people affected in the scam... in fact it is Congress leader Abdul Mannan who filed the petition in Supreme Court seeking CBI investigation and our MP and senior advocate Bikash Ranjan Bhattacharya who fought the case successfully."

The multi-crore Saradha scam unearthed in 2013 saw how lakhs of people were cheated of their savings. Subsequently following massive media uproar Sen and his deputy Debjani Mukherjee were arrested from Sonmargin Kashmir.

## AGITATION AGAINST FARM LAWS

# SAD team meets Maha CM to seek support for farmers' stir

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Amid the ongoing farmers' agitation demanding the scrapping of farm laws, a delegation of Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) - led by its general secretary and former MP Prem Singh Chandumajra - met Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray here on Sunday and elicited the latter's support for the protests staged by farmers on the outskirts of the national capital.

At the meeting, the SAD delegation urged Uddhav to join a meeting of the leaders of all the Opposition and regional parties being scheduled within a fortnight to chalk out a strategy to take on the BJP-led government at the Centre on the farm laws and various other issues.

Talking to media persons after the meeting, Chandumajra said that the

chief minister had assured the SAD delegation would join the meeting.

"The (Maharashtra) CM has said he supports the farmers' agitation and will come to the meeting of the leaders of all the Opposition and regional parties to be held in Delhi in a fortnight from now," he said.

In a statement issued here, the Chief Minister's Office here said that the Akali Dal leader stressed during the meeting that the farm laws were against the interests of farmers.

The chief minister said that the farmers are the 'backbone of the country' and resolving their problems and difficulties should be the Centre's priority.

"We would like the ongoing talks to succeed. In the event of failure of talks, all Opposition parties will come together and discuss the future strategy. The Centre pushed

through the farm laws without taking the Opposition into confidence.

The farmers for whom the laws have been made are angry and out on the streets," Chandumajra said.

Chandumajra said that the leaders of all Opposition parties would meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Ram Nath Kovind and take up the farmers' issue with them.

Dwelling upon how the Centre had diluted the states' revenues by denying them rightful share of the revenue raised from the GST, Chandumajra said that there was a need for the regional parties and representatives of the non-BJP governments in the states to unite against what he said "the attempts to centralise" the country's politics.

Both the Shiv Sena and SAD were once strong allies of the ruling BJP at the Centre.

The Shiv Sena severed its ties with the BJP to join hands with the NCP and Congress to form a government in Maharashtra in November last year. The SDA quit the BJP-led NDA in September this year in protest against the Centre's farm laws.

Prior to its meeting with the Maharashtra chief minister, the SAD delegations had met Samajwadi Party leader and UP's former chief minister Akhilesh Yadav, Biju Janata Dal leaders and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamta Banerjee.

Meanwhile, NCP president Sharad Pawar - who is calling on President Ram Nath Kovind on the farmers' issue on December 9 - hit out at the Narendra Modi government for hurrying the bill through both the Houses of Parliament despite the protests by the Opposition.

"We had said that there

should be a debate on the issue and demanded the bills be sent a Select Committee for the purpose.

But nothing of that sort happened and the bill was passed hurriedly. Now, the Government is facing problems because of that haste," Pawar said.

In a related development, many of trade unions, social and farmers organisations are gearing up for the 'Bharat Bandh' planned for December 8 to support the farmers' agitation.

Vishwas Utagi, Trade Unions Joint Action Committee Convenor and the 'bandh' coordinator, said: "We want maximum people to observe the Bharat Bandh being organised to support the farmers' cause and protest against anti-people policies of the BJP government which are detrimental to the progress of the country."

# Another Bengal Min raises rebellious tone

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

There is ruffle in ruling Trinamool Congress with another high-profile Minister Rajiv Banerjee beginning to sing in a disharmonious note.

Reacting to Banerjee's rebellious comment veteran Trinamool Congress politician and minister Subroto Mukherjee on Sunday asked his colleagues to express their grievances inside the party and not go to the media immediately.

Much like powerful leader Suvendu Adhikari who last week quit as a Minister, Banerjee on Saturday attacked an anonymous layer of the party accusing it of promoting sycophancy.

"It is strange that the side-kicks who engage in corruption get the plum responsibilities in the party whereas the sincere, dedicated workers are relegated to the back," Banerjee said adding "only the sycophants

enjoy prominence and get a higher marks in the party... those like me who cannot do that... get low score.... But I cannot call good as bad and a bad as good." Banerjee the State Forest Minister and a good orator further said that those sitting in the air-conditioned enclosures enjoy being big leaders and those who toil it hard on the ground are ignored.

On whether he was following in the footsteps of his rebel party colleague Suvendu Adhikari the minister said "aage aage dekho hota hai kya (watch out the unfolding drama).

On whether he would like to name some people in the party he said "I'm still a minister and a party member. In future, if I have to say anything in the party, I shall definitely do so. But I don't think I should discuss that now with the media persons."

"Catching the small fishes will not help if corruption has

to be rooted out from the party. The big fish also have to be nabbed," he had said.

Banerjee's neighbor, Cabinet colleague and veteran leader Subroto Mukherjee however advised the discontented leaders to discuss their issues in the party and not make things public. Last hear he had criticized the party leadership for singling out lesser leaders on corruption charges but sparing the fountain heads.

"It is better to discuss your grudges and complaints within the party instead of going to the media," Mukherjee said.

Reacting to Banerjee's statement, Bengal Urban Development Minister Firdah Hakim said: "Rajib is a good man. He is our minister and he is like my brother. He is doing a good job... I don't think he will be so foolish to be carried away by the machinations of mischievous people."

The immediate trigger for Hakim's statement was not

Banerjee's words but some mysterious posters appearing in Kolkata in support of him.

Much like the ones that have been appearing across the state in favour of Adhikari the posters in Kolkata backed the Forest Minister and read "Satatar Prateek (symbol of honesty). The same symbols were used to identify Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in the early part of her rule.

Apart from the posters BJP leadership too welcomed him to join the party saying the saffron outfit needed honest people like him. "He is an honest person and is always welcome in our party," State BJP president Dilip Ghosh said provoking Hakim to say that Banerjee was not a green horn to fall prey to such machinations.

Much like him another senior BJP leader Mukul Roy said that "Rajiv Banerjee is a good and honest person," saying "whatever he said had substance." The TMC would "lose

power in 2021 Assembly elections," Roy said adding "the rot has started... now they will lose power and after 2021 they will be reduced to a microscopic party."

Meanwhile the Trinamool Congress targeted the Hyderabad based All India Majlis-e-Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen AIMIM for trying to cut into its minority vote bank. Minister Firdah Hakim attacked Deccan outfit saying a "Hyderabad party is being sent by our opponents to cut minority votes. But the trick will be caught by the smart voters of Bengal."

Stopping short of naming All India Majlis-e-Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen AIMIM, and its leader Asaduddin Owaisi whom he apparently referred to as Bhajjaam, Hakim said "A Bhajjan is being sent Bengal to eat into our votes but I must warn the voters that voting for that party would amount to cutting your own legs."

# BJP wins 3 out of 5 graduates seats in UP legislative council, SP gets 2

**Lucknow:** BJP's Avinash Kumar Singh on Sunday bagged the Lucknow graduates' constituency seat for Uttar Pradesh legislative council with his party emerging winner on total three seats and SP on two out of the five seats following a tough fight for them.

As per the results declared for graduates' constituency seats gradually since Saturday, BJP bagged a total of three seats with Dr Manvendra Pratap Singh 'Guruji' winning the Agra seat and Dinesh Kumar Goyal Meerut's.

The Samajwadi Party, on the other hand, bagged two out of the five graduates' constituencies seats with SP's Ashutosh Sinha winning the Varanasi seat and Dr Maan Singh Yadav the Allahabad-Jhansi division's one.

Both the SP candidates bagged the seats divesting them from the BJP, while the BJP's 'Guruji' won the Agra seat

divesting it from the SP and Goyal by defeating four-time and sitting independent MLC Hem Singh Pundir.

The third win for the BJP came in the form of Avinash Kumar Singh, who won the Lucknow Graduate constituency, an election official said on Sunday.

The voting for the five graduates' constituencies along with the six seats for the teachers' constituencies of the UP legislative councils had been held on Tuesday.

In results declared earlier on Friday for the six teachers' constituency seats, three were bagged by the BJP while two by independents and one by the Samajwadi Party.

BJP's Umesh Dwivedi, Shrichandra Sharma and Hari Singh Dhillon were declared winners from Lucknow, Meerut and Bareilly-Moradabad teachers' constituencies respectively.

SP candidate Lal Bihari Yadav won from Varanasi teachers' constituency and independents Akash Agarwal and Dhruv Kumar Tripathi won Agra and Faizabad teachers' constituencies respectively.

Polling was held on Tuesday for 11 Legislative Council seats -- five reserved for graduates and six for teachers.

BJP, SP, Congress and teachers' associations contested the polls, with 199 candidates in the fray. The BSP did not contest the polls.

The term of office of the MLCs from these constituencies had expired on May 6. Following the declaration of results, the 100-strong UP legislative council has now 55 Samajwadi Party members, 25 of BJP, eight of the Bahujan Samaj Party, two of the Congress, one of Apna Dal (Sonelal), two of Sikshak Dal and four independents. **PTI**

# Girl alleges gangrape in moving van in Bulandshahr

**Bulandshahr:** A girl has accused four youths of gang-raping her in a moving vehicle after abducting her in the Chhatari police station area here, police said on Sunday.

Police have registered a case and are questioning one of the accused named in the written complaint by the girl, Senior Superintendent of Police Santosh Kumar Singh said.

According to the complaint, the victim claimed that she was going to a shop for some work on December 3 when a van came to a halt and 3-4 boys pulled her into the vehicle.

They took her to Bairamnagar road, where they allegedly raped her and made a video of their act. She alleged that they threatened to kill her parents if she disclosed the incident to anyone.

The girl also alleged that the main accused reached her house with 2-3 people on Saturday morning and threatened to kill her family members

According to the complaint, the victim claimed that she was going to a shop for some work on December 3 when a van came to a halt and 3-4 boys pulled her into the vehicle

if she registered a case against him. During questioning, the main accused named in the complaint denied his involvement, the police said.

He claimed there was a dispute between his father and the girl's mother over the payment of Rs 2,000 as a "commission" to her for helping him get a loan of Rs 30,000 before Diwali, due to which there were frequent quarrels, they said.

The accused claimed that he was called to the girl's house on Saturday afternoon, and there was an argument between him and the girl's father. Police are carrying out an in-depth investigating, the SSP said. **PTI**

# Youth held for allegedly abducting, raping girl in Ballia

**Ballia:** Police have apprehended a 17-year-old youth for allegedly abducting and raping a minor girl in a village here in Bhipmura Police Station area, an official said on Sunday.

The 16-year-old girl was allegedly lured by the youth on the pretext of marriage, SHO of Bhipmura Police Station Shivmilan said.

"On the complaint lodged by the girl's father, a case was registered against the youth," he added. Police rescued the girl on Saturday and apprehended the accused, he said.

The girl has been sent for a medical examination, police said. **PTI**

# Court sentences two men to 10-year imprisonment for raping teenager

**Jalaun (UP):** Two men have been sentenced to 10-year imprisonment by a court here for raping a 15-year-old girl in 2017.

Special Judge Ghulam Mustafa also imposed a fine of Rs 13,000 each on the convicts, Rahul Kushwaha (22) and Kamal (24), according to special public prosecutor Vishwajeet Vishwakarma.

On June 7, 2017, a case was registered against the two men by the girl's father. **PTI**

# Kerala local body polls: Infighting in Cong over alliance

**KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI/THIRUVANANTHAPURAM**

Even as the CPI(M) is facing one of its worst crises in the run up to the local body elections in Kerala, situation is no different in Congress, the principal Opposition party.

The Grand Old Party is facing a major trust deficit as well as infighting among party leadership over its overt and covert alliance with extremist organizations like Jamaath Islami, Welfare Party of India and SDPI.

"Yes, we do have alliances with these parties and what is wrong in it? It is the decision of the Congress leadership to cooperate with all democratic, secular and progressive parties," said M M Haasan, convener, United Democratic Front and prominent Congress leader.

M u l l a p p a l l i Ramachandran, KPCC

President, says he does not know of any such decision. While senior leaders are fighting it out over the alliance with the extremist

organizations, the only visible face of the Congress in the State is former chief minister Oommen Chandi who is on an arduous and strenuous campaign across Kerala despite his ill health.

K Muralaeddharan, MP, is on record that the Congress has no alliance with extremist organizations. "Though there were some local arrangements in some of the municipal and panchayat bodies, all of them were nipped in the bud itself. The Congress has electoral alliance only with the constituents of the United Democratic Front," said Muralaeddharan.

But the local media were full of pictures and news about senior Congress leaders like Ramachandran campaigning

and soliciting votes for candidates belonging to parties like WPI, SDPI and PFI.

Leaders of Muslim League, the second largest constituent in the UDF, are facing probe by Directorate of Vigilance and Anti-Corruption Bureau. M C Kamaruddeen, MLA from Manjeshwar was arrested on November 7 in connection with duping of depositors in his gold business and has been jailed since then. K M Shaji, another MLA belonging to the Muslim League is facing series of charges and is under probe by both the DVAC as well as Kerala Police.

Ebrahim Kunju, former minister belonging to the Muslim League has been arrested in connection with Palarivattam Fly Over scam and is struggling to get bail from Kerala High Court. He has been admitted to a corporate hospital in Kochi for serious ailment and alleged

that the arrest was part of the LDF Government's move to divert the attention of the electorate from serious corruption charges faced by the CPI(M) leaders that include gold smuggling scam, hawala transaction and LIFE Mission corruption charges.

As the campaign for the first phase of local body polls came to an end on Sunday evening, the BJP has come out with an allegation stating that the LDF and UDF had entered into a secret mission to defeat the Hindutwa party candidates by en mass transferring of votes in municipal corporations like Thiruvananthapuram, Thrissur and Kozhikode.

"This has been a trend in the State for decades but this time we will defeat the evil designs of these fronts," said V V Rajesh, the mayoral candidate for Thiruvananthapuram Corporation.

# Arunachal Pradesh reports 17 new cases

**Itanagar:** Seventeen more people tested positive for Covid-19 in Arunachal Pradesh, pushing the tally in the State to 16,384, a senior health department official said here on Sunday.

Of the 17 fresh cases, six were reported from the Capital Complex region, three from Tawang and two from Upper Siang, State Surveillance Officer (SSO) Dr Lobsang Jampa said.

One case each was also recorded in West Kameng, Lower Subansiri, Tirap, Changlang, East Siang and Anjaw, he said.

Fifteen infections were detected through rapid antigen tests while one each was diagnosed through RT-PCR and True NAT tests, the SSO said. The state now has 748 active coronavirus cases.

Twenty more patients were cured of the disease, taking the total number of recoveries to 15,581. **PTI**

# Maha Covid deaths plummet to 40

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

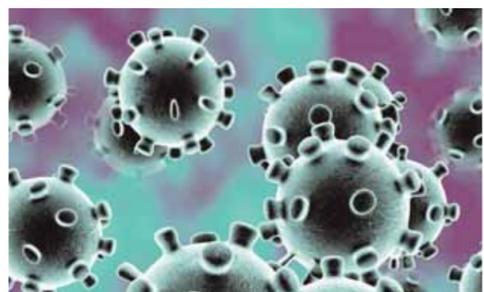
For the second time in less than a fortnight, the Covid-19 deaths plunged below 50 in Maharashtra on Sunday, even as the infections dropped to 4,757 in the state.

Maharashtra, which had recorded 30 deaths on November 23, logged 40 deaths on Sunday, indicating the flattening of the pandemic curve in the state.

With 40 new deaths, the Covid-19 toll in Maharashtra came down from 47,694 to 47,734. Similarly, with 4,757 fresh infections, the total number of infected cases jumped from 18,47,509 to 18,52,266.

As 7,486 patients were discharged from the hospitals across the state after full recovery, the total number of people discharged from the hospitals since the second week of March this year rose to 17,23,370. The recovery rate in the state rose marginally from 92.88 per cent to 93.08 per cent.

Of the 40 deaths reported on Sunday, Mumbai accounted for a maximum of 13 deaths, followed by 5 deaths in Nagpur, 4 in Satara, 3 in Pune, 2 each in Thane and Solapur and one



death each in Raigad, Nashik, Ahmednagar, Jalgaon, Sangli, Sindhudurg, Latur, Buldhana, Washim, Chandrapur, besides one outsider.

On a day when Mumbai recorded 19 deaths, the Covid-19 toll in the metropolis dropped from 10,964 on Saturday to 10,896 on Sunday, owing to a reconciliation of figures, while the infected cases rose by 786 to trigger a jump in the total infections from 285,267 to 286,053.

Meanwhile, the number of "active cases" total cases in the state dropped from 82,849 to 80,079. The fatality rate in the state stood at 2.58 per cent.

Pune district, which continued to be the worst-affected

city-district in Maharashtra, saw the total number of cases increase from 3,57,289 to 3,57,911 while the total number of deaths in Pune increased from 7541 to 7571.

Thane district remained in the third spot --after Pune and Mumbai -- after the total number of infections rose from 2,43,768 to 2,44,292 while the total deaths climbed from 5347 to 5364.

Of the 1,12,73,705 samples sent to laboratories, 18,52,266 have tested positive (16.43 per cent) for COVID-19 until Sunday.

Currently, 5,56,085 people are in home quarantine while 5903 people are in institutional quarantine. **PNS**

# Child labour in Aligarh continues

**Aligarh:** Despite the supreme court's order of forbidding the employment of children as labourers, The department of labour of aligarh have failed to take effective steps to impose a ban on child labour in various lock and hardware units.

About 5,000 lock manufacturing units are functioning as semi-organized and tiny shaps in the industrial estate and Muslim dominated areas here with nearly 2000 child labour.

Thousands of children are losing their childhood under air pollution and toxicant fumes in Aligarh in absence of effective and proper implementation of the beneficiary schemes for poor and Right To Education .

According to house hold surveys the maximum child labour and drop out rate is in Muslim concentrated areas.

More than 2000 children of Aligarh are actively involved in the lock and hardware industry .

They are either working from their homes or are employed in factories. **PNS**

# Kochi Port hosts giant Maersk Edinburg

**KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI**

Kochi, The Queen of Arabian Sea, had an unusual visitor on early Sunday morning. Maersk Edinburg, a 366.5 meter long and 48.2 meter beam width giant of a ship, sailed into Kochi Port by 0700 hrs unnoticed and without any fuss.

"This is the biggest ship ever to call on Kochi Port in its history," said Captain Bhaskar Krishnan Kunji, the chief pilot who led the mission of ushering in the vessel through the narrow channels of Kochi Port. The ship reached Kochi from Port of Salalah in Oman.

The 90-minutes long operation of berthing the vessel saw four giant tugs, pilots and co-pilots working non-stop from day break. "It was a scintillating and action packed experience," said Captain Kunhi, who led the mission. The vessel would sail out early Monday morning after unloading and loading the giant containers.

Captain Shaji Abraham, Harbour Master, said the arrival of Maersk Edinburg, marked the elevation of Kochi Port into the big league of global trade. "It was a satisfying experience and our crew are



confident of handling any kind of vessels." Captain Abraham told *The Pioneer*.

The movement of giant vessels for berthing in the Port is a complicated operation. "Only pilots who know the channels like the back of their

hand would be able to lead the ship from the deep seas into the Port premises. This morning's successful mission prove that Kochi Port has come off age and vessels like super containers would be safe here," said Captain Kunhi.

## Fight to the finish

The Govt, which could have avoided the stir with a consensual approach, is ready to amend laws but farmers are adamant



The farmers' protests are no longer confined to a sectoral concern. As the agitators have descended on Delhi, hoping to be heard justly in the corridors of power, they have gathered traction from transport, taxi unions and civil society. And they have held their own admirably, shunning all politicians and even Government hospitality, choosing to drink their own tea, having their own food, sleeping in their own shelters and even making their own presentation on gaps in the contentious new farm laws. In fact, such is the spontaneous combustion that the stir is turning into a people's movement that, though leaderless, has a beehive unity about

it and tugs at most who have chased big city dreams, coming as they do from farming families themselves. Besides, it epitomises the subterranean resentment of the citizenry at top-down impositions of an autocratic and arrogant dispensation that interprets all dissent as anti-national than rational. If the stalemate drags on, there is a real chance of food supplies getting affected. With sustained pressure, the Government is now not only willing to give the farmers a listen, it is keen to walk the whole distance to the extent of giving a written assurance on Minimum Support Price (MSP) and procurement, just stopping short of legalising it. And given the corporatisation that farm liberalisation entails, the Government is also willing to consider the farmers' demand to approach the courts in case of a dispute over contract farming to shield them from being exploited. The big question is why did the Government act in haste and repent at leisure? Much of the issues raised by farmers, including convening a special Parliament session to debate the farm laws, had already been a part of the Opposition's demand for a consensual approach akin to that followed in rolling out the Goods and Services Tax (GST). If only the Government had been reasonable, consulted all stakeholders and worked a common ground with States than road-rolling the legislation through a voice vote for political point-scoring, things would not have come to such a pass. The prickliest issue has been that of the Minimum Support Price (MSP), which has ensured Government pick-ups of crops, mainly wheat and paddy, at an assured rate and volume. It takes no rocket science to understand that any competitive market policy would ultimately have an impact on a parallel, protected market and shrink it, especially one that has for years led to the prosperity of farmers and has led to an over reliance on and excess production of rice and wheat to the detriment of other crops. Besides, even the corporate majors wouldn't want to deal with trade markets that are under hostile State Governments. Most importantly, the cost of inputs has gone up exponentially, sometimes higher than the MSP. Given the unremunerative nature of the MSP itself, farmers are but naturally wary of any contracted price that could drive them down further and, therefore, seeking an equivalence.

Finally, the Government may claim that reforms embedded in the farm Acts would help the small and marginal farmers access markets anywhere, sell directly and get best prices. This argument doesn't fly simply because 86.2 per cent of land holdings are small and marginal, or less than two acres in size. Hence, a majority of our farmers really don't produce enough or are aware enough to get their way around any model, the existing or the proposed, without an interventionist on their behalf, agents or *arhatiyas*. Besides, small farmers can hardly afford the infrastructure to transfer their goods to the local *mandi*, leave aside ferrying them outside their geographical limits. Liberalisation of the farm economy also means putting other farmer-friendly enablers in place, from cold storage to warehousing to connectivity between markets. Only then can the rest make sense. In fact, Bihar did away with Government *mandis* in 2006 but farmers there are still struggling, as dependent on their agents to get the prices, because of the absence of supporting infrastructure. And as farmers in Gujarat, who were sued by Pepsico, and sugarcane growers chasing their dues will tell you, corporatisation hasn't worked. The Government needs to be more transitional and graded when it comes to farm reforms. Some concerns are worth a listen. For example, the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act 2020, allows buys and sales outside the notified Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) *mandis*, thereby limiting their cartelisation tendencies. A licence won't be required to trade in farm produce and anyone with a PAN card can now buy directly from the farmers. So they want clarity on what "outside" means and contrary to perception that they want the middlemen out, they actually have a trusted bond with their existing commission agents, as their licence is proof enough of their credibility and delivery abilities, and would not want to experiment with an untested model. With most farmers not literate enough about exercising their rights, dispute resolution could also end up being loaded against them. Besides, they would want direct payment rather than have the money routed through banks which could deduct amounts as loan recovery. The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020, does allow the farmer to enter into a contract with a corporate entity at a mutually agreed price. But the mechanism for price fixation is not codified, it's not mandatory for a company to make a written contract and companies may not be penalised for not registering their contracts. So farmers fear that corporations could use their institutional heft to manipulate or browbeat them into accepting their terms. History proves that farmers' movements have been revolutionary and this being the biggest in recent times, cannot be shrugged off easily.

## Legalise cannabis

With its vote at a UN panel, India's stance on marijuana is changing slowly but surely



India's vote at the United Nations Commission for Narcotic Drugs (UNCND) to reclassify marijuana from illegal to legal has raised a few eyebrows. Now, this vote is not legally binding on member states and as we are seeing with Bollywood stars right now, marijuana in all its forms, leaf, flower or resin, remains quite illegal under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act (NDPS), 1985. However, several think-tanks, including some with substantial links to the present Government, have come out with white papers that have made a strong case for legalisation.

We believe that marijuana consumption should be legalised and like alcohol, its use should be regulated by the State. There are several compelling arguments for this, starting with the fact that marijuana has been legalised in many parts of the Western world thanks to studies proving that levels of intoxication are manageable and that the active compounds in it can help in pain and stress relief. In addition, in places where the plant has been legalised, the State has received a significant amount of tax revenue from sales and simultaneously reduced costs of policing with lower levels of criminal incarceration for drug crime. This has allowed authorities to go after "hard" drugs like cocaine and heroin and their smuggling networks. In fact, until the strict NDPS was introduced by the Rajiv Gandhi government in deference to the Reagan administration and its so-called "war on drugs," marijuana usage and possession here, while frowned upon, was fairly legal. As the West understands the abilities of a plant that is native to India and is an integral part of our medication and social norms, we should unburden ourselves of the laws that make marijuana consumption and possession illegal. In fact, much like several major research institutions and universities across the world, which have begun research into the abilities of the plant, we could do well to sponsor similar studies and R&D. This does not mean that Indian society will continue its *laissez faire* attitude to drug consumption but the positives outweigh the negatives and would also allow Indian farmers new and innovative sources of income.

# Girls please, not brides

With the Coronavirus resulting in widespread job losses and economic hardships, particularly in rural areas, there is an epidemic of child marriages



REENA AMOS DYES

It was a frantic phone call to her school teacher by a desperate 13-year-old Radha (name changed) that saved her from being married off by her impoverished parents at Anoopshahr town of UP's Bulandshahr district in June. In October, the Karnataka Police saved a 14-year-old from a similar fate in Ballari district. Acting on a tip-off, the police raided the marriage hall, where the wedding was taking place, and arrested eight people under the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006. These are not isolated cases or an aberration, though the legal age for the marriage of women in India is 18 years. According to the UNICEF, India accounts for a third of the child brides globally. And now, with the Coronavirus resulting in widespread job losses and economic hardships, particularly in rural areas, there is an epidemic of child marriages in the country. As usual desperate parents, suffering from the socio-economic impact of the outbreak, are trying to get rid of "the extra mouth to feed, clothe and educate." Predictably, the girl child is tradeable.

Incidentally, India is not alone. Around the world, Save the Children warns that a whopping 2.5 million more underage girls could be pushed into marriage in the next five years because of the difficult socio-economic conditions created by the pandemic. In its Global Girlhood Report 2020, the charity has predicted that 5,00,000 more girls are at risk of becoming child brides. This will take up the total number of child marriages to around 12.5 million this year.

Closer home, the Union Ministry of Women and Child Development reported 5,584 cases of child marriage between March and June this year. The children's helpline, Childline, saw a 17 per cent rise in distress calls during the same period. These are worrying statistics because there are already a whopping 17.26 million married children and adolescents within the age group of 10-19 years (seven per cent of the population in the same age group) in India. This is according to child rights group CRY's new study, that was released ahead of the International Day of the Girl Child on October 11. "The data



also reveals that girls between 10 and 19 years of age account for 75 per cent of all the married children in India," says the distressing study. Trends show that while child marriage affects both girls and boys, its impact on the health, education and human rights of girls, especially from marginalised communities, is higher. Experts say there is also an urgent need to strengthen implementation of the Prohibition of the Child Marriage Act, 2006, particularly at the grassroots, where the ease of social custom overwhelms the need to register complaints.

In fact, so prevalent is the practice that a task-force to re-examine and raise the minimum age of marriage for girls was set up on June 2 by the Union Ministry for Women and Child Development. In mid-October, a worried Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the Government would soon take a decision on this vexed issue after it received the committee's report. However, eradication of child marriage in India is a complex issue because it is not just about poverty, it is also about changing rigid and regressive mindsets of a largely patriarchal society, repressing the sexuality of girls and carrying the burden of their safety in a society where victim-shaming is a norm rather than an anomaly. We, as a society, have to ask ourselves the uncomfortable question as to why do parents in the hinterland, despite the flood of girl child schemes and incentives, too, still prize boys over girls? That's because

THERE HAS TO BE AN INTEGRATED AND COORDINATED APPROACH TO TACKLE THE ROOT CAUSES PROPORTIONATELY, NAMELY FIGHTING SOCIETAL MALAISE WITH AWARENESS PROGRAMMES, STRENGTHENING AND ENFORCING LAWS AND BUILDING A SAFETY AND REHABILITATIVE NETWORK FOR THE ABUSED

beyond a point, it is cold economics. Parents in the countryside believe that sons will continue to keep contributing to the family income and hold ancestral land even after they are married. Or such is the expectation. That's why, underprivileged parents prefer to send boys to school and college and not girls. Even when they do send a girl child to school, her education is the first casualty if things get difficult financially. So, till we consider the education of a girl child a dispensable privilege and not a guaranteed right and deprive them of the opportunity to pursue higher education and hence the hope of a paying career, this malaise will not stop.

Another major and more sinister reason for girls in economically weaker societies being married off at a tender age, whether it is in urban India or the countryside, is the regressive mindset over the sexuality and purity of women. In a country obsessed with chastity, the loss of virginity/innocence is considered a great shame and a calamity. So burdened with the task of having to protect the girl child, who is neither safe in public places nor within the home, the parents prefer to marry her off as soon as they can, so that they can be absolved of all responsibility and are done with the onerous task of having to protect her "izzat (honour)." Many reports have also drawn a link between increasing cases of female foeticide in villages to increasing rape cases in recent years. Unless we change our

archaic mindsets and start treating boys and girls as equals, give them both equal nutrition and educational opportunities so that girls too can pursue flourishing careers and provide for their parents in their old age, more Radhas will keep on getting married off like cattle. Sold to the highest bidder by parents mired in poverty. More importantly, till we teach our men and boys to respect women/girls and stop all forms of gender-based and sexual violence, poor and unlettered parents, who are unaware of the detrimental effects on the mental and physical health of girls married off in their childhood, will continue to subject them to this tortuous tradition. Till we, as a society, step out of our comfort zone and report each and every case of child marriage that comes to our notice, we will never see the end of this malaise. If we look the other way when the crime of child marriage involves our domestic help, driver, gardener, washerman or security guard, then we too, are a party to this heinous tradition. We, too, are equally responsible for pushing a hapless child into a world of untold misery and suffering. And we need to stop expecting the Government and the NGOs to solve all societal problems and give us a perfect world. As a society it is incumbent upon us to ensure good health and nutrition of girls. We must ensure that they complete 12 years of schooling and get life skill education and opportunities for higher studies. It is a tragedy and a travesty when someone who can afford to spend on an expensive phone, car, handbag or shoes cannot spend 2000 rupees a month to sponsor a child's education. Till we learn to work together as a society, and in the spirit of "each one, teach one," we cannot break this vicious cycle of inter-generational deprivation, malnutrition, poverty and lack of basic human rights. There has to be an integrated and coordinated approach to tackle the root causes proportionately, namely fighting societal malaise with awareness programmes, strengthening laws and enforcing them diligently, building a safety and rehabilitative network for the abused and most importantly skilling and empowering girls from a young age so that they know when to exercise their rights. Otherwise, girls in the countryside will not be seen as anything more than future brides, a liability rather than an asset. (The writer is Senior Editor, The Pioneer)

## SOUNDBITE

There is major mismanagement in police stations of East Champaran. The police are unable to arrest criminals.

Bihar BJP chief —Sanjay Jaiswal



To me, this show (*Delhi Crime*) is not about crime. It's about the people who we ask and demand to solve it for us.

Indo-Canadian filmmaker —Richie Mehta



There is no in-house DDCA academy, and in its absence talented boys can't train all the year round.

Chairman, DDCA's CAC —Atul Wassan



I expressed my determination to host the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games next year as proof that humanity has defeated the pandemic.

Japan's Prime Minister —Yoshihide Suga



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Good for the UK

Sir — Great Britain is leading the global vaccine challenge as it was the first nation to announce 95 per cent success of the Coronavirus shot during the trials. But there are immense logistical challenges involved in preserving the vaccine as it must be stored at minus 70 °C and each person needs two injections, three weeks apart. So, it will inevitably take some months before even the most vulnerable are protected in the UK. As a country, Britain is no longer resting on the hope that it can return to normal in the spring. It is working to go that way. Scientists deserve all credit for achieving this victory against all odds that at times seemed impossible.

CK Subramaniam  
Navi Mumbai

### All in the game

Sir — There was a small controversy in the match between India and Australia as in the last over Ravindra Jadeja was hit by a Mitchell Starc shot ball on the helmet and had to be moved out. Yuzvendra Chahal came on as a concussion substitute and Justin Langer, the Australian coach, was

furiously and had an argument with the ICC match referee David Boon.

Chahal only worsened the mood of the Australians by taking three wickets. Aided by T Natarajan's three-wicket haul and aided by Jadeja's blitz that resulted in 46 runs in the final three overs, India managed to get out of jail with a 11-run win at the Manuka Oval in Canberra to

take a 1-0 lead in the T20 three-match series. Jadeja's batting and the 46 runs in the last three overs proved to be crucial for India as they continued their resurgence following their win in the third and final ODI at the same venue on December 2.

But Australia was clearly distracted by the Chahal substitution and they paid the price for poor batting and death overs. This was

India's 12th win in 21 T20I encounters against Australia. It is good to see that the boys in blue have gotten over the fear that they used to have of Australia at one time and now put up a fight at least. Of course Australia, too, is a superior team worthy of respect. At the end of the day, it's all in the game.

Bhagwan Thadani  
Mumbai

### Worrying outcome of the GHMC poll

The outcome of the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation election was disappointing to the extent that the BJP's campaign to polarise voters paid the party some dividends. The only redeeming feature of the outcome is that it can be construed as a rejection of communal politics, too, as the BJP couldn't manage an outright win. The speeches made by some of the leaders during electioneering were very inflammatory and bordered on rank communalism. If still the party found favour with many myopic voters and made gains, it indicates the value of Hindu nationalism as a USP.

However, it is doubtful if the gains made by the BJP in the municipal elections could be relied upon to predict that the party will gain strength to mount a major challenge to the TRS in the Assembly election, which is still over three years away, and supplant the regional party. Remember that a week is a long time in politics. The BJP's emergence as the principal Opposition party in Telangana is explicable in terms of many people accepting its revivalist agenda. Religious resurgence is a phenomenon now,



in the phase of waxing before waning. The adversarial nature of the ideological war is getting starker in Telangana as elsewhere. The BJP's growth as the second-largest party in States where it is not in power highlights the crystallisation of the ideological battle between those who are for India's continued existence as a secular democracy and those who are hastening its retreat from secularism. One hopes that better sense prevails.

David Milton  
Maruthancode

### A disturbing letter

Sir — In a surprise move that might prove embarrassing for India, 36 British MPs from various parties have written to British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab, asking him to raise the issue of farmers' agitation with the Narendra Modi Government. Significantly, some of these MPs are of Indian origin and others represent many constituents with links to Punjab. The letter seeks an urgent meeting with Raab and an update on representations the foreign office may have made with India on the issue, including during the recent visit by Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla.

Signatories to the letter include MPs from the Labour, Conservative and Scottish National Party, including Virendra Sharma, Seema Malhotra, Valerie Vaz, Nadia Whittome, Peter Bottomley, John McDonnell, Martin Docherty-Hughes and Alison Theewliss. The NDA Government must sort this issue out at the earliest.

Raghu Singh  
Delhi

Send your feedback to:  
letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## FIRST COLUMN

## Of immunity, shots and rejuvenation

A rejuvenated era and civilisation would flourish where the old one existed. Hopefully, this would be one with greater splendour



VINAYSHIL GAUTAM

The time when the Coronavirus pandemic assailed the world and brought it to its knees will be remembered because of many unique indicators. It was first and foremost a great equaliser as the virus did not discriminate between the privileged and underprivileged. It was also a time for testing boundaries and a vocabulary, which was quite specific to the experiences of the COVID times. It developed as the war with the virus drew on.

The Corona times have had some buzzwords like "social distancing", "stay home, stay safe," "mask up" and the community has lapped it up. Among them a major favourite is "immunity." This word has found close cousins in the form of several edibles such as the Indian gooseberry, bell pepper, lemon, almonds, turmeric, ginger *et al*. The meaning of immunity as understood in the context of biological systems is a system endowed with the capacity to recognise and tolerate whatever belongs to the self and to recognise and reject what is foreign. It can be derived from antibodies from one's own body, in which case it is active immunity. It can also be categorised as natural immunity. Whether active or natural, it is in a class apart from passive immunity or indeed for that matter artificial immunity. Passive immunity is derived from antibodies from another body. Mother's milk is a good example of this. It can also be artificial, say typically antibodies which come from a base like anti-venom.

Enter the world of vaccines. The lure of antibodies or vaccines in the context of the COVID era has been so large that individuals who have never written a serious research paper have become expert authors on it. They are well-paired with eminent names which help draw buyers and what is sold is boosting the printing business.

This is very much like agencies, who have converted unemployed information technology salesmen overnight to set up outlets promoting communication platforms. One myth which needs to be nailed is that the COVID era promoted only unemployment. The truth is, only those who remain committed to sinking business lines were met with unemployment. It will be good to remember that ever since organised business became a reality forever, there are business lines which sank without a trace and business lines which popped up like Pacific atolls. That way there is nothing unique about these times.

That may itself be the subject matter of a future dissertation fancifully nurtured in a newly-celebrated centre of learning, perhaps somewhere on an Asia-Pacific island or a Himalayan State then well-celebrated for its salubrious climate. Did we not ourselves create the alluring Centre of Advanced Studies in the hills of Shimla perched on the top of a small piece of land where once a building called the Rashtrapati Nivas carried a magical charm? Thus it is that like each era, the COVID one is generating its own lexicon and mythologies. Since the era is a continuing one, people may have expected more additions. In spite of predicted, aspired immunity through vaccines, the era of "mature" COVID vaccines is yet to dawn with re-assured credibility. Some knowledgeable reader will no doubt point out that vaccines have already been launched a few days ago in an island State north-west of Europe. May they be blessed!

The truth of the vaccines (without getting into the fanciful and the not so fanciful names they carry) is that nobody is sure with total definitiveness, how long the effect of a given vaccine or a group of vaccines will last. They are still not 100 per cent sure of the kind of booster dose it would require. The list of uncertainties is, understandably, large. Enumerating them may not be necessarily a contribution to the mental peace of people who would wish to see deliverance round the corner. There is nothing wrong with hope and it is nice to recognise that "hope springs eternal in the human breast." Be that as it may, the attraction of the vaccines is undoubtedly in the immunity which it is expected to usher. A person who may be interested in the science of language may wonder if there couldn't have been another word to better represent the ideas communicated by the word "immunity." It evokes an imagery of putting up one's guard. It helps to protect. There's nothing wrong with that.

The word "rejuvenation," however, evokes an imagery of something coming alive again from a low-energy level of existence. Thus it is that rejuvenation has a focussed meaning. It is also a very positive concept. Perhaps gradually the thinking community will talk of the era of COVID as one which had the potential of rejuvenation. The Corona era would be seen as having a duality. One aspect where life itself was under serious disruption. The other aspect would be of the potential of "rejuvenation." It could and probably would rejuvenate itself. A rejuvenated era and civilisation would flourish where the old one existed. Hopefully, this would be one with greater splendour. Perhaps it is a world round the corner. Of this, vaccines are the precursors!

(The writer is a well-known management consultant of international repute)

WHAT BLOOD DOES DIDI HAVE IN HER BODY THAT SHE CANNOT STAND THE 'JAI SHRI RAM' SLOGAN? YOU ARE ACTING LIKE A...(EXPLETIVE USED).

—BENGAL BJP CHIEF  
DILIP GHOSH

## POINT COUNTERPOINT



THERE IS ALWAYS A RIVALRY BETWEEN TWO POLITICAL PARTIES. BUT SUCH REMARKS TARGETING A CHIEF MINISTER ARE CONDEMNABLE.

—TMC MP  
SAUGATA ROY

# Close the gender gap

Giving women direct access to financial services might improve their chances to become entrepreneurs, more independent and increase their participation in family decision-making



MOÏN QAZI

Women make up nearly half the population. A nation cannot have sustained economic prosperity and well-being until the central role of women is recognised and their economic health is used as a measure to shape policy. The human race is like a bird that needs both wings to fly. A great opportunity is wasted when women are isolated from the economy. It is now widely surmised that until they are financially literate and empowered around money, we'll never truly have equality. Women's participation in the financial system can have significant benefits in terms of economic growth, greater equality and societal well-being. When accessible finance reaches women, the benefits are particularly sustainable. Women channel money into solving more fundamental issues.

Access and usage of financial services are levers for increasing women's participation in the economy. They enhance their self-confidence and place financial decision-making power in their hands, resulting in large development pay-offs. We need to study the myriad social and behavioural impediments impacting women and use this knowledge to design customised financial product offerings. In failing to develop client experiences rooted in men and women's fundamentally-different perspectives on finance, banks are missing a very significant business opportunity.

Women often face several barriers which limit their financial inclusion, other than the universal constraints that low-income communities face: Limited access to mobile phones, lower literacy levels, less confidence in using technology and restrictions on travel or social interaction. We need to address them through behavioural and reformist approaches, instead of the usual hardware-based approach. It's not that the barriers are necessarily different for rural and urban women. But the same barriers are greater for rural ones. We need last-mile banking agents to help mitigate barriers such as dependency on male family members for travel.

Women make for a low-revenue segment but prove to be loyal and profitable clients when served with appropriately-designed products. Financial service providers need to ensure that their charges are not prohibitive and the tools are so designed that they make women's engagement with financial service providers friendly, safe, affordable and convenient. The real issue is that many women, despite strides in education, simply aren't as confident and knowledgeable about financial matters as men. This problem persists even when women handle many of their families' routine money management duties.

Giving women direct access to financial services might improve their chances to become entrepreneurs, more independent and increase their participation in family and community decision-making. There is also an important insurance effect: Better access to credit, savings or insurance services reduces the need to use child labour as a buffer in case of seasonal income fluctuations and transitory income shocks and allows consumption. In the case of transitory income reductions resulting from health shocks, it also allows faster attention to health problems.

It is now recognised that "the women's market" represents varied segments of clients, from low-income salaried workers (factory workers, domestic help and so on) and low-income self-employed women in the informal sector, to women who work in agricultural value chains, to small- and medium-enterprises. Serving this market not only makes business sense, it also has a positive impact on society as a whole by expanding economic growth and job creation. When accessible finance reaches women,

THERE ARE FIVE CRITERIA THAT NEED TO BE AT THE CORE OF A SUCCESSFUL WOMEN-INCLUSIVE STRATEGY: POSITIONING PRODUCTS AS SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS; POSITIONING INFORMATION, EDUCATION AND NETWORKING AS CORE PRODUCTS; BUILDING THE FINANCIAL CAPABILITY OF WOMEN CUSTOMERS; ESTABLISHING AN INTELLIGENT, NO 'PINK MARKETING' ZONE; AND TRAINING STAFF TO LISTEN TO WOMEN RATHER THAN SELL TO THEM. CREATING A RELATIONSHIP-BASED BUSINESS MODEL THAT SUSTAINS THEIR LOYALTY



The benefits are highly productive and sustainable. The positive economic knock-on effects are obvious. Savings rates are higher, repayment rates of family loans are remarkable, families are healthier, social cohesion is stronger and business growth is stable. This shows that increasing women bank account holders will reduce systemic risks in the economy.

Women should be considered as a distinct segment with specific financial services requirements. Instead of disguising male-focussed products as gender-neutral, we need specific products tailored to their unique needs. Low-income women usually need timely and hassle-free credit to increase their financial prospects.

Women have restricted mobility due to gendered social norms, are sometimes unschooled and are not the sole decision-makers of their households. There is a need to actively employ oral informational management tools so that these women can transact independently. Women prefer to learn and work with peers. Bankers must build trust in this segment by using women agents in frontline financial operations. Behaviourally, women customers take more time to develop trust in a new product or service. The same holds good for finance and building confidence and trust in them requires more interaction.

In all societies, howsoever oppressed women may be or low the level of their literacy, they remain the stewards of household savings. Women investors have greater patience for long-term returns and show greater self-control, which results in less impulsive and risky decisions.

A lot more awareness has to be created in women about financial services. This underlines the need for inclusion of women policy makers in designing financial services so that the female perspective is kept in mind. If women are not involved in financial product design and service delivery, then the needs and preferences of women customers may be less likely to be reflected in the marketplace.

Most financial systems have been designed by and for men. Therefore, when an application is made for business or personal loan, the lender asks for collateral, such as land or a house. In most cultures, it is men who traditionally own the land or the house, which immediately excludes women. Plus, women are more price-sensitive and expect affordable fees.

Women are usually tasked with stretching the family budget in times of financial hardship. Providing micro-credit or a small affordable and account-linked overdraft could help them cover their day-to-day contingencies in management of household finances. A woman's financial needs and responsibilities require bundled solutions of savings, credit and insurance because they are more relevant to her circumstances. There are several barriers that constrain the full inclusion of women in formal finance. Product-driven financial literacy is necessary to ensure that poor women are not short-changed. While financial products have their benefits, there is a clear danger of mis-selling, which could damage marginalised segments who have an uncertain cash flow. The philosophy which the financial inclusion community must foster is that engagement creates knowledge and knowledge creates confidence.

Professionals and practitioners have distilled some salient features of financial products and services that foster women's active participation in formal finance. They find that women don't have a straight financial journey and have more interruptions and life-stages in their financial lives (withdrawal from employment during pregnancy and in medical contingencies for nursing sick family members). They may remain active users of bank accounts during these periods. Women should be able to reactivate their accounts without much hassle or penalties. Micro-finance services are focussed on women but they are too loan-obsessed. The sector is awash in credit. In several cases, women are availing loans when their

need is insurance, which is not affordable and easily available. The Government should consider recognising semi-formal titles of land as workable collateral.

One of the most promising ways to close the stubbornly persisting gender divide is technology. The large gaps in mobile subscriptions and ownership mean that if digital financial services are going to deliver on their promise to women, these gaps need to be taken into consideration. Mobile phones are an inspirational and utilitarian item that most of them long for. The key to harnessing mobile technology will be to make sure women have equal access to phones in the first place.

The overall gender gap in mobile phone ownership in the developing world is wider than the bank account ownership gaps. The onus is now on mobile providers to start making products more suitable and affordable for women. One reason for the technological divide is that smartphones are not marketed as an empowerment tool. Making gadgets available will surely help but we have to bring about a change in the overall outlook.

There are five criteria that need to be at the core of a successful women-inclusive strategy: Positioning products as solutions to problems; positioning information, education and networking as core products; building the financial capability of women customers; establishing an intelligent, no "pink marketing" zone; and training staff to listen to women rather than sell to them, creating a relationship-based business model that sustains their loyalty. In short, what is needed for a broader, deeper and more relevant and meaningful financial inclusion is a nuanced approach that tackles the underlying, interconnected barriers that women face in accessing and using financial services. We cannot overcome poverty until both men and women have equal rights and opportunities. This approach makes financial sense for everyone.

(The writer is a development professional)

## Populists turning reckless in wake of Trump's defeat?

It's just straws in the wind right now, but his loss is creating a sense in other populist-ruled nations that the juggernaut has stalled



GWYNNE DYER

There is nothing wrong in participating in a sex party of any kind. However, such meetings with many people are illegal under the Coronavirus laws," said a source in the European Parliament.

To be specific, 25 men attending a loud party above a gay bar in central Brussels is clearly against Belgium's Coronavirus laws, which allow no more than four people to meet indoors, so somebody called the police. At least three of those arrested were Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). It was particularly unfortunate for

József Szájer. He's a senior founding member of Hungary's ruling Fidesz party, an ultra-nationalist, populist, authoritarian grouping that defends family values and condemns homosexuality. But Szájer was arrested while fleeing that party (with Ecstasy pills in his backpack). According to the Brussels region's deputy public prosecutor, he was arrested with bloodied hands after a passerby spotted him "fleeing along the gutter" to escape the raid. Szájer admitted he had been at a "house party" but said the drugs the police found on him were planted. He apologised to his family but made no reference to the nature of the party. It's hard to feel much sympathy for him. Szájer was a leading anti-gay agitator in Fidesz and boasts that he personally drafted the changes to the Hungarian Constitution that defined marriage as being between a man and a woman. He has now resigned as the leader of the Hungarian delegation to the European Parliament, and will doubtless have to quit the Fidesz, too. But there's a bigger story here.

There was another scandal in Hungary last week, in which Szilárd Demeter, a senior cultural official linked to Fidesz, wrote an opinion piece for a pro-Government outlet comparing Budapest-born American billionaire George Soros, a Jew who fled the Holocaust, to Adolf Hitler. Demeter also called the European Union (EU) "George Soros' gas chamber", and claimed that Hungary and Poland, the two Eastern European EU members with extreme-Right populist governments, are "the new Jews" of Europe.

It's utterly unhinged, and yet it sounds vaguely familiar. The unbridled arrogance, the self-pity, the shameless, hysterical exaggeration are all hallmarks of the new breed of "illiberal" populists. And when they think they are losing, they always up the ante. I'm thinking, of course, of US President Donald Trump's recent electoral defeat and his subsequent behaviour, especially towards President-elect Joe Biden.

Could that extraordinary recklessness be a communicable disease?

Could it somehow be spreading to Trump's acolytes overseas as well? Well, consider Poland. The Catholic, ultra-conservative Law and Justice Party has been in power in Poland since 2015. Elected by the same, older, less well-educated, non-urban, deeply religious coalition that backs populist takeovers elsewhere. And as in other populist-ruled countries, there has been a steady erosion both, in human rights and in respect for democratic norms.

The Law and Justice Party was re-elected just last year, and its leader, 71-year-old J Kaczyński, was widely supposed to have his finger on Poland's pulse. But it all fell apart when a Law and Justice Party-appointed court declared in late October that abortions would not be permitted even in cases of severe foetal abnormality where the child would die immediately after birth. Poland already had tight restrictions on abortion rights, but this turned out to be the last straw for the citizens. Millions of young people, and especially young women, filled the

streets of Poland's cities in the biggest anti-Government demonstration since the fall of Communism in 1989. They spoke out in favour of the reproductive rights of women. "I wish I could abort my Government", said one popular banner. The demonstrations continued every day until a new lockdown was declared, and the Law and Justice Party has now backed down, postponing the publication of the court's decision indefinitely. But something has definitely changed in Poland: Support for Kaczyński has now plunged to only 30 per cent.

Then there's President Jair Bolsonaro, or "Tropical Trump", whose favoured candidates were thrashed in all Brazil's big cities in local elections last month, and the UK's Prime Minister Boris Johnson, dubbed "Britain Trump" by "The Donald", who is now trailing the Opposition leader in the polls for the first time ever.

It's just straws in the wind at this stage, but the defeat of Donald Trump, the populist standard-bearer, is creating a sense in other populist-ruled

countries that the juggernaut has stalled. It seems that the effect hasn't reached Asia yet. Prime Minister Narendra Modi in India and President Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines are still riding very high in the polls. But the main thing that the populists had going for them was momentum, and in Western countries it seems to be dropping off.

Was there really a "coat-tail effect"? Hard to say. After all, both the Law and Justice Party in Poland and Fidesz in Hungary came to power before Trump was elected in late 2016. But populist leaders across the West seem to believe that somehow or other their fates are tied to Trump's. It shows in the growing recklessness of their behaviour and in the frequency of their failures. Does this mean that they are all destined to vanish in his wake? Probably not, but that would be nice if it were to happen. The sooner the better.

(Gwynne Dyer's new book is *Growing Pains: The Future of Democracy and Work*)



FOREIGN EYE



A STORY TOLD ON A CAVE WALL

Around 4,000 years ago, forest communities were fertilising soil, planting trees and clearing land for crop cultivation. Their successors are today's indigenous populations whose existence is threatened. The ancient cave paintings discovered in Colombia are not just a spectacle, they are the roots of a way of life that our greed has done its best to end. (The Guardian editorial)

# Election was 'rigged' in favour of Biden: Trump

Washington: A defiant Donald Trump is showing no signs of surrender and has reiterated yet again his unsubstantiated allegations of widespread voter fraud, claiming at his first post-poll rally in Georgia that he won a "rigged" US presidential election that he lost.

Trump alleged on Saturday that the last month's US election was rigged in favour of his Democratic opponent Joe Biden, who is now the President-elect.

"They cheated and they rigged our presidential election, and they're gonna try to rig this election too," Trump told his cheering supporters at the rally in Georgia where he campaigned for his Republican candidates for the Special Senatorial elections.

Trump began by falsely claiming he won Georgia in the presidential race. The state has already certified its election results, declaring Biden the winner.

Trump claimed he won an election that he lost.

"If I lost, I would be a very gracious loser. If I lost, I would



President Donald Trump speaks at a campaign rally for Senate Republican candidates, Sen Kelly Loeffler, R-Ga, and Sen David Perdue, R-Ga, at Valdosta Regional Airport on Saturday

say I lost and I would go to Florida and I would take it easy," Trump said at the rally.

Trump was a resident of New York. After becoming the president, he moved his residence from New York to Florida.

Thousands of his support-

ers, not only from Georgia but also from the neighbouring states, as far as California and Ohio, came to hear his speech.

This was Trump's first public rally after he lost the election and Biden was declared as the President-elect.

"I think they say that if you

win Florida and if you win Ohio, in history you've never lost an election. This has got to be a first time - but the truth is they were right, we've never lost and we're winning this election," Trump said.

He urged his supporters to go out and vote for the January

5 Senate elections in Georgia. "You must go vote and vote early starting December 14. You have to do it. They cheated and they rigged our presidential election, but we will still win it. We will still win it. We'll still win it. And they're going to try and rig this election, too," he said.

"If you don't vote, the socialists and the communists win. They win. Georgia patriots must show up and vote for these two incredible people. They are two of the finest people you will ever meet," he said.

The cheering crowd frequently erupted into chants of "stop the steal" and "fight for Trump".

"This election was rigged, and we can't let it happen to two of the most respected people in Washington. We can't let it happen again. Your governor could stop it very easily if he knew what the hell he was doing. He could stop it very easily," he claimed.

"The answer to the Democrats' fraud is not to stay at home; that's what (House

Speaker) Nancy Pelosi and (Senate Minority Leader Chuck) Schumer want you to do - stay at home. If you want to do something to them - I don't want to use the word revenge, but it is a sense of revenge - to the Democrats, you show up and vote in record numbers," he said.

The president alleged that "hundreds of thousands of illegal votes were cast in each state" and insisted falsely that poll watchers were "thrown out" of polling places in Pennsylvania.

Trump has allowed the official start of Biden's transition to power but has not yet conceded defeat.

Trump has yet to concede the election, which he has repeatedly alleged was massively rigged. State officials and media have said that they have not found any such evidence.

The Trump campaign has filed a slew of lawsuits across the United States in an attempt to turn his defeat in the November 3 election into a victory. Except for one, all have been rejected by the courts. **PTI**

# Saudi prince strongly criticises Israel at Bahrain summit

Dubai: A prominent Saudi prince harshly criticized Israel on Sunday at a Bahrain security summit that was remotely attended by Israel's foreign minister.

Prince Turki al-Faisal, who led Saudi intelligence for more than two decades and served as ambassador to the US and Britain, warned that any normalisation deals needed to help the Palestinians obtain their own independent state.

He described Israel as a "Western colonising" power.

He said Israel has "incarcerated (Palestinians) in concentration camps under the flimsiest of security accusations— young and old, women and men, who are rotting there without recourse to justice."

They are demolishing homes as they wish and they assassinate whomever they want."

Although the prince does not hold any official position, his stance is seen as closely mir-

roring that of King Salman.

In contrast, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has signalled greater willingness to quietly engage with Israel to counter common rival, Iran, and boost foreign investment in the kingdom.

Prince Turki's comments come as neighbouring Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates recently moved to normalise relations and establish ties with Israel.

Saudi Arabia has insisted that any normalisation between it and Israel can only happen alongside a lasting peace deal involving a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Israeli Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi, who spoke immediately after Prince Turki, said: "I would like to express my regret on the comments of the Saudi representative."

"I don't believe that they reflect the spirit and the changes taking place in the Middle East," he said. **AP**

# Nepal PM skips crucial Standing Committee meeting of ruling party

Kathmandu: Nepalese Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli, one of the chairmen of the Communist Party of Nepal (NCP), on Sunday skipped a crucial meeting of the party's 45-member strong Standing Committee, amid growing internal rift within the ruling party due to factional feud.

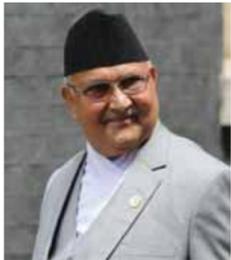
In a letter sent to the party's Standing Committee, Oli said that he was unable to attend the meeting, NCP spokesperson Narayan Kaji Shrestha said.

Shrestha said that the next Standing Committee meeting has been scheduled for December 13.

The NCP's internal dispute which had surfaced after the dissident group leaders, including the party's executive chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' and senior leader Madhav Kumar Nepal, demanded Oli's resignation from both as the party's chairman and as Nepal's prime minister after he accused the dissident leaders of conspiring to topple his government.

In a 19-page political document presented on November 13 at the party's Secretariat meeting, Prachanda criticised Oli for failing to properly run both the government and the party. He even accused Oli of corruption.

Oli, however, denied the



allegations and challenged Prachanda to legally prove the graft charges or apologise.

Taking a strong exception to the political document, Oli made it clear that he couldn't join Sunday's meeting if the same proposal is presented before the Standing Committee meeting. He also termed the political document presented by Prachanda "allegation paper" directed against him.

In the letter, Oli reiterated his stance that Prachanda should unconditionally withdraw his political proposal tabled during the Secretariat meeting.

"The Standing Committee meeting should discuss about finalising the pending works relating to the party unification, making preparations for the party's upcoming general convention and working toward better response to con-

tain the COVID-19 pandemic," Oli wrote in the letter.

Oli also said that the issue of change in party's leadership should be settled through the first general convention of the unified party which is just four months away.

"The ongoing intra-party crisis must be resolved through dialogue and the party should remain united as there is just four months left to hold the first general convention of the party. The question of leadership change in the party can be well settled through the general convention," he said in the letter.

During Sunday's meeting, Deputy Prime Minister Ishwar Pokharel, who is also one of Secretariat members, read out Oli's letter to the Standing Committee.

As Oli chose to boycott the meeting, the Standing Committee meeting was postponed for a week. During next week's Standing Committee meeting, discussion will start on both the political documents presented by Oli and Prachanda separately, said Ganesh Shah, one of the Standing Committee members.

"Now the Standing Committee's only agenda is to settle the party's internal problem," party's spokesperson Shrestha said. **PTI**

Paris: Police arrested 95 people during protests across France against a planned security law, and 67 officers were injured during the demonstrations, Interior Minister Gerard Darmanin said Sunday.

In Paris, the site of the worst violence, 48 police officers or gendarmes were injured during Saturday's street clashes, the interior ministry said on Twitter.

A firefighter was also injured in the capital after being hit by a projectile, a police source said.

Paris police held 25 people, including two minors,

# 95 held during protests across France over security law

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Paris police held 25 people, including two minors,



Riot police officers detain a man during a demonstration on Saturday

said the prosecutors' office.

It was the second weekend of violence in the capital dur-

ing protests against a security bill currently going through French parliament.

Demonstrators clashed with police, vehicles were set alight and shop windows smashed.

The weekly nationwide protests are becoming a major headache for President Emmanuel Macron's government, with tensions intensified by the beating of a black music producer by police last month.

Paris city officials and others also expressed outrage over the way police broke up an improvised migrant camp in the heart of Paris in November.

Darmanin has ordered an investigation into the incident.

The numbers demonstrating on Saturday were significantly down, with the nationwide figure at 52,350 against 133,000 a week earlier, the interior ministry said.

Around 5,000 people demonstrated in Paris against 46,000 last week, it added. A police source on Saturday blamed the violence on 400 to 500 radical elements.

There were also clashes in the eastern city of Nantes, where four officers and a gendarme were injured, one of them by a Molotov cocktail, said local officials.

There was violence, too, in the eastern city of Lyon. **AFP**

# Mexican President wants to restrict US agents in Mexico

AP ■ MEXICO CITY

Mexico's President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has tossed another hot potato to US President-elect Joe Biden with a proposal that would restrict US agents in Mexico and remove their diplomatic immunity.

The proposal submitted quietly this week by López Obrador would require Drug Enforcement Administration agents to hand over all information they collect to the Mexican government, and require any Mexican officials they contact to submit a full report to Mexico's Foreign Relations Department.

"The proposal is that foreign agents will not have any immunity," according to a summary of the president's proposal to the Mexican Senate published Friday. In most countries, the chief DEA agent in the country often has full diplomatic immunity and other agents have some form of limited or technical immunity.

"The proposal requires that foreign agents give Mexican authorities the information they gather," according to the proposed changes. Mike Vigil, the DEA's for-

mer chief of international operations, said of the handover of all information, "That is not going to happen." "Sadly, there is endemic corruption within the (Mexican) government. It's going to be leaked, it's going to compromise agents, it's going to compromise informants," Vigil said.

The history of leaks is well documented. In 2017, the commander of a Mexican police intelligence-sharing unit that received DEA information was charged with passing the DEA data to the Beltran Leyva drug cartel in exchange for millions of dollars.

The proposed changes also specify that any Mexican public servant — state, federal or local — who has as much as a phone call or text message from a U.S. Agent would be required "to deliver a written report to the Foreign Relations Department and the Public Safety Department within three days."

"It's just going to make a burdensome system," Vigil said, adding, "It is going to hinder bilateral operations, it is going to hinder bilateral exchange of information. This is going to be much more detrimental to Mexico than to the United States."



A member of JAXA retrieves a capsule dropped by Hayabusa2 in Woomera, southern Australia on Sunday

# Japanese space officials eager to analyse asteroid samples

Tokyo: Japanese space officials said they are excited about the return of a capsule that safely landed in Australian Outback on Sunday while carrying soil samples from a distant asteroid so they can start analyzing what they say are treasures inside.

The capsule's delivery by the Hayabusa2 spacecraft completes its six-year sample-return mission and opens the door for research into finding clues to the origin of the solar system and life on Earth.

"We were able to land the

treasure box" onto the sparsely populated Australian desert of Woomera as planned, said Yuichi Tsuda, Hayabusa2 project manager at the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency, or JAXA, adding that the capsule was in perfect shape.

"I really look forward to opening it and looking inside."

The capsule will be packed in a container as soon as its preliminary treatment at an Australian lab is finished and brought back to Japan this week, Satoru Nakazawa, a project sub-manager, said during

an online news conference from Woomera.

Hayabusa2 left the asteroid Ryugu, about 300 million kilometers (180 million miles) from Earth, a year ago. After it released the capsule on Saturday, it set off on a new expedition to another distant asteroid.

Scientists say they believe the samples, especially ones taken from under the asteroid's surface, contain valuable data unaffected by space radiation and other environmental factors. **AP**

# Mass evacuation in Germany's Frankfurt after WW II bomb found

AFP ■ BERLIN

Nearly 13,000 residents were evacuated in Frankfurt on Sunday as experts defused an unexploded World War II bomb, local emergency services said.

The 500-kilogramme (1,100-pound) British bomb had been found on a construction site in Germany's financial capital on Thursday, the emergency services said.

A 700-metre (half-mile) evacuation radius was set up in the west of the city centre in an

area that included a number of old people's homes, heating and internet infrastructure and facilities of the Deutsche Bahn national rail operator.

The work was expected to continue into the evening because of coronavirus restrictions, the authorities said.

Some 75 years after the war, Germany remains littered with unexploded ordnance, often uncovered during construction work.

Earlier this year, experts defused seven World War II bombs found on the future

location of Tesla's first European factory, just outside Berlin.

Sizeable bombs have also been defused in Cologne and Dortmund this year.

Mass Evacuation In Germany's Frankfurt After World War 2 Bomb Found

Nearly 13,000 residents were evacuated in Frankfurt on Sunday.

In 2017, the discovery of a 1.4-tonne bomb in Frankfurt prompted the evacuation of 65,000 people — the largest such operation since the end of the war in Europe in 1945.

# Ethiopia's conflict stokes humanitarian, virus crisis

Hamdayet (Sudan): Ethiopia's month-long war in its northern Tigray region has severely hampered efforts to fight one of Africa's worst coronavirus outbreaks, as the fighting has displaced almost 1 million people and strained local humanitarian services to the breaking point.

Tens of thousands of those fleeing the conflict between Tigrayan and Ethiopian federal forces have crossed into neighboring Sudan, where countrywide virus numbers are also rising rapidly.

More than 45,000 refugees from the Tigray conflict are now living in remote parts of Sudan, where they have taken shelter in crowded camps that have no coronavirus testing or treatment capabilities.

"With COVID-19, it's not



comfortable in these buses," said one refugee, Hailem, who said over 60 people were crammed

onto the transport that took them from Hamdayet, on the Sudanese side of a main border

crossing, to the camps.

Many staying in the camps are forced to share shelters and

crowd together in lines for food, cash and registration with different aid agencies. There are few face masks to be seen - or available for distribution.

At the Umm Rakouba camp, Javanshir Hajiyev with aid group Mercy Corps told The Associated Press that the number of chest infections was high, but that humanitarian workers had no materials to test for the coronavirus.

Few of the refugees see the pandemic as their first concern, having witnessed deadly attacks as they fled Ethiopia, and now living in fear for family members left behind. "I just escaped from war," said one, Gebre Meten. "I think the war is worse." The virus outbreak is a threat, Gebre said, but the drastic conditions in the refugee camps make people

forget its risks, as they face hunger, heat, and thirst. But Sudan's growing virus cases has raised concerns that a new countrywide lockdown could be imposed - including measures that could stop further refugees from crossing the border. "The people that are fleeing from conflict and violence are also fleeing for their lives," U.N. Refugee chief Filippo Grandi said last weekend about the Tigray conflict. "So we have a difficult dilemma."

He added that with the right health measures, "the policy of open borders" can be maintained. Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed declared victory in the month-long conflict last weekend, but fighting between federal and regional forces has continued. According to humanitarian officials, the

crisis in the Tigray region of 6 million people remains critical, with medical supplies running low, including those needed to fight the coronavirus pandemic. "The pandemic is still with us, despite the fighting and a new humanitarian crisis unfolding in its wake," the International Committee for the Red Cross said recently after visiting struggling health centers in the Tigray and neighboring Amhara regions. The largest hospital in northern Ethiopia, in the Tigray capital of Mekele, "is running dangerously low on sutures, antibiotics, anticonvulsants, painkillers, and even gloves," said the ICRC's Maria Soledad.

Ethiopia surpassed 100,000 confirmed infections last month shortly after the deadly conflict began.

All humanitarian aid to the Tigray region, from medical supplies to food, has been blocked since the fighting began, to the growing distress of the humanitarian community and health experts alike.

On Wednesday, the U.N. Said it had signed a deal with Ethiopia's government to allow aid access in Tigray - but only to those areas of it under the federal government's control.

That access will take time, as fighting continues.

Norwegian Refugee Council chief Jan Egeland said aid workers still "have a lot of concerns" as they prepare to return to the Tigray region, where there has been scant information on how the conflict has impacted local health facilities and infrastructure, or the outbreak's spread. **AP**

# Petrol price up 28 paise, diesel 29 paise a litre

## Rates touch two-year high

**New Delhi:** Petrol price on Sunday was hiked by 28 paise per litre and diesel by 29 paise, the fifth straight day of increase in rates due to firming international oil prices.

Petrol price in Delhi rose to ₹83.41 per litre from ₹83.13. Diesel rates went up from ₹73.32 to ₹73.61 per litre, according to a price notification of oil marketing companies.

Rates crossed ₹90-mark for petrol and ₹80 in case of diesel in Mumbai.

This is the fifth straight day of price hike and the 14th increase in rates since November 20 when oil companies resumed daily price revision after nearly two-month hiatus.

Rates are now at the highest level since September 2018.

In 17 days, the petrol price has gone up by ₹ 2.35 per litre and diesel rate has risen by Rs

**This is the fifth straight day of price hike and the 14th increase in rates since November 20 when oil companies resumed daily price revision after nearly two-month hiatus**

3.15.

Brent crude oil has risen 34 per cent from USD 36.9 per barrel on October 30 to USD 49.5 on December 4 - the last trading day - on hopes that COVID-19 vaccines would lead to demand recovery.

Prior to the November 20 hike in rates in India, petrol prices had been static since September 22 and diesel rates hadn't changed since October 2.

Public sector oil marketing companies - Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd

(BPCL) and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) - revise rates of petrol and diesel daily based on benchmark international oil price and foreign exchange rate.

They had, however, resorted to calibrating the rates since the pandemic broke out with a view to avoiding volatility in retail prices.

The 58-day hiatus in petrol price revision and 48-day status quo on diesel rates were preceded by no change in rates between June 30 and August 15 and an 85-day status quo between March 17 and June 6.

In Mumbai, the petrol price was raised to ₹90.05 per litre from ₹89.78, while diesel rates went up from ₹79.93 to ₹80.23.

Rates vary from state to state depending on the incidence of local sales tax or VAT.

# FPIs pump in ₹17,818 crore in just 4 trading sessions of December

**New Delhi:** Overseas investors remained net buyers to the tune of ₹17,818 crore in Indian markets in first four trading sessions of December amidst better than expected economic recovery around the world and positive sentiment on the back of various vaccine results.

As per depositories data, foreign portfolio investors (FPI) pumped in a net sum of ₹16,520 crore into equities and ₹ 1,298 crore in the debt segment during December 1-4.

This translated into a total net investment of ₹17,818 crore during the period under review. In November, the total net investment of FPIs stood at ₹62,951 crore.

"The economies world over have continued to improve at a pace that is much better than what was expected and hence, Indian markets may continue to see this kind of an inflow," Harsh Jain, co-founder and COO at Groww. Said.

The announcements of

various vaccine results is giving confidence to investors about the possible future of the markets, Jain added.

According to Himanshu Srivastava, associate director - manager research, Morningstar India, there has been "unprecedented interest" among FPIs towards emerging markets and India too has been benefiting from this trend.

The pace of net inflows increased considerably after the outcome of US presidential election. Besides, attractive valuation compared to the developed markets and weakness in the dollar has been supporting buying trend, he noted.

Commenting on future of FPI investment, Vinod Nair, head of research at Geojit Financial Services, said that in the near-term, inflows can slowdown as FPIs will have to review the strategy of next year considering the fiscal and monetary policies of developed economies and vaccination plan.

# FDI equity inflows into India cross \$ 500 bn milestone

**New Delhi:** Foreign direct investment (FDI) equity inflows into India crossed the USD 500 billion milestone during April 2000 to September 2020 period, firmly establishing the country's credentials as a safe and key investment destination in the world.

According to the data of the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), the inflows during the period stood at USD 500.12 billion.

About 29 per cent of the FDI came through the Mauritius route. It was followed by Singapore (21 per cent), the US, the Netherlands, Japan (each 7 per cent), and the UK (6 per cent).

India received USD 144.71 billion from Mauritius and about USD 106 billion from Singapore during the period under review.

The other big investors have been from Germany, Cyprus, France and Cayman Islands.

Since 2015-16, FDI inflows have been recording significant

**India received USD 144.71 billion from Mauritius and about USD 106 billion from Singapore during the period under review**

growth.

In that fiscal, the country received USD 40 billion FDI, an increase of 35 per cent over the previous year. In 2016-17, 2017-18, 2018-19 and 2019-20, the investments stood at USD 43.5 billion, USD 44.85 billion, USD 44.37 billion and USD 50 billion, respectively.

The key sectors which attracted the maximum of these inflows include services segment, computer software and hardware, telecommunications, trading, construction development, automobile, chemicals, and pharmaceuticals.

"Indian FDI journey began with enactment of FEMA (that replaced the draconian FERA) in 1999. Looking back, the half-trillion dollar FDI in India is an indication of foreign investor's firm belief in India's strong economic fundamentals,

stable political outlook and sustained economic growth which generated returns for investors even during the global recession of 2007-08," Nischal Arora, Partner-Regulatory, Nangia Andersen India said.

He said as the country cautiously steps into the next decade under the shadow of the ongoing pandemic, it is imperative that the government continues its measures to attract FDI in the manufacturing and high-end technology sectors.

Rajat Wahli, Partner, Deloitte India, said FDI equity inflows crossing USD 500 billion "is indeed a great milestone, and continues to show the trust and faith that the global investors have in India's growing economy."

This growth is a strong reflection of the market potential of India coupled with the steady state of market reforms that India has undertaken since 2000, including opening up of various sectors of the economy to 100 per cent FDI over the last 5 years, he said.

# I-T Dept allows revision of declarations filed under 'Vivad Se Vishwas' scheme

**New Delhi:** Entities filing declaration under the direct tax dispute resolution scheme 'Vivad Se Vishwas' can revise their till the time tax authorities issue certificate mentioning details of tax arrear and the amount payable, the Income Tax Department has said.

Issuing a set of FAQs on 'Vivad Se Vishwas' scheme, the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) also said the scheme cannot be availed in a case where proceedings are pending before Income Tax Settlement Commission (ITSC) or where writ has been filed against the order of ITSC.

The CBDT also clarified that in a case where Mutual Agreement Procedure (MAP) resolution is pending or the assessee has not accepted MAP decision, the related appeal shall be eligible under 'Vivad se Vishwas'.

"In such case, the declarant will be required to withdraw both MAP application and appeal," it added.

The I-T department also clarified that a taxpayer would be eligible for

making declarations in cases where the Authority for Advance Ruling (AAR) has ruled in favour of the taxpayer and the department has filed appeal before the High Court/Supreme Court and the total income of the taxpayer was quantified before AAR.

"Yes, the taxpayer is eligible since the income is quantifiable. In such case, since the issue is covered in favour of taxpayer, only 50 per cent of the disputed tax is payable," the CBDT said.

The government had in October extended for the third time the deadline for making payment under the direct tax dispute settlement scheme 'Vivad Se Vishwas' by three months to March 31, 2021, in view of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. However, declarations have to be filed by December 31, 2020.

Nangia Andersen LLP Partner Sandeep Jhunjhunwala said the provision of revision would enable the taxpayer to revise the application filed in case the matter is revisited on account of any errors or factual clar-

ifications.

"The authorities are ensuring that the scheme is utilised by maximum number of taxpayers and as the scheme is new, this provision enabling revision before the certificate is issued would equip the applicant to revise the application in case any errors are discovered or any clarification is subsequently obtained from the Authorities itself," he added.

Till November 17, the government had garnered Rs 72,480 crore tax through the scheme.

A total of 45,855 declarations were filed under the scheme, involving disputed tax demand of ₹31,734 crore till November 17. Besides, central public sector companies are also settling their dispute totalling Rs 1 lakh crore under the scheme.

The scheme provides for settlement of disputed tax, disputed interest, disputed penalty or disputed fees in relation to an assessment or reassessment order on payment of 100 per cent of the disputed tax and 25 per cent of the disputed penalty or inter-

est or fee.

The taxpayer is granted immunity from levy of interest, penalty and institution of any proceeding for prosecution for any offence under the Income-tax Act in respect of matters covered in the declaration.

The Direct Tax Vivad se Vishwas Act, 2020 was enacted on March 17, 2020 to settle direct tax disputes locked up in various appellate forum. In order to provide more time to taxpayers to settle disputes, earlier the date for filing declaration and making payment without additional amount under Vivad se Vishwas was extended from March 31, 2020 to June 30, 2020.

Later again, this date was extended further to December 31, 2020.

Therefore, earlier both the declaration and the payment without additional amount under the Vivad se Vishwas were required to be made by December 31, 2020.

The payment date has since being extended to March 2021.

# Economy to reach pre-Covid-levels by end of FY2022: Niti Aayog

**New Delhi:** India's economic growth is likely to reach pre-COVID-19 levels by the end of the 2021-22 fiscal as the GDP contraction in this financial year is expected to be less than 8 per cent, Niti Aayog vice chairman Rajiv Kumar said on Sunday.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has also revised its forecast of economic growth for the current fiscal year (2020-21) to (-)7.5 per cent as against its earlier forecast of (-)9.5 per cent.

"We should reach pre-COVID-19 levels at the end of fiscal year 2021-22 for sure," Kumar told PTI when asked about growth projection for the next financial year. He added that the GDP contraction this fiscal is expected at less than 8 per cent.

India's economy recovered faster than expected in the September quarter as a pick-up in

manufacturing helped GDP clock a lower contraction of 7.5 per cent and held out hopes for further improvement on better consumer demand.

Replying to a question on asset monetisation, he said this is ongoing work and it has received attention at the highest level. "We will continue to pursue this and make sure that the targets of asset monetisation are reached," Kumar stressed.

The government is looking to raise Rs 2.10 lakh crore through disinvestment in the current fiscal. This includes Rs 1.20 lakh crore from Central Public Sector Enterprise (CPSE) stake sale and Rs 90,000 crore from sale of government stake in financial institutions.

Talking about banking reforms, he said the sector needs further expansion and an increase in competition

because India's private debt to GDP ratio remains limit to mid 50s. Stating that in case of other emerging economy, private debt to GDP ratio is well beyond 100 per cent, Kumar said that "so we need to increase private debt and this will happen when our banking sector will expand".

On the Indian agriculture sector, he said the Niti Aayog now is very strongly pushing the programmes for chemical free natural farming which has a potential to reduce cost for agriculture production dramatically and also has very positive impact on the environment. Kumar said the expansion of natural farming all over the country will make Indian agriculture more competitive and it also promises to have a significant positive impact on farmers' income.

# MFs selling spree continues; withdraw ₹30,760 cr from equities in November

**New Delhi:** Continuing their selling spree for the sixth straight month, mutual funds pulled out ₹30,760 crore from equities in November on profit booking and experts believe the outflow trend will continue unless there is correction in markets.

With this, net withdrawal by mutual funds (MFs) has reached to over ₹ 28,000 crore in the first 11 months of the ongoing year (January-November), data available with the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) showed.

The markets, despite the withdrawals from mutual funds in the last few months, have continued to rise as flows from FPIs have been robust.

Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) have put in over ₹1.08 lakh crore in the Indian equity markets during January-November period of 2020.

"With markets touching new highs and Nifty PE (private equity) valuations crossing 36 times, there is profit book-

ing happening. This is visible from the increased 'outflow' number compared with September - October," said Vidya Bala, co-founder of PrimalInvestor.In.

The gross inflows have also not picked up much as the impact of COVID-19 on individual investor's income is yet to normalise, she added.

Making similar statement, Omkeshwar Singh, head RankMF at Samco Securities, said there has been a very sharp rally in November coupled with markets at an all-time high, which prompted many investors to book profits as they are not very comfortable at this level and the same can be visible in the latest data.

According to the data, MFs pulled out ₹30,760 crore from equities in November. This has taken the outflow to over ₹68,400 crore since June.

MFs withdrew ₹14,492 crore in October, ₹4,134 crore in September, ₹9,213 crore in August, ₹ 9,195 crore in July and ₹612 crore in June.

However, they invested over ₹40,200 crore in the first five months of the year (January-May). Of this, ₹30,285 crore was invested in March.

Divam Sharma, co-founder at Green Portfolio, said the rise in markets and higher valuations have triggered the recent withdrawals from equities.

Going ahead, Bala said, "we expect equity outflows to continue to remain tepid until there is some correction in the equity market".

Kaustubh Belapurkar, Director - Manager Research at Morningstar India said net inflows into equity schemes from investors, which could be triggered by a market correction or a longer term visibility of pick-up in economic growth, would result in net positive investments by MFs in stocks.

Green Portfolio's Sharma said decent correction would induce investors to increase equity allocations going forward.

# Over 80% consumers support Govt's move to cap surge pricing for online taxi platforms: Survey

**New Delhi:** About 81 per cent consumers support union government's move to cap surge pricing for online taxi booking platforms like Ola and Uber at 1.5 times of base fare, according to a survey report by online platform LocalCircles.

Consumers in the survey supported Motor Vehicle Aggregator Guidelines 2020, including the clause to impose a penalty of ₹ 100 on drivers if they cancel the ride.

"The survey that collected responses from more than 16,000 consumers states that 81 per cent approve of the 1.5 times surge pricing cap and the clause of penalty of up to ₹100 if the driver cancels a ride," the survey report said.

The guidelines were released on November 27, after which LocalCircles did a survey across 219 districts, covering 16,585 respondents.

"Many consumers discussed this becoming a ground reality and urged the various state governments across the country to operationalise these guidelines at the earliest," LocalCircles founder and chairman Sachin Taparia told PTI.

In a survey done last year, LocalCircles had found that consumers were facing 5-10 times rise in online taxi ride pricing.

The survey this year found that 55 per cent citizens were unable to speak with app taxi customer service in case of an emergency or need.

# IRFC IPO may hit markets this month

**New Delhi:** Indian Railway Finance Corporation (IRFC) initial public offering of about ₹4,600 crore is likely to hit the markets later this month.

This will be the first IPO by a railway NBFC (Non-Banking Financial Company).

"In all probability, it (IPO) will be by the third week but, if the market is not okay then we can go to the first or second week of January also," Amitabh Banerjee, Chairman and Managing Director, IRFC, told PTI here.

The company, the dedicated financing arm of the Indian Railways, will be going for the anchor investment also.

"The government is planning to have anchor investors in place for this IPO," he added.

In January 2020, IRFC filed draft papers for its IPO. According to market sources, the IPO is likely to be worth around ₹4,600 crore.

On reasons for bringing the anchor portion, the CMD said it is a confident market and the anchor investors would be assured of the fact that they will be able to get the desired proportion of issuance without regular bidding.

"They will be able to get the amount that they want to invest in IRFC without going for the bidding route. Also, it will give a lot of confidence to other investors in the market who are sitting on the fence," he said.

The issue is of up to 178.20 crore shares, comprising a fresh issue of up to 118.80 crore shares and offer for sale of up to 59.40 crore shares by the government, according to the draft prospectus.

On plans to utilise the funds mopped up from the offer, he added that 10 per cent of the IPO proceeds will go to the company's balance sheet and that will increase its net worth and this the firm will be using for raising more money from the market.

He said this will add to the company's capability to explore the market further and garner more funds from the market which is the order of the day because the government is in need of funds for its capex expansion outlay requirements.

"Therefore, 10 per cent will come to my balance sheet and 5 per cent will go to the government of India's exchequer," he added.

Banerjee said the prospect for

having a good IPO is "very much bright". "Everyone (domestic and foreign investors) has a lot of interest in this particular issue," he said.

"Indian Railway Finance Corporation happens to be one of the safest havens as far as investors are concerned," he added.

Banerjee is hopeful that the IPO will be one of the landmark issuances of the fiscal.

"I hope that it will be one of the landmark issuances in this fiscal which augurs well for the other issuances that are coming forward for the government of India in this fiscal," the CMD said.

The book running lead managers to the issue are DAM Capital Advisors, HSBC Securities and Capital Markets, ICICI Securities and SBI Capital Markets.

One of the purposes of the IPO is to unlock the value that the company has built over so many years of its existence.

"We have already traversed a period of 34 years since its inception in 1986. So, it will unlock the value of the company, it will bring in better corporate governance norms in the organisation which is extremely necessary in any public sector company.

# Banks need to hire experienced chief risk officers to deal with cyber attacks: Report

**New Delhi:** The banking industry needs to upgrade its IT infrastructure and appoint experienced chief risk officers to effectively deal with incidence of cybercrimes, says a report by Deloitte India.

Observing that banks are the most targeted sector, the report said that nearly 22 per cent of cybersecurity attacks which took place in India in 2018-19 were on the banking industry...These (cyber) attacks are becoming complex day by day. To address these challenges, banks need to appoint experienced Chief Risk Officers who can take the responsibility of skilling the employees and lead investment in military-grade cybersecurity solutions to detect the most advanced attacks," said the Deloitte report on "Digitizing the post COVID world: The '3I' approach".

Banking sector, the report added, has been fast to adapt to the changing demands by accelerating efforts toward contactless business operations and speeding up digital transition to enable employees to work from home post the lockdown.

As a result of the technology integration, the sector has been facing several challenges with respect to ensuring data security, the

report said.

It noted that the year 2020 has been quite challenging for Indian banks when it comes to cybersecurity.

After the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, banking operations were disrupted severely as banks struggled to provide uninterrupted services to their clients during various stages of lockdowns.

In the following months, they accelerated their digital transition efforts (such as digital banking and remote access to employees) to ensure contactless business operations.

"With a surge in digitisation, banks also witnessed a spike in cyber attacks as cybercriminals found new opportunities and vulnerabilities," it said.

Munjal Kamdar, Partner, Deloitte India said banks will likely adopt technologies such as mobile, cloud, remote access out of the need to sustain business during the pandemic and thrive thereafter. For bank executives, the focus will be on achieving business goals even as they recalibrate strategies to address the ever-evolving cyber risks. Such transformative digitisation will also result in an increased attack surface, he said.

# Value of LIC's equity holdings rallies 40% in H1 to \$ 77 bn

**Mumbai:** The value of equity holdings of the nation's financial powerhouse LIC has crossed USD 77 billion (₹5.7 lakh crore) by the end of the September quarter which is a shade below its record holding of USD 84 billion in the March 2018 quarter, rallying over 40 per cent in the first half, says a report.

But since the second quarter, the market has rallied around 13 per cent which could have increased the value of LIC's portfolio if not in as many percentage but considerably.

According to a weekend note by Kotak Institutional Securities, in the March 2000 quarter, the value of LIC's holdings was a pale of this at USD 4 billion when the BSE market capitalisation was only USD 102 billion and this touched USD 59 billion in March 2010 when the mcap was at USD 1.14 trillion.

Since then it was steadily rising with LIC's stake touching a record of USD 84 billion in March 2018 while the mcap rose to USD 1.67 trillion. The mcap peaked to USD 1.8 trillion in March 2019 and LIC owned USD 81 billion of that and at USD 1.77 trillion, LIC's ownership is at USD 77 billion,

says the report.

At the end of the second quarter, the holdings by foreign portfolio investors, including ADRs and GDRs, in the BSE-200 Index rose to USD 415 billion from USD 360 billion in the first quarter. The BSE 200 Index accounts for 84 per cent of the country's market capitalisation.

During the quarter, FPIs pumped Rs 46,900 crore into the market, says the brokerage, taking the FPI ownership in the BSE-200 index to 23.3 per cent.

As against this, domestic institutional investors' holdings in the BSE-200 Index slipped to 13.6 per cent in Q2 from 14 per cent in Q1, as they sold shares worth Rs 63,500 crore since April.

As of July-September, the value of LIC's holdings in top 200 stocks stood at USD 77 billion. Between October 1 and December 4, the market has rallied around 13 per cent to 45,079 and if the value of LIC's holdings has risen in line with the markets, the value of its portfolio should be around USD 87 billion - a record high over the previous record of USD 84 billion in March 2018, according to the Kotak report.

# PLI scheme well timed, to fuel manufacturing ecosystem for telecom, networking products: Qualcomm

**New Delhi:** The production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme is expected to fuel the overall manufacturing ecosystem in India for telecom and networking gear, components as well as tech products, and its strategic timing places the country in a 'great position' for the future, a senior official of Qualcomm has said.

The PLI scheme for telecom, announced recently by the government, would not only boost the local network gear manufacturing industry but would also help build a robust ecosystem, Rajen Vagadia, VP and President, Qualcomm India and SAARC, said.

"The strategic timing of the PLI scheme has placed India in a great position for the future," he told PTI.

India is an "enormous" consumption market and has an incredible technology-savvy and technology-hungry constituent base, he said adding that the country is emerging

as the tech platform for global companies to drive innovations.

"The production linked incentive (PLI) scheme by the government is a big catalyst as it will help global companies move their manufacturing and large parts of their supply chain to India and local companies to serve not just India but also export their products," Vagadia said in an email interview.

The incentive scheme will fuel the overall manufacturing ecosystem in India for telecom and networking products, components, as well as technology products. Further, it would boost the local network gear manufacturing industry, while helping build a robust ecosystem.

"Considering Qualcomm has a play across each of these sectors, it will drive the continued adoption of our technologies in these segments, through our ecosystem partners," Vagadia added.

Trend Blazer

Never thought I'd play a man: Adah

Actor **ADAH SHARMA** plays a man in her new film, *Man To Man*. She says she never imagined she would play a man in life.

"This film is a romantic comedy. A boy falls in love with a girl and gets married to her but then he finds out that she is not a girl but she is a man. I am playing a man in this film. I can't reveal too much about. I can promise you that you haven't seen something like this before," Adah said.

She added, "I never thought I would play a man ever. My character in the film goes through a sex change surgery to become a woman and I hope that we would be able to do justice to the transgender community through the film."



When I choose my films, I look at the story. I try and understand if the concept will be clutter-

breaking, if it is fresh and not done to death and if it will deliver superlative entertainment. I feel responsible that when I'm personally reaching out to people across the country, it needs to deliver a kind of entertaining communication that's unique to me.

—Ayushmann Khurrana

Actor **NAWAZUDDIN SIDDIQUI** has had a good year. Despite lockdown, he stood out with roles in the burgeoning OTT space.



This year, he has impressed as always with roles in the digitally-released films *Raat Akeli Hai* and *Serious Men*. The actor agrees this has been a special year.

"This has been a special year owing to two completely contrasting characters that I portrayed — of Jatilekha and Ayyan Mani. They represented distinct ideologies and mannerisms, which make them stand apart. I am thankful for all the love and appreciation from the audience," he said.

Billie Eilish calls off a tour

Singer **BILLIE EILISH** has officially cancelled her forthcoming *When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go* tour, saying she tried to explore many ways to make it possible, but could not find a way.

The tour, which was supposed to last for at least six months, launched in March. It was postponed after just three shows due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"I wish that I could have seen you on tour this year. I've missed performing on stage," Eilish wrote on Twitter.

"We've tried as many different scenarios as possible but none are possible. I know so many of you want to hold onto your tickets and vip passes, the best thing we can do is to get the money back into your hands asap," she added.



# AN INBORN TALENT

More than picking references for his roles, actor **ARSHAD WARSI** tries and manufactures his own identity. He tells **AYUSHI SHARMA** that he didn't want to look caricatured on screen. He prefers to bring out his original style

When it comes to actor Arshad Warsi, we know we are talking about someone who can be congruent in a lot of different roles, believable as a rogue or a lawyer or a goon or just a boy next door. Is there a need to name the films these roles are being listed from? No, right? Well, it's his versatility yet a natural way of expression that ensures his roles are etched in the audience's minds. And now, with his next, *Durgamati*, a horror drama, he is all set to make us believe in him as a politician.

It seems that there wasn't really much to do for him in terms of preparation for the role since he is already somebody or picking up different references for my roles to look the same, I try to create my own presence and identity. I have done in most of my films. I think that's why you like the novelty... I come across as somebody you haven't seen before. So I really like doing that. For instance, Circuit was a *tapori* role and a character like him has been played by so many other people. But when you saw me doing it, you liked it because it was different from others," he says with confidence gushing in voice from the other end of the phone.

The film is a remake of Ashok's Telugu-Tamil bilingual film, *Bhaagamathie*. It revolves around Ishwar Prasad (played by Warsi), a powerful politician, who enjoys massive public support. When idols from 12 temples go missing, CBI officer Nidhi Verma suspects Ishwar of the theft. In order to expose him, she recruits suspended IAS officer, Chanchal Chauhan to find the clues. Chanchal goes to live in the ancient *Durgamati* mansion and soon enough, the ghost of *Durgamati* takes control of her body and swears revenge on everyone who did wrong to her.

There has been a lot of mystery built behind Warsi's character and when asked, he wishes to tell us more about it, however, "Put it this way... If I have done it, there must have been a very valid reason for me. Other than that you need to watch the film to find out what's the actual suspense," he says.

A remake certainly sets reference points for the preparation. However, Warsi believes in manufacturing his own identity and prefers to do his homework in his head. And hence, he watched *Bhaagamathie* after he finished shooting for the film. He says, "Personally, I don't do much of homework. Everything usually happens in my mind. When I hear about a particular role, I instantly start figuring out how one can play with this character, what can be added or, if necessary, removed. More than looking at



somebody or picking up different references for my roles to look the same, I try to create my own presence and identity. I have done in most of my films. I think that's why you like the novelty... I come across as somebody you haven't seen before. So I really like doing that. For instance, Circuit was a *tapori* role and a character like him has been played by so many other people. But when you saw me doing it, you liked it because it was different from others," he says with confidence gushing in voice from the other end of the phone.

He gives another instance. "When I did *Ishqjya*, my reference point was actually Jagdeep Sahab in *Sholay*. That's all I have seen of a Bhopali person. I didn't want to look caricatured. I wanted to bring out my original style. So I kept on thinking about it. I have a friend who is from Bhopal and lives in Dubai now. So I called him and asked about the lingo, the language, the swearing and slang words which Bhopali people use. I keep adding little things to my character. I did the same with Ishwar Prasad, too. I was told that he's a politician so there's a certain way he would behave. I worked on the body language, hair, sitting and walk postures and the way of talking. To be honest, it's pretty much a figment of my imagination, just like most of my characters. Well, they are a figment of the writer's imagination, which I bring to life as much as I can with my personal touch," adds he.

For him, when he listens to a script or decides to go for it, it's completely on the basis of — "Would I want to see it?" He says, "Sometimes, I could go wrong or sometimes the decision could turn out right." And he feels that *Durgamati* has all the elements to be called a "good" film. "It's thrilling, keeps you at the edge of your seat and is totally unpredictable. It's not gruesome. There's no blood shed or ugly

**'DURGAMATI HAS ALL THE ELEMENTS TO BE CALLED A "GOOD" FILM. IT'S THRILLING, KEEPS YOU AT THE EDGE OF YOUR SEAT AND IS TOTALLY UNPREDICTABLE. IT'S NOT GRUESOME. THERE'S NO BLOOD SHED OR UGLY VIOLENCE. IT SIMPLY SCARES YOU'**

violence. It simply scares you... the whole environment of it does."

Since horror presents highly fictionalised phenomenon, stories are set up in a different background altogether and do not find any connection with reality. However, from the trailer, it seems like *Durgamati* has been set up in a real world. Warsi says that it's not the first horror film to be set up in pace with the real scenario. "I saw Anushka's (Sharma) *Pari* and I thought it was very smart of them to show a world that we know and can connect easily. And that is the real challenge — to merge this genre with reality."

Talking about how realism has

become a recurrent theme in cinema now, he tells us that he looks up to films "for entertainment only." He adds, "Everybody is trying to be politically correct as much as possible. I don't take them seriously, be it fiction or a reality-based thriller." For Warsi, a film doesn't have to be "necessarily" socially responsible. "We have schools and teachers for that. If everything becomes about being responsible, then there will be no entertainment at all. I can't show a great film to a murderer and expect him to suddenly become a good man and vice versa. It's not possible! I can't expect a good human being to start being violent just because he saw a crime genre. He won't just head out and start killing people. It's never going to happen that way. Either you are good or you're bad. Films can't change your personality. Or else, people would just use that as an excuse," says he.

When it comes to horror, the genre has not been well-experimented or explored in mainstream Indian cinema. Warsi believes that it's because it's not been widely watched. He says, "There's a major segment which is scared of horror, and hence, directors don't want to get into that space. Filmmakers make movies for business and they would rather prefer experimenting with some other common genre such as comedy or romcom because they know that everybody would see it. Why make horror and risk it with nobody watching it? If I, as an audience, probably would have to choose between horror and comedy, I'd definitely go for the latter. Or maybe an action film."

The actor doesn't seem to enjoy film promotions much. He would rather just interact with people casually or stay at home with his family. Since the COVID-19 pandemic has brought new ways of promotion, Warsi says life is so much easier because of digital film promotions. "I have realised this lately that I really like staying at home. I don't know why... Now that promotions are going on from home, I am absolutely fine. I can chat with the media all day if I'm doing from the comfort of my home. I don't really enjoy the hassle of getting in and out all day," he chuckles and signs off.

(The film, which also stars Bhumi Pednekar, Mahie Gill and Jisshu Sengupta, is slated to release on December 11 on Amazon Prime Video.)



## Beyond just crime

For filmmaker **RICHIE MEHTA**, the audience's positive response to *Delhi Crime* was more of a validation than the series winning the International Emmy Award



Indo-Canadian filmmaker Richie Mehta does not seek validation from his International Emmy win for his web series, *Delhi Crime*, but by audience response. He says the real point of pride was when people resonated with everything that he was trying to convey with the story.

Last month, his web series *Delhi Crime* won the Best Drama Series award at the 48th International Emmy Awards. The show became the first Indian programme to win an International Emmy. Overwhelmed after the win, Mehta said, "It's the culmination of years of work for me and for hundreds of people."

The web series opens the files of the notorious December 2012 gangrape in Delhi that shook the world. The case made headlines around the world, and also started having a ripple effect on the image of the country. and that bothered Mehta. "It is also a kind of gratification that you can take a subject, which is as dark as what we have tried to tackle, and turn

it around and make something that is actually hopeful and positive. A lot of people around the world started to define India based on crimes like this, and that made me very uncomfortable," he added.

The filmmaker continued, "Because they were missing the point that for every crime like this — and there are so many of them, which is awful — there are also people all over the country, especially women, who are trying to deal with it and tackle it, and people who are honourable and courageous. You have to look at both sides. So, to me, this was a kind of gratification that a story about that resonated globally."

Soon after the win, a section of users called out the filmmaker for glorifying a crime, and questioned how a show about a horrific incident would be a source of pride and celebration. Asked

about his reaction to such views, Mehta said, "I feel either they didn't see it or maybe they missed the point." He explained, "The first episode is very valuable, each second counts, because you can lose the viewer, especially in the first half an hour, viewers can turn it off and say 'this is not for me'. And in the first episode of *Delhi Crime*, I use half an hour of screen time to show the backstories of these cops. That's a very valuable time and I don't show the crime. To me, this show is not about crime. It's about the people who we ask and demand to solve it for us. It just so happens that these people, especially the women, have been spending so much time in that darkness that they've figured out what causes it. That's what I wanted to get into the show. That is what the show is about. If you think it's about the crime, then why didn't I show the crime?"

According to Mehta, the global coverage of the case became a bridge connecting people with the emotions and complexities of the story. "The subject had something to do with it. Everyone around the world heard about this. So they knew and had some point of reference, and I took advantage of that in terms of (that) I wanted to dispel the myths of what people had heard and thought they understood. There was nobody around the world who I think watched the show and didn't have some basic understanding and a very strong emotional reaction already (about it) before they pressed play," said Mehta, whose first feature film *Amal* released in 2007. —IANS

WEBBED



TINY PRETTY THINGS

When an attack brings down the star student at an elite ballet school, her replacement enters a world of lies, betrayal — and cutthroat competition. Starring Lauren Holly, Kylie Jefferson and Casimere Jollette, Season 1 releases on December 14 on Netflix.



EDGE OF TOMORROW

Bill Cage is stuck in a time loop, reliving the day he died in a battle — unless he can find a way to not only survive, but defeat the alien invaders. It releases on December 14 on Netflix.



A CALIFORNIA CHRISTMAS

With his carefree lifestyle on the line, a wealthy charmer poses as a ranch hand to get a hardworking farmer to sell her family's land before Christmas. Starring Lauren Swickard, Josh Swickard and Ali Afshar, the film releases on December 14 on Netflix.

# FROM THE ARCHIVES



## Open the doors of knowledge

We should learn something everyday to achieve better goals and shed the ego and false perception that we know everything, says RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JI

“When you stop learning, you start dying,” said Albert Einstein once. As conscious beings, we have five sense organs, which are also known as the ‘doors of knowledge’. Hence, it would not be wrong to say that because of nature, we constantly keep learning. For instance, through our ears, we are always listening and grasping new things. The words that go through our ears to our brain are like lessons we receive constantly. Similarly, through our eyes, we view new things and learn them. Then comes the tongue. The electric impulse that we receive through our skin or taste buds reach our brain, and stimulates a new kind of learning.

However, one must understand a fact that all the above mentioned processes of learning take place by the virtue of self-awareness and consciousness that is present in our brain. Without all these processes, learning is next to impossible. In this context, we should know that our sense organs are only the doors. Learning is actually a process that is undergone by the consciousness. It can be called the ‘feeling of mind, intellect and memory’ or simply, the ‘soul’ as every information or message we receive influence the soul. And then it’s determined whether something was a good or a bad experience.



We must know that there are two kinds of knowledge that we acquire. — material things, and spiritual things like soul, and karma. The latter kind of knowledge, when put into actions, results in personality values or *sanskaars*. Most of our actions performed again and again under the influence of a *sanskaar* result in experiencing happiness or sorrow. Throughout the journey of life, we constantly learn such lessons that result in the formation of *sanskaars* according to our karma. Hence, we should know how learning is clearly unavoidable and that we are always learning good or bad things. Likewise, if we know that our *sanskaars* go along with us life after life, we will be more careful and particular about learning good things in life and giving up on inappropriate things because education seems to be an elixir that can help us form a healthy mind and body along with a lasting and fruitful life.

We all know that in today’s time, nobody is perfect as far as goodness and virtues are concerned. Hence, it cannot be denied that we all need to be enlightened and we urgently need to improve the quality of our thoughts, speech and actions. Since we cannot avoid learning, even if we wish to, why don’t we then learn to inculcate in us moral values, virtues and good qualities so that we make progress towards perfection? Why do we wish to carry a heavy load of rubbish on our heads? Why do we want to delay our march towards our goals? What do we gain by making lame excuses, saying that we have no time or that we are not interested? Why shouldn’t we find what we are really interested in? Are we interested in our downfall, decay or doom? Why are we letting ourselves sink and drown deep down in the quagmire of vice and evil?

Remember, the more we delay, the worse will be our condition and more difficult would it be to rectify our ways. The process of learning, as said earlier, is ceaseless and continuous and hence, it has been rightly said, “We need to learn everyday and shed the ego and the false perception that ‘we know everything.’” Well, why not we remain alert and follow the right path to save ourselves from tragedy, trauma, tension and turmoil?

Filmmaker, art historian and photographer BENOY K BEHL studies how the ancient murals at the Ajanta Caves still have the potential to lend a new perspective to Indian art

India has one of the finest traditions of paintings in the world. This early tradition is not generally known, as many of these paintings are hidden in dark recesses in ancient temples and caves. These had not been clearly photographed or sufficiently represented to the world before as it was generally believed that we didn’t have such a tradition.

My photography of the early Indian murals has given a new perspective to the Indian tradition of paintings. The murals of India have also been established as one of the greatest and most sublime traditions of the art of the world. In 1930, Laurence Binyon, Director of the British Museum and a leading authority on Asian art, wrote, “In the art of Asia what a supreme and central position Ajanta owns! Whoever studies the art of China and Japan, at whatever time he begins, starts on a long road which will lead him ultimately to Ajanta.”



versities and museums around the world invited me to speak on Ajanta and show the paintings. National Geographic Magazine were among the hundreds of journals and newspapers,

### TRUE COLOURS OF AJANTA

In 1991-92, I had the privilege of documenting the glorious paintings of Ajanta of the second century BCE and fifth and sixth centuries CE. Scholars and institutions around the world responded to state that this was the first time that they were able to see the true details and colours of the Ajanta paintings, which were considered to be the fountainhead of the classic traditions of painting in Asia.

### DARK CAVES

The ancient caves are dark, strong lights were not allowed to be used inside as these would damage the paintings. Photography was normally not allowed in order to save the paintings from the adverse effects of flash lights. Some earlier photography of the paintings, which had been carried out with special permission, was not very accurate, as there was much surface reflection from the painted surfaces. I had fortunately developed a technique of photographing in extremely low light to document the wall and ceiling paintings of the Ajanta Caves in 1991-92. The then Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India M.C. Joshi wrote to me that I had “conquered the darkness of the Ajanta Caves.”

### WORLDWIDE RESPONSE

Scores of the most prestigious uni-

who hailed my photography as path-breaking. In 2008, National Geographic Magazine published an 18-page story about Indian art as revealed to the world through my photographs. It was the cover story in some of the European editions of the magazine.

In the meantime, many noted international book publishers offered to publish my book on the Ajanta paintings. The first edition of the book came out in 1998, with an American Edition by Harry N Abrams.

There was a unanimous response of the leading art critics and historians at the great capital cities of the world, where I was invited by the art institutions. They felt that the Ajanta paintings “were surely the finest art of humankind”. Experts commented on the technical virtuosity found in these paintings. They saw qualities in them which appeared in Western art only in the High Renaissance, Impressionist, Expressionist and Modern periods.

### CAPTURE THE SHADES

Numerous attempts of the reproduction of the Ajanta paintings with colour photography were made. In the

earlier part of this century, photography was not developed enough to capture the colours of the paintings accurately. In recent years, the Archaeological Survey of India has not permitted the use of photographic lights as these would damage the 2200 to 1500-year old paintings. Strictly limited attempts to photograph some of the panels with lights were allowed, but these too failed to capture the colours accurately. Thus, the exquisite beauty of these paintings seemed to remain in the dark interiors of the remote caves.

### ESTABLISHING A CONTINUOUS TRADITION

Subsequently, in 1992, I went on to photograph the 10th century paintings in the dark and narrow corridors of the Brihadeshwara Temple at Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu. These had not been clearly photographed before and scholars around the world responded warmly when they saw my photographs. Dr. Milo C. Beach, Director of the two American National Galleries of Asian Art (in the Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC) said that he would

have to revise his understanding of the history of Indian paintings. He explained that the paintings had been well-known, but since paintings before and after Ajanta for the next eight hundred years, were not known, it was not seen or studied as a part of a continuous tradition of art. However, since he was now seeing the art of the tenth century, which had the same technical virtuosity as the fifth century paintings, it pointed towards the fact that there was a continuity and a great tradition of art.

### ANCIENT MURALS

I had a good fortune to photograph other Indian mural paintings of the fifth and the later centuries of the ancient and medieval periods, clearly establishing a continuous tradition. As the paintings are considerably damaged, the digital restoration has made it much easier for the people to appreciate this early art.

### EARLY SURVIVING PAINTINGS

Descriptions of the *Badami* paintings in the 1950s included paintings that were lost by the time I reached there to photograph in 2001. National Geographic Magazine, when they were doing a story about my work in 2008, could hardly see even those paintings which I had seen and photographed in 2001. Therefore, this photography and restoration is of fundamental importance for the Hindu tradition specifically as well as for overall tradition of the paintings of India.

### VIRTUAL MUSEUMS

The government has a vision of the vast documentation and digital restoration of Indian art, as well as the making of virtual museums to take this art to the people. For this purpose, Government Advisory Company Sapio Analytics have been taking shared rights from me for some of my photographs, as well as *Badami* and other early Indian paintings. Sapio Analytics will be using these photographs and my digital restoration for the virtual museums. They will also be using my digital restoration for training purposes, to establish a base for future digital restoration.

(The article includes the paper which was preserved in Arctic World Archives on October 21, 2020.)

# Human touch

A team of Indian-origin engineers has made it possible to communicate digitally, just by touching a surface

A team of Indian-origin researchers in the US has made it possible to essentially let their bodies act as the link between the card or smartphone and the reader or scanner, making it possible to transmit information just by touching a surface.

The prototype, developed by Purdue University engineers, doesn’t transfer money yet but it’s the first technology that can send any information through the direct touch of a fingertip.

While wearing the prototype as a watch, a user’s body can be used to send information such as a photo or a password when touching a sensor on a laptop, the researchers said.

“We’re used to unlocking devices using our fingerprints, but this technology wouldn’t rely on biometrics — it would rely on digital signals. Imagine logging into an app on someone else’s phone just by touch,” said Shreyas Sen, a Purdue associate professor of electrical and computer engineering.

“Whatever you touch would

become more powerful because digital information is going through it,” Sen added in the study published in *Transactions on Computer-Human Interaction*, a journal by the Association for Computing Machinery.

Shovan Maity led the study as a PhD student in Sen’s lab. The technology works by establishing an “internet” within the body that smartphones, smartwatches, pacemakers, insulin pumps and other wearable or implantable devices can use to send information.

“These devices typically communicate using Bluetooth signals that tend to radiate out from the body. A hacker could intercept those signals from 30 feet away,” Sen said.

Sen’s technology instead keeps signals confined within the body by coupling them in a so-called ‘Electro-Quasistatic range’ that is much lower on the electromagnetic spectrum than typical Bluetooth communication.

This mechanism is what enables information transfer by



only touching a surface. Even if your finger hovered just one centimetre above a surface, information wouldn’t transfer through this technology without a direct touch. “This would prevent a hacker from stealing private information such as credit card credentials by intercepting the signals,” the authors wrote.

Credit card machines and apps such as Apple Pay use a more secure alternative to Bluetooth signals, called near-field communication, to receive a payment from tapping a card or scanning a phone. Sen’s technology would add the convenience of making a secure payment in a single gesture. “You

wouldn’t have to bring a device out of your pocket. You could leave it in your pocket or on your body and just touch,” Sen said.

The technology could also replace key fobs or cards that currently use Bluetooth communication to grant access into a building. Instead, a person

might just touch a door handle to enter. The researchers believe that the applications of this technology would go beyond how we interact with devices today.

“The ability to transfer information through your touch would change the applications of that big touch screen,” Sen said. —IANS

Someone is sitting in the shade today because someone planted a tree a long time ago.

—Warren Buffett

### ANTIVIRAL DRUG BLOCKS COVID IN 24 HRS

Researchers have discovered that the treatment of SARS-CoV-2 infection (COVID-19) with a new anti-viral drug, MK-4482/EIDD-2801 or Molnupiravir, completely suppresses the virus transmission within 24 hours.

According to the study, published in the journal *Nature Microbiology*, the research team from Georgia State University (GSU) originally discovered that the drug is potent against influenza viruses.

“This is the first demonstration of an orally available drug to rapidly block SARS-CoV-2 transmission. MK-4482/EIDD-2801 could be game-changing,” said study author Richard Plimpher from GSU. Because the drug can be taken by mouth, treatment can be started early for a potentially three-fold benefit: inhibit patients’ progress to severe disease, shorten the infectious phase to ease the emotional and socio-economic toll of prolonged patient isolation and rapidly silence local outbreaks.



### AIRFLOW IN CAR RISKS TRANSMITTING COVID-19

Airflow patterns inside a car’s passenger cabin offers some suggestions for potentially reducing the risk of COVID-19 transmission while sharing rides with others, say researchers, including one of Indian-origin.

The study, published in the journal *Science Advances*, used computer models to simulate the airflow inside a compact car with various combinations of windows open or closed. The simulations showed that opening windows — the more windows the better — created airflow patterns that dramatically reduced the concentration of airborne particles exchanged between a driver and a single passenger.

The researchers found that blasting the car’s ventilation system didn’t circulate air nearly as well as a few open windows. “Driving around with the windows up and the air conditioning or heat on is definitely the worst scenario, according to our computer simulations,” said study author Asimanshu Das from the Brown University, US.



### AUTOIMMUNE PATIENTS RISK DEATH BY COVID

Researchers have now found that people with rare autoimmune rheumatic diseases are at a greater risk of dying at a younger age amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

For the study, published in the journal *Rheumatology*, the research team looked at the electronic health records of 170,000 people in England with rare autoimmune rheumatic diseases. During March and April 2020 (the first two months of the COVID-19 pandemic), the team found that 1,815 (1.1 per cent) of people with these diseases died.

“People with rare diseases often have poorer health outcomes generally, so we wanted to find out what impact the pandemic has had,” said study co-author Fiona Pearce from the University of Nottingham in the UK. “From our study, we know that during the early months of the pandemic, people with these diseases were more likely to die than other,” Pearce added.

The results showed that the risk of dying during COVID-19 for people with these conditions increased from age 35.



### BLOOD SUGAR DRUG CUTS COVID DEATH RISK

Metformin, a generic medication for managing blood sugar levels in patients with diabetes, has been linked to significantly reduced COVID-19 death risks in women in an observational study.

It also reduces inflammation proteins like TNF-alpha that appear to make COVID-19 worse, said the research published in the journal *The Lancet Healthy Longevity*.

“Seeing a bigger association with protection in women over men may point towards inflammation reduction as a key way that metformin reduces risk from COVID-19,” said principal investigator Carolyn Bramante, Assistant Professor at the University of Minnesota Medical School in the US.

“However, more research is needed,” Bramante said. The study is based on analysis of de-identified patient data from healthcare company UnitedHealth Group.



### PETS PLAYED LIFE-SAVING ROLE IN PANDEMIC

In the absence of human-to-human contact, in millions of households worldwide, animals or pets have provided much-needed comfort via cuddles, pats and a constant physical presence, say researchers.

The study, published in the *Journal of Behavioural Economics for Policy (JBEF)* outlined how pets have a crucial role to play in an era where human-human contact can be life endangering.

According to the researchers, physical touch is a sense that has been taken for granted — even overlooked — until COVID-19 visited our door.

“To fill the void of loneliness and provide a buffer against stress, there has been a global upsurge in people adopting dogs and cats from animal shelters during lockdown,” said study author Janette Young from the University of South Australia.

“Breeders have also been inundated, with demands for puppies quadrupling some waiting lists,” Young added.



Hardik surge in last over gives India T20 series win

PTI ■ SYDNEY

India sealed the T20I series against Australia with a game to spare after a swashbuckling Hardik Pandya finished what Shikhar Dhawan had set out to achieve with a scintillating 36-ball 52 in the second and penultimate match here at Sydney Cricket Ground on Sunday.

The visitors thus avenged their 1-2 ODI series loss, chasing down a challenging 195-run target in 19.4 overs with six wickets in hand. India won the opener in Canberra by 11 runs on Friday.

This was India's 10th successive win away from home in T20Is.

Needing 25 of the final 12 balls after fetching 12 in the 18th over, Pandya brought the equation down to 14 in the last over with two fours. The all-rounder then hit two sixes to seal the match in India's favour and also claim the player of the match honours.

Pandya remained unconquered on 42 off 22 balls.

India were off to a sedate start with no boundaries coming in the first two overs. But fours and sixes rained from the willows of Dhawan (52) and KL Rahul (30) once the duo got their eye in.

Australia got their first breakthrough when Rahul gave a simple catch to Mitchell Swepson at deep point. But India had still managed a strong start, reaching 60 for one at the end of the Powerplay.

Having played some fine shots, Dhawan top-edged an attempted slog sweep off leg-spinner Adam Zampa to give Australia their second wicket.

Sanju Samson got out after a 10-ball 15 but it was debutant Daniel Sams, who gave the hosts their biggest breakthrough when he had Virat Kohli caught behind

# Kings of 20/20



It was not about what they are doing, it was about what I can do. It's a matter of two big shots and today it came off. I always back myself. I like to look at scoreboard and play so that I know which bowlers to target.

HARDIK PANDYA

for a well-made 24-ball 40.

Earlier, stand-in skipper Matthew Wade led from the front with a blistering half century and

powered Australia to a strong total after a fairly commanding performance with the bat.

Leading the side in the

absence of an injured Aaron Finch, Wade smashed 58 off 32 balls while Steve Smith made a breezy 38-ball 46 after India opted to field.

For the visitors, T Natarajan finished with fine figures of 2/20 in his four-over spell. Australia accumulated 62 runs in the last five overs after a few tight middle overs.

## Proud to win series without Rohit, Bumrah: Kohli

PTI ■ SYDNEY

India captain Virat Kohli on Sunday said winning the T20 series against Australia without established players like Rohit Sharma and Jasprit Bumrah meant a great deal to him and lavished praise on the marauding Hardik Pandya's "raw talent".

Pandya struck an unbeaten 22-ball 42 to take India home with six wickets in hands.

"Yeah meant a great deal. We've played as a team in T20 cricket. The fact that we don't have Rohit and Bumrah, our established white ball players, in and still doing well makes me happy and I am very proud of this team," Kohli said after the win.

The India skipper believes that with his raw talent, Pandya, who earned the man-of-the-match award for his batting, can become a bankable player for the team in years to come.

"The reason for him (Hardik) coming into the team in 2016 was



pure ability. He has raw talent. And now he realises that this is his time, the next 4-5 years, to be that bankable player that can win you games from anywhere. His plans are right and I'm glad to see that," Kohli said.

"He now realises that this is the time to establish in that (finishing) role and play match-winning knocks for us. He plays with all his heart and he certainly got that competitive nature about him and also has the skill to execute that at the highest level."

## Langer compares Pandya's finishing skills to Dhoni

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Australia coach Justin Langer on Sunday described India all-rounder Hardik Pandya's match-winning innings in the second T20I as an "incredible spectacle" and likened him to former captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni as a finisher.

"It was an incredible spectacle of a game. We know how dangerous he (Pandya) is. In the past we had MS Dhoni and the way he (Pandya) played today," Langer said at the post-match conference.

"He has played really well all summer so, obviously it was a great innings in the end there."

Langer admitted that India were too good for his side with a

lot of experienced T20 players in their ranks.

"I thought the whole game was a very close one. Our fielding was absolutely incredible, it was electric to watch, but India with their experienced T20 players were too good for us today," said the Australia coach.

According to Langer, his side thought they had enough runs on the board to defend and India had to bat really well to win the match. "I am proud of my players. It was a great spectacle, on a Sunday night India versus Australia, it got so close, it was a really exciting game. We batted really well, had enough runs and thought India would have to bat really well."

## SINGLES

### STARC TO MISS FINAL TWO T20 GAMES

**SYDNEY:** Australian pacer Mitchell Starc has pulled out of the remainder of the T20 series against India due to an illness in his family. The 30-year-old pacer had missed the third ODI due to back and rib niggles but returned to claim two wickets in the 11-run loss in the first T20I in Canberra on Friday. He had arrived in Sydney on Saturday but soon left the team bubble after learning about a family illness.

### 1ST SA-ENGLAND ODI CANCELLED AGAIN

**PAARL:** The rescheduled first ODI of the three-match series between South Africa and England to be played at the Boland Park on Sunday was cancelled after two members of the touring England returned "unconfirmed positive tests". The status of games due to be played on Monday and Wednesday is also now in doubt, the decision on which will be made once "the results of the tests are ratified independently by medical experts".

### SARFARAZ, TALAT RECALLED FOR NZ T20S

**CHRISTCHURCH:** Veteran wicketkeeper Sarfaraz Ahmed and all-rounder Hussain Talat were on Sunday recalled to Pak's 18-member squad for the three T20Is against New Zealand, beginning Dec 18 in Auckland. Talat played his last T20I against South Africa at Centurion in February 2019, while former skipper Sarfaraz has reclaimed his spot from Rohail Nazir after missing the Zimbabwe series. The squad was finalised by head coach Misbah-ul-Haq and captain Babar Azam in consultation with Pakistan Shaheens coach Ijaz Ahmed, who also locked his 16-member squad for the four-day match against New Zealand 'A' to be played in Whangarei from Dec 17.

### KANDIE SETS HALF MARATHON RECORD

**VALENCIA:** Kenya's Kibiwoti Kandie broke the men's world half marathon record in Valencia on Sunday. The 24-year-old Kandie won the 21-kilometer race in 57 minutes, 32 seconds, bettering the previous mark established by Geoffrey Kamworor in 2019 by 29 seconds. The extremely fast race saw the next three men come across inside Kamworor's previous record time. World champion Jacob Kiplimo of Uganda was second, followed by Kenyans Rhonex Kipruto and Alexander Mutiso. Genzebe Dibaba won the women's race in 1:05:18. That was the fastest ever debut over the distance, according to World Athletics.

### MUMBAI TO JUMP TO TOP OF ISL TABLE

**BAMBOLIM:** Mumbai City FC struck twice in the first half to beat Odisha FC 2-0 and register their third win in the ISL at the GMC Stadium here on Sunday. A penalty from Batholomew Ogbeche (30th minute) and a header from Rowlin Borges (45th) gave Sergio Lobera's men their third win in four games and their first-win ever over Odisha. The win sent them to the top of the table. They are level on points with ATK Mohun Bagan but are placed above with a better goal difference. For Odisha FC, this was their third loss in four games and only point-less SC East Bengal lie below Stuart Baxter's side. Agencies

## Hardik don't mind staying back for Tests

**SYDNEY:** He is not in India's Test squad for the upcoming series against Australia but fresh from his white-ball heroics, all-rounder Hardik Pandya on Sunday said he wouldn't mind staying back if the team management wants.

Coming back from a back surgery, Pandya, who is yet to start bowling on a regular basis, shone bright with the bat in the limited overs matches against Australia, helping the visitors claim the T20 series after two big losses in the ODI rubber.

Asked if he aspires to stay back for the four-match Test series starting December 17, Pandya said, "It's a different ball game, I think I need to be, I mean I don't mind but at the end of the day, the call is on the management. So, yeah, I don't think I can say much about it."

Pandya arrived in Australia having played a key role for Mumbai Indians in their title-winning run in the IPL and on Sunday, he powered India to a six-wicket win with a blazing 42

off 22 balls.

The all-rounder said he had worked on gaining mastery over "finishing games when it matters the most" during the coronavirus-forced lockdown.

"During lockdown I wanted to focus on finishing games where it matters the most. It doesn't matter whether I score or don't score more runs," Pandya said at post-match conference.

The all-rounder was not new to the kind of situation he faced with at the SCG on Sunday, having won some and lost a few in the past.

"I have been in these situations many times and I learnt from my mistakes. My game is always around the confidence which I carry, it has that fine line where I back myself and not become overconfident."

"I always remember all those times when we chased big totals and it helps," said the man who is a pretty good zone at the moment and playing according to the situation instead of getting too excited. PTI

## Rahane leads from front with 108

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Ajinkya Rahane geared up for the much-anticipated four-Test series against Australia with a resolute century, steering India A to 237 for 8 against Australia A on the opening day of the first warm-up match here on Sunday.

Rahane (108 off 228 balls), leading the side, and Cheteshwar Pujara (54 off 140 balls), who will be to India's batting mainstay especially once Virat Kohli goes for paternity leave after the first Test, shared a 76-run stand for the fourth wicket after India A were reduced to 40 for 3 early on.

The *Mumbaikar* then added 69 with Kuldeep Yadav (15) to keep India A afloat.

Rahane, who won the toss and decided to bat, watched the ball closely and punished anything over-pitched or short to pick up 16 boundaries and a six during his long stay at the crease.

Returning to action after almost nine months, Pujara struck form right away and his innings was laced with five fours.

Pujara played the leg-glance to pick up three boundaries in the fine leg area, two off them in successive deliveries of James Pattinson in the ninth over.

At stumps, Rahane and Mohammed Siraj (0) were at the crease.

Earlier, Shubman Gill and Prithvi Shaw, who are fighting for one of the opening slots



in the Test team, did their chances no good after registering ducks.

While Gill edged the first ball he faced to Marcus Harris at third slip, Shaw nicked one to wicketkeeper Tim Paine as India slipped to 6 for 2 in the third over.

Playing his first competitive game since the coronavirus-induced break, Hanuma

Vihari (15) looked good for a while before Jackson Bird found him plumb in front in the 19th over.

Pujara and Rahane then joined hands to steady the innings. The former reached his fifty with a shot at deep mid-wicket in the 45th over which yielded three runs.

Pujara was dismissed in the 47th over, caught at leg gully by Harris off Pattinson.

Back in action after recovering from a hamstring injury, Wriddhiman Saha, a contender for the wicket-keeping spot, had a dismal outing as he was out for naught after being trapped by Travis Head in the 50th over.

Ravi Ashwin (5) then became the third victim of Pattinson as India went into the tea break at 128 for six in 53 overs with Kuldeep joining Rahane in the middle.

Rahane struggled a bit after the break before reaching his fifty with an upper cut six off Pattinson in the 61st over.

Rahane kept the scoreboard ticking but Head removed Kuldeep, who misjudged a sweep shot as the side slumped to 197-7. For Australia, Pattinson, who played a crucial role in Mumbai Indians' title-winning IPL campaign, continued his good run with three wickets.

Pacer Michael Neser (2/51) and Bird (1/34) too bowled well, while skipper Travis Head too picked up two wickets with his off-spin.



New Zealand's players celebrate their innings and 134 run win over Windies AP

## Kiwis extend unbeaten home run

AFP ■ HAMILTON

New Zealand stretched their unbeaten run at home with a comprehensive win by an innings and 134 runs in the first Test against the West Indies in Hamilton on Sunday after ending a battling rearguard century by Jermaine Blackwood.

The West Indies were all out before lunch on day four for 247 after making only 138 in their first innings in reply to New Zealand's 519/7.

Blackwood was the penultimate wicket to fall, for 104, after a 155-run stand with Alzarri Joseph who made 86.

The victory, set up over the first two days when New Zealand captain Kane Williamson crafted a majestic 251, highlighted the difficulty overseas teams have on New Zealand wickets.

The latest victory extended New Zealand's unbeaten home streak to an impressive 14 Tests, a statistic which took Williamson by surprise.

"To be honest, I didn't know that was the case, but it's great. It was a really good performance for us to put together collectively," said Williamson, who deflected all credit away from himself.

## Spurs go top of table

Son & Kane score in North London derby win over Arsenal

AFP ■ LONDON

Heung-Min Son and Harry Kane were Tottenham's heroes once again, firing their side back to the top of the Premier League table with a 2-0 win over rivals Arsenal in front of 2,000 fans.

Son (13) curled in a delicious opener after being assisted by Kane for the eighth time in the Premier League this season, before returning the favour as Kane (45+1) slammed in the second to become the top scorer in north London derby history.

Arsenal dominated possession and territory throughout but once again their disjointed attack failed to fire. That's just two goals in seven top-flight games for Arsenal now, and their sixth defeat in their last nine Premier League games leaving them 15th in the table.

Earlier on Sunday, Jamie Vardy struck in the final minute to move Leicester up to third with a 2-1 win at Sheffield United. The Foxes moved above Liverpool in the table after ending a four-game winless run at an empty Bramall Lane, to push the Blades ever closer to a return to the Championship.

Sheffield United still have just one point from 11 games and were punished for a lack of ruthlessness as John Egan let Vardy run through rather than bringing down the striker outside the box and taking



a red card, before the former England international kept his cool to beat Aaron Ramsdale.

The late winner was just reward for Leicester's domination of the game as they hit the woodwork twice in the first half through Vardy and James Maddison.

Instead it was Ayoze Perez who put Brendan Rodgers's men in front when he pounced on Marc Albrighton's deflected shot.

However, Chris Wilder's men hit back immediately for only their fifth league goal of the season when



Oli McBurnie showed good strength to head home from a corner.

The hosts then held out more comfortably in the second period until they gifted away possession inside their own half and Maddison picked out a perfect pass to release Vardy for the winner.

In the first game of the day, Wilfried Zaha and Christian Benteke both scored twice as Crystal Palace made West Brom pay for Mathews Pereira's first-half red card in a 5-1 rout at the Hawthorns.

## Hakimi leads Inter win

**MILAN:** Inter closed the gap on Serie A leaders Milan as Achraf Hakimi scored twice to help Antonio Conte's team to a 3-1 victory over Bologna.

With Milan not playing until Sunday, Inter took the chance to move to within two points of their city rivals as they claimed a third straight league win.

Romelu Lukaku got the ball rolling with his 12th goal of the season in all competitions, before Marcelo Brozovic's sublime pass played in Hakimi for a second.

Emanuel Vignato's 67th-minute goal threatened to make things tense for Inter, but Hakimi's second — a fine finish at the culmination of a fantastic run infield — wrapped things up.

Earlier in Turin derby, Juventus came from behind to beat Torino 2-1 with American midfielder Weston McKennie scoring for the first time since he joined the Italian champions on loan.

McKennie's close-range header on 78 minutes put Juve level after Nicolas Nkoulou had given Torino a first-half advantage.

After McKennie's equaliser, Leonardo Bonucci produced an almost identical header in the 89th minute to give Juve victory and put them on 20 points from ten games, a total littered with five draws.

Torino remained in the relegation zone, two points from safety, with only six points from its first 10 matches. AFP



Barca's Lionel Messi reacts during the La Liga match against Cadiz AP

## MATS errors punish Barca

AFP ■ MADRID

Lionel Messi's Barcelona suffered a fourth Liga defeat of the season as they went down 2-1 to Cadiz on Saturday.

Barca are now a distant seventh, 12 points off leaders Atletico Madrid, who beat Real Valladolid 2-0.

Koeman made three changes from the mid-week Champions League win at Ferencvaros with goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen coming in for Neto.

But Ter Stegen made a first costly error in Andalusia after eight minutes as Alvaro Gimenez claimed his second goal in as many games.

The Barca defence failed to clear a corner which fell to Ter Stegen, but his weak parry onto his own line was tapped in by

Gimenez.

Koeman's men were all square after 56 minutes as Jordi Alba's low cross was deflected into his own goal by defender Pedro Alcala.

But Ter Stegen's second costly error came eight minutes later.

Clement Lenglet made a hash of Alba's throw in before Ter Stegen failed to clear under pressure from Negredo and the former Manchester City striker claimed his third goal league goal of the campaign.

Earlier, Atletico, now unbeaten in 26 games in La Liga, moved to the top of the table after France international Thomas Lemar and Spain midfielder Marcos Llorente scored for Diego Simeone's men against Valladolid.



## Mbappe reaches goal century for PSG

**PARIS:** Striker Kylian Mbappe came off the bench to score his 100th goal for Paris Saint-Germain as the French league leader secured a hard-fought 3-1 win at Montpellier.

Mbappe's century of PSG goals — in 137 games — was completed when the 21-year-old turned in a cross from Layvin Kurzawa from close range in the 90th minute.

Up until then, it was uncertain for PSG after English striker Steph Mavididi equalized for Montpellier in the 40th and the home side pushed strongly for a winner after the break.

PSG striker Moise Kean broke away and netted with a fine finish in the 76th to put the visitors ahead. Mbappe then stroked the ball home from Kurzawa's quick pass to embellish a win which moves PSG two points ahead of second-place Lille. AP