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Covid vaccine dry run on Dec 28-29

Govt readies for vaccination across country

PNS ■ NEW DELHI
The Government is all set to launch the vaccination drive for Covid-19 across the country and has planned a dry run in Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Gujarat, Punjab next week.

The detailed checklist has been prepared by the Union Health Ministry and shared with the four States to guide them in the dry run planned on December 28 and 29 as a step to prepare before the actual vaccination takes off.

According to the Ministry, each State will plan the dry run in two districts. Preferably this will be in different session type settings, for example, district hospital, urban site, private health facility, rural outreach.

"This exercise will enable end-to-end mobilisation and testing of Covid-19 vaccination process and check the usage of Co-WIN in field environment," the Ministry said.

It would also enable linkages between planning, implementation and reporting mechanisms and identify challenges and guide the way forward prior to actual implementation, including improvements that may be required in the envisaged process.

This will also provide a hands-on experience to programme managers at various levels and will include activities from the necessary data entries in Co-WIN to vaccine receipt



Security staff members work inside a CWG village Covid-19 Care Centre near Akshardham in New Delhi on Friday PTI

and allocation to deployment of team members, mock drill of session sites with test beneficiaries to reporting and evening meeting.

Over 2,360 participants were trained during national level training comprising State immunisation officers, cold chain officers, IEC officials, development partners, etc.

As on date, the State-level trainings had been completed in all States and UTs with participation of more than 7,000 district level trainees, except Lakshadweep which will conduct it on December 29.

Cascading down, 681 districts (49,604 trainees) have completed the training of Medical Officers on operational guidelines. Vaccination team trainings have been completed in 1,399 out of 17,831 blocks and planning units. It is going on in the other blocks.

The dry run will also

Don't be misled by Opp lies: PM to kisan

Modi says Govt is ready to discuss all issues, asserts farm laws give farmers freedom

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his mega-outreach to farmers, on Friday said his Government is ready to talk with them on all issues with an "open mind" on "facts and logic" and not on the basis of the "lies spread by Opposition parties".

He claimed that new farm laws offer "all alternatives" and "gateways" to the farmers to sell their produce and increase income.

Speaking to the farmers of six-States, Modi strongly backed agricultural laws and gave enough indication that though he was ready to remove any "fault" in them, his Government has no rollback plan as demanded by the agitating farmers on the outskirts of Delhi.

"Don't be misled by lies of others and think on facts," said Modi and alleged that the agitation was being fuelled by Opposition parties.

Modi said TMC-ruled West Bengal, which is "blocking" cash benefits to farmers in the State coming from the Central schemes, is supporting farmers protest.

The Left-ruled Kerala which has already done away with the APMC "mandi system," is also doing the same.

Modi interacted virtually with the farmers and asked them questions on the con-



Prime Minister Narendra Modi releases the next installment of financial benefit under PM Kisan Samman Nidhi through video conference in New Delhi on Friday PTI

tract-farming and its "benefits". He asked farmers not to be "misled" by the "lies" of the Opposition parties looking for "jari booti" (panacea) to resurrect their "falling political graph".

Squarely blaming those with political agenda for the deadlock in the Government's talks with protesting farmers, the Prime Minister said the protest which started with demand for guaranteeing Minimum Support Price (MSP) has now moved to seeking release of those accused of violence and making highway toll-free at the behest of the Opposition parties "who are firing from the shoulders of innocent farmers".

"You would have seen that when the agitation started their demand was about MSP guarantee. They had genuine issues because they were farmers. But then those with political ideology took over," he said.

Defending new laws, the Prime Minister said they allow farmers freedom to sell their produce anywhere in the coun-

try, including through "mandis". Modi said like in all sectors, modernisation in agriculture is the need of the time.

He said it is six-month since new farm laws have come into effect and "not a single mandi has been closed".

Modi said the Centre is willing to resume the dialogue on all farmers-related issues, even with those staunchly opposed to his Government as long as the talks are based on "issues, facts and logic".

He asserted that an overwhelming number of farmers across the country have welcomed the new laws and are already reaping the benefits, and listed out the BJP's victory in panchayat elections across States, in which farmers were the main voters and including in areas surrounding protest sites.

"Despite that, farmers across the country have wholeheartedly welcomed agriculture reforms. I assure you that I will not let you down," Modi said.

The Prime Minister alleged that the farmers' protest is also being used now for opposing

TMC, Left rap Modi over scheme blocking charge

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Hours after Prime Minister Narendra Modi blamed the Trinamool Congress and the Left Front for doing great disservice to farmers' cause by their recent acts — like refusing Central Kisan Samman Nidhi funds for their aid and inciting farmers' protest in Delhi — the Bengal ruling outfit and Left parties hit back in equal measures.

Taking on the Prime Minister, senior TMC leader Saugato Roy said it is the arrogance of the Central Government and the PM himself and not the Bengal Government which was hindering the flow of Central Kisan Samman Nidhi funds.

Roy said, "The Prime Minister is saying only half truth by claiming that the State Government is blocking the Prime Minister Kisan Samman funds... the fact is we only want to get the funds channeled through the State Government... the Centre must not bypass the federal norms... if it does so then where is there a need of a State Government to be in place?"

Earlier the Prime Minister while delivering a speech singled out Bengal saying the TMC Government and the Left Front were ruining the future of the farmers. He alleged that the State Government was blocking the passage of the Kisan Samman funds.

Continued on Page 2

many existing policies. Though the Prime Minister did not name any particular group, he made several references that appeared aimed at Left-affiliated outfits and other Opposition parties.

He said those with political agenda are not letting farmers engage in dialogue with the Government to address their concerns.

Thousands of farmers, mainly from Punjab, Haryana and parts of Uttar Pradesh, are camping on various Delhi borders for almost a month to protest against the three farm laws.

Continued on Page 2

Pro-farm laws farmers gather in Noida

Noida: Thousands of farmers from UP gathered in Noida on Thursday on the call of the Kisan Sena, a farmers' union supporting the new farm laws, even as the Bharatiya Kisan Union (Lok Shakti) which is demanding withdrawal of the legislations dubbed this farmers' faction as "jaichand" — after the 12th century ruler came to be known for treason.

Continued on Page 2

6 JD(U) MLAs in Arunachal join BJP

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The already uneasy tie between the Janata Dal(U) and the BJP hit a new low with the saffron party poaching six MLAs of its ally in Arunachal Pradesh.

The development comes a day ahead of the announcement of the panchayat and municipal polls' results in Arunachal Pradesh.

The lone MLA from the People's Party of Arunachal (PPA), Kardo Nyigyor from Likabali constituency, has also joined the BJP. The PPA MLA was also suspended by the regional outfit earlier this month.

JD(U) MLAs who switched sides are Talem Taboh from Rumgong Assembly Constituency, Hayeng Mangfi (Chayang Tajo), Jikke Tako (Tali), Dorjee Wangdi Kharma (Kalaktang), Dongru Siogju (Bomdila) and Kanggong Taku from Mariyang-Geku constituency, according to a bul-



letin issued by the State Legislative Assembly.

On November 26, the JD(U) had issued show-cause notices to Siogju, Kharma and Taku for "anti-party" activities, and suspended them.

The six JD(U) MLAs had earlier elected Talem Taboh as the new Legislature Party leader allegedly without the knowledge of senior party members.

"We have accepted their letters conveying the intention to join the party," BJP's Arunachal Pradesh president BR Waghe said.

Continued on Page 2

CPM picks 21-year-old Arya as Kerala's youngest ever Mayor

PNS ■ KOCHI

The CPI(M) sprang a surprise on Christmas Day by anointing 21-year-old Arya Rajendran as the party's candidate for the Thiruvananthapuram Mayoral election scheduled to be held next week.

A BSc (Mathematics) student in a city college, Arya would be the youngest Mayor in the country. Since the CPI(M) commands absolute majority in the corporation council, it is certain that Arya would sail through the election.

Arya won from Mudavanmugal ward, defeating UDF candidate Sreekala by 2872 votes.

The district committee of the CPI(M) that met on Friday took the decision to field Arya as the party's mayoral candidate. The formal announcement is expected to be made on Saturday.

Daughter of a long time party activist, Arya is the pres-



ident of the children's wing of the party. She was searching for words when media persons rushed to her residence in Mudavanmugal from where she was elected as the councillor in the recently held election to the local self Government bodies.

"My father has taught me to obey the directives issued by the party and I'll follow that teaching. The CPI(M) is more important to me than anything else. My role model is Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, who is the best crisis manager I have seen," said Arya while speaking to the media.

She said she is yet to formulate policies for the future development of Thiruvananthapuram. However, she added that her main focus will be on addressing women's issues and other developmental activities.

"I was busy learning the basic requirements of the ward from where I have been elected. Now I have to learn the whole issues haunting the capital city and chart out an action programme to make Thiruvananthapuram the best city in the country. Waste management is one of the important problems staring the city," said the Mayor designate.

Students of All Saints College will have the rare honour of having the "Worshipful Mayor" of the city as their colleague.

The Left front had fielded many youngsters and women in the local body polls. With this decision, the CPM hopes to attract more youngsters to the party ahead of the Assembly elections.

Bangladesh raises concern over cross-border smuggling

No illegal immigration into India, claims BGB

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) on Friday claimed that no illegal immigration is taking place into India from the neighbouring country, but expressed concern over rising incidents of smuggling across the border.

Addressing a joint press conference with Border Security Force (BSF) Director-

General Rakesh Asthana, BGB Director-General Maj Gen Md Shafeenul Islam said that at least 86 Bangladeshi nationals were killed on the Indian side in the last three years for their alleged criminal activities.

Asthana, however, said BSF has apprehended 3,204 persons this year for illegally entering India from Bangladesh and 60 of them, whose nationalities were established, were handed over to BGB.

Discussing various issues concerning the border during the ongoing five-day 51st DG-

level talks between the BSF and BGB that started on December 22, the two forces signed a Joint Accord of Discussion and decided to increase coordinated night patrolling to prevent illegal activities.

"No illegal immigration is going on from Bangladesh to India. The GDP of Bangladesh is on a steady upward trend. There is no reason for any citizen to come to India for jobs or any other reason. People have come with valid documents only for medical purposes," Islam said.

Continued on Page 2

CAPSULE

NATION REMEMBERS ATAL ON HIS 96TH BIRTHDAY

New Delhi: President Ram Nath Kovind led the nation on Friday in paying homage to former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on his 96th birth anniversary with leaders hailing the BJP stalwart's vision of a strong and prosperous India.

FOREX RESERVES RISES TO RECORD \$581.131 BN

Mumbai: The country's foreign exchange reserves surged by \$2.563 billion to touch a record high of \$581.131 billion in the week to December 18, RBI data showed. In the previous week, the reserves had declined by \$778 million to \$578.568 billion.

SHOW CAUSE NOTICE TO NEPAL'S OLI GOVT

Kathmandu: Nepal's Supreme Court on Friday issued a show-cause notice to Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli-led Government, asking it to submit a written clarification over its decision to abruptly dissolve Parliament.



A man dressed as Santa Claus gives a gift to a Covid-19 patient during Christmas celebration at Yatharth Hospital in Noida Friday PTI

Air improves to 'very poor' in Delhi, NCR

STAFF REPORTER/PTI ■ NEW DELHI/NOIDA

The average air quality improved from "severe" level and was recorded in "very poor" category in Delhi, Ghaziabad, Noida, Greater Noida, Faridabad and Gurgaon, according to a 24-hour data issued by a Government agency on Friday.

Presence of pollutant PM 2.5 and PM 10, though, remained high in the five immediate neighbours of Delhi, according to air quality index (AQI) maintained by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB).

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".



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Judge, High Court of Madras



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Covid vaccine will be available to 35,000 health workers in G'gram

Gurugram: The district health department said on Friday that the Covid-19 vaccine will be available to around 35,000 health workers of Government and private hospitals in the district.

Also, apart from the Government facilities, Covid vaccine centres will also be set up at private hospitals across the district.

A meeting of the Adverse

Events Following Immunisation (AEFI) committee was conducted on Friday under the chairmanship of Virender Yadav, civil surgeon, Gurugram. The meeting was also attended by the representative of the World Health Organization, Bindu Yadav, officials of all private hospitals and the Indian Medical Association.

Elaborating the Covid-19

vaccination process, deputy civil surgeon M.P. Singh said that the Covid-19 vaccination drive may start in the district by January.

"For this, a training programme was organised at the mini secretariat recently about the procedure of giving vaccines and preparations related to it. Initially, this vaccine will be given to corona warriors in a phased manner. The vaccine



will be first given to health workers, officials and employees associated with health services," Singh said.

Singh also informed that the vaccination process would be monitored through the Covid portal.

"The process of preparing data of Covid warriors has started on this portal," Singh said.

According to the instruc-

tions of the government, the vaccine has been planned to be given in different stages so that it can be administered in a systematic manner. Also, the vaccine storage transmission work will be done under the observation of the government.

"A team of five vaccinators will provide vaccines to a group of 100 people. Particular attention will be given to social dis-

tancing during this process. The person who is vaccinated will be informed through SMS on his mobile in advance so that this work can be done in a planned manner. After vaccination, the person will have to stay in the centre for 30 minutes so that any reaction can be cured immediately," he said.

The official further stated that at the time of vaccination,

the person's information who came for the vaccination will be matched with the online Covid portal.

"Vaccination will be given on getting the correct information and the person will be kept in the observation room for some time. We will soon start a campaign to give information about the process," he added.

IANS

Two army porters hurt as Pak violates ceasefire along LoC

Jammu: Two porters working for the Army were injured on Friday when Pakistan carried out a ceasefire violation on the Line of Control (LoC) in J&K's Poonch district.

Police sources said Pakistan targeted Indian Army's Bandi Post on the LoC

in Poonch district on Friday. Two porters working for the army identified as Altaf Hussain and Mohammad Sulaiman were injured in Pakistani firing.

"The injured porters have been shifted to hospital for treatment", sources said.

Pakistan has with impunity been violating the bilateral ceasefire agreement signed by the two countries in 1999. Since January 2020, in more than 3200 ceasefire violations by Pakistan, 30 civilians have been killed and 102 injured.

IANS

Zero Covid +ve cases in Dharavi for 1st time

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

For the first time since the outbreak of Covid-19 in Dharavi on April 1 this year, Asia's largest slum went without even a single case on Friday, even as Maharashtra logged 3,431 fresh infections and 71 deaths.

Once considered one of the Covid-19 hotspots in Mumbai, Dharavi has just 12 "active cases" and the infected persons are being treated at local hospitals.

Expressing his happiness over Dharavi's complete turnaround, Mumbai Municipal Commissioner IS Chahal said: "We salute the people of Dharavi for their full cooperation. Our SOPs and other health guidelines have helped matters".

Dharavi has come a long way since the first Covid-19 infection and death were reported from Dharavi on April 1. There have been a total 3,788 infections in this most-congested slum.

It may be recalled that the BMC and the state government successfully adopted "chase the virus" at Dharavi slum in north-central Mumbai where

the authorities have contained the spread of virus. This slum had attracted national as well as international attention as a large number of infections were reported in April, May and June, sending the health authorities in Mumbai and Maharashtra into a tizzy.

Being densely populated (2,27,136 persons/ sq. km), Dharavi had 491 cases in April 2020 with a 12% growth rate and a case doubling period of 18 days. The proactive measures adopted by BMC reduced the COVID-19 growth rate to 4.3 per cent in May 2020 and further to 1.02% in June. These measures also ensured an improved case doubling time to 43 days in May 2020 and 78 days in June 2020.

Several challenges presented themselves to BMC in Dharavi where 80% population depends on community toilets. BMC adopted a model of actively following four T's - Tracing, Tracking, Testing and Treating. This approach included activities like proactive screening. While 47,500 people were covered by doctors and private clinics in house-to-house screening, about 14,970 people were screened with the

help of Mobile Vans, and 4,76,775 were surveyed by BMC health workers.

Fever clinics were set up for screening high risk categories such as elderly/senior citizens. This helped to screen 3.6 lakh people. Also, around 8246 senior Citizens were surveyed and as part of its policy of "Timely Separation", they were separated from the other community to effectively limit the transmission of the disease.

To tackle the issue of manpower to carry out proactive screening in high risk zones, BMC forged strategic public private partnerships in containment measures and all available 'private' practitioners were mobilized. BMC provided the private doctors with PPE Kits, thermal scanners, pulse Oxymeters, masks and gloves and started Door-to-Door screening in high risk zones and all suspects were identified.

BMC encouraged all practitioners to open their clinics to attend to the patients and communicate to BMC in case any COVID-19 suspects were found. BMC sanitised the clinics of the private practitioners and provided them all necessary support. To augment



health infrastructure in the city, all private hospitals were brought onboard and acquired for treatment.

Meanwhile, with 3431 fresh infections reported in Maharashtra on Friday, the total infections in the state climbed from 19,09,951 to 19,13,382. Similarly, with 71 new deaths, the total toll in the state rose from 49,058 to 49,129.

As 1427 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 went up to 18,06,298. The recovery rate in the state dropped marginally from from

94.5 per cent to 94.4 per cent. With 11 new deaths, the total number of deaths went up from 11045 to 11,056, while the infected cases rose by 596 to trigger a jump in the total infections from 2,89,204 to 289,800.

Meanwhile, the number of "active cases" total cases in the state rose from 54,891 to 56,823. The fatality rate in the state stood at 2.57 per cent.

Pune district, which continued to be the worst-affected city-district in Maharashtra, saw the total number of cases increase from 3,69,065 to 3,69,631, while the total number of deaths in Pune increased from 7713 to 7721.

Thane district remained in the third spot - after Pune and Mumbai - after the total number of infections rose from 2,51,880 to 2,52,273, while the total deaths climbed from 5527 to 5540.

Of the 1,24,01,637 samples sent to laboratories, 19,13,382 have tested positive (15.43 per cent) for COVID-19 until Friday.

Currently, 4,77,528 people are in home quarantine while 3,69,5 people are in institutional quarantine.

Karnataka open to giving 'autonomous status' to any degree or polytechnic college

Bengaluru: Karnataka is ready to give 'autonomous status' any degree or polytechnic college that comes forward in order to enhance skills and leverage technology. Deputy Chief Minister, C. N. Ashwath Narayana said here on Friday.

Addressing a gathering after inaugurating the - Good Governance Day - observed in Vidhana Soudha to commemorate the birth anniversary of former Prime Minister A. B. Vajpayee here, Narayan who is incharge of Higher Education portfolio said that the incumbent government does not believe in a rigid controlling mindset.

"We feel that more and more polytechnic, engineering colleges should try to get autonomous status. All the developed countries all over the world have achieved excellence because of decentralisation. This should happen in our state also, at a rapid pace," the Dy. CM said. He added that the new National Education Policy has paved way for this by eliminating limitations and rigidi-

ty which had been existing for the last several years. According to him, education is the only way to get solutions for the problems that one comes across. "It is education that can give out permanent solutions to the problems. In view of this, the government strongly believes in empowering the education system and is ready to fill any shortfalls towards achieving this," he claimed. The Dy. CM argued that it is not always true that changes could be made only by spending a large amount of money but it is possible to make big changes by incurring minimum spending. "The Learning Management System (LMS) which is being implemented in the state would make a revolutionary change in the years to come. Higher education institutions should consolidate local co-operation, enhance skill, leverage technology, ensure the judicious execution of responsibility in their way to become autonomous," he explained.

IANS

Raj BJP chief: Modi Govt making strong arrangements for farmers

Jaipur: Rajasthan BJP State president Satish Poonia on Friday interacted with the farmers in an open field during a 'Kisaan Chaupal' and said that for the first time Prime Minister Narendra Modi has accomplished the task of giving 1.5 times MSP to the farmers and made best arrangements for them for advanced farming, away from traditional farming techniques.

"The budget of agriculture in this country during the Congress regime in 2013-14 was Rs 21,000 crore. Today it has gone up to Rs 1.34 lakh crore. The increased budget aims to make the farmers of India prosperous through innovation," he said.

On this occasion, Poonia had the opportunity to watch Prime Minister Narendra Modi's live virtual televised dialogue with the farmers in the fields. Poonia also paid floral tribute to former Prime Minister late Atal Bihari Vajpayee on the occasion of the latter's 96th birth anniversary.

Poonia said that the farmers in Maheshwas village in his Amer Assembly constituency strongly supported the newly enacted farm laws.

"If they (Congress) have so much sympathy for the farmers, why did they not implement all the schemes that Atal ji implemented or which are now being implemented by Prime Minister Modi," he asked.

IANS

BHU to soon start country's first 'Atal Study Centre'

Varanasi: The country's first Centre for Studies, the 'Atal Study Centre', named after Bharat Ratna and late Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, is going to be established in Uttar Pradesh's prestigious Banaras Hindu University (BHU).

This study centre run by the Faculty of Social Sciences would have detailed study and research programmes related to lives of eminent political personalities of the country.

Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Banaras Hindu University, Kaushal Kishore Mishra, told IANS, "The Atal Study Centre is being established in the BHU named after former Prime Minister late Atal Bihari

Vajpayee. More than one dozen courses will be taught in this centre."

He said, "The centre would teach about the lives of eminent personalities from Atal ji till the Yogi Adityanath era, besides ancient Indian political thought, modern political thought, nationalism, Hindutva, mythology, democracy, constitution, employment generation methods, Indian political thought etc. Studies and research will be conducted on subjects such as the development journey of independent India, cultural nationalism, democracy, constitution etc. It is the first such proposed centre of the country."

He further informed, "The

proposal for the centre will go to the policy making committee. After this, it will be discussed in the Academic Council and then passed through the Executive Committee Council which will send it to the Central government. The Social Sciences Centre would start by the end of February next year."

Mishra said the purpose of this centre is to reveal the knowledge tradition of ancient, medieval and modern India as well as inspire the youth. Apart from Gandhi, Nehru and Vajpayee, there will be a detailed study on the lives of many big political personalities. It will not be inspired by any political thought or ideology, he said.

TMC, Left rap...

From Page 1

"While all other States are receiving the funds the Bengal Government is stopping that from happening depriving the farmers of early Rs 6,000 ... all for narrow political reasons," Modi said accusing the Left Front too with double standards as "they are hobnobbing with the same people in Punjab with whom they are fighting in Bengal... the condition of the farmers of Bengal is not good."

Reacting to the Prime Minister's remarks Roy said that the farmers in Bengal were better placed than their counterparts in the other parts of the country adding "the Bengal farmers are not crying for your help."

He also reminded how Mamata Banerjee-led the Singur and Nandigram movements which became a landmark in the

political history of free India.

The Left too hit back at the Prime Minister saying he was not saying the truth.

CPI(M) politburo member Md Salim said, "We have never seen a liar of a Prime Minister like him who can say anything to further his political interests ... today he is talking all kinds of nonsense but it was the same person and his party that had appointed Mamata as its agent to demolish the Left movement in Bengal... we remember how he said after TMC came to power that it will take some time for her to fill the holes (gaddas) left by the Left Front... it was he who told the Bengal audience that BJP in the Centre and Mamata in the State would mean two laddoos in the hands of the people of the State ...today the BJP is reaping the harvest of the misdeeds and communal seeds sowed by Mamata in Bengal."

Don't be misled by Opp...

From Page 1

Modi released the installment of ₹2,000 to every farmer on the birth anniversary of the former Prime Minister and BJP stalwart Atal Bihari Vajpayee, which is every year celebrated as "Good Governance Day" by the ruling party.

Under the PM-KISAN SAMMAN scheme, a financial benefit of Rs 6,000 per year is provided to small and marginal farmers, payable in three equal installments of Rs 2,000 each. The fund is transferred directly to the bank accounts of the beneficiaries.

Several top BJP and Central Ministers also participated across the country in the "awareness campaign" (on farm laws) launched by the party.

Covid vaccine...

From Page 1

India has eight Covid-19 vaccine candidates, including three indigenous vaccines, under different stages of clinical trials which could be ready for authorization in near future.

It includes AstraZeneca and Oxford University developed and Serum Institute of India manufactured Covishield,

Covaxin by Bharat Biotech Limited, ZyCoV-D by Zydus Cadila and Russian vaccine candidate Sputnik-V.

The list also contains NVX-CoV2373 by SII, HGCO19 by Geneva, and two unlabeled vaccines-Recombinant Protein Antigen based vaccine by Biological E Limited-and Inactivated rabies vector plat-

form by Bharat Biotech.

The National Expert Group on Vaccine Administration of COVID-19 (NEGVAIC) has recommended three prioritised population groups including Healthcare Workers (HCWs) (about 1 crore), Frontline Workers (about 2 crore), and Prioritised Age Group (about 27 crore).

Bangladesh raises concern over cross-border smuggling

From Page 1

Many families in border areas have their relatives on the other side and they keep visiting them during festivals or other occasions, but with only valid travel documents, he added.

The BGB DG also denied the reports that some people have crossed over to his nation from Assam as they did not find their names in the National Register of Citizens (NRC).

The "continuous illegal immigration" is a political hot-cake for political parties in Assam, Northeast and also in West Bengal, and promises to deport such immigrants are made in every election.

The top officers of the two forces, however, expressed concerns over the illegal movement of Rohingyas and said BSF and BGB are taking measures to control it by regularly apprehending such people on both sides of the border. Both of them also accepted that criminal activities, mostly smuggling of various items, are on the rise.

"We are concerned about cross-border illegal trade. These syndicates are mainly dealing with narcotics and cattle smuggling. We are constantly monitoring them and have increased our vigil along

the border," Asthana said.

On rising incidents of cattle smuggling, Islam said it is affecting the local cattle farms in Bangladesh as the country is self-sufficient in cattle production. "In fact, we are producing more cattle than we need. Moreover, 400-600 cattle legally come every day from Myanmar. Because of smuggling, many criminals are getting killed in operations by security forces," he added.

The BGB chief told the press that three persons were killed in 2018 on the Indian side for their criminal activities, while the figure stood at 35 and 48 persons in 2019 and 2020, respectively.

"The border killing is a concerning issue, not only for the BGB but also for the Bangladeshi people," he added.

Asthana said even Indian people are getting killed due to their involvement in criminal activities such as smuggling, and mentioned that at least three Indians were killed this year.

"This is an issue that concerns both parties. We can assure one thing that BSF uses lethal weapons as a last resort only. These killings are taking place at the dead of the night between 10 pm and 5 am. We are trying to solve this in the most appropriate manner," he

added.

The BSF DG said his force has apprehended 3,204 persons for illegally entering into India through various border states such as Assam, West Bengal and Tripura, and 60 of them were handed over to the BGB after establishing their nationalities.

"Those people whose nationalities can not be identified by the BSF, are handed over to the local police as they have a better mechanism to deal with," he said.

Asthana said the two forces have agreed to increase the "coordinated night patrolling" in vulnerable places to prevent smuggling and illegal movement of people in order to reduce the killing of civilians by the security forces.

"We have agreed to initiate confidence-building measures in border areas. We will also promote civic activities like organising medical camps, having border hubs and helping visit of people so that the population living along the border is benefitted," he said.

Asthana further said that the BGB has agreed to extend full cooperation to the BSF in its year-long celebration to commemorate the 50 years of independence of Bangladesh. PTI

PUBLIC NOTICE

To be known to all that, Krishna Devi W/o Late Sh. Shobha Ram R/o 359, Pocket-1, Paschim Puri, ND-63 is the owner/purchaser of 359, Pocket-1, Paschim Puri, ND-63 situated at Paschim Puri. All the original Property Documents of the above said property have been lost. An FIR to this effect has been lodged in Police Station dt 14/12/2020. Any person claiming any right, interest having any objection may write/contact with above named person at above Ph. 9993-52265 within 15days from the date of publication of this notice and can personally inform or write to Dy. Director (LAB) or Director (LAB) H, D Block, 3rd floor, Vikas Sadan, INA, New Delhi.

Pro-farm laws farmers...

From Page 1

The Kisan Sena supporters, which included members from Agra, Mathura, Hathras, Mainpuri, Firozabad, Meerut and Muzaffarnagar, among other districts, remained on the road at the Mahamaya Flyover in Noida during the afternoon before they all returned to their hometowns.

"While a majority of us were prohibited entry into Delhi by the police, a 21-member delegation of the union went to the national capital and met with Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar," Kisan Sena's convener Thakur Gauri Shankar Singh told PTI.

He said their demonstration was to apprise Tomar that the farmers union, especially from Punjab and Haryana, protesting at Delhi's borders "do not represent" all Indian farmers.

cause of farmers," BKU (Lok Shakti) spokesperson Shailesh Kumar Giri said.

The simultaneous protests by those against and in support of the farm laws prompted partial closure of the Noida-Delhi Link Road and diversion on some routes, according to the Noida Traffic Police.

The diversion from near Amity University close to Mahamaya Flyover to the Kalindi Kunj route remained in place for over an hour. Later both Kalindi Kunj as well as the DND routes were opened for normal traffic, an official said.

"One carriageway of the Noida-Delhi Link Road although remained closed. Commuters are allowed to come from Delhi to Noida but the other way round is closed," the official added.

Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police, Noida, Ranvijay Singh said the Kisan Sena supporters had gathered in the afternoon and left Noida by

evening.

"There was no major law and order situation except for the traffic obstruction, which got sorted in some time," the officer said.

Thousands of farmers are currently staying put at Delhi's borders with Haryana and Uttar Pradesh in protest against the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020, the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020 and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020.

They have expressed apprehension that these laws would pave the way for the dismantling of the minimum support price system, leaving them at the "mercy" of big corporations.

However, the government has maintained that the new laws will bring farmers better opportunities and usher in new technologies in agriculture. PTI

Modi's address bid to divide, mislead us: Farmers

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Farmers who have been sitting across the national Capital's border to press for their demands for scrapping Centre's new farm laws, alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's address appeared as an attempt to divide and mislead the farmers and said they want a legal guarantee on minimum support price (MSP).

Meanwhile, farmers camping at Singhu, Tikri, Chilla and Ghazipur border points have led to closure of several routes in Delhi and due to ongoing protest at National Capital's borders, there was disruption of traffic movement on key routes prompting Delhi Traffic Police to tweet about closed and its alternate routes.

Reacting to the PM's allegations that political rivals were misusing the protest to

push their agenda, farmer leader Abhimanyu Kohar, member of Sankyut Kisan Morcha said the unions do not allow any political party to use their stage and accused the government of diverting the issue.

"The prime minister's claim that we are being misguided by other political parties is false. It has been a month since we have been protesting at Delhi borders, and we have not offered our platform to any politician. In fact, we have banned them from using our stage. Our protest is not political," said Kohar.

All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee secretary Avik Saha sought to know why the central government is not giving a legal guarantee on MSP.

Saha said the prime minister on Friday only addressed farmers from six states and wondered why he did not



address issues of protesting peasants.

Kohar, who is also the, said during his speech, PM Modi claimed that the three

farm laws will benefit farmers, but he did not tell how the new laws will be beneficial for the peasants.

"You cannot go away by

saying that it is good law, you will have to prove how it is good for farmers. There should be arguments based on facts," he said.

However, the protests have led to closure of roads in Delhi, and diversions have also caused traffic congestions. Taking to Twitter on Friday, Delhi Traffic Police said Singhu, Auchandi, Piau Maniyari, Saboli and Mangesh borders were closed for traffic.

"Pl take alternate routes via Lampur, Safiabad, Palla & Singhu school toll tax borders. Traffic has been diverted from Mukarba & GTK road. Pl avoid Outer Ring Rd, GTK road & NH 44," stated Delhi Traffic Police in a tweet.

In another tweet, the traffic police said Chilla and Ghazipur borders were closed for traffic coming from Noida and Ghaziabad to Delhi.

"People are advised to take

alternative route for coming to Delhi via Anand Vihar, DND, Apsara, Bhopra & Loni borders," it further stated.

In an advisory, the Delhi Traffic Police said NH-44 beyond Singhu Border has been closed for general traffic with effect from Saturday, and diversions have been made accordingly to avoid inconvenience to the public.

According to another advisory, vehicular traffic going to Haryana from NH-44 via Palla red light is being diverted from NIIT to Holambi 100-foot-road and DSIDC 80-foot-road to pass through Lampur border and Safiabad border.

Another diversion is from the U-turn near DSIDC and Singhu village cut towards the

Singhu school toll tax.

Vehicular traffic coming from Haryana via Safiabad, Saboli, Pau Maniyari borders is being diverted from the Safiabad More, Saboli More, Ramdev Chowk and sector-A/5 Narela via Raja Harish Chander hospital towards NH-44 to go to Delhi. Vehicles coming from Lampur border are being diverted towards Grain Mandi and then Munim ka Bagh via Harish Chander red light to NH-44.

Vehicular traffic coming from Azadpur Mandi to GTK depot will be diverted from GTK depot towards Rohini. Vehicles coming from Mukandpur to Singhu border will be diverted towards Mukandpur, the advisory stated.

Man arrested for depositing ₹9 cr on fake papers

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Economic Offences Wing (EOW) of Delhi Police has arrested a 35-year-old man for misappropriating black money of ₹9 crore by opening bank accounts on forged documents in seven banks. Police said that the accused was absconding for a long time and to evade arrest he was continuously changing his residence in different localities of the city.

The accused has been identified as Gaurav Singhal alias Yogesh, a resident of Jyoti Colony in Shahdara area.

According to Dr O P Mishra, the Joint Commissioner of Police, EOW, a complaint was received in which the complainant Rajesh Kumar Gupta, Income Tax officer had alleged that during the period from November 9, 2016 to December 30, 2016, large amount of cash of Rs nine crores was deposited in different bank accounts.

"The complainant stated that on enquiry from concerned banks it emerged that the account holders were carrying out their business activities from the same premises. It was further found that there were too many businesses claiming to be the occupants of the same premises," said the Joint CP.

"On the basis of the photographs available in the KYC documents, Gaurav Singhal was identified, who gave his statement under section 133 A of I.T. Act and admitted that he prepared fake Voter Cards and Pan Cards for opening various bank accounts in which large amounts of cash were deposited during the period of demonetization," stated the complainant.



"A case under relevant section of Indian Penal Code (IPC) was registered by EOW in 2018 and investigation was taken up. During investigation, the original account opening forms of all the 7 bank accounts were taken on record. It was found that all the accounts were opened using two different names, Yogesh Kumar and Rahul Jain," said the Joint CP.

"The account opening forms obtained from the banks also revealed that Gaurav had used his own photographs in all the four accounts of Canara Bank and used photographs of some unknown persons in the remaining three accounts. The documents attached with the forms were also found to be fake," said the Joint CP.

"Police team also found that mobile number mentioned on six of the account opening forms was in the name of Gaurav. Majority of withdrawal and transfer had taken place through mobile banking and Internet Banking, which was activated on the mobile number of Gaurav," said the Joint CP.

"Gaurav was nabbed by the EOW team on December 24 from a paying guest house in Shahdara area. He was evading police arrest for a long time and he preferred to hide in congested localities," said the Joint CP.

AAP MPs raise slogans in front of PM seeking rollback of agri laws

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

AAP MPs raised slogans in front of Prime Minister Narendra Modi demanding immediate rollback of these anti-farmer laws, during the ceremony to launch a book on former Prime Minister AB Vajpayee.

Senior Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader and Lok Sabha MP Bhagwant Mann and Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh carried placards while trying to seek attention of the Prime Minister on Friday.

The AAP leader said "Today after the celebration of former PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee's birth anniversary we raised slogans reiterating the demands of the farmers."

Mann said that PM Modi goes to Gujarat to meet the

farmers of his choice but he does not go to meet thousands of farmers sitting 20 km away from his house.

The AAP leader said that at one side the BJP government is saying that they are ready to amend these bills and talk to the farmers on the other hand, they are praising these bills. "There is a nexus between Congress and BJP, Congress is protesting only to show off, that is why Congress leaders present in the Central Hall did not raise their voice for farmers today," he said.

Mann further said, "We wanted to apprise the BJP led central government about the demands of the farmers. We wanted to tell the BJP ruled central government that they must listen to the demands of these farmers who are sitting at the borders of Delhi for the past

several days demanding immediate rollback of these anti-farmer laws."

"I was trying to tell the Prime Minister that this is the same BJP government who held a joint session at the midnight to pass the GST Bill and celebrated the event. I wanted to tell the Prime Minister that today it is high time and the BJP government must immediately call a special session of the Parliament and rollback these anti-farmer laws," he said.

At one side the BJP government is not ready to call a special session of the Parliament citing the reason of COVID-19 pandemic and on the other side, the same party is doing rallies with thousands and thousands of people in West Bengal before the election, he added.

New farm laws will harm farmers: Kejriwal

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Friday claimed the Centre's new agricultural reform laws will not benefit farmers in any way and will cause a lot of harm.

These laws will enable farmers to sell their produce outside mandis but they only get half the price for their crop outside mandis so how is that a benefit, the chief minister said.

"BJP says that these laws will not harm farmers. But what is their benefit? They say that now the farmers will be able to sell their crop anywhere outside the market. But outside the market, the crop is sold at half the price. How is this a benefit? The truth is that these laws will do a lot of harm and don't have a single benefit," Kejriwal tweeted in Hindi.

Farmers from various parts of the country have been camping at different border points of Delhi for four weeks now to demand repeal of the three agri laws, which were voted through in Parliament in September amid strong



protests by opposition parties.

Kejriwal and his Aam Aadmi Party have come out strongly in support of protesting farmers. Earlier this month, Kejriwal had visited Singhu border, one of the protest sites, and reviewed arrangements made for farmers by the city government.

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

However, protesting farmers have expressed apprehension that these laws would pave the way for eliminating the safety cushion of mini-

mum support price (MSP) and do away with mandis that ensure income, leaving them at the mercy of big corporates.

They have repeatedly rejected a government offer to amend the farm laws and give a "written assurance" on continuing the MSP system and stuck to their demand for the repeal of the legislations -- the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, Farmers Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act.

Earlier in the day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi squarely blamed those with political agenda for the deadlock in the government's talks with protesting farmers and said genuine apprehensions about MSP guarantee have got overshadowed by unrelated issues such as the release of those accused of violence and making highways toll-free

He said the parties rejected by the electorate are pushing their own political agenda by misleading farmers.

8 pubs, liquor shops fined in G'gram for serving liquor after midnight

STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM

A joint team of Chief Minister's flying wing and the excise officials conducted raids and issued challans to four pubs and an equal number of liquor vendors for violations of excise rules and for serving liquor beyond the prescribed time in the intervening night of Thursday-Friday in Gurugram.

As per the state excise pol-

icy the operating time of these establishments from 9 am to 12 am. Inderjeet Yadav, DSP CM flying wing said, the raids were conducted at 10 pubs and 9 liquor vendors situated in Sector-29, Sector-53, MG Road, Golf Course Road, Cyber Hub and DLF in Gurugram.

Acting on a tip-off, both teams had conducted a raid and issued challans to the pubs.

"Out of 10 pubs the fines were issued to 4 pubs and out of 9 liquor shops, 4 liquor

shops were issued challaned being run after the prescribed time it was a violation of the Excise Act," he said.

However, the officials expect a penalty of Rs 10 to 14 lakh could be framed against these violators.

These four liquor shops were identified as discovery wine at DLF phase-1 metro station on the golf course road, Chaudhary wine shop located in front of Maruti company gate on old Delhi Road, Lake

forest wine at DLF Phase-3 and Royal Green at DLF Phase-2.

Similarly, the 4 pubs & bars were Boom Box and Friction located at Sector-29 while ZSL Realtors PVT Ltd (Stricker Club) located at South Point Mall, Sector-53 and GH Slath Wellness (King Club) at JMD Regent Arcade on the MG Road.

"These establishments were fined for violating excise rules. We have imposed challans to these outlet owners and sent it to the headquarters at

Chandigarh for penalties. The department is conducting frequent checks to ensure liquor is not served after the prescribed time in open and that no one sells liquor without permission," Aruna Singh, deputy excise and taxation commissioner (East), said.

Also, We have formed teams to conduct surprise checks at all outlets to ensure pub owners or operators are not violating the rules and regulations," Singh said.

PFWS Skill Centre displays woolen products 'Knit Yarn'

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Police Families Welfare Society (PFWS) Skill Centre displayed its woolen products "Knit Yarn" and a porta-cabin for sale on Friday. The event was inaugurated by Pratima Shrivastava, President of PFWSA.

This Skill Centre will boost the knitting speed as well as income of family members. The residents of police colony Vikasपुरi performed various cultural programmes.

According to a PFWS official, during the Covid pandemic, a new trend of online programmes including Summer Camps, Khana Khazana, 'We Care' were started by the PFWS.

"On Friday, the PFWS president distributed the prizes to the winners of Summer Camps and Khana Khazana competitions held earlier. An e-recipe book will also be released very soon, which is the collection of recipes prepared by the female members of police families," said the official.

President-PFWS stated that the prime objective of this Welfare Centre is to provide Skill development training, coaching for competitive exams, recreational activities, medical & summer camps, cookery classes etc.

Man held for killing son of woman who spurned his marriage offer

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A 22-year-old man was arrested for allegedly kidnapping and killing a minor boy in order to get close to his mother in south Delhi's Maidan Garhi area.

The accused has been identified as Bittu, a resident of Sanjay Colony Bhati Mines. Police said that he had planned kidnapping and murder after watching the crime serial CID.

According to Atul Kumar Thakur, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), South district, on November 28, a woman, resident of Sanjay Colony Bhati Mines, lodged a missing report of her minor son.

"Initially, it was found that there was some family dispute over the custody of the child between parents who were living separately. The parents of the missing boy were interrogated, but no clue was found. The CCTV footage of the area was analyzed, but no movement of the victim was seen," said the DCP.

"On Thursday, a highly decomposed body of a boy was recovered in the pond in a ridge area near Maidan Garhi Village. The parents of the victim were called to identify the body. The name of a known person of the mother of the victim came into light after which a police team was formed to nab Bittu.

"Police apprehended him and interrogated where he revealed that he was attached with the mother of the deceased since his childhood and wanted to marry her, but the parents of the woman fixed her marriage with another person," said the DCP.

According to police, he committed such heinous crime in order to get close to his mother in south Delhi's Maidan Garhi area

they started living separately. The woman started living at her parental house in a separate room, the DCP said.

"Bittu again got an opportunity to come close to her. He used to send food and other items to women through her son. He became very friendly with her son also. Bittu proposed the woman to marry him, but she refused due to her son. He used to watch CID and after getting ideas from there, he planned the kidnapping and murder of the boy," said the DCP.

"On November 28, he saw the boy was going towards the market. He called him and took him to the jungle to eat berry. Bittu took him to the bus stand Fatehpur Beri towards jungle way and told him that he will purchase new clothes for him. He strangled him with a cloth and threw the dead body in the pond," said the DCP.

"He immediately came back to the house of the woman and helped her in searching for the boy. Next day, he again went to the jungle and noticed that the body was visible in the pond. He again took the dead body in the jungle and tried to burn it with petrol, but the body was wet and he could not be succeeded. He hid the body under stones in the jungle. Later, he again went to the jungle and removed the clothes and shoes of the deceased. He kept the body in a plastic bag and threw in the pond," said the DCP.

Delhi Metro completes 18 years in service

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) on Friday completed 18 years of commencing passenger operations since 2002.

On the December 24, 2002, operations on the 8.4 kilometre long Shahdara — Tis Hazari section was flagged off and passenger services were started from the next day.

Since then the Delhi Metro has emerged as one of the fastest growing Metro networks in the world both in terms of ridership as well as

network length. In fact, with a network of 390 kilometres spanning 11 lines, today the Delhi Metro is among the largest Metro networks anywhere in the world.

The expansion of the network has also been among the fastest in the world, as more than 380 kilometres of new lines have been added since 2002. During the pre-covid times, about 65 lakh journeys were being performed on weekdays on the Delhi Metro making it the mass transportation backbone of the National Capital Region (NCR).



About 350 train sets operate on the Delhi Metro system for 18 hours a day today and perform more than 5,000 trips

across the 285 stations on the network maintaining a consistent punctuality of over 99.9 percent, the DMRC said in a statement.

The impeccable punctuality rate of the Delhi Metro has remained consistent ever since the commencement of operations and has not been dented by the massive expansion in the scale of operations, it said.

Having set high benchmarks in construction as well as operations, DMRC is now working on developing indigenous technologies in line with the Government's 'Make in

India' initiative and 'Atma Nirbhar Bharat' by indigenous development of many systems/sub-systems of Metro.

In March, the services of the Delhi Metro were halted for the first time ever to curb the spread of the Coronavirus virus pandemic. This crisis was turned into an opportunity by DMRC's Operations and Maintenance team as a number of important maintenance and overhaul activities were taken up and completed, which otherwise would have been difficult to execute when the services were operational.

End stir, hold talks, Tomar urges kisan



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar on Friday urged Punjab farmers to end their protest and come forward to hold discussions with the Government to resolve the deadlock over the three new farm laws.

Soon after Prime Minister Narendra Modi accused Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee of blocking the PM KISAN scheme for farmers in West Bengal due to political reasons, Tomar said he wrote a letter to Banerjee on Thursday asking her to not prevent farmers from the benefits of the PM Kisan Samman Nidhi scheme.

Stating that there is some misconception in the minds of Punjab farmers, the agriculture minister said: "I want to urge them to leave the protest and come forward for the dialogue. I am hopeful that farmers will understand the importance of new laws and reach a solution."

His deputy Minister of State for Agriculture Kailash Choudhary said, "I hope in the



next meeting between farmers and the government, a solution will be reached. Farmers in many states are also supporting the new farm laws and sending 'thank you' letters to the Prime Minister."

The ministry also reiterated it is ready to find a "logical solution" to the issues raised by protesting farmer unions.

The Government has written twice inviting them for the next round of talks at a date of their convenience.

Reacting to the PM KISAN scheme in West Bengal, the agriculture minister also attacked the opposition for 'shooting their ideological gun' from the shoulders of farmers and harming them eventually. He asked the agi-

tating farmers to stop the protest and come to the discussion table.

Tomar said that the Agriculture Ministry has collated data that shows 70 lakh farmers would have benefitted PM Kisan Samman Nidhi had the Mamata government participated and allowed implementation of the scheme in the state, which was also pointed out by the Prime Minister earlier on Friday.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had written to Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar on two occasions saying that she is willing to transfer the benefits of PM Kisan to the farmers provided it is routed through the State Government.

Vajpayee played key role in shaping India's foreign policy, says Jaishankar

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee performed a key role in shaping India's foreign policy and "introduced corrections, some bold and some others nuanced," External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said here on Friday.

Paying rich tributes to Vajpayee, the minister also said the then prime minister played a transformational role in fashioning foreign policy that led to a new beginning in ties with the United States.

Making these observations in his opening remarks at the maiden Atal Bihari Vajpayee memorial lecture, Jaishankar said he also "introduced corrections, some bold and others more nuanced," in a range of national security and foreign policy issues.

Highlighting some of the major contributions by the former prime minister, Jaishankar said "Atalji's vision of India-US cooperation has been advanced, particularly in recent years, by the leadership and commitment of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Overcoming the hesitations of history, we are today focused on addressing contemporary challenges and emerging opportunities."

He also said "This vision led

to a new beginning with the United States that has since been developed by successive governments on both sides. It required us, as a nation, to overcome difficult moments and continuing concerns. Only someone with Atalji's enormous self-assurance could, in the early days, have visualised how natural this partnership would become."

At the same time, India's relationship with Russia has remained steady partly due to Vajpayee's endeavours, Jaishankar said. India's principled approach of engaging China on the "basis of mutual respect and mutual sensitivity" too reflects Vajpayee's thinking, he added.

On ties with countries in the neighbourhood, the minister said Vajpayee "radiated goodwill and friendship, while being clear that terrorism and trust could not coexist."

Vajpayee could "finesse difficult issues" while warmly reaching out across regions and continents, he said, pointing to the country's relations with the Association of South East Asian Nations (Asean) and with countries in Europe, Africa and Latin America. And most notably, he embraced the Indian diaspora in a way that had no parallel till then, Jaishankar said.

Hemant honoured with DRDO's 'Scientist of the Year Award'



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Senior scientist of Defence Research Development Organization (DRDO), Dr Hemant Kumar Pandey, has been honoured with DRDO's "Scientist of the Year Award" for his contribution in developing several herbal medicines, including the well-known drug Lukoskin, meant for treatment of leucoderma also known as Vitiligo.

Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh recently facilitated Pandey at an event here with the prestigious award that comprises a certificate and cash prize of ₹2 lakh.

Recipient of several prestigious awards for his contri-

bution in the field of herbal medicines, Pandey has been undertaking research at DRDO's lab Defence Institute of Bio-energy Research (DIBER) at Pithoragarh in Uttarakhand for the past 25 years.

Though Pandey has developed six herbal drugs so far, Lukoskin, used for treating leucoderma or Vitiligo, a condition in which white patches get developed on the skin, has been most widely appreciated and found huge acceptance in the market.

A formulation of around six herbs found in Himalayan region, Lukoskin helps in treating white patches and is marketed by Delhi-based Aimil Pharmaceuticals.

Available in oral liquid as well as lotion form, it has effectively helped treat over 2 lakh people suffering from the disease in the country.

Leucoderma is an autoimmune disorder and about over 5 crore people are under its grip in India. It is neither contagious nor life-threatening but often mistaken as leprosy and hence surrounded with stigma and myths. Worldwide, the incidence of leucoderma is 1-2 per cent of the population.

Apart from Lukoskin, Pandey has developed drugs for treatment of itching and toothache as well as an anti-radiation cream, most of which are already being sold in the market following transfer of technology.

Try new farm laws for a year or two: Rajnath to farmers

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Senior BJP leader and Union Minister Rajnath Singh on Friday appealed to farmers to try the three new farm laws as an "experiment" for a year or two and in case they are found not beneficial for the farming community, the government will do all necessary amendments.

Describing the protesting farmers as his own people, Singh said, "Those who are sitting on dharna are farmers and are born to farmers' families. We have a lot of respect for them."

Thousands of farmers, mainly from Punjab, Haryana and parts of Uttar Pradesh, are camping on Delhi borders for almost a month in protest

against the three laws enacted in September.

At least five rounds of talks have taken place between the protesting unions and the government but a stalemate has continued with farmers refusing to accept anything less than the repeal of the laws, which they fear would leave them at the mercy of corporates by weakening mandi and MSP systems. The government has allayed these apprehensions as misplaced and has projected the new laws as major agriculture reforms aimed at helping the farmers.

Addressing a rally at Dwarka in the national capital, Singh said he himself is a farmers' son and assured that the Modi government "will never do anything which is not in the interest of the farmers".

"People are trying to mislead farmers about these farm laws that they are not in their interest. I am the son of a farmer and have worked in farms. I want to assure you that there is not a single provision in these laws which is against farmers," Singh said at the rally organised as part of the ruling BJP's massive outreach programme on the farm laws.

He reiterated that the minimum support price (MSP) will continue and some people are trying to create a misconception that it will end.

Requesting farmers to try the new agri laws for a year or two as an experiment, the former BJP president said if these are not found beneficial, the government would bring all necessary amendments.

"For once let this act (acts) be implemented, for a year or two... Try this experiment and if you feel that this act (acts) is not in the interest of farmers, then I can say you this with conviction as I know the intention of our Prime Minister Narendra Modi we will do all necessary amendments in it," Singh said.

Underlining that all problems can be resolved through dialogue, Singh said Prime Minister Modi wants the talks with farmers to continue, and therefore, the government has extended an invitation to them.

Singh appealed to all protesting farmers to come forward for discussions on the farm laws and if they want to rope in experts for discussions,

the government is ready for that as well.

"Several rounds of talks have been held whatever suggested by farmers our government has ready to do all those amendments. The problems can be resolved through dialogue only, wherever there is scope for amendment Government is ready to do that," the Defence Minister said.

Hailing former Prime Minister Chaudhary Charan Singh as the great farmers' leader, former BJP president also attacked opposition parties saying that Congress and CPI always cheated and breached the trust of the farmer leader.

He also mentioned and talked about Sir Chotu Ram in his address.

CBI arrests 2 ex-MDs of 2 pvt firms in ₹837 crore bank fraud

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has arrested two former Managing Directors of two separate private companies in an on-going investigation of ₹837 crore banking fraud.

The first case was registered against Sun Plant Agro Ltd. (ponzi company) and its then Managing Director of Awdhesh Singh and others.

In this case, it was alleged that Singh and others had illegally collected about ₹697.72 crore from the investors under various fraudulent schemes on assurance of paying high returns on such investments on maturity. In this case also the accused fled away and cheated the investors by misappropriation of their invested money.

Meanwhile, the CBI has registered a case on a complaint from Canara Bank (lead bank) on behalf of a consortium of four member banks against a Surat-based private company Surya Exim Ltd. and others including its Directors, unknown public servants and unknown others.

"It was alleged that, during the period 2017 to 2019, the accused entered into a conspiracy to cheat a consortium of banks including Canara Bank to the tune of ₹121.05 crore (approximately) by way of forgery and diversion of



investments on maturity. In this case also the accused fled away and cheated the investors by misappropriation of their invested money.

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"It was alleged that, during the period 2017 to 2019, the accused entered into a conspiracy to cheat a consortium of banks including Canara Bank to the tune of ₹121.05 crore (approximately) by way of forgery and diversion of

funds," the CBI said in a statement.

The company was allegedly enjoying credit facilities from the banks. It was further alleged that the company maintained accounts in private banks without obtaining a No Objection Certificate (NOC) from consortium member banks and also indulged in fraudulent practices to siphon off funds of the banks. The account became non-performing assets (NPA), thereby causing an alleged loss of Rs 121.05 crore to the consortium.

Searches were conducted at five places including official and residential premises of the accused at Surat and Navsari in Gujarat which led to the recovery of incriminating documents/articles, it added.

EC plans to protect State poll officials from possible harassment for holding objective polls

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Seeking to insulate its election officers especially the state chief electoral officers from possible harassment for holding objective polls, the Election Commission plans to write to the government saying no action should be taken against them by states "under any excuse", including old cases, for at least one year after the completion of the Lok Sabha or assembly elections.

There have been instances where Chief Electoral Officers (CEOs) have been allegedly targeted by the state governments after elections by reopening old complaints and cases.

The chief electoral officers are usually IAS officers who have held other responsibilities in their respective states in the past.

The Election Commission is yet to firm up its proposal which it plans to send to the government, sources aware of the development said.

They said officers who



The Election Commission is yet to firm up its proposal which it plans to send to the Government, sources aware of the development said

hold free and objective polls at times have been targeted by ruling parties in many states.

The EC holds Lok Sabha, assembly, legislative council and Rajya Sabha polls

through its CEOs in the states.

The Legislative Department in the Law Ministry is the nodal unit for the EC with whom the poll panel usually interacts.

2020: A glimpse of life without trains as Rlys battled odds to keep India's lifeline running

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The year 2020 showed India a glimpse of how life would be without trains. As the coronavirus lockdown was announced on March 24, the Railways for the first time in its 167-year-old history shut down all its services.

People stranded across the country and who usually looked to the Railways to ferry them home, were left without their lifeline. Some, like the thousands of migrant workers, took to the streets choosing to walk to their destinations.

As the Railways directed its resources towards carrying essentials across the country, lakhs of tickets were cancelled during the summer holidays - something unheard of in rail history.

It was on May 1 that the wheels of trains started chugging again.

This time, to ferry migrant workers home. Between May 1 and August 30, the Railways ferried 63.15 such workers home across 23 states in over 4,000 Shramik Special trains, not only bringing huge relief to the stranded migrants, but also hope for the others that their lifeline was down, but not out.

It was, however, the Shramik Special trains which saw the Railways being criticised by the Opposition parties over the fares being charged from the migrant workers. While the Railways said that it did not charge a penny from the workers and spent more than Rs 2,000 crore on their transportation, the politics over the issue continued.

"What do trains mean for me? They mean hope, joy and also a sense of routine. For 25 years, I have taken the same route home to Bihar to be with my family after months of

being away from them. That's what they mean to me, they get me to my family.

"Every year, I would book tickets around the same time to go home. This year it did not happen and I feel a sense of loss that something that was part of life could very easily be taken away," said Jitender Kumar, a security guard working in Noida.

Currently, the Railways is operating 1,089 special train services, while Kolkata Metro was running 60 per cent of its services, Mumbai suburban was running on 88 per cent and 50 per cent of Chennai suburban services were in operation. Railway Board Chairman and CEO VK Yadav agreed that it was a tough year for the national transporter, but also highlighted how it innovated and used the crisis as an opportunity.

"This year has been of grit and victories for Indian Railways. Faced with daunting and unprecedented COVID-related challenges, Indian Railways has not only been able to keep the national supply chain running and move millions of people back home in most adverse circumstances, but has also been able to realise the potential of its workforce, which driven to the wall has come out with innovative solutions," Yadav told PTI.

While passenger movement dipped resulting in an estimated loss of 87 per cent as compared to last year, the Railways' made drastic changes in their freight movement, introducing parcel services, carrying essentials like milk, medicines and even ventilators. The innovation was to realise that if the Railways could not move passengers freely, it could move freight instead.



President Ram Nath Kovind, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah after paying tribute to former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on his birth anniversary, at his memorial Sadaiv Atal in New Delhi on Friday PTI



The website and mobile app was launched by Minister for Housing and Urban Affairs Hardeep Singh Puri in the presence of Durga Shanker Mishra, Secretary, MoHUA and other senior officials

In line with the objectives of boosting transparency and accountability while ensuring ease of living for the citizens, the Directorate of Estates, Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs on Friday dedicated to the nation, a new Web Portal and Mobile App, e-Sampada.

The new application provides a single window for all these services including allotment for over one lakh government residential accommodations at 40 locations, Vigyan Bhawan, office space allotment to Government organisations in 45 office complexes in 28 cities, booking of 1,176 holiday home rooms and venues like 5, Ashoka Road for social functions etc.

The website and mobile app was launched by Minister for Housing and Urban Affairs, Hardeep Singh Puri, in the presence of Durga Shanker Mishra, Secretary, MoHUA and other senior officials.

Addressing the media in a program organised on virtual platform, Puri said that this is a significant step towards pro-

motion of e-governance to boost transparency and accountability in providing various Estate Services like allotment, retention, regularisation, no dues certificate etc. He further said that E-Sampada is developed to simplify processes and bring uniformity in system across India. This will promote ease of living for Government of India

officers / Departments as all services can be availed online on a single window with a live tracking of applications. Real time information on utilisation of assets and delivery of service will facilitate optimum utilisation of resources. The automated processes will minimise human intervention and will lead to greater transparency.

BJP's 24.82% vote highest by a party in J&K's DDC polls

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU
 Amid war of words between the Bharatiya Janta Party and top brass of the People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD) whether the electorate in Jammu and Kashmir have supported or rejected Abrogation of Article 370 and reorganisation of the erstwhile State in the recently concluded District Development Council polls statistics released by the office of State Election Commission throw a more

clearer picture. According to the data sheet released by the State Election Commission in Jammu and Kashmir, "A total number of 28,55,509 votes were polled and out of this a little over 12 percent voters, which means 3.64 lakh voters elected 138 candidates across 10 districts of Kashmir valley while 32.08 percent voters i.e 9.16 lakh voters from Jammu region elected 140 representatives in the eight phase long maiden DDC polls. If we look at the picture at

the district level these statistics reveal, "an average number of 444 voters across Srinagar district stepped out of their homes to elect their representative while in Jammu district more than 13,000 voters elected their favorite candidate." It means the claims made by the Kashmir based leaders of National Conference and the Peoples Democratic Party clearly mean out of an electorate size of 28,55,509 lakh voters only 3.64 lakh voters stood behind them across Kashmir valley.

The situation remained the same in the militancy infested districts of Shopian and Pulwama in South Kashmir. Here an average number of 725 and 785 voters participated in the democratic process of electing their own representative. On the other hand in Jammu region, Rajouri and Kathua districts figured in the list of districts where the highest number of voters turned up to elect their representatives. In Rajouri, an average number of 9113 voters exercised their right

to franchise to elect their candidate while in Kathua district 7532 voters elected their representative. According to the election data released by the office of the state election commission, a total number of 2855509 votes were counted at the end of the eight phase long polling which was spread over a period of three weeks. Out of this the winning candidates across 10 districts of Kashmir valley polled a total number of 3.64 lakh votes i.e

12.76 per cent votes. On the other hand, 9.16 lakh votes were polled in support of winning candidates across Jammu province on 140 seats. This comes around 32.08 percent of the total votes polled. If we look at the vote share garnered by the major political parties BJP figured on top of the chart. The party secured the highest number of 708714 votes (24.82 percent) of the total votes polled. On the other hand, Jammu and Kashmir National

Conference party, which won 67 seats, 25 from Jammu and 42 from Kashmir region polled 470099 votes i.e 16.46 percent of the total votes polled. It was followed by the Congress party which polled 394575 votes i.e 13.82 percent. Another important constituent of the PAGD, JKPPD polled 113175 votes which is 3.96 percent of the total votes polled. The Jammu and Kashmir APNI party, won 12 seats, three from Jammu region and 9 from

Kashmir valley, securing 5.30 percent votes and garnered 151331 total votes. Further analysis of the poll data reveals another interesting aspect of the DDC polls. To elect each BJP candidate an average number of 9449 voters exercised their right to vote, a JKNC candidate was supported by an average number of 7016 voters, 4191 voters elected each PDP candidate while the highest number of 15175 voters elected each Congress candidate in these polls.

Didi defends Amartya against Viswa Bharati squatter charge

PNS ■ KOLKATA
 Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has written a letter expressing solidarity with Amartya Sen following reports that the Nobel Laureate economist had been identified along with dozens of others who were "unauthorized occupants" of plots around centrally controlled Viswa Bharati University. Saying that the allegations were being brought against the octogenarian economist who spent his childhood at Shantiniketan --- receiving the blessings of Poet Laureate Rabindranath Tagore who founded the university --- to harass him as he was not inclined towards the saffron ideology.

Banerjee in her letter said that she would stand by Sen like her sister should he be victimized by some "nouveau invaders" who had "started raising surprising and completely baseless allegations." "We all salute Amartya Sen. Just because he isn't inclined towards BJP's ideology, they're making such allegations against him," she said earlier after State Government reportedly received a communication from the Viswa Bharati alleging Sen was among dozens of unauthorized occupants of plots in the campus. "We all are aware about your family's deep and organic linkages with Shantiniketan... your maternal grandfather the revered scholar Krishnamohan Sen was one of the early settlers

in Shantiniketan while your father Asutosh Sen a noted educationist and public administrator had his famed house Pratchi built up in Shantiniketan about eight decades back," her letter read adding how some "nouveau invaders" had started making some surprising and baseless allegations. "I write this letter to express my surprise and anguish over some recent developments, as I read about them in media, alluding to your ancestral links in Shantiniketan," she wrote expressing solidarity with him in his fight against the "bigotry of the majoritarians" in the country, before finally assuring "we shall overcome." Sen runs his research social foundation Pratchi Trust from his house.

Kerala: 2 Cong leaders call for leadership revamp

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI
 Two prominent Congress leaders in Kerala have sounded caution about the state of affairs in the party and want the High Command to give top priority to revamp the leadership without any delay. "It is true that we have suffered a set back in the recently held election to the local-self bodies. But it is not a failure which is insurmountable. There are some basic issues haunting the Kerala unit of the party which the national leadership should address without any delay," V D Satheshan, KPCC vice -president who is serving his fourth term as the member of the legislative assembly. Satheshan is of the view that party's Kerala unit was lethargic and did not put up its full efforts during the election to the local bodies. "Please remember that we ad won 19 out of the 20 seats in the

2019 Lok Sabha election. What we lacked this time was the kind of hard work which we saw during the parliament election," he said. There is still time to recoup the spirit of 2019, feels this leader who is the Congressman to watch in Kerala. "The local body election was held in a small canvas while the assembly election is an entirely different ball game. Once the proper leaders are in place in the State, Kerala would see entirely different results in the assembly poll," said Satheshan. He pointed out past incidents when the local body polls and the subsequent assembly polls threw out entirely different results. "For that to happen, we have to pull up the sleeves and start working right now," he said. Thiruvanchoor Radhakrishnan, who is serving his sixth term as MLA and a former minister for home, vigilance and water resources, too expressed his

disappointment over the poor performance of the Congress in local body election. "We can still win the assembly election provided the Congress High Command attend to the issues haunting the party. The cohesion and unity seen in the past were missing this time. If the leadership inspire the cadre with hard work and inculcate in them a spirit of unity, people will prefer only the Congress," said Radhakrishnan. The decision of the Muslim League to call back P K Kunhalikutty from the Lok Sabha to lead the Muslim League in the upcoming election has unnerved the Congress leaders. "Chances of the Muslim League demanding the chair of the Chief Minister could not be ruled out. Last time they just walked away with five ministerial posts as the Congress leadership watched helplessly," said another Congress leader.

Karni Sena general secretary among 5 people arrested for disturbing peace in Hathras

Hathras: The Karni Sena announced a mahapanchayat in the villages of the Hathras victim in support of the accused, due to which the related messages also went viral on social media. The police administration and the local intelligence agency became alert and started their investigation. Five people, including the National General Secretary of the Karni Sena, Okendra Rana, was arrested on the charges of disturbing the peace in the city. He came here from Haryana and stayed in a hotel in the city. They were produced in the court of sadar SDM and from there sent to jail. According to Okendra Rana, the charge sheet of CBI is totally wrong. All four accused are innocent. In the beginning, the girl said that she had not been raped. The same thing was also revealed in the medical report that there has been no incident like rape. He told the media that the Karni Sena will conduct a mahapanchayat in support of the accused in the same village. He came here from Bhiwani for the preparation of this, but someone informed the police and the police arrested him and 5 other people. **PNS**

UP man receives death threats after voluntarily converting to Hinduism

PRADEEP SAXENA ■ ALIGARH
 The man who converted from Islam to Hinduism and became a Karmaveer from Qasim Khan is now receiving threats. He met the SSP and explained his problems on which Dehli Gate Police has registered a case against unknown people on the instruction of the SSP. Qasim Khan, a resident of Jhalkari town located in Junglegadi bypass of Dehli Gate area has converted to Hinduism from Islam and has become Karmaveer Singh Mahore. Lodhi Vihar residents Neeraj Bhardwaj and Karamveer Singh Mahore along with his wife Anita visited the SSP. He said that he is

getting threats call from unknown numbers and their life are in danger. He has been living in Lodhi Vihar since conversion. Along with this, there is also the temptation of money that if he wants then he can come back to his previous religion and stay in his house. On his complaint, the SSP immediately called Inspector Dehli Gate Ashish Kumar Singh to his office and sent the victim to the police station. Where his Tahrir has been registered. According to Inspector Ashish, the case has been registered. Now, based on the investigation and statement of the victim, action will be taken by identifying the accused.

Aligarh: 66 people who returned from UK under observation for 28 days

Aligarh: The health department is alerted after the spread of new corona strains in the UK. The health officers here have received a list of 66 people. They have returned to Aligarh between 9th December to 24th December from the UK. Now the department is identifying them. 9 people have been identified and did the RTPCR test. Even after a negative report, they will be under observation of the surveillance team for 28 days. People returning from the UK are being monitored. According to health officials, so far 2 lists have been received from the government having a name of total 66 people. All these people returned from the UK to Aligarh between 9th December and 24th December. The district surveillance team has traced 9 of these people and RTPCR tests have been con-

ducted and the search for the remaining people is going on. Anyone found infected will be tested in Delhi and Mathura labs. District Magistrate Chandra Bhushan Singh said that the administration is alert for those returning from Britain. Everyone is being monitored. Will be isolated for 28 days. All are being compulsorily tested. A review meeting of Corona was held under the chairmanship of DM, in which DM said that everyone should follow the rules and guidelines of home quarantine. Negligence will not be tolerated at any stage. If any person is coming from abroad, they should not hide it and inform it in the control room immediately. Their test report will come within 24 hours. **PNS**

Yogi Govt to roll out road ambulances next year

Lucknow: The Yogi Adityanath government in Uttar Pradesh is all set to roll out an ambitious scheme of 'Road Ambulances' early next year. Through this, the state government is going to give a fresh momentum to the campaign to rid the roads of potholes and will redefine the upkeep, standards and maintenance of roads in the state.

According to the government spokesman, the Public Works Department is going to deploy road ambulances under a pilot project in about half-a-dozen districts of the state. The Yogi government is working on three fronts through the Road Ambulance Scheme. Apart from making the roads pothole free, the government plans to prevent

major damage by immediately repairing the damaged roads. With the presence of road ambulances, the government is also going to take care of regular security, cleaning and the maintenance of roads. A road ambulance equipped with all the technical and gang related road construction including mixes, gener-

ators, is being built at a cost of more than Rs 40 lakh. It is touted to be the most modern road ambulance used in any state of the country. The state government will launch about a dozen road ambulances in the first phase. Road ambulances will be deployed in about half a dozen metros of the state, including Lucknow and Kanpur. **IAN S**

MNS workers vandalise Amazon warehouses in Mumbai, Pune

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI
 In an indication of the party's return to politics of intimidation, the MNS workers on Friday vandalised at least three warehouses of the Amazon in Mumbai and Pune over the leading e-commerce retailer's alleged failure to provide Marathi as a language option for its App. A day after a Mumbai court issued a notice to their party president Raj Thackeray to appear before it on January 5, 2021 in connection with a case filed by Amazon against the party, the MNS workers - armed with sticks - went on a rampage at Amazon's warehouses at Andheri and Malad in north Mumbai and one at Kondwa locality in Pune. As they indulged in rampage, the MNS workers shouted anti-Amazon slogans. The MNS' rampage at three Amazon warehouses took place at a time when the e-commerce

retailer was in the midst of catering to bulk orders placed during the Christmas-New Year season. However, the extent of damage caused by the MNS workers was not immediately known. Apparently, the MNS workers targeted the warehouses of Amazon to express their anger over the summons issued by Dindoshi court to their party president to remain present before it on January 5, in connection with a case filed by the e-commerce retailer against the tearing of its posters by the political party workers. Amazon had filed its civil suit before the Dindoshi court in suburban Mumbai against the MNS and its workers' union which had allegedly threatened to block the firm's operations in Mumbai if it did not include Marathi as one of the preferred languages on its mobile application or website. After hearing Amazon's arguments on December 14, the

court had ordered that the company staff be given protection. The court had restrained the MNS and its activists from obstructing the e-retailer or its employees from working at the e-commerce firm's site or disturbing its business activities. Since October this year, the MNS has been carrying a campaign 'No Marathi, No Amazon' in the state seeking incorporating a Marathi option on the Amazon Apps, and warned that it would not tolerate step-motherly treatment meted out to the state language. MNS had last week threatened to launch an agitation against Amazon and Flipkart for the non-inclusion of Marathi as a preferred language in their Apps. While customers in India can access Amazon services in English, Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam, Flipkart is available in English, Hindi, Tamil, Telugu and Kannada language.

Jilted lover kills girl in Bihar

Gopalganj (Bihar): A man in Bihar's Gopalganj district stabbed a girl to death for refusing his marriage proposal. The incident took place in the Sidhwalia area and the accused has been identified as Anil Yadav. Yadav was nearly lynched by the locals, leaving him grievously injured. The police have arrested Yadav and Dheeraj, who is said to be the accused's friend. A police official on Friday said Yadav, a resident of Jalalpur village was a phone friend of the victim. He reached the victim's house late Wednesday and proposed marriage. When the girl rejected his proposal, the jilted lover stabbed her repeatedly. The injured girl succumbed on the way to the hospital. Superintendent of Gopalganj police, Manoj Kumar Tiwari, said the accused was taken into custody by the police and is undergoing treatment at a Patna hospital. Dheeraj was arrested on Thursday. **IAN S**

Devotees throng Vishnu temples in Bengaluru amid Covid fear

Bengaluru: Amid the Covid-19 scare, devotees offered prayers at various prominent Lord Vishnu temples across Bengaluru on the occasion of Vaikuntha Ekadashi festival. All the temples followed the Covid protocols strictly such as maintaining social distancing, while several temples voluntarily suspended distribution of 'Teertha' (holy water), instead they gave away 'laddus' as 'prasadam' to the devotees. Besides this, the temples also restricted the entry of the devotees as the festival is observed for more than 10 days. Several prominent Vishnu temples, including Tirupati

Devasthanams' (TTD) Vishnu temple in Vyalikaval, ISKCON, Kote Venkataramana Swamy in Chamarajpet, Srinivasa Temple in Mahalakshmi Layout, and Tirumalagiri Temple in J.P. Nagar have been decked up with a variety of flowers. Septuagenarian Padmanabha Rao, a devotee who visited the TTD temple in Vyalikaval, told IANS that the Vaishnava worshippers (followers of Vishnu) believe that 'Vaikuntha Dwaram' or 'the gate to the Lord's inner sanctum' is opened on this day. "The Margashirsha Shukla Paksha Ekadashi in the lunar calendar is known as a

'Mokshada Ekadashi'. Special prayers, yagnas, discourses and speeches are arranged at Vishnu temples across the world on this auspicious day," he explained. Another devotee, Tamme Gowda, offered his special prayers at the Mahalakshmi Layout temple and told IANS that fasting on Vaikuntha Ekadashi is equivalent to fasting on the remaining 23 Ekadashis of the Hindu year. Quoting Vishnu Purana, Rao said Vaishnavites believe that Lord Vishnu opened the gate of 'Vaikuntam' (his abode) for two 'asuras' (demons) in spite of them being against him. They also asked for the

'boon' that whoever listens to their story and sees the image of Vishnu coming out of the door called 'Vaikunth Dwara' would reach Vaikuntha as well. "Temples all over India make a door kind of structure on this day for devotees to walk through," he said and revealed that their family members could not visit Tirupati this year for the first time in seven decades. "We actually wanted to go to Tirupati but due to the Covid scare, we cancelled our plans and instead we came here. This being a 10-day long festival, we plan to visit all prominent temples across Bengaluru," he added. **IAN S**

सदा अमर रहेगा अस्तित्व आजादी के हीवानों का

People of Haryana pay homage to Shaheed Udham Singh on his Birth Anniversary

December 26, 2020

Govt. of Haryana

"Shaheed Udham Singh fought with valour in every difficult time. He sacrificed his life for the freedom and dignity of the Nation. His courage inspires us to face every situation with bravery."

- Manohar Lal, Chief Minister, Haryana

Wear mask & keep social distance.

Information, Public Relations & Languages Department, Haryana www.prharyana.gov.in

Modi's outreach

The PM has made an effort to engage but he needs to take tangible measures to convince farmers & minorities



One has got to give it to the farmers for forcing the need for an inclusive dialogue on the Government. Their relentless protest demonstrates not only the determination of purpose but an insistence on looking at the fine print of the new farm Acts which, while structurally reforming the agriculture sector, do leave the farmer at the mercy of corporates and disadvantaged enough to avail the benefits of an open market. So much so that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had to distribute ₹18,000 crore to over nine crore farmers against the backdrop of the unrelenting protests near Delhi. He also interacted

with farmers from nine States, looking concerned on the face of it. And a few days ago, by addressing the Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) on its centenary year or engaging with the Visva Bharati University in Bengal, he seemed to have understood the importance of political outreach to his polar opposites. At both the institutions, he seemed to highlight the plurality, inclusiveness and accommodation embedded in our culture and a glorious past, something that his party and minions are committed to overturn and rewrite at the slightest provocation. Modi appeared to make the right moves but these stopped just short of conviction and intent. As it turns out, his outreach was thickly laden with electoral logic. For example, there was no need to highlight that Bengal was the only State to block cash transfers to farmers under the PM-Kisan scheme at a time when protesters in Delhi are looking for some words of reassurance. Worse, he wondered aloud why there were agitations in Bengal against the farm Acts, implying that Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee was backing the protests out of political motivation in maintaining her adversarial pitch against the Centre. It is understandable that the PM was playing up the poll pitch for the Bengal Assembly elections but it seemed terribly out of context and reduced a real understanding of farmers' fears. The same was true of his speech at the AMU where, by harking back to the institution's past heritage and the freedom movement, he glossed over the present-day students who have been targeted for civil dissent during the countrywide students' protests. Or while talking of our Nobel poet-laureate Rabindranath Tagore's connection to Gujarat, he seemed to ignore the latter's universal vision that broke down silos, the kind that his politics endorses. Or implying that another Nobel laureate Amartya Sen got an illegal plot of land from the Visva Bharati University.

However, at least the Prime Minister made a gesture that's still tentative. Sure he cannot ignore his core constituency but because he has the mammoth verdict and rightly owns the stature it gives him, he could use it to sober up passions at least. While appealing to those affected by majoritarianism to set aside ideological differences and narrow politics for national self-reliance, putting the onus on the "others", couldn't he have blunted the brazen and brute manifestation of Hindutva? The divisive politics has reaped political dividends for the BJP but has cost the nation deeply, going by the protests against a religion-based citizenship law that is targeted at Muslims, the Delhi riots and now the very worrisome trend of criminalisation of inter-faith marriage in the BJP-ruled States of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. But when he is contradicted by his own party's State Governments and Ministers reiterating their seriousness about a National Register of Citizens (NRC) in the middle of a pandemic, his vaunted promises ring hollow. Similarly, the Government needs to take care of farmers' reservations on the new Acts empathetically. It's not that they are against the open market but that willy-nilly makes pricing competitive and lowers their earnings. In the end, the Government has to give a price guarantee of sorts for all crops as the Minimum Support Price (MSP) has itself become unremunerative given the rising input costs. The Government may have to do some more direct cash transfers to farmers as a transitional measure to a new system. Of course, the small and marginal farmers, the lot of whom the Acts intend to improve, would still be dependent on some sort of mediatory intervention to deal with food majors. These are real concerns. Modi has bucked the trend of most heads of State becoming unpopular with their people. If he has indeed retained his political stock despite the pandemic, it is time for him to do something tangible that would endear him to all sections of the populace.

Brexit, finally!

After years of torturous negotiations, the United Kingdom has finally come to an agreement with the European Union



Anybody who has gone through a messy divorce would know that taking the decision to split up, by either partner, in most cases by just one partner, is the easy part. It is the court case, even when the partners are getting divorced completely agreeably and mutually, where things can go wrong. Particularly when couples have been married for a long, long time since the amicable division of assets can lead to huge amounts of legal wrangles. Who gets to keep the house? Who gets the dogs? Heck, couples have been known to fight over the crockery more than the children, particularly when the progeny are old enough to make their own choices. That

is the sort of divorce that the United Kingdom (UK) and the European Union (EU) went through, a divorce decided by the people of the UK but whose politicians found it almost impossible to deliver. There was the 'Irish' question as the divided Emerald Isle would actually mean that the UK has a land border with the EU. In addition, there was the very divisive issue of fishing rights, and many a headline writer in the London press had fun with puns and the flounder, one of the fish in question. When just seven days before the Brexit transition period was slated to end on December 31, the EU and the UK announced the reaching of an agreement that will govern the trade and security relationship between the two sides starting January 1, 2021, the European Parliament and the EU member states hailed with relief the last-minute deal while some, with a sentiment tinged with caution, have pledged to scrutinise the text before giving it the green light.

There was a palpable fear among many that the lack of agreement, the so-called 'No Deal Brexit', would lead to utter chaos at the borders mimicking the closure that the UK just experienced thanks to the new rapid-transmitting mutation of the COVID-19 virus. This is a victory for Boris Johnson, the embattled Prime Minister of the UK whose handling of the lockdown in the nation has been severely criticised. However, with many of the finer details yet to emerge, it remains to be seen what the UK has sacrificed for the deal with the EU and just how competitive the UK will be outside the European Union. Will Johnson be able to deliver on free trade deals with nations like India, as he has promised? It may not be as easy as he thinks given that India wants better access for her citizens into the UK, which has treated visas as an extortionate system to make money. How will Johnson get a trade deal with an incoming Democratic Government in the United States and will there be a flight of capital and talent from London to cities like Paris and Frankfurt or even Eastern Europe? Fighting against control by the European Union was like Cervantes railing against the windmills, but what will the future hold now that the windmills have been demolished? What will be the *raison d'être*, pardon our French of ultra-nationalist British politicians, and how will history remember this in 10, 15 or 20 years' time?

Forests in flames

The havoc caused by forest fires needs serious attention and enhanced budgetary allocation, besides modern equipment and adequate manpower



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

As this piece is being written, forest fires are burning at a number of places in Uttarakhand, and perhaps in a few other parts of India as well. According to a report by Lalmani Verma in *The Indian Express* of December 6, 2020, Uttarakhand had recorded 185 wildfires between October 1 and December 1 this year. This was more than the number of fires that occurred between mid-February and mid-June, which is the season for forest fires in the State. But then, the number of conflagrations in this year's fire season was incredibly low. The report quotes Man Singh, Chief Conservator of Forests, Forest Fire & Disaster Management, as saying: "The number of fire incidents in forests from February to June this year was almost 10 per cent of the average number of incidents that occurred in the past 20 years. In October and November, only a negligible number of forest fires had occurred in the past years, but there was a sharp rise in these months this year after the unlockdown process. It leads to the conclusion that such incidents occurred due to carelessness of humans who moved out after the unlockdown process."

This tends to corroborate the belief, held by many, that the sharp fall in the number of fires in this year's season was a result of the COVID-19 outbreak and the lockdown, and that the numbers will soar at an unprecedentedly high rate as normal activity picks up. This prospect must cause serious concern because of the severe damage that forest fires cause. They destroy entire forest ecosystems, kill wildlife, drive endangered species towards extinction through the destruction of their habitats and burn trees and the undergrowth. Spreading out, they destroy human settlements, houses, property and kill people. Environmentally, they are a major source of greenhouse gas emissions. A report by Daisy Dunne, dated July 14, 2020, and titled "How climate change is affecting wildfires across the world" in *Carbon Brief*, states that they are responsible for 5-8% of the 3.3 million annual premature deaths from poor air quality.

At least a billion animals and birds are estimated to have perished in Australia's devastating forest fires in the late 2019 and early 2020. The actual number may turn out to have reached trillions if the estimates had taken into account bats, frogs and inverte-



brates like insects, worms and spiders. According to a CNN report by Jessie Yeung titled "Australia's deadly wildfires are showing no signs of stopping. Here's what you need to know", last updated on January 14, 2020, the catastrophic forest fires in Australia destroyed 1,588 houses and damaged 650 others in New South Wales, the country's most populated State.

In the United States, the State that has suffered most over the years is California. Things were, doubtless, better in 2019 than in 2018. In late October last year, however, forest fires forced 2,00,000 people to leave their homes and led to the declaration of an emergency. The period from January 1 to November 22, 2019, witnessed 46,706 wildfires compared to 52,080 in the corresponding period in 2018. About 4.6 million acres perished in the same period in 2019, compared to 8.5 million acres in 2018. Towns, property and houses have been destroyed and people killed.

The situation is grim in India which, on an average, loses ₹1,176 crore a year to forest fires. The Forest Survey of India (FSI) detected 29,547 fires in 2019 using the Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer (MODIS) system. In a written response to a query, Minister of State for Environment Babul Supriyo told the Lok Sabha on September 23, 2020, that an area of 2,56,710 hectares was affected by forest fires in the country in 2019. What is also alarming, a report by the FSI submitted in 2019 has it that 1,52,412 out of India's 7,12,249 square kilome-

tres of forest cover, 21.40 per cent, is highly fire-prone, with the forests of Mizoram, Chhattisgarh, Manipur, Odisha and Madhya Pradesh being the most vulnerable.

The prospects are forbidding. For one thing, global warming is conducting to an increase in the number of forest fires. Many experts consider it to have been an important factor aggravating the circumstances leading to the Australian and American forest fires referred to above. This is hardly surprising. Global warming makes vegetation highly inflammable through enhanced evaporation, which causes fires to spread rapidly and become more intense. It has also caused the length of fire seasons — when conflagrations are most frequent — worldwide to increase by 19 per cent between 1979 and 2013.

It is a cyclical process, with global warming conducting to forest fires and the latter contributing to global warming. The way things are, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change's call for holding the increase in global average temperature in this century to well below 2°C above the pre-industrial revolution level and for trying to limit it to 1.5°C above it, is not going to be achieved. More, according to the *Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C*, released by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) on October 7, 2018, the adverse effects of climate change would not be reduced even if the increase is limited to 1.5°C. What is particularly alarming, this level, according to the

report, is likely to be reached sometime between 2030 and 2052.

With global warming continuing to aggravate — and make more potent — the circumstances leading to forest fires, the actual spark is sometimes provided by lightning strikes or friction between dry branches of trees or bamboo fragments. The main factor, however, is human activity which is responsible for 95 per cent of the forest fires in India and 90 per cent in the case of the United States. In the latter, some human-caused fires result from campfires left unattended, the burning of debris, downed power lines, negligently discarded cigarettes and intentional acts of arson.

In Brazil, farmers and ranchers have been setting large tracts of the Amazon rain forests aflame while the Government is accused of being either indifferent to, or encouraging of, their doings. According to *India's State of Forest Report 2017*, people in this country set fire to forests for, among other reasons, clearing areas for shifting cultivation, non-timber forest produce collection and for hunting/poaching purposes. Another reason is making room for growing towns and villages.

Preventing forest fires will, therefore, require action on multiple fronts. The National Action Plan on Forest Fires by Forest Protection Division of the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, released in 2019, makes a number of recommendations. These include a vigorous strategy for

spreading awareness of the implications of forest fires, ensuring the participation of local communities in forest management, enhanced training and specifically designated policies to increase the capacity of local communities to prevent and control forest fires, increasing the resilience of forests to withstand fires through management intervention and the rooting out of invasive weeds like Lantana, which contribute significantly to the outbreak of forest fires and threaten native biodiversity.

For their part, the Union and State Governments need to enhance their preparedness to act early against fire outbreaks. This would have to include an effective communications network, the use of modern technologies and products like drones to identify the exact location of forest fires and the directions of their spread, deployment of adequate manpower in fire-prone areas through the filling of all vacancies in the ranks or frontline forest officials.

All this will require money. The provision of ₹50 crore in the 2020-21 Union Budget is not going to be enough. The argument, however, will be that even the last budget's allocation of ₹46.58 crore was not fully spent. While the Union Government must play its part financially and administratively, State Governments, which are responsible for forest management on the ground, need to pull up their socks.

(The author is Consulting Editor, *The Pioneer*. The views expressed are personal.)

SOUNDBITE

With the withdrawal of politically motivated cases against the BJP leaders in UP, similar cases slapped on all Opposition leaders must also be withdrawn.

BSP chief
—Mayawati



We have taken back control of every jot and tittle of our regulation in a way that is complete and unfettered. Britain has taken back control of our laws and our destiny.

British Prime Minister
—Boris Johnson



@remodsouza I love u to the moon and back...pls now u need to stop making me prove it to u time and again...cmn let the joy of Christmas festivities begin.....

Remo D'souza's wife
—Lizelle



The onus lies on bowlers to bowl in partnerships. Openers' role everywhere is crucial. We don't want to put pressure. We want to give them the freedom to play their game.

Stand-in India captain
—Ajinkya Rahane



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Bengal & Assam polls

Sir — West Bengal and Assam will go to the Assembly polls in 2021 and, in both the States, the BJP has high stakes. In Assam, the BJP is seeking return to power for the second consecutive time. In Bengal, the party is hoping to defeat Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress.

In both the States, the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) is an emotive issue but Union Home Minister Amit Shah's statement that the CAA rules are yet to be framed as the exercise could not be carried out because of COVID-19 means that it won't be the main election issue. Both the States are strong opponents of the CAA ever since it was enacted in 2019.

While the BJP is aggressively pushing its campaign in favour of the CAA in Bengal ahead of the Assembly elections, it is defensive in the neighbouring Assam. Both the States have significant Muslim populations — 27-28 per cent and 34-35 per cent, respectively.

An election narrative around the CAA is expected to polarise the voters.

Bhagwan Thadani
Mumbai

Lessons to learn from the murder in convent

The verdict of a special CBI court in Kerala convicting Father Thomas M Kottoor and Sister Sephy and sentencing them to life is a tribute to the long arm of the law. It is a case of justice long delayed, but eventually not denied.

It will give Sister Abhaya's brother, members of her wider family and all those who grieved the tragic death and fought for justice a sense of closure. The details of how the 21-year-old Sister was killed in cold blood don't bear thinking about. The court found out that the convicts were together in a compromising position on the night of March 26, 1992, and bludgeoned Sister Abhaya to death when she accidentally saw them. But there seems to be more than a legal angle to the crime.

The convicts did not spare the accidental discoverer of their copulation because sex is forbidden among the nuns. The Church should ask itself whether it is necessary to be so rigid on sexual mores and stigmatise sexual gratification. Catholic priests and nuns take vows of celibacy when they are inducted into religious orders.

But then celibacy is against the law of nature and priests and nuns do not cease to be men and women in



flesh and blood or overcome biological urges just by taking celibacy vows and donning religious robes. Its abolition will bring about some desirable changes in the lives of those tasked with ministry in the Church. Normalising or legitimising what is now regarded as forbidden love through reforms could help abate crimes emanating from the negative feelings of fear, guilt and shame.

G David Milton
Kanyakumari

COVID curbs not fair

Sir — The discovery of a mutated and more virulent COVID-19 virus strain in England has caused turmoil around the world. As a precaution, a night curfew has been imposed in the faraway Maharashtra.

This is ridiculous on the part of the State Government because

the virus will not stop spreading and we are forced to be content without jobs and eat only stones and mud for another five years because the Chief Minister is not willing to resume local trains so that we can reach office and get our salaries to feed our families.

Uddhav Thackeray does not need Christian votes; that is why he has now started harassing

Christians by not allowing us to celebrate Christmas and the New Year Mass even during daytime.

First, he and his policemen demolished Kangana Ranaut's bungalow. Now they are targeting Christians. Is the virus active only during Christian festivals like Easter and Christmas?

Jubel D'Cruz
Mumbai

Magical Messi

Sir — Records are meant to be broken but in a field game like football, breaking records is not an easy task to achieve. However, Lionel Messi has become the all-time top scorer for a single club after scoring his 644th goal for FC Barcelona during their La Liga match.

Messi touched peak form in 2011-12 but continued to garner goals in a steady way. Incidentally, Pele scored 643 goals in 665 competitive games for his Santos club while Messi needed 749 matches to break the record, though he did it in 17 seasons as compared to the 19 seasons the Brazilian great needed.

In addition, Messi, who made his first appearance for Barcelona aged 17 in 2004, has won 10 La Liga titles with the club plus four Champions League Trophies. Thus, a magical Lionel Messi broke the goal-scoring record for a single club and entered the record books by bettering the veteran Brazilian's feat.

CK Subramaniam
Chennai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

Mystery Shoppers of our privacy

Mass surveillance gives uninterrupted access to millions of malleable minds, which can then be meddled with using tools like social media



NIRMAL ABRAHAM

It was the festive season in Bengaluru and like most young working vicenarians, I strode into my favourite apparel store the day I got my salary. As I casually walked through the men's section searching for a chambray waistcoat, I noticed a young woman entering the floor, holding a cellphone in her hand. She appeared to be a regular customer at first — moving swiftly from one shelf to another, checking out the newest collections of course — but as she navigated through the counters, I noticed something unusual about her. She was subtly giving the whole store a closer look. She was reading through the banners, redeeming old coupons, seeking advice from sales clerks and taking assistance in spotting the cloth rails. One would think of it all as standard customer behaviour, but here's why it felt a little odd. Every time she exited a counter, she would furtively type something on her phone.

Given the kind of enigma she invoked, I couldn't help but think she was a "Mystery Shopper." Just like mothers employ intrusive cousins to secretly track the activities of a teenager, companies hire external experts to monitor how an organisation works in the absence of top management personnel. This is an established global practice and these experts often pretend to be customers. In reality they are paid detectives who inspect activities and arrangements in stores, right from the bargain basement to the billing counter. They virtually rate everything, from a random smile to rapid customer service, with the aim of reporting competency gaps to the management.

But since it is a dubious intrusion into the privacy of employees, many companies around the world aren't comfortable doing this. In fact, many have dropped the idea of a secret audit owing to the anxiety it creates among the workforce. After all, who likes being constantly watched and rated? Funnily enough, we seem to have come to terms with the continuous inspection of our private lives by apps, gadgets and online services that we use on an everyday basis. Be it virtual assistants, conferencing tools, search engines, streaming services or social media, the ways we get spied on, are plentiful.

It wasn't long ago that the login details of over 5,00,000 Zoom accounts were found being sold on the Dark Web, for a paltry one pence each. Although it did strike fear into the minds of many prospective users, the news was forgotten way too soon.

Forget data theft, a 2019 report from Freedom on the Net suggests that at least nine out of 10 Internet users are being actively monitored online. With advances in Artificial Intelligence and pattern analytics, these numbers are only expected to go high. Mass surveillance was thought to be practically impossible given the massive influx of Internet users worldwide, so when Edward Snowden exposed its existence in 2013, it only served as a mild warning to many netizens who presumed it to be less widespread.

But the Internet has changed dramatically since the Snowden scandal and what we experience today, isn't mere observation.

What starts as a basic "two-step" process, first monitors and analyses political views, personal preferences and buying patterns and dexterously manipulates it to turn hesitations to decisions, considerations to actions and vehemence to outright violence. If you ever thought the growing number of global demonstrations and violent protests post 2010 is a coincidence, think again. Mass surveillance is dangerous because it gives uninterrupted access to millions of malleable minds, which then can be meddled with using digital tools like social media and streaming services, gradually leading to mass indoctrination. Just as Joseph Goebbels filled the public spaces of Germany with Nazi propaganda posters in the 1930s, the social media space today is occupied by carefully-crafted ideas expressed in visual, verbal and auditory forms — virtually locking them up in an echo chamber of thoughts that facilitate groupthink.

The long, ongoing tussle between Conservative and Liberal groups in the US is a classic example of the "division phenomenon" the media deftly created. The efforts have been so sinister that it has essentially transformed the "United" States into countless "divided" ones now, paving the way for political think tanks to benefit from it on a perpetual basis. Much like crony capitalism, as long as the nexus stands - it will keep hurting the common man. And here's why it's alarming. These social media outlets and internet monopolies have now practically crossed all physical borders by reach, exceeded every strong army in the world by number and surpassed some of the most robust economies on Earth by wealth.

Alphabet (Google's parent company) for instance, is now worth over \$1 trillion, which is nearly double the Gross Domestic Product of Sweden. With over 2.7 billion active users and a market cap of \$800 billion, Facebook too, enjoys a similar privilege. In fact, the tech giant has a total "population" of India and China combined and an "economy" of New Zealand, Denmark and Finland put together. Unlike any known leader in world history, these titans can now easily infuse ideas, influence people and instigate change on a global scale. And therein, lies the concern.

(The writer is a Tax Advisor and Management Consultant. The views expressed are personal)

OVER BIPARTISAN OBJECTIONS, HOWEVER, THE NDAA ACT PURPORTS TO RESTRICT THE PRESIDENT'S ABILITY TO WITHDRAW US TROOPS (OVERSEAS).

—US PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP

POINT COUNTERPOINT



NEXT WEEK, ON DECEMBER 28, THE HOUSE WILL TAKE UP THE VETO OVERRIDE WITH BIPARTISAN SUPPORT.

—HOUSE SPEAKER NANCY PELOSI

Growing a movement

Nawaz Sharif is promising a democratic and political system that will not be rigged, engineered or tampered by non-civilian elite



NADEEM PARACHA

On December 13, the 11-party Opposition alliance, the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), held a large rally in Lahore. It marked the completion of the first phase of the alliance's agitation against the Imran Khan Government which saw the PDM hold anti-Government rallies in six cities in Pakistan.

The next phase of the movement was kicked off by the PDM holding a rally in Mardan on December 23 despite a ban imposed by the district administration amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The protesters, led by Jamiat Ulema-Islam (F) and PDM chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman, senior Pakistan Peoples Party leader Yousuf Raza Gilani and Pakistani Muslim League (Nawaz) vice-president Maryam Nawaz, gathered at the Gaju Baba Khan flyover to address a huge crowd. The rally in Mardan would be followed by another public meeting in Larkana on December 27 on the eve of the death anniversary of Benazir Bhutto.

The PDM has demanded that Prime Minister Khan's Government quit by January 31 or face intensified movements by Opposition parties. This includes a "long march" towards Islamabad in late January or early February and possible resignations of Opposition members in the Assemblies. The PDM has decided to focus on smaller cities for public meetings and protests will be held in Bahawalpur on December 30, Malakand on January 3, Bannu on January 6, Khuzdar on January 9, Loralai on January 13, Tharparkar on January 16, Faisalabad on January 18, Sargodha on January 23, and Sialkot on January 27.

Political pundits and analysts are already weighing the chances of both the PDM and the Imran Khan Government. Heated debates are taking place about whether the Opposition alliance would be able to dislodge the Pakistan-Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Government that is already besieged by a faltering economy, rising inflation, a lethal pandemic and the Government's own blunders, which are many.

In his characteristic style Khan stepped up his efforts to silence the voice of the PDM, along with the voices of thousands who criticised his Government. Despite such attempts, the PDM has held its ground and organised five major rallies in Multan, Peshawar, Gujranwala, Karachi, and Quetta since October 16. Now it is upping the ante even further.

Most commentators are of the view that, even if the PDM is unable to outright force Khan's departure, it can create a serious constitutional and political crisis, which will not only bog down a troubled regime but can also create issues for the military establishment that is overtly backing the present set-up in Islamabad.

The most worrisome aspect of this is that the military establishment has begun to be seen as a visible party in the conflict between the PDM and the Khan Government. The kind of political crisis the PDM's agitation is expected to create can be detrimental to a highly polarised polity. There have been five major anti-Government movements since Pakistan's inception in August 1947. The first such movement was able to force the military dictator, Ayub Khan to resign in 1969. Though the second one managed to stall Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's bid to rule as the Prime Minister of Pakistan for the second time in 1977, but it also saw the imposition of the country's third and perhaps harshest, military regime.



PROMISING DEMOCRACY ALONE WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN ABLE TO DRAW THE KIND OF ATTENTION THAT THE PDM HAS MANAGED TO ATTRACT. THIS PROMISE NEEDED A NEW ANGLE WHICH SHARIF HAS INGENUOUSLY PROVIDED



The third major movement was made up of a cluster of movements between 1981 and 1986, against the General Zia-ul-Haq dictatorship. Even though intense and at times extremely violent, this movement failed to dislodge the dictator. He died in a plane crash in 1988.

The fourth movement rose up against the General Musharraf dictatorship in 2007 and succeeded in ousting him through a forced resignation.

Ironically, the last major anti-Government movement was led by Imran Khan's PTI against the third Nawaz Sharif regime. It was unsuccessful but it did manage to create enough space for the PTI to squeeze through during the controversial 2018 elections.

The PDM has succeeded in holding impressive rallies. But it is still not a full-fledged movement. It is expecting to evolve into becoming one during its next phase. However, it is still too early to predict whether the PDM will succeed in removing the Imran Khan Government or, especially, if it can actually achieve its second and more ambitious, aim to neutralise the self-appointed political role of the military-establishment.

Succeed or not, once the PDM does evolve into becoming a movement, there is every likelihood that things will begin to alter, for good or otherwise. In a 1973 essay for the *Annual Review of Anthropology*, the American sociologist and anthropologist Ralph W Nicholas writes that political and social movements may have varying degrees of success (or, for that matter, failure) but they leave behind societies that are never quite the same.

Nicholas describes movements as "liminal" or "the interim between the end of the old and the beginning of the

new." According to Nicholas, movements may evolve into becoming successful uprisings, or they may be crushed but, no matter what the outcome, they always have what it takes to become contagious. He adds that they also have the seeds to become "successive." By this Nicholas means that even movements that are crushed or collapse become paradigms for future protests.

As long as there are conditions for a movement to emerge, they will, despite being repeatedly vanquished. According to the "political opportunity theory", if a political system seems vulnerable, there will emerge challengers who would move to use this vulnerability as an opportunity to push for political or social change. The American political scientist and historian, Charles Tilly is often credited as being one of the foremost pioneers of the aforementioned theory.

The theory is not as much about why movements emerge, as such, but rather what course they take once they get going. Reasons behind the why, generally speaking, can be economic or to do with repression. Interestingly, the theory states that democratic pluralism too, can become a factor.

For example, all these factors can be seen as playing a role in the large pockets of protests emerging in India recently. An economic downturn, coupled with political repression of liberal voices and the country's long-standing democratic systems, are allowing these protests to take shape, so much so that some members of the Government are now lamenting that "too much democracy" is a problem. This could be understood as meaning that democracy is hindering their desire to fully implement the Government's contentious projects.

However, the theory is equally applicable in regions where there are economic issues and repression but too little or no democracy. The theory states that agitation against these or other issues brews in pockets that continue to expand even when these pockets are repressed. Their consistency eventually begins to sap the energy of the State and this creates opportunities for pockets of resistance to mobilise from within and outside their circle until they merge to become a people's protest.

The conditions for a movement in Pakistan are ripe. Economic meltdown, State repression, bad governance and political polarisation are now pitching one chunk of the polity against the other. The PDM's agenda is thus clear — to exhaust its opponents, so ample opportunities emerge to further expand and grow the movement. But according to Nicholas, politics alone will not be sufficient. Disillusionment against an existing governing ideology needs to be replaced by a new promise to invigorate a disillusioned polity.

The anti-Ayub Khan movement offered various forms of economic equality to inspire the people to come out and protest. An "Islamic" system of Government was promised by the movement to bring people out against the ZA Bhutto regime. The idea of "tab-deeli (change)" was floated by Imran Khan during his party's street protests. And now Sharif is promising a democratic and political system that will not be rigged, engineered or tampered by non-civilian elite.

Promising democracy alone would not have been able to draw the kind of attention that the PDM has managed to attract. This promise needed a new angle which Sharif has ingeniously provided. (Courtesy: Dawn)

A push to sort out the urban waste crisis

Local, State and Central governments will have to work cohesively to look at mechanisms to bring all stakeholders on board to turn garbage into a resource

gas (GHG) emissions, leading to climate change on a global scale.

All policymakers and administrators dealing in waste management thoroughly understand the wealth potential associated with this MSW, which can be unlocked with appropriate energy and economic linkages, yet the codes to unlock such potentials are not unified. Once mixed, many potentially recyclable items lose their value for recycling. Hence, segregation at source is the key to manage MSW in an efficient manner. Solid Waste Management Rules require people to hand over segregated garbage to Urban Local Bodies (ULBs). However, proper implementation and monitoring of this golden rule which may turn many downstream processes in waste management more efficient and effective, is lacking. To discover what would motivate residents to segregate garbage and help cities reduce their waste burden through appropriate management of organic and inorganic

garbage in a decentralised manner, a pilot project was implemented from January to mid-November this year in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh (UP). The project was initiated under the Development and Management of Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions (NAMA) project in India.

Under the pilot intervention, initially, a group of three colonies—Saraswati Nagar, Krantipalli and Rambagh & Kolhua Vinayaka were piloted from January (Group 1) and this was later extended to include Vijaynagar and Vijayanagar extension (Group 2) in September.

Starting with information education and capacity building (IEC) drives in these colonies, pilot interventions were started where households were encouraged to hand over segregated waste to the Varanasi Municipal Corporation (VMC) collection staff on a daily basis. From August onwards, lucky draw competitions for households giving segregated waste to collectors were initiated to increase the motivation and engagement of residents.



Initially, it was found that none of the households were separating garbage. But, due to the source segregation awareness programme and engagement of the VMC staff, around 67.42 per cent of the residents began to segregate garbage by the end of the pilot in November. The number of households giving segregated garbage went up steeply

from 40 per cent in August, after the announcement of the lucky draws.

In Group 1 colonies, due to the availability of large garbage collection bins or existing garbage accumulation points, residents either self-dispose the waste or get it disposed through their domestic help in an unsegregated manner. For them the domestic help provided a better level of garbage collection services, compared to door-to-door collection by the VMC as the staff was only available to collect waste from the main gate of the apartment blocks. As a result, many households residing on higher floors were not interested in availing of the door-to-door collection services provided by the waste collection staff and used to dispose mixed garbage.

In Group 2 colonies, which had mostly bungalows and row houses, due to the non-availability of any garbage disposal point and appropriate service by the VMC staff, almost all residents were handing over waste to VMC collectors.

As an outcome of the pilot, the services provided by the VMC staff were streamlined further. Hence, it can be concluded, that with an appropriate infrastructure, service support from ULBs and regular monitoring, it is possible to increase the number of households providing segregated garbage.

While certain people were motivated to do source segregation of MSW based on awareness programme inputs, others responded to incentives. Though such measures can be effective in motivating households to separate garbage in the initial phase, once source segregation becomes a practice, such incentives might not be required.

The experience from these pilots also revealed that awareness, along with appropriate infrastructure (for collection and treating waste), can indeed motivate people to segregate waste at source. However, for mass involvement, a habit of segregation will have to be infused through appropriate IECs,

monitoring, a motivational mechanism, monitoring (possibly through Information Technology-based systems) and penalties.

With regards to IECs, the concept and benefits of source segregation should be strongly interlinked with health and economic benefits to the city, demonstrating direct impact and benefits to the public. The local, State and Central governments will also have to work cohesively to look at possible mechanisms to bring all stakeholders on board to turn waste into a resource and demonstrate a strong political will to bring about change.

Interlinking workers from the informal sector, building their capacities and adjusting key performance indicators of existing staff members will also help enhance the level of services in cities.

(Manuja is a Fellow at TERI and Gaurav is a Technical Advisor at GLZ India. This article has inputs from NAMA, India. Views expressed are personal.)



SOURABH MANUJA

JAI GAURAV

Urban India generated about 59.56 million metric tonnes of municipal solid waste (MSW) in 2019. While the average collection rate was reported to be around 92 per cent, only about 37 per cent of the collected waste was treated. As per the biannual review report (BUR) submitted by the Government to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 2014 this untreated MSW, when disposed, contributed to nearly 15065 x 106 Kg CO2Eq of the country's greenhouse

PARLIAMENT DISSOLUTION

SC issues show cause notice to Oli Govt

Kathmandu: Nepal's Supreme Court on Friday issued a show-cause notice to Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli-led government, asking it to submit a written clarification over its decision to abruptly dissolve Parliament.



the hearing.

The notice was issued after a preliminary hearing at the five-member Constitutional bench headed by Chief Justice Chandra Shumsher Rana on the writ petitions filed against the government's decision to dissolve the 275-member House of Representatives, according to court officials.

The bench sought the written clarification from the Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Minister and Office of the President as they are made defendants in all the writ petitions, they said.

The court has also asked the government to submit an original copy of the recommendations made by the government to dissolve the House and the decision made by President Bidya Devi Bhandari to authenticate the government's recommendations within 10 days.

Earlier, the apex court demanded an amicus curiae from Nepal Bar Association and Supreme Court Bar Association in connection with

An amicus curiae is a legal professional or expert who assists the court by offering information, expertise, or insight that has a bearing on the case.

Meanwhile, the Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda'-led faction of the ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP) staged a protest rally in Kathmandu against the decision.

'Prachanda' and Madhav Kumar Nepal, senior leaders Jhala Nath Khanal, spokesperson Narayan Kaji Shrestha along with the party's Central Committee members and members of the dissolved House gathered near the Prime Minister's Office for the protest.

"We are here," "Reinstate the House of Representatives," and "dissolution of the House is unconstitutional," were the

slogans raised by the protesters. Around 300 Central Committee members of the NCP and nearly 100 members of the House were present in the protest rally.

After staging a sit-in, the crowd marched towards the Election Commission (EC) office.

The EC will decide which faction of the NCP is legitimate to carry the party name and election symbol.

"We have the support of the majority of the Central Committee members. Therefore, we are going to the commission to prove and show that we are the legitimate faction," protesting leader Sunil Manandhar, who is also a Central Committee member of the NCP, told PTI.

He said that the party will launch the agitation against the Oli government in collaboration with other Opposition parties, including the Nepali Congress and Janata Samajwadi Party for the reinstatement of the House of Representatives.

Separately, Prime Minister Oli has called a Cabinet meeting on Friday evening, amid an intensified struggle between the two warring factions of the ruling Nepal Communist Party to wrest control of the party. PTI

Men charged in Pearl's murder case to be released today

Karachi: British-born al-Qaeda leader Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh and his three aides, whose release in the abduction and murder case of US journalist Daniel Pearl was ordered by a court here, would walk out of the prison on Saturday, police and lawyer said on Friday.

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

The court observed that the four men's detention was "illegal".

According to the Jail Superintendent, the four men could not be released from Karachi's Central Jail on Thursday as the prison authorities received orders from the Sindh High Court for their release very late.

The legal counsel for the four men said that they would

now be released on Saturday as Friday is a public holiday in the country.

Meanwhile, the United States on Friday expressed "deep concern" over Sindh High Court's order to release Sheikh and his aides and said it will continue to monitor any developments in the case.

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

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

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

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

"We refuse to believe that the Pakistani government and the Pakistani people will let such a travesty of justice tarnish the image and legacy of Pakistan," they said in a statement.

In April, a two-judge Sindh High Court bench commuted the death sentence of 46-year-old Sheikh to seven years imprisonment. The court also acquitted his three aides who were serving life terms in the case - almost two decades after they were found guilty and jailed.

However, the Sindh government refused to release them and kept them in detention under the Maintenance of Public Order. PTI

US expresses deep concern over Pak court's order to release accused

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

The US on Friday expressed "deep concern" over a Pakistani court's order to release British-born al-Qaeda leader Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh and his three aides, who were convicted and sentenced in the abduction and murder case of American journalist Daniel Pearl.

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

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

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

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

One in 85 test +ve for Covid in England as cases spike

PTI ■ LONDON

A record number of people have tested positive for Covid-19 in England as millions spend Christmas Day away from friends and family due to a continuing spike in coronavirus infections on Friday.

Figures from the National Health Service's (NHS) Test and Trace network show that between December 10 and 16, 173,875 people received a positive result - the highest weekly total of positive cases and a 58 per cent increase on the previous week.

Separately, according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS), positive cases

of coronavirus are increasing sharply in parts of the UK, with around one in 60 people now testing positive in Wales and one in 85 in England.

Experts believe the new mutations of the deadly virus are driving cases up across the country as they are more contagious. It has resulted in most parts of the UK to be placed in some form of stringent lockdown measures, with London and surrounding areas in Tier 4 level of highest alert with a near-complete shutdown.

UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson has warned that tougher restrictions could be needed to keep a mutant coronavirus strain "running out of control" in the New Year.



Apostolic Administrator of the Latin Church in the Holy Land Pierbattista Pizzaballa, centre, leads a Christmas midnight mass at the Church of the Nativity in the West Bank city of Bethlehem on Friday. AP

South Africa rejects claim of its coronavirus variant dangerous than UK strain

Johannesburg: South Africa's health minister has rejected his British counterpart's claim that a new coronavirus variant in the country is more contagious or dangerous than a similar one in spreading the UK.

"At present, there is no evidence that the 501.V2 (variant) is more transmissible than the United Kingdom variant - as suggested by the British Health Secretary," Zwelini Mkhize said in a statement published late Thursday.

"There is also no evidence that (it) causes more severe disease or increased mortality than the UK variant or any variant that has been sequenced around the world".

Announcing restrictions on travel from South Africa Wednesday, Britain's Matt Hancock had said that the variant there was "highly concerning, because it is yet more transmissible, and it appears to

have mutated further" than the similar strain in Britain.

The British minister's words "have created a perception that the variant in SA has been a major factor in the second wave in UK," Mkhize said.

He pointed to evidence that the British strain, which bears a similar mutation to the South African one, appeared as early as September in south-eastern county Kent - "approximately a month before the South African variant appears to have developed".

Citing "the widely shared view of the scientific community," Mkhize also argued that "the risks of travel bans may outweigh the benefits".

"Banning travel between UK and SA is an unfortunate decision," he added.

South Africa is the country hit hardest by coronavirus on the continent, with close to one million infections so far and 26,000 people dead.

Around 14,000 positive cases were detected on each of the past two days, compared with between 8,000 and 10,000 earlier this week. AFP

US requires UK passengers to get -ve test

Atlanta: The United States will require airline passengers from Britain to get a negative Covid-19 test before their flight.

The US is the latest country to announce new travel restrictions because of a new variant of the coronavirus that is spreading in Britain.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says airline passengers from the United Kingdom will have to get negative Covid-19 tests within three days of their trip and provide the results to the airline.

The agency says the order will be signed Friday and go into effect on Monday.

The CDC says because of travel restrictions in place since March, air travel to the US from the UK has been cut by 90 per cent.

Last weekend, Britain's prime minister said a new variant of the coronavirus seemed to spread more easily than earlier ones and was moving rapidly through England. Dozens of countries have since barred flights from the UK. AP

Channel logjam eases for truckers blocked in Britain

Calais: Hundreds of lorries arrived at the French port of Calais on Friday as authorities scrambled to ease a bottleneck in Britain, where thousands of drivers have been stuck for days because of tougher coronavirus rules.

"Yesterday, we had 1,000 lorries cross over from Dover. As of 10:00 am (0900 GMT) we already had 550 lorries from Britain," Benoit Rochet, head of the Calais port operator, told AFP.

"At this rate, the situation should be completely taken care of by tomorrow," he said. The port decided to remain

open despite the Christmas holiday so that ferries as well as the trains bringing trucks through the Channel Tunnel could operate.

Getlink, the Eurotunnel operator, said 478 trucks had arrived in Calais by 11:00 am, after 1,942 were brought over Thursday.

Most of the drivers headed straight for the highway, according to an AFP journalist at the scene.

Truckers were stranded in southeast England after France halted all travel from Britain on Sunday for 48 hours in a bid to prevent a new strain of coronavirus, which experts feared could spread even faster, from reaching its shores.

The move created a massive logjam with up to 10,000 trucks parked along highways as well as the runways of the Manston airport, according to EU transport commissioner Adina Valean, who criticised the French government's decision.

Drivers fumed at having to spend Christmas in their cabs away from their families with only minimal toilet facilities, because they were unable to get Covid-19 tests that must be negative to be allowed into France. AFP

Afghan Army: 2 officers killed by roadside bomb in north

Kabul: At least two Afghan army officers including a battalion commander were killed on Friday when their vehicle was hit by a roadside bomb in the northern Balkh province, the military said.

Hanif Rezaie, a spokesman for the army in the country's north, said Capt. Mohammad Qasim Paikar and another officer were killed and two other soldiers were wounded in the explosion, which took place between Balkh and Char Bolak districts.

The attack was the latest amid relentless violence in Afghanistan even as Taliban and Afghan Government negotiators hold talks in Qatar, try-

ing to hammer out a peace deal that could put an end to decades of war.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for Friday's bombing. Rezaie blamed the Taliban, who are active in both districts and regularly launch attacks against Afghan security forces.

Elsewhere, the Taliban announced the release of 30 imprisoned Afghan security personnel on Thursday in the southern Kandahar province's Panjwai district.

This is the first batch of prisoners released by the Taliban since the start of direct peace talks with the Afghan Government in September. AP

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Details of the Tender Notices of SC Railway can be seen on our website: [www.scr.indianrailways.gov.in](#)

TENDER NOTICE No.77/2020
dt. 24.12.2020
SUPPLY OF STORES ITEMS.
e-Procurement Tender Notice

The following Tenders have been floated online. Tenderers are requested to visit the website [www.ireps.gov.in](#) and submit their offers online. The Tender Description, Qty, EMD, SD may be seen in website. Offers submitted manually will not be accepted. Offers by post will not be entertained. Tender Closing time is 14.30 hrs. of the Due date of the Tender. "For all indigenous offers, EMD will be accepted only via online system as available on [www.ireps.gov.in](#)."

Tender No.: 52.20.5007, **BRIEF DESC.:** Supply Testing Installation

Tender No.: 30.20.1211, **BRIEF DESC.:** Double acting hydraulic shock

Tender No.: 30.20.3641, **BRIEF DESC.:** Set of side flange RH and LH

Tender No.: 30.20.1192, **BRIEF DESC.:** Hanger block

Tender No.: 38.20.1709, **BRIEF DESC.:** Key bolt nut with spring

Tender No.: 56.20.1005, **BRIEF DESC.:** U/G Sig. cable size 24 core X 1.5 Sq. mm

Tender No.: 12.20.5002, **BRIEF DESC.:** Traction Motor to medha model

Tender No.: 38.20.1219, **BRIEF DESC.:** Coupler body with shank

Note: Due dates of Tender Opening:
SL.No. 01 on dt. 18.01.2021; SL.No.02 on dt. 20.01.2021; SL.No.03 to 05 on dt. 21.01.2021; SL.No.07 on 27.01.2021; SL.No.08 on 28.01.2021.

Beside above mentioned tenders there are other tenders having value below ₹ 25 lakhs. For details, please visit Railway website above.

Principal Chief Materials Manager/ A1409 Secunderabad.
For further tender conditions / details and for downloading the tender documents, Please visit website at [http://www.ireps.gov.in](#) or [www.scr.indianrailways.gov.in](#)

CANCELLATION/SHORT TERMINATION/REGULATION OF TRAINS DUE TO DOUBLING WORK

In order to further strengthen the existing infrastructure, Northern Railway will undertake the Non-Interlocking work for doubling at Haridwar-Laksar section of Moradabad Division. To execute this work, Northern Railway will take a traffic block up to 05.01.2021. As a result, the following trains will temporarily be affected on the dates shown against each:-

Train No. & Train Name	Date(s) of Cancellation (from originating station)
02017/02018 New Delhi - Dehradun - New Delhi Shatabdi Special	29.12.2020 to 05.01.2021
02092/02091 Kathgodam - Dehradun - Kathgodam Jan Shatabdi Special	29.12.2020 to 05.01.2021
02191 Jabalpur - Haridwar Jn. Special Express	30.12.2020
02192 Jabalpur Jn. - Jabalpur Special Express	31.12.2020
04609 Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra - Rishikesh Special Express	30.12.2020 to 04.01.2021
04610 Rishikesh - Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra Special Express	31.12.2020 to 05.01.2021
02055/02056 Dehradun - New Delhi - Dehradun Jan Shatabdi Special	29.12.2020
04888 Barmer - Rishikesh Special Express	28.12.2020 to 04.01.2021
04887 Rishikesh - Barmer Special Express	29.12.2020 to 05.01.2021
04113 Prayagraj - Dehradun Special Express	28.12.2020 to 04.01.2021
04114 Dehradun - Prayagraj Special Express	29.12.2020 to 05.01.2021
05001/05002 Muzaffarpur Jn. - Dehradun - Muzaffarpur Jn. Special Exp.	28.12.2020 to 04.01.2021
05005/05006 Gorakhpur Jn. - Dehradun - Gorakhpur Jn. Special Express	30.12.2020 to 05.01.2021

Train No. & Name	Short Terminated at/Originated from	Partial Cancelled between Stations	Date (from the Originating Station)
09609 Udaipur City - Haridwar Spl. Exp.	at Delhi	Delhi - Haridwar	28.12.2020 to 04.01.2021
09610 Haridwar - Udaipur City Spl. Exp.	from Delhi	Haridwar - Delhi	29.12.2020 to 05.01.2021
09111 Valsad - Haridwar Spl. Express	at Meerut City	Meerut City - Haridwar	29.12.2020
09112 Haridwar - Valsad Spl. Express	from Meerut City	Haridwar - Meerut City	30.12.2020
09017 Bandra Terminus - Haridwar Special Express	at Meerut City	Meerut City - Haridwar	30.12.2020
09018 Haridwar - Bandra Terminus Special Express	from Meerut City	Haridwar - Meerut City	31.12.2020

Train No. & Name	Regulation	Date (from the Originating Station)
04042 Dehradun - Delhi Special Express	will be regulated for 60 Minutes	29.12.2020

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SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

A pandemic Christmas: Churches shut, borders complicated

Rome: Curfews, quarantines and even border closings complicated Christmas celebrations Friday for countless people around the globe, but ingenuity, determination and imagination helped keep the day special for many.

In Beijing, official churches abruptly cancelled Mass on Christmas Day in a last-minute move, after China's capital was put on high alert following the confirmation of two confirmed Covid-19 cases last week, and two new asymptomatic cases were reported on Friday.

One of several notices was posted at Beijing's St. Joseph's

Church, which was built originally by Jesuit missionaries in the 17th century.

Border crossing closures kept thousands of migrants from economically devastated Venezuela who live in Colombia from going home for Christmas.

Colombia's government shut down the crossings in a bid to slow down the spread of Covid-19 infections. Those trying to return home for the holidays this year had to turn to smugglers.

Yakelin Tamaure, a nurse who left Venezuela two years ago, won't be going home and said there will be no gifts or

new clothes for her two children, aged 10 and 15. Tamaure said that she hasn't been able to find work as a nurse because she still doesn't have a Colombia residence permit. Her parents are still in Venezuela.

"My mother broke her foot and can't walk properly so I'm worried about her," said Tamaure. "I try to send her money, but it's not the same as being there."

Others successfully crossed borders elsewhere only to find themselves in quarantine. For their first Christmas since getting married in March, Mariatuda

Anusonadisai and Patrick Kaplin are cooped up in quarantine in a Bangkok hotel room. It wasn't great fun but they did make sure to get a Christmas tree.

They returned earlier this month from a 4 1/2-month trip to Canada and the United States, making a 32-hour journey from Montreal via Doha. One condition of entering Thailand is a 14-day quarantine upon arrival. Thai citizens can stay at state facilities for free but foreigners like Kaplin, from Canada, must pay to stay at an approved hotel, the option the couple took so they could stay together. AP

SEARCH FOR MISSING



Bhavna

General Public is hereby informed that a girl namely Bhavna, D/o Ravinder, R/o H.No. 723, Near Bengali Chowk, Village Pooth Khurd, Delhi, Age: 15 years, Height: 5', Complexion: Sallow, Built: Thin, Face: Round, Hair: Black, Identification: Old injury mark on right hand, Wearing: Black T-Shirt Brown Leggin, Blue Shoes in her feet has been missing from her home since 27.11.2020 at about 5.30 AM. In this regard a wide FIR No. 709/2020, u/s 363 IPC dated 07.12.2020 has been registered at P.S. Bawana, Delhi.

Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out the missing girl but no clue has come to light so far. If any one having any information about this girl please inform undersigned.

E-mail : [cic@cbi.gov.nic.in](#)
Ph.: 011-24368638, 24368641
Fax : 011-24368639
DP/676/ON/2020

SHO P.S. Bawana, Delhi
Ph. : 011-27752534 / 7065036321

Many just want hug for Christmas this year, says Queen Elizabeth

AFP ■ LONDON

All many people want for Christmas this year is a simple hug, Britain's Queen Elizabeth said in her annual festive message, saying it would be hard for those who lost loved ones to Covid-19 pandemic or were separated by curbs on social mixing.

In her traditional pre-recorded Christmas Day address to the nation, the 94-year-old monarch repeatedly spoke of hope for the future whilst acknowledging millions of Britons would be unable to have their usual family celebrations this year.

"Of course for many, this time of year will be tinged with sadness; some mourning the loss of those dear to them, and others missing friends and family members distanced for safety when all they really want for Christmas is a simple hug or a squeeze of the hand," Elizabeth said.

"If you are among them, you are not alone. And let me assure you of my thoughts and prayers."

The queen herself has had to eschew her traditional Christmas celebrations, and is spending the festive season quietly at Windsor Castle with her husband Prince Philip, 99.

NOMURA RESEARCH INSTITUTE Indian auto industry to see stronger growth

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian auto industry is expected to see stronger growth in 2021-22, after recovering from the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, with electric vehicle sales, especially two-wheelers, also likely to see positive movements, according to Nomura Research Institute Consulting & Solutions India.

However, in the personal vehicles segment, the levels reached in 2018-19 would be reached only in 2022-23, it added.

In 2018-19, passenger vehicle sales rose 2.7 per cent to 33,77,436 units from 32,88,581 units in 2017-18, according to the Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM).

"After the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is expected that the auto industry will see stronger growth in 2021-22," Ashim Sharma, partner and group head (business performance

improvement consulting-auto, engineering and logistics) at NRI Consulting & Solutions India, said.

As far as personal vehicles are concerned, the 2018-19 levels would be reached only in 2022-23 whereas for two-wheelers, it will be achieved maybe a year after that, he added.

"This is also on account of some price hikes expected with introduction of new regulations," Sharma said.

In 2018-19, total two-wheeler sales rose 4.86 per cent to 2,11,81,390 units as compared with 2,02,00,117 units in 2017-18.

As far as electric vehicles (EVs) are concerned, Sharma said 2021-22 would also see positive movements, especially in the two-wheeler EV segment, with new players like Ola Electric getting into the fray.

"In addition, on the EV components side, we could finally see cell level manufacturing starting off in India

with technological collaborations focusing on cutting-edge technologies such as LTO (lithium titanium oxide) batteries," he said.

The LTO batteries can be fast charged at high temperatures as well as last for 10,000-plus cycles and other enhanced chemistries like NMC811, he said. NMC811 is a cathode composition with 80 per cent nickel, 10 per cent manganese and 10 per cent cobalt.

In case of other EV components such as motors and controllers, Sharma said, "We could see a wider participation by local component players and also the entry of some new players especially to cater to the rise in domestic EV two-wheeler and three-wheeler demand."

In addition, export opportunities for EV components as well as batteries could certainly emerge for domestic players as the world struggles to find alternative sources for supply chain resilience, he added.

India should now aggressively pursue FTAs with EU, UK: Trade experts

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

With European Union and the UK clinching a post-Brexit trade pact, India should now aggressively pursue free trade agreements (FTAs) separately with both the regions, according to experts.

Although it is premature to assess the gains for India from the agreement between European Union (EU) and the UK, Indian goods would not get much benefit from this pact, they said. However, India can explore opportunities in service sectors like IT, architecture, research and development and engineering in both the markets as the EU-UK pact does not cover services, they added. "There is not much gain for Indian goods, but we can gain in services sector in both the UK and EU markets. We will gain more in the UK market as we are English speaking country," Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO) Director General Ajay Sahai said.

He said there are no specific customs duty benefits for domestic goods from this agreement. "Now we should push the

India can explore opportunities in service sectors like IT, architecture, research and development and engineering in both the markets as the EU-UK pact does not cover services- Experts

FTA negotiations with both the EU and the UK. Indian competitors like Vietnam have greater duty advantage in sectors like apparel and marine goods," Sahai said.

Sharing similar views, Biswajit Dhar, a professor of economics at Jawaharlal Nehru University, said India had a lot of contentious issues while negotiating FTA with the EU. However, after Brexit, the UK could have different stand on those issues and now "India should pursue FTA talks again with both the regions".

He added that there is a possibility of doing a favourable free trade pact with the UK.

FIEO President Sharad Kumar Saraf said that India

should now move "aggressively" on starting negotiations for FTA with both the EU and UK.

"We have requested the government to sign an MoU (Memorandum of Understanding) regarding a deadline to conclude FTA talks with Britain during the visit of UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson next month in India," Saraf said. Rakesh Mohan Joshi, professor at Indian Institute of Foreign Trade (IIFT), said that after the trade deal with the EU and the UK, India will get a better opportunity to cater to the demands of both the markets. "But India needs to plan accordingly," he added.

Apparel Export Promotion Council (APEC) Chairman A Sakthivel said India-UK FTA would help in removing the customs duty disadvantages faced by domestic players in Britain. Britain clinched a historic deal with the European Union on Thursday as both sides managed to thrash out a post-Brexit free trade agreement just days before the December 31 deadline. The bilateral trade between India and the UK dipped to USD 15.5 billion in 2019-20 from USD 16.9 billion in 2018-19.

Forex reserves up by \$2.56 bn to record \$581.131 bn

PTI ■ NMUMBAI

The country's foreign exchange reserves surged by USD 2.563 billion to touch a record high of USD 581.131 billion in the week to December 18, RBI data showed.

In the previous week, the reserves had declined by USD 778 million to USD 578.568 billion.

In the reporting week, the increase in reserves was due to a rise in foreign currency assets (FCAs), a major component of the overall reserves.

FCAs rose by USD 1.382 billion to USD 537.727 billion, the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) weekly data showed.

Expressed in dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units like the euro, pound and yen held in the foreign exchange reserves.

The gold reserves increased by USD 1.008 billion in the reporting week to USD 37.020 billion in the week ended December 18, the data showed.

The special drawing rights (SDRs) with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) rose by USD 12 million to USD 1.515 billion.

The country's reserve position with the IMF also rose by USD 160 million to USD 4.870 billion.



PE investment in Indian real estate likely to revive in 2021

FIANS ■ NEW DELHI

Private equity investment in the Indian real estate sector is likely to recover and hit the \$6 billion-mark next year, registering a year-on-year growth of 30 per cent, according to a report by Savills India.

The report noted that the growth may come on the back of an improving economic sentiment supported by policy reforms and growth in key emerging sectors.

It said that PE investment in real estate in 2020 is expected to contract at \$4.6 billion due to decline in economic activity, adding that investors are likely to adapt themselves in the altered world order and steadily return to the market with evolved strategies.

"The next wave of investments will be driven by growth in warehousing, affordable housing and data centres apart from the commercial office segment which will continue to see steady improvement," said the report titled Beyond The '20: Private Equity in Indian Real Estate.

A likely repair of the bruised economy, improving trade relations, policy support and progress on the vaccination front, are the key factors that



would drive the sentiment henceforth, it added.

A Savills India statement said that its estimates for private equity investment in the sector are based on factors like overall economic and infrastructure growth, growth in sectors such as manufacturing, logistics and e-commerce.

Geopolitical scenario and policy enabling environment are also considered to be key determinants. As per the report, the warehousing and logistics segment has been among the most resilient asset classes in the ongoing pandemic. Warehouse leasing is expected to increase by 60 per cent in 2021 as compared to 2020, keeping investors riveted and on the lookout for investment opportunities.

Savills Research also expects private equity investors to assess an opportunity of around \$330 million in the industrial and warehousing segment in 2021.

Race for DHFL takeover intensifies: Suitors sweetening offers

FIANS ■ NEW DELHI

The race to acquire the bankrupt Dewan Housing Finance Corporation Ltd (DHFL) has intensified with both the final bidders Oaktree and Piramal having enhanced their offers.

US-based Oaktree Capital has raised its offer for the insolvent NBFC by Rs 1,700 crore, intensifying the bidding war with Piramal Enterprises.

In its letter to the Committee of Creditors on Thursday, Oaktree said that its bid is now at Rs 36,410 crore and that of Piramal is Rs 34,909 crore.

Oaktree's offer came a day after Piramal raised its bid by

Rs 1,000 crore and also improved its offer for a controlling stake in DHFL's Pramerica Life Insurance Company to Rs 1,000 crore from Rs 300 crore.

"We understand that the bidder that submitted the second highest bid has sought to increase its bid by means of (a) allocating additional interest income to the financial creditors and (b) increasing its bid for the insurance stake. As required, we are allocating an additional amount of Rs 1,700 crores as additional interest income to the financial creditors," Oaktree said in its latest letter to the CoC.

The lenders had asked both the final bidders in the

December 18 meeting to sweeten their bids.

The CoC also asked Oaktree and Piramal to specify the proposed shareholding structure of DHFL's insurance business, where foreign ownership is currently capped at 49 per cent.

Earlier, Kapil Wadhawan, the erstwhile promoter of the Dewan Housing Finance Corporation Ltd (DHFL), wrote to the administrator of DHFL, reiterating his new proposal to repay 100 per cent of the principal debt to the creditors.

He also assured to run the NBFC following the best corporate governance standards as decided by the lenders.

CAIT urges FM to defer rollout of Rule 86B in GST

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Traders' body CAIT on Friday urged Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to defer the implementation of Rule 86B in GST, whereby businesses with over Rs 50 lakh monthly turnover will have to pay at least 1 per cent of their GST liability in cash, terming it a "counter productive" measure that will increase the traders' compliance burden.

The Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs has introduced Rule 86B in Goods and Services Tax (GST) which restricts use of input tax credit for discharging GST liability

to 99 per cent.

However, this restriction will not apply where the managing director or any partner has paid more than Rs 1 lakh as income tax or the registered person has received a refund amount of over Rs 1 lakh in the preceding financial year on account of unutilised input tax credit.

The Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) in a letter to Sitharaman has drawn her attention towards Section 86B, saying that "it is a counter-productive step which will load the traders further with burden of compliance and also much financial obligation".

The traders' body stated that it has "urged Sitharaman to defer implementation of Rule 86 B immediately which is scheduled to be implemented from January 1, 2021 and also extend the last date for filing GST and Income Tax Audit return from December 31 to March 31, 2021".

CAIT Secretary General Praveen Khandelwal said that in light of the current scenario when domestic trade is disturbed due to repercussions of COVID-19 and traders are fighting for survival of business, it is "strongly urged that the implementation of Rule 86 B may be deferred".

Rajasthan tops in good governance: CM

Jaipur: Rajasthan is among those States in the country where right to information was initiated years ago and right to information was provided to its people through the act, said the Chief Minister. This time also, the Jan Soochna Portal has been developed to further strengthen the right to information. Through the portal information relating to government departments, agencies, board, corporations, is being made available to the

common man easily.

With the view to increase transparency, the list of the beneficiaries of different schemes of state government has been made available on Jan Soochna Portal, he said.

Waiving off crop loan from cooperative banks was under the jurisdiction of the state government, so it fulfilled its promise in 48hrs only, but since the commercial banks, nationalized banks and regional rural banks comes under the

administrative control of the Ministry of Finance, GoI, so the State Government has sent to the Union Government, the one time settlement proposal for waiving off the loans of the farmers. The Hon'ble CM has written letter twice to the Prime Minister and one letter to Union



Finance Minister, whose reply is still awaited.

3.97 cr ITRs filed for 2019-20 fiscal till Dec 24

New Delhi: As many as 3.97 crore taxpayers have already filed their income tax returns for assessment year (AY) 2020-21 (fiscal year 2019-20) till December 24, the Income Tax Department said on Friday.

"Over 3.97 crore Income Tax Returns have already been filed till 24th of December, 2020. Have you filed yours as yet? If not, please do it TODAY! File your Return of Income Tax

& ...Relax!" the department tweeted. This includes 2.27 crore taxpayers filing ITR-1, 85.20 lakh filing ITR-4, 46.78 lakh ITR-3 and 28.74 lakh filing ITR-2. The deadline to file I-T returns by individual taxpayers for the 2019-20 fiscal (AY 2020-21) ends on December 31, 2020, while the same for taxpayers whose accounts require to be audited is January 31, 2021. PTI

EoW files FIR on Religare Finvest's complaint of ₹793cr fraud

FIANS ■ NEW DELHI

The Economic Offences Wing of Delhi Police has filed an FIR against Strategic Credit Capital Private Ltd (SCCPL) along with other associated entities and individuals Mohnish Mukkar over an alleged fraud of over Rs 793 crore based on a complaint by Religare Finvest Ltd (RFL).

RFL had filed a criminal complaint in August 2019 for offences of cheating, misappropriation, forgery, criminal breach of trust, and criminal conspiracy against SCCPL and its associate entities and individuals.

According to the FIR, the accused persons including SCCPL and Mohnish Mukkar along with cheating and defrauding RFL, also forged and fabricated documents to induce RFL to execute an assignment agreement.

As per the FIR, around April-May 2015, Mohnish Mukkar and Veena Singh, Director of PHFPL, had approached RFL expressing interest in acquiring certain existing RFL loans. Mohnish Mukkar at the relevant time, had represented to RFL that he was a promoter and director of Halcyon Asia Support Services Private Limited, which company was engaged in the business of debt restructuring.

Haryana CM honours Information, Public Relations and Languages Dept with State-level award

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar on Friday honoured Information, Public Relations and Languages Department with a state-level award for developing first of its kind Enterprise Resources Planning (ERP) Software for issuing release orders and payment of bills to various media houses. The department has received the award at a state-level function held on the occasion of Good Governance Day here.

While honouring Additional Chief Secretary, Information, Public Relations and Languages Department, Dheera Khandelwal, Director General, Information, Public Relations and Languages Department, P.C. Meena, Additional Director (Admin), Information, Public Relations and Languages Department, Varsha Khangwal and Pardeep Kaushal, Senior Technical Director, NIC, Khattar lauded the officers for bringing the much-needed e-reform in the old age system of issuing release orders and payment of bills by replacing it with the first of its kind e-solution.

Envisioning the Chief Minister's idea of bringing transparency and efficiency in the entire process of releasing State Government Advertisements and Payments



to media houses, the Information, Public Relations and Languages Department has developed first of its kind Online Release Orders and Billing System (OROBS).

Appreciating the efforts of the Department especially the project team, Khattar said it is an example worth emulating for other states as well.

He said that release orders and advertisement bills are being processed through this online system, adding that the payment of bills will be made within a period of 30 days of submission to the media houses concerned after the submission of bills.

Sharing more details, Director General, Information, Public Relations and Languages Department, P.C. Meena said that the Online Release Orders and Billing System (OROBS) is an ERP system for Information

Public Relations and Languages Department, Haryana aimed at bringing transparency and quickness in the entire process of issuance of release orders and bill payments.

The system has been developed in-house by the teams of NIC Haryana and DIPRL Haryana, he shared.

The online system will eliminate the manual process of submission of advertisement requests/indents by client organizations and manual bill submission by the print media.

The departmental officials and print media will also be able to track the status of release orders and bills online through a comprehensive dashboard. Besides this, the system has been integrated with SMS gateway to send event-based alerts to various stakeholders.

SEARCH FOR MISSING



DEEPIKA

General public is hereby informed that a female (depicted in the photo), **Namely: Deepika D/o Ram Niwas R/o E-71, Yadav Nagar, Samaipur Badli, Delhi** has been missing since 06.10.2020 from her house. In this regard a case vide DD No. 84A dated 07.10.2020 has been lodged at Police Station Samaipur Badli, Delhi. Her physical description is as under:-

Age : 30 Years, **Height:** 5'3", **Complexion :** Fair, **Face:** Long, **Built:** Medium, **Hair:** Black, **Wearing :** Blue Colour suit-salwar and chappal in feet. Any person having any information/Clue about this missing female, may inform SHO, Samaipur Badli, Delhi at E-mail Id - cic@cbi.gov.in or Website: <http://cbi.nic.in> Phone: SHO 011-24368638, 24368641 P.S. Samaipur Badli, Delhi Outer North Distt., Delhi Fax No. 011-24368639 Ph. No. 9311567793 DP/674/ON/2020

APPEAL FOR IDENTIFICATION

General Public is hereby informed that an unidentified dead body of a male **Namely Unknown S/o Unknown, R/o Unknown Age:** approx. 35 years, **Height:** 5'6", **Complexion:** Shallow, **Wearing:** White coloured shirt, Red coloured Sweater and Grey coloured Sports pajaami, was found dead on 17.12.2020 at 09:30 AM (Opp. C-420, DSIIDC, Narela, Delhi) BJ Ram Hospital, Jahangir Puri, Delhi. In this regard a FIR/DD No.14-A, dated 17.12.2020 has been lodged at P.S. Narela Industrial Area, Delhi.



If any one having any clue about deceased male may kindly inform the undersigned and contact on following numbers. SHO P.S. Narela Industrial Area, Delhi Ph.: 011-27787592-93 Mob.: 7065036324 DP/691/ON/2020

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF ACCUSED PERSON

See Section 82 Cr. P.C.

Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused **Margub, S/o Md. Tahir, R/o Village Lakhana, Distt. Purnea, Bihar** has committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence **Case FIR No. 50/18 U/s 3/14 Child Labour Act & 16/17/18/75/79/370/374 IPC, at P.S. Timarpur, Delhi**, and it has been returned to a warrant of arrest thereupon issued that the said accused **Margub** cannot be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said accused **Margub** has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant). Proclamation is hereby made that the said accused **Margub of Case FIR No. 50/18 U/s 3/14 Child Labour Act & 16/17/18/75/79/370/374 IPC, at P.S. Timarpur, Delhi**, is required to appear on this Court to answer the said complaint on or before 02.02.2020.

By Order **Sh. Anurag Thakur, Ld. MM, Room No. 26, Tis Hazari Courts, Delhi** DP/786/N/2020-(Court Matter)

UNIDENTIFIED DEAD BODY

General Public is hereby informed that an one male person was found dead at Piller No. 73, Near Power House Rohtak Road, Punjabi Bagh, New Delhi dated 27.03.2017. In this regard a FIR No. 134/17, u/s 279/33/304 IPC, dated 27.03.2017 has been registered at P.S. Punjabi Bagh, New Delhi. The description of the dead body is given as under **Name:** Shaiten, **S/o:** Unkonwn, **R/o:** Unkonwn, **Age:** About 32-35 years, **Height:** 5'4", **Complexion:** Black, **Hair:** Black, **Eyes:** Black, **Face:** Round, **Built:** Normal, **Wearing:** Yellow white shirt and Blue jeans and bare foot. Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out the dead person but no clue has come to light so far. If any one having any information about this dead person please inform undersigned.



SHO P.S. Punjabi Bagh, New Delhi Ph.: 011-25225616, 25224162, 8750871124, 9668971248 DP/303/WD/2020

SHORT CIRCUITS

PREITY ZINTA

I cannot believe that this year is finally coming to an end. Hope the worst is behind us and next year will be a happy and a positive one. So stay home, stay safe and be silly. I wish you all lots of love, happiness and good health. Please don't go out and if you do, wear masks.



SUNNY LEONE

I would like to wish Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to my fans and followers. During this festive season, let's be safe, spread love because we are living in a time where we need to spread more love than hate. It feels amazing to have over 42 million fans, I think they are the best. It feels good to have that many followers.



SHEHNAAZ GILL

This year has been a milestone for me. A young girl from Punjab have come this far. And today because of the love and honour of my fans, my hashtag on Instagram has crossed two million. I have absolutely no words to thank you enough. I am and will always be a forever fan of #Shehnaazians.



MANAV KAUL

When I tested positive for COVID, my doctor friend was very helpful. He said 'you are a fit person and you live alone, so don't worry about anything.' He checked my report and said I had very mild Corona. So I was confident that I would be fine. I was completely at home for about two weeks. Then I tested negative, so it was okay.

KERRY KATONA

Tested positive ... Never felt so poor in all my life. Those who think this isn't real, think again. I am absolutely heartbroken. Sending love and light to all those affected.



IMMERSIVE 45 MINUTES

SAIL THROUGH IT

Actor-filmmaker **GEORGE CLOONEY** discusses his new film, *The Midnight Sky*, the arc of his career and his twilight years as an actor

How has George Clooney been handling isolation? Aside from spending time with his wife, Amal Clooney, and their three-year-old twins, and editing his new film *The Midnight Sky*, he's relied on, like many others, a text chain with pals and Zoom. He just got off one with Matt Damon and John Krasinski.

"In some ways, we keep more in touch now than we did before," says Clooney on the other end of the phone from London.

The Midnight Sky, which Clooney directed and stars in, is an apocalyptic sci-fi drama with some striking solitude. A thickly bearded Clooney plays an astronomer with terminal cancer living at the Barbeau Observatory in the Arctic Circle. It's 2049. When cataclysm covers the globe, he — and a young, unspeaking girl (Caolinn Springall) — are potentially all that remains, along with the returning crew of a space expedition to a Jupiter moon.

The film based on Lily Brooks-Dalton's novel *Good Morning, Midnight*, is Clooney's seventh film as director and his biggest scaled production yet. In an interview, the 59-year-old actor-filmmaker discussed his new film, the arc of his career and his latest novelty device of choice. Excerpt:

You finished shooting *The Midnight Sky* in February, right before the pandemic began. How has your year been since?

I'm kind of doing what everyone's doing. Washing dishes, doing laundry and mopping floors. Mostly I just wish I was able to see my mom and dad, and that kind of thing. They're social creatures and it's not as much fun when they can't be out with their old friends.

It's been years since you were the lead in a film. Why?

Things change for you as an actor. The roles that are brought to you become very different. I was doing an interview the other day and they asked if this was the way my career is going to be going, playing more character actor roles. I was like, well, I didn't want to.



But I'm almost 60 years old. That's how it works. I focus on actors who I admired greatly and how they handled their career. (Paul) Newman, who was a very good friend of mine, by the time he was in his mid-50s, he's doing *The Verdict*, which is a character-actor piece. Even though he was a giant film star, one of greats of all time, he was developing as he grew older the character-actor pieces he found interesting, that demanded less of him.

Nobody's Fool is a great late-period Newman film.

Yes. I just watched that the other day. I hadn't seen it in forever. I forgot about him stealing the snow plow. That's a really underrated film. But there's only a couple ways you can go if you're a person in my shoes. You can try to deny your aging. You can dye your hair and get a face lift and try to still be the guy who gets the girl in the films. Or you can accept that you're getting older and be that guy. The reason I got into directing and writing and producing 35 years ago was because I knew at some point I don't want to be worried about what some casting director thinks of me.

You've always seemed aware of being part of a Hollywood continuum. Your Los Angeles house belonged to Clark Gable.

When I moved to Hollywood, I went and lived with my Aunt Rosemary (a top singer in the 50s) for about six months until she kicked me out. Then I was living on the floor of an apartment for a couple years. But the reality was she was part of that continuum. She was married to Jose Ferrer. She'd have people over to the

house. Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis Jr. and Dean Martin. And I got to spend time around that kind of world. Before that I drove Rosemary when she was doing a show called *4 Girls 4*. It was Margaret Whiting and Kaye Ballard and Kay Starr. So I had an understanding of the continuum in the entertainment industry. We all stand on the shoulders of the people who did it beautifully before us. I got to be friends with Gregory Peck and would go over to his house for dinners with (Peck's wife) Veronique. Some of the most memorable nights I ever had was sitting around listening to them talk about "Roman Holiday." It's an amazing thing, when stars were giants.

You said you were "ashamed" as a native Kentuckian when charges weren't pursued in the death of Breonna Taylor. Do you feel a disconnect with your home state?

The divide is so different now. I do blame the way we get our information. It really started when Fox News came in and said: 'We're going to give you another version of reality. When I grew up in Kentucky as a Democrat, that wasn't a particularly popular thing. But you weren't demonised by it. My parents voted for McGovern and everyone around them voted for Nixon, but we were all friends. It's just what it was. Because you're all starting from the same fact base. NBC, ABC and CBS are all giving you basically the same news and then you take that into your political persuasion, digest it and come up with your own opinion. Now the internet has obviously made it a thousand times worse.

One thing I think people missed in that

Tom Cruise on-set audio was the fear in his voice for the future of the industry. Are you worried for what Hollywood might look like after the pandemic?

Well, no. My concern is only specifically in the theatres themselves because they're going to have to tread water for at least six months before people are in anyway comfortable enough to go in big groups. So you've got to keep them afloat. They are a part of our economy. They're what people do on a Friday night. People have to get out of the house. It's like music venues for concerts. We subsidise oil companies, we can subsidise theaters. Having said that, once we get through it, this sounds so much like everything we heard when television and VHS and DVDs came in. I have no fear at all that the theatre world is going to be around.

What drew you towards the film?

What I always saw in this was the idea of what regret can do to you. I always thought what he's really dying of is not cancer but regret. It's killing him. I know people who are older — older than me, even — who live with real regret. It's deep in them. When you get older, it's a cancer. Everyone has regrets. You hope you don't have the ones that last a lifetime.

Has working alongside Amal, while she's in the next room waging humanitarian battles, changed your approach to filmmaking at all?

For the last 15-20 years, I've spent about half of my day working on things other than the film business because I have interests in other issues around the world. But there are some funny moments. I have an office and she has an office and they're kind of up against each other. The other day, I was doing the Howard Stern Show. We're talking about, like, a prank pooping in a cat box. And on the other side of the wall, my wife is having a conversation trying to keep Maria Ressa from going to prison in the Philippines. She can hear me and I can hear her. We go to dinner afterward and say: 'What an insane household we live in.'

You've brought renewed attention to the Flowbee by saying you use it to cut your own hair. Is there any other novelty device you'd like to plug?

Here's what I think we should do. Let me go buy some stock in the Pocket Fisherman. I'll go buy some stock in that, and then you and I will split the proceeds.

STUDIO CHAT 30 MINUTES

Bring back the thrill

The adventure-reality series, *Feelin Alive 2*, helmed by hosts AMOL PARASHAR and CYRUS SAHUKAR, gives an insight into various extreme sports

After a long time of being cooped up at home, a lot of us are craving that feeling of exhilaration that comes from participating in extreme adventure sports. The adrenaline rush, the sheer excitement, the butterflies in the stomach before taking the plunge are all hallmarks of what great adventures look like! Discovery Channel is all set to bring back the thrill of extreme sports with a new season of its adventure reality series *Feelin Alive Season 2*, this time, helmed by hosts Amol Parashar and Cyrus Sahukar.

Shot in one of the most beautiful locations, Manali, the show will take the viewers on an adventure to conquer the extreme and experience that adrenaline rush that they've been craving for some time now. In the four-part series the



hosts will go around Manali discovering the unknown and overcoming their fears. Training under experts, the duo will set out to perform some of the extreme sports including slacklining at Jagat Sukh, canyoning at Jogini Falls, snowboarding at Solang Valley and ATV off-roading.

Manali is such a beautiful place, but this time, it was more than just the beauty of this place that I got to savour. That rush and the thrill of trying something new for the first time, was priceless. To be honest, it was a bit nerve wracking for me before I tried these extreme sports. But once I got into it, I was loving every moment of it. I not only enjoyed shooting the show but it also helped me overcome my fears."

Sharing his experience, Cyrus said, "I thoroughly enjoyed myself while shooting for the show. It was fun and beautiful experiencing Manali. I feel, trying new things really helps you overcome your fears. I would watch people do all these things and being cool, but never had the courage to do this on my own, until now. I glad to have had the opportunity. This is going to be one experience I will remember for the rest of my life."

Megha Tata, Managing Director - South Asia, Discovery Communications India said, "Shows like this enhance our offering of real life entertainment. We are delighted to bring back the adventure show and collaborate with some of the leading brands."

(The show premieres on December 28 on Discovery Channel, Discovery Channel HD, TLC and TLC HD.)

CONVERSATION 15 MINUTES

Walk the same path

Writer-director **KANWAL KHOOSAT**'s play, *Gidh*, revolves around two women protagonists bound together by their shared miseries in a patriarchal society

After screening carefully curated offerings through the year, Zee Theatre ends 2020 with *Gidh*, a gripping teleplay from across the border. Written and directed by Kanwal Khoosat, the play revolves around two women protagonists bound together by their shared miseries of life in a patriarchal society.

Gidh which means 'Vulture', delves into Saleema's mundane life which is disrupted after an unexpected visit from Salma who claims to be her sister-in-law. As the plot unfolds, both the women share the trials of their respective lives which they had to undergo because of the same man - Junaid, Salma's brother and Saleema's husband. Together, they decide to put an end to their suffering. What in fact transpires changes one of their lives forever, but not in the way she had expected.

Kanwal says, "It has been an exciting experience collaborating with Zee Theatre. After *Jhaanjhar Di Paanwaan Chhankaar* and *Mushk*, the journey to this one has been more than enriching, engrossing and liberating as I embarked on developing the teleplay vocabulary for it. The development of the play was experimental, energetic and challenging, but overall, I am proud of the team that stood by me and believed in me to create something authentic and thrilling."

Actor Sana says, "The characters in this play are the antithesis of the stereotypical women we see on TV as good or bad. In the beginning, I thought I was playing a woman very different from myself but ended up realising that we shared so many



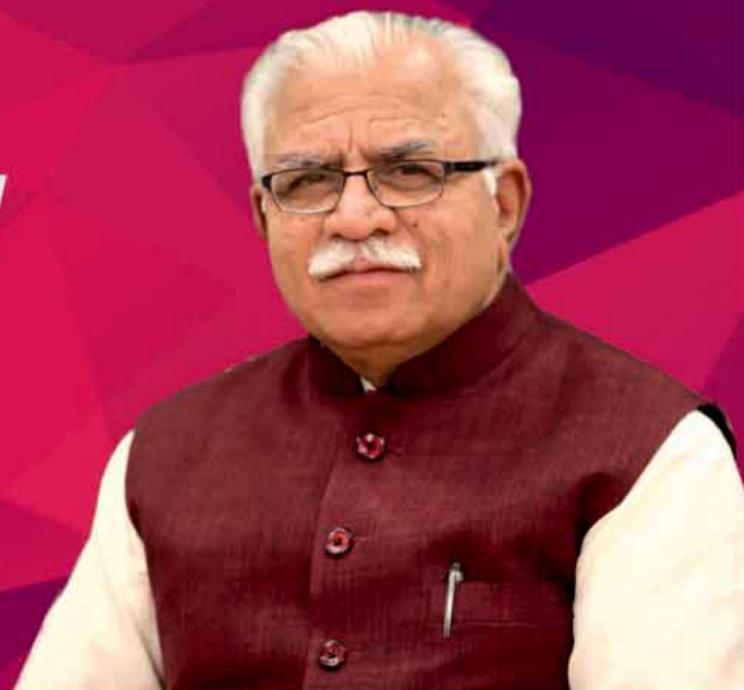
similarities. Working in a room full of strong women helped me let my guard down, altering my perception of womanhood as I know it. We incorporated all our unique experiences, ideas, stories and manifested it into a piece that didn't adhere to any specific format.

The teleplay also stars Raasti Ferooq and Adeel Afzal and will be aired on TataSky theatre on December 27 at 2 pm and 8pm. This is the first time that the play will be screened on TV and in India.



On the Occasion of Good Governance Day (25 December, 2020)

Sh. Manohar Lal Chief Minister, Haryana unveiled



New Announcements

'Sooksham Sinchai Se Har Khet Me Pani'

Scheme to provide canal-based water and sewerage treated water to farmers in their fields through Micro Irrigation Project, it will be implemented from January 1, 2021.

'Mukhyamantri Bagwani Bima Yojana'

20 horticultural crops included in this scheme to compensate for the losses due to natural calamities.

'One Time Registration for Application'

- Applicants of Haryana Staff Selection Commission and Haryana Public Service Commission will have to fill personal details only once.
- Application form will be linked to the Parivar Pehchan-Patra and applicant will not have to deposit the fee again and again.

'Haryana Credit Guarantee Scheme'

- Under the Credit Guarantee Scheme for the students studying in the higher educational institutions of the State.
- Higher education loan will be available at lower interest rate.

Registration facility in any Tehsil of the District

Facility will be started from April 1, 2021. Online process for property registration already started in September 2020.

CLUs Will Be Online Completely

- Online facility of land use change system (CLU) in the State.
- All the CLUs will be available online and permission will be available within 30 days.

Facilities to Employees

Deemed ACP will be provided to Government employees in case of delay of 3 months on ACP due to any reason.

Enhancement in Honorarium for the Sports Awardees of the State from January 1, 2021

- Monthly honorarium of Arjuna, Dronacharya & Dhyani Chand awardees increased from Rs.5,000 to Rs.20,000.
- Monthly honorarium of Rs.20,000 to the winners of Tenzing Norga National Adventure Award and Rs.5,000 monthly to Bhim awardees started.

Launch / Expansion of New Schemes

Winners of Atal Bihari Vajpayee Good Governance Award - 2020

Digital Project	Name and Department
e-Kharid Portal	Sh. PK DAS, IAS, Sh. V Umashankar, IAS, Sh. Chander Shekhar Khare, IAS, Sh. Rajiv Rattan, IAS, Sh. Munish Chandan & Team (Food Supplies and Consumer Affairs & Information Technology Electronics and Communication Department)
Online Release Orders & Billing System (ERP) Software	Mrs. Dheera Khandelwal, IAS, Mr. P.C. Meena, IAS, Mrs. Varsha Khangwal, HCS, Mr. Pardeep Kaushal & Team (Information, Public Relations and Languages Department)
Encouragement to Diversification and agriculture growth	Mr. Devender Singh, IAS, Dr. Arjun Singh Saini & Team (Horticulture Department)
Agriculture growth through enhanced water supply by ground water recharging through abandoned river beds	Mr. Devender Singh, IAS, Mr. Satbir Singh Kadian & Team (Irrigation and Water Resources Department)
Asha app to cover door to door covid-19 survey	Mr. Rajeev Arora, IAS, Dr. Prabhjot Singh, IAS, Dr. V.K. Bansal & Team (Health Department)
Implementation of eSanjeevani OPD teleconsultation services	Mr. Rajeev Arora, IAS, Dr. Prabhjot Singh, IAS, Mr. Suraj Bhan Kamboj & Team (Health Department)
Ayushman Bharat	Mr. Rajeev Arora, IAS, Mr. Ashok Kumar Meena, IAS, Ms. Amneet P Kumar, IAS & Team (Health Department)
Achieving immunization for all under universal immunization programme	Mr. Rajeev Arora, IAS, Dr. Prabhjot Singh, IAS & Team (Health Department)
Antyodaya-saral	Mr. V. Umashankar, IAS, Dr. Rakesh Gupta, IAS, Mr. Deepak Bansal & Team (Department of Information Technology Electronics and Communication)
Jansahayak mobile app.	Mr. Vijayendra Kumar, IAS, Mr. Yashpal, IAS & Team (General Administration Department)

Integration of Parivar Pehchan Patra with the Services being provided on Saral Platform

Various services and benefits of schemes will be available to the citizens at their doorstep.

e-Office Launched in all District Offices

Initiative to ensure accountability and transparency and to perform paperless work.

Bharat Bill Payment System (BBPS)

Payment of water and sewerage bills started through this system.

Portal for Horticultural Products

Portal started in Hindi for online sale of horticultural products/vegetable plants.

Digital Public Library

More than 6 crore e-Books and other study material will be available on e-Granthkosh.

Haryana Forest Management Information System

- Various applicants of forest department integrated under this scheme.
- Size wise information of nurseries and species wise information of plants will be available for the people.

Distribution of Title Deeds under Svamitva Scheme

On Good Governance Day title deeds provided to 18,323 beneficiaries of 81 villages of 12 districts.

More Villages included under Mhara Gaon Jagmag Gaon

From 25 December 2020, 24-hours power supply to 202 more villages of the state, along with more than 5,000 villages.

Passport facility for students

Passport distribution for college students started under the scheme.



India brace for Boxing Day bout

Hour of reckoning for Rahane as new-look India eye equaliser against on-fire Baggy Greens

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

A few bruised egos will eye redemption when India square off against Australia in the second Test here from Saturday, ready to bounce back in skipper Ajinkya Rahane's hour of reckoning after hitting the 'nadir of 36'.

Seldom has an Indian outfit been at such difficult crossroads in recent years as it is in the aftermath of the humiliating defeat in Adelaide and Virat Kohli's departure for the birth of his child.

But the good thing is that star-in-waiting, Shubman Gill, is ready to honour his team's leap of faith in him when he makes his Test debut at the imposing Melbourne Cricket Ground.

Likewise, young workhorse Mohammed Siraj will step in temporarily to fill the void created by crafty Mohammed Shami's injury and it will be about how Rahane, touted as a bowler's captain, handles him.

It's not about the defeat but the manner of capitulation which can come back to haunt a side that's not short on quality. The next few days will be a test of real character and it's only fair that a strategic shift was on the cards.

A couple of forced and an equal number of tactical changes was always on cards for the visitors as they take on Tim Paine's confident men, spending Christmas without their families. Gill's languid approach and that extra second while facing fast bowlers, coupled with a way tighter technique than Prithvi Shaw, might just give the dressing room the confidence required in testing times.

He will have the company of Mayank Agarwal, who would be wanting to do an encore, if not better, of his performance at a venue where he made his Test debut.

Similarly, Rishabh Pant,



Cheteshwar Pujara prepares to bat as India stand-in captain Ajinkya Rahane watches other players during Team India's net session ahead of 2nd Test in Melbourne BCCI

whose intent always provides way more assurance than a passive Wriddhiman Saha, is expected to play his fearless brand of cricket which is the need of the hour.

Pant was an instant hit during the last tour in 2018-19 but in the past year, had lost both form and confidence to surrender his place in the white-ball formats.

Amid the ruins, there lies a glimmer of hope as Ravindra Jadeja, who has recovered fully from his concussion and hamstring injury, will add a new dimension with his all-round abilities in a five-bowler set-up.

Hanuma Vihari will be shunted up the batting order after retaining his place and the experienced KL Rahul have to wait patiently for his turn.

The Australians aren't known to take any prisoners and an unchanged XI that is expected to play at the MCG will not take its foot off the pedal, skipper Tim Paine insisted.

While Kohli's absence can never be really compensated for, Rahane would like to show his character by promoting himself up the batting order and taking more responsibility.

Cheteshwar Pujara can play his natural doggedly defensive game but head coach Ravi Shastri might just tell him that there's no harm if the scoreboard is ticking as it will only lessen the pressure on a batting line-up that will miss Kohli way too much.

In the absence of Shami, Jasprit Bumrah and Umesh Yadav will have to be relentless and also guide a young Siraj,

Australians are very good at playing mind games and I will let them do that. We are focussing on ourselves, what we want to do as a unit and we are going to back our every individual



— AJINKYA RAHANE

We can't pay any attention to mental scars or whatever thing they're talking about. We know India is a proud cricket country, an extremely talented Test match side with lots of dangerous players



— TIM PAINE

who is expected to feel a bit jittery.

Finally, the Indians would like to take that big front-foot stride forward while facing Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood not only physically but also figuratively.

TEAMS

Australia XI: Tim Paine (captain & wk), Joe Burns, Matthew Wade, Marnus Labuschagne, Steve Smith, Travis Head, Cameron Green, Pat Cummins, Josh Hazlewood, Mitchell Starc, Nathan Lyon.

India XI: Ajinkya Rahane (captain), Mayank Agarwal, Shubman Gill, Cheteshwar Pujara, Hanuma Vihari, Rishabh Pant (wk), Ravindra Jadeja, R Ashwin, Umesh Yadav, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Siraj.

Team management has been unfair to both Saha & Pant: Gambhir

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian team management has made players "insecure" and the decision to rotate between Wriddhiman Saha and Rishabh Pant has been "unfair" on both the wicketkeepers, feels former opener Gautam Gambhir.

Saha was on Friday dropped from the Boxing Day Test due to his poor batting form in the opening game and Gambhir asked whether the team's think-tank will do the same with Pant if he fails in the next two games.

"It's unfortunate and Wriddhiman Saha has played just one Test match in this series and he hasn't done well and gets dropped.

"Imagine what happens to Pant if he doesn't do well in this Test or the third Test. What do

you do then? Would you go back to Wriddhiman Saha," Gambhir questioned on YouTube channel *Sports Today*.

For Gambhir, it's not lip-service but actions that makes players secure, something that this current regime has failed, according to him.

"That's why this team looks so unsettled because no one is secured. Professional sport is all about security.

Everyone has talent when they are representing the country," Gambhir, known for his frank opinion, said.

"All they want is security and that assurance that we are

there to back you, not just by words but by action."

No one apart from India rotates wicketkeeper based on conditions, said Gambhir.

"Actually, it's been unfair on Rishabh Pant and Wriddhiman Saha both over a long period of time when they have picked and chosen players on conditions. You don't do that with wicketkeepers. You do that with bowlers," he fumed.

"In overseas conditions, you play two spinners based on conditions, its understandable, but which other teams in the world has chopped and changed wicketkeepers based on conditions. No one apart from India."



Proteas to make 'meaningful' anti-racism gesture

PTI ■ CENTURION

South Africa will make a "meaningful" anti-racism gesture when they take the field against Sri Lanka on Boxing Day here, after failing to do so during the T20I series against England last month.

The first Test against Sri Lanka starts on Saturday and coach Mark Boucher said the South African team would look to express its support for inclusion after its inaction in the last series, which attracted criticism from many quarters.

"We've had a lot of discussions since we've come into the bubble about this, especially after what the board statement was and the guys have come up with a meaningful gesture," Boucher said during a virtual press conference on Friday.

"That's something the players will share with everyone before match day," he added.

Chauhan faction flags violation of Sports Code in nominations from rival camp

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The All India Chess Federation (AICF) elections, scheduled to be held online on January 4, again seem to be headed towards rough weather when Bharat Singh Chauhan faction have filed an objection over the eligibility of former AICF President PR Venkatrama Raja and candidate for general secretary's position, Ravindra Dongre.

The court-appointed Returning Officer Justice (retired) K Kannan has released the list of nominated candidates for 15 posts, which includes names of PR Venkatrama Raja (Tamil Nadu) and Ravindra Dongre (Maharashtra).

The Chauhan camp contended that the nominations of these two in the electoral roll and later in the list of candidates is in violation of country's Sports Code and should be rejected.

Quoting an RTI reply by the Ministry of Sports, Government of India, the appeal said that elected representatives of the

state associations should be eligible to represent their respective state association in the National Sports Federation (NSF) meetings. And, those representing elected representatives of the state associations can only be eligible to contest elections.

"...Only such persons who are the elected members of the executive body of the State/UT Associations can only be authorized by the President of such Association to represent in the meetings of the NSFs including casting of vote in the election of the NSFs," the Sports Ministry said in its reply to a RTI query.

The BS Chauhan group claim that the names of Raja and Dongre should not be in the voters' list because they are not elected representative of their respective state associations. Only those whose names appear in the voters' list are eligible to contest AICF elections.

Justice Kannan will be hearing these objections on December 26.



THE 'WRITE' STUFF

MANTA SIDHU wanted to be a journalist but she loved music too much...

#SoundsofDelhi

the pioneer



KIA

The Power to Surprise

SONET

WILD BY DESIGN

“

THAT IS WHERE I DECIDED THAT I WOULD BE IN MUSIC PROFESSIONALLY, BUT I HAD NO IDEA ABOUT HOW DEEP I WILL GET INTO IT. MUSIC WAS AN UNCONVENTIONAL CAREER CHOICE THEN

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Manta also credits her bandmates for her songwriting. "As a writer you have a vision and it is your bandmates, who are expert instrumentalists and put your vision into action. I have been blessed in both my bands to have great bandmates. I really wouldn't change anything about my experiences." She also adds that a lot of what she knows about music was picked up from her fellow musicians. "Some of them are very highly educated in music, some have studied abroad. There are so many things that I lack that they make up for. There are numerous things that I was unaware of that I have learnt thanks to the privilege of working with them. Collaborating with others in your field is very important in any cre-

ative profession because you can't go the solo way." The inspiration for her songs often comes from her personal experiences but that is not a deliberate thing, she says. "I think, I speak for most songwriters when I say that when you are writing about a subject, subconsciously, you are taking from your own experiences. But it isn't always that. One major aspect that people often forget about anybody indulging in creative writing is that it isn't always experiences but also observations and even your mood at the point of time that you are writing a song." However, a major portion of writing is inspired from observing life around them and that is where a bulk of their creativity comes from, she feels. For someone who wanted to be a creative writer, Manta says that songwriting is where she channels her inventive energy.

As for this year, Manta is fairly pragmatic. "There are many aspects to 2020, but some days it is great to wake up

and not go anywhere." And while not performing has taken its toll, she is very pleased that she managed to finish writing the material for the Ensemble's third album. Although when she recently caught up with her bandmates for the first time since the lockdown began, ostensibly for the first practice of the new material, no music happened. "We were meeting after so long that we just ate, chatted and partied." She says that she has been fortunate as she teaches music at the Shiv Nadar School in Gurugram's DLF Phase 1 which has meant that unlike some other musicians she has managed financially.

Talking about the revolutionary Intelligent Manual Transmission that removes the clutch but keeps the gear lever, allowing drivers to get the best of both worlds, she says, "Well, my left foot was feeling idle, but this really took me just a minute to get used to, so it isn't very difficult at all. The music is great in the car so your left foot can keep tapping to it." She hopes that the IMT concept catches on with more cars adopting it. As for the seven-speaker BOSE audio system, Manta's first comments are that it is 'beautifully balanced.' "Some audio systems are too heavy on the base, and others, like bad headphones, can be too high on treble. As musicians the experience you want listeners to have is a balanced one and that is what we try to achieve in the mixing studio and the translation on this system is perfect," she exults.

While the Sonet has turned out to be one of 2020's best things, its music system is actually a hidden surprise for melody lovers. Here is to a very musical 2021. ■

Manta Sidhu, songwriter and vocalist for the Manta Sidhu Ensemble, always wanted to write and had chalked out a career in journalism ever since she was in school. After graduating from Delhi University's Hindu College she joined the fabled A J K Mass Communication Research Centre at Delhi's Jamia Millia Islamia. Yet, after a few years of writing stories, editing and spending long hours in the newsroom, she realised that her true love was music and writing songs. While supporting herself with some freelance journalism gigs on the side, Manta was drawn more and more into music. "I was already quite deeply into it since college and I always wanted to pursue music seriously, but I didn't realise to what extent."

Despite being blessed with a great voice, Manta admits that, music was just one of several extra-curricular activities she participated in during school. It was while studying at Hindu College that she became a part of the college's active music society and met new friends — all with an interest in music. "That is where I decided that I would be pursue music professionally, but I had no idea about how deep I would get into it. Music was an unconventional career choice then."

Yet, Sidhu states that while it might have seemed tougher earlier because there were fewer locations and gigs, nowadays with a whole bunch of younger and hungrier musicians taking up instruments, competition has ensured that 'making it' is still a challenge. "By making it I mean, earning enough to make ends meet and live comfortably, so that you can spend time writing and composing your own music and releasing albums. It is still a challenge today. Although there are so many more places to play music but there are also so many more musicians. And that is a good thing."

